
Maeser the Man

What have I ever done to call forth such undeserved praise?

—Karl G. Maeser¹

A discussion of Maeser the teacher is not complete without an attempt to describe Maeser the man, the father, the learner, and the husband. Maeser believed that in education, the school should not be separated from the home (the “fireside”); likewise, he believed that the teacher should not be separated from the person, the theory from the practice, or the content from the Holy Spirit. At the same time, however, Maeser’s personal qualities were precisely the ones least discoverable from documented evidence and the ones most vulnerable to hearsay, misinterpretation, speculation, and inaccurate memories.

In March 1901, Edward Schoenfeld claimed that there was no one then living who knew Maeser so long or so well as he, so he ventured to give a character sketch of the beloved doctor. He described Maeser as “a man of wonderful force; he had a magnetic power of inspiration. He could fill all around him with enthusiasm. I have seen him in the schoolroom, looking at his little flock, and by just a sound from his lips, or a smile, or a gesture of his hands, the little fellows would fairly jump on the benches to reach him. I have seen his entire class of sixty or eighty children trying



Maeser radiated a personal intensity and love that left a lasting legacy. Photographer unknown, courtesy of Eilene Thompspon.

to get hold of his hands, or even the skirts of his coat, when school was dismissed.”² This magnetic power, which Schoenfeld saw as a quality of all great men, was noticed by many, but it was difficult for them to describe.

Bryant Hinckley described the quality as “a purity and transparent goodness about this man that won one’s affection and gave weight and force to all he said and did.” Hinckley also wrote, “He could stir the best

that slumbers in the human heart.”³ Josiah Hickman claimed that Maeser “kindled a sacred fire within my soul.”⁴ George Middleton, who became a physician, wrote that Maeser’s strength was not in his academic preparation but that “his strength was in his sheer moral force, and the inspiration he put into the lives of young people.”⁵

Earlier in his career, Maeser may have lacked the love that his later students felt from him at BYA. For example, Reed Smoot believed he witnessed a dramatic change in Maeser. When Smoot was in his mid-seventies, he recalled that as a small boy (probably eight years old), he attended the Twentieth Ward School in Salt Lake. This must have been just after Maeser returned from his mission in 1870, because Smoot left for Provo the next year to join his father.⁶ Smoot described Maeser as strict as a German general. He claimed that he and all the other children who were unprepared one day were slapped on the ears. Such behavior was very common in the schools of the day, but stands in total contrast to everything Maeser was teaching teachers about their conduct even before he started teaching at BYA. In *School and Fireside*, he even argued, “The boxing of ears, or blows on the head, as punishment for offenses, whether inflicted by parents or by teachers are most criminal, and deserve the severest censure without any mitigation.”⁷ Smoot’s point, however, was not to substantiate that Maeser violated his own principles, but to contrast the love he later felt from and for Maeser. As a fourteen-year-old, Smoot had been one of the first twenty-nine students at BYA and said, “I saw him, as I say, transformed from the German spirit into a man with the humblest spirit and with a devout belief in God’s way . . . I thank God that later I had a chance to demonstrate to him that I loved him, . . . I would have done anything in the world for him.”⁸

Alice Reynolds was reluctant to enroll at the BYA because she had had relatives who had been taught by Maeser at the Twentieth Ward School who convinced her that Maeser “was severe and anything but kindly.”⁹ She was thrilled to discover that the reports she had heard were very different than the man she met at the academy. He turned out to be deeply loving and “a living Dynamo. . . . He made his students feel the worth of life. . . . He had the most penetrating personality I have ever known.”¹⁰

She wrote, “His words pierced men’s souls. His handshake, his smile, his rebuke, his God bless you that thrilled to the very center of the soul were alike all pervading and irresistible.”¹¹

With his erect posture, his distinguished goatee, his heavy German accent, and his impeccable style,¹² Maeser sometimes left a first impression that he was far more formal and serious than he actually was. Some students even seemed frightened by him at first, but as Amy Brown Lyman put it, “Under his seeming austerity, there was a hidden gentleness, and out of the goodness of his heart, he had genuine sympathy for the feelings of his students. . . . Never did he fail to respect the dignity of human personality.”¹³ He was strict as a disciplinarian, but he knew that the development of individuality and personal differences were necessary for young people. As one who had lived in the Maeser home, Lyman observed, “While Dr. Maeser was always the same powerful personality and head of his household, yet he was in reality a co-partner, and stood strictly for the rights of every member of the family. He was a tender and loving husband and father, unselfish and kind, and most considerate of the feelings of others. It was no task for him to apologize, even to a little child if he felt such an apology was due.”¹⁴

Maeser was fastidious and punctual. When others were not, he easily became anxious. Elder James E. Talmage, for example, described how nervous Maeser became on an occasion when a man was supposed to bring him tickets for a train but was detained. Talmage said it was painful to watch how nervous he became.¹⁵ Finally, all were relieved when, after the whistle had blown, Warren Dusenberry, then a member of the BYA board, stepped up and purchased new tickets—though the man arrived moments later. Maeser’s daughter believed it was his training that made “father



James E. Talmage began attending BYA in 1877 and was awarded the first collegiate diploma in 1881. He became an instructor even before he graduated. Detail from photo “Young Men from the Brigham Young Academy,” ca. 1880, courtesy of LTPSC.

a sort of perfectionist in everything he did. When he did a thing, it must be done right. He would say, "When you sweep a room, sweep the corners. When you black a boot, black the heels."¹⁶

Profanity and vulgarity had no place in the Maeser home or school. He believed that anything unrefined in a person's life reflected a lack of proper training and reflected poorly on their school. Likewise, Maeser had no patience for college yells; he believed they were undignified and unbecoming of Latter-day Saints. Maeser's daughter Eva told of the day Karl was to say farewell to the BYA. He had been away on a trip and was greeted by a large contingent of students who had prepared a special yell for him. Eva felt hurt by his response. He clearly displayed his disapproval of the students' choice. He told the group in the carriage from the station that the Brigham Young Academy should not adopt the patterns of the world. It was to be an example of culture and refinement and never to be a "copyist."¹⁷

Maeser also had little patience with those who were arrogant or abused their authority. From his earliest days as a student, he fought oppression. He believed it was especially inappropriate for religious authorities or teachers to exercise unrighteous dominion. Mere behavioral compliance could not exalt; one must choose to follow with one's heart. Perhaps this is why Brigham's intellectual opponents, who saw Brigham as a tyrant, supposed they might successfully recruit Maeser. But Maeser's loyalty to Church leadership was based on his conviction that true priesthood authority was fundamentally different from other authority. Throughout his life, he humbly turned to those holding the keys of the kingdom for guidance and direction, even when his own opinion would have suggested a different route. Schoenfeld wrote that Maeser was deeply generous to others, "but when anybody attempted to assume that which belonged to him by authority of his calling, he would jump up like a lion."¹⁸

Maeser often used humor when correcting students. Eva said that one day, two girls came into the principal to tell him what was wrong with the school and what changes were needed. Apparently, their extravagant suggestions were not realistic or consistent with the established principles of the academy. Maeser listened closely, thanked them, and with a

twinkle in his eye told them he had not considered such a thing. "I now know what to do. I shall write immediately to President Young and tell him to put you two girls in as principal of this school." They thought about his suggestion and realized that their proposals were not really consistent with the purposes of the school and that it would not be a good idea to put them in charge.¹⁹ With a great laugh, they thanked him for his time and returned with a little greater commitment to the academy. Maeser believed that the rules of the academy had come from divine inspiration, and he regularly invited each student to pray to receive their own spiritual confirmation of them.

In 1881, Maeser traveled to southern Utah on a recruitment tour. He took James E. Talmage and his own son, Reinhard, with him as speaking companions. After a meeting held in Parowan, Talmage wrote in his journal, "One thing is sure—the Prof. likes to talk and is on hot bricks while anyone else is talking."²⁰ Maeser had given the young men ten to fifteen minutes each to speak, and that night he asked them to cut down their remarks to allow him more time. Talmage continued, "We silently rebelled." One week later, at a twenty-fourth of July gathering, Talmage "didn't feel like stopping after 10 minutes," and took all the time he wanted. He wrote, "[I] made the Prof. terribly mad at me: ran over my time in speaking."²¹ For a moment, Maeser acted as if he would not speak at all. Some have cited this story to suggest Maeser's own struggles with vanity, but there may have been a better explanation. The incident might provide greater insight into the young Talmage than into the veteran teacher. Though Talmage would eventually become a wonderful speaker, at the time he was an eighteen-year-old boy, and the audience had not gathered to listen to him. More importantly for Maeser than not having sufficient time for his message, Talmage had given his word to comply with Maeser's request. Maeser's response may have had much more to do with impressing the importance of one's word to a young man of great promise than it was an expression of personal vanity. At any rate, Talmage was taught an important lesson that day about keeping his word, and he did not run over his allotted time again.

The Women in Maeser's Life

It would be impossible to understand Maeser without recognizing the powerful women in his life, especially the faithful, consistent support of his wives, Anna and Emilie. It is unfortunate that we know so little of their stories. Anna decided to marry a young man who was full of promise, one who had entered a profession that seemed stable and secure. So when Maeser began to investigate this new religion, the stability of her life was threatened. She had not been included in his intense investigation, but she remained faithful to him and resolved to make his decision her own. Through years of sacrifice and service, she stood by his side, found creative ways to supplement his meager salary, and managed the affairs of the home in his absence. Maeser was not gifted in financial matters. He had very little time or interest for monetary pursuits. Fortunately for him, however, Anna was a resourceful manager. She kept her husband looking meticulous in dress and demeanor. Much of his refinement was a result of hers. Their son Reinhard declared that the capacities God had given his father "lay dormant and might forever have remained so had he not met, loved, and married my mother."²²

How Anna survived alone in Philadelphia in 1857 would be a story worth telling if the details were known. She was an immigrant, and her husband was away in Virginia; her baby had been buried, and she had a young son and sister in her care. The challenges of her life must have been excruciating, especially because she had few friends and did not know the language of her new land. She made money by sewing and babysitting for others, but it was a desperate struggle. Nevertheless, sadness did not prevail in the home, but laughter, hope, and faith did.

It would be a strain to imagine this refined German woman crossing the plains while trudging behind a wagon and gathering buffalo chips in her apron with her sister Camilla for the evening fire, but that was exactly what she did. It was not easy for this refined lady to hear the crude language of the wranglers, endure the baking sun, or face the unrelenting howl of the wind; nevertheless, she spent the evenings singing, dancing, and bearing testimony.²³



Anna Maeser (1830–96), wife of Karl G. Maeser. Courtesy of Eilene Thompson.

Anna gave birth to eight children, only five of whom lived to adulthood. Reinhard was born in Dresden in 1855, before they joined the Church. Karl Gustav Franklin Maeser died at the age of six months as the family arrived in the port at Philadelphia in 1857. Anna Ottilie was born in Philadelphia in 1859. A baby boy was stillborn in Salt Lake in 1862 while they were trying to get established. Anna Camilla Maeser died just before her second birthday in 1865 before Karl started teaching Brigham Young's children. Karl Emil was born in 1866 just before Maeser was called to Switzerland. Helen Jeanette (Nettie) was born in 1872 after Karl had returned, and Evelyn (Eva) was born in 1876 just after the Maesers had moved to Provo. Each child brought joy and hope, and those who tragically died at such tender ages helped weld Karl and Anna's relationship together.

Throughout most of their life together, Anna supplemented Karl's meager income by keeping boarders in the Maeser home and sewing clothes. She was always generous to strangers, even when there was

hardly enough for themselves. Their granddaughter Mabel remembered Anna as a petite, quick-moving woman who was always busy decorating, sewing, or cooking. She loved to play games and entertain the children with stories and dances. She believed her husband had a special calling to serve the youth of the Church, and she felt called to assist him. She loved beautiful things, fine music, great theater, and cultured people. At the same time, however, she learned to scrimp and serve the sick and downtrodden with tenderness and care.²⁴ She took pride in setting a neat table with a clean white cloth, folded napkins, and fine dishes, even when they could only afford flour mush to eat.²⁵

Eva described a day on which the school celebrated Karl's birthday. Anna was happy to hear the children's report of the praise her husband had received. One of the neighbors who was also listening to the report made a comment of how much joy it must have brought her to be married to such a wonderful man. Everyone loved and respected him. "You must be so proud," said the neighbor. "Of course I am," she replied, "very proud." Then she added the tease that she had worked hard to raise him up: "He wasn't a bit like that when I married him."²⁶ Of course, beneath her humorous response was an important truth, and he would have been the first to agree. They had suffered and learned together and her support sustained him in his efforts, making him a better man.

Amy Brown Lyman, who had resided in the Maeser home, described Anna as totally devoted to her husband and his interests. "She was innately modest and unassuming and willing to remain in the background. Her abilities and qualifications, therefore, were not generally known nor fully appreciated."²⁷ Anna was a wonderful cook, but rarely knew how many to expect for at dinner since Karl often brought home a guest to dine with them.

Karl and Anna adored each other and clung to one another through bitter storms and strife. One of the greatest trials in Anna's life, however, was not the sacrifices she had to make to keep the family alive, but the decision to participate in plural marriage. It is not likely that a modern mind can easily understand the issues of a Latter-day Saint polygamous family in the late nineteenth century. Until 1875, Karl was, according to

Moritz Lindeman, “only a theoretical polygamist.”²⁸ He had believed in the principle of plural marriage and had publically defended it ever since he joined the Church, but he had not participated in it.

In 1861, Bishop Hocklin, Maeser’s bishop, counseled Karl to take Anna’s sister Camilla as a plural wife. Karl wanted to do what the Lord would have him do; therefore, by letter, he sought Brigham’s counsel on the matter. Anna did not like the idea. In Karl’s words, she “acknowledged plurality as good as a general thing, but not as far as herself is concerned.” At that time, an older married man had been secretly colluding with Anna to marry Camilla. Karl had been disappointed that these plans were conducted without his knowledge, and though he had confronted the brother, who promised to “let it drop,” Karl complained to Brigham that “his wife and mine will not cease to work at him.” He felt that Camilla was being prematurely rushed into a marriage, “under the influence of my wife’s permission and other people’s pies and cakes.” Karl suggested to Brigham that if it were the Lord’s will for him to live this principle, Anna would require either “a little more time or some powerful influence to get her prepared to the obedience to the Lord’s command.” Karl presented the entire matter for Brigham’s counsel. “I have laid hereby before you a simple statement of the facts concerning my family affairs, after I have daily called on the Lord in my secret prayers, and am so doing still, to give me wisdom in this Matter and let my feelings be pure and holy before him. I look upon your decision as the answer from my father to all my prayers on the subject, and will obey you in all you tell me.”²⁹ Brigham did not encourage Karl to pursue the matter further at that time, and so Karl dropped the matter. Camilla did not marry the older man either. Three years later, she married James Cobb as a plural wife.

Five years later, Karl wrote Brigham Young again asking for his counsel regarding plural marriage. More than anything else, he wanted to be in harmony with the Lord’s will. He expressed that because of the financial struggles he had to face, he did not consider it just “to my family to think of enlarging my household by taking another wife; and being unable to do that, I considered it my duty to smother every desire that may have occasionally arisen, to raise the affection of any sister.”³⁰ He did not have

any particular woman in mind at the time, but he did not want to do anything in opposition to Young's counsel. "I have promised the Lord that I would be directed in all things and especially also in these matters by you." Therefore, he was willing to "come up to the line," if it was Young's wish.

Young replied the same day, "I have no objections to your doing what you state, in your letter, that you feel to be right, if you can obtain somebody who instead of being a drawback to you, can help you in your temporal affairs. I do not think that it would be prudent for you to increase your expenses too much at present until you would be in a better position to meet them."³¹ Six years later, in 1872, German tourists visiting Salt Lake asked Maeser specifically about polygamy. He convinced them that "providing for several women would be disproportionately expensive even in Salt Lake City."³²

President Lincoln signed an antibigamy law directed at Mormonism in 1862, but it had not been enforced. In 1874, the Poland Act was passed, giving Congress the power to enforce the earlier law and prosecute members of the Church with the threat of heavy fines and confiscation of property. It was decided that George Reynolds, Brigham Young's personal secretary, would be a good test case to see if the courts would uphold the constitutionality of this law. Reynolds was arrested, found guilty, and forced to pay a heavy fine on April 1, 1875. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested a second time. In December, he was found guilty and sentenced to two years of imprisonment.

It is not insignificant, then, that with the threat of prosecution looming large, Karl was given permission from Brigham Young and Anna to marry Emilie (pronounced "Amelia") Damke in 1875. Emilie was the second daughter of a German widow who converted to the Church and immigrated to Utah with her three daughters. They moved into the home of her uncle Charles Wilckens in 1873, who was a close friend of the Maesers. Emilie was refined, cultured, bright, and artistic. She was also a teacher in Salt Lake. Anna agreed to the marriage and attended the ceremony when Brigham sealed Karl and Emilie on October 18, 1875, two days after the signing of the deed for the BYA.³³ Emilie was quickly made a part of the family. She taught the girls piano and participated in



In the 1870s the federal government began to prosecute Mormon polygamists. Maeser never did spend time in prison. George Q. Cannon (center) served six months in the Sugarhouse prison. Photo by C. R. Savage, ca. 1888, courtesy of LTPSC.

family activities where practicable, given the ever-increasing threat of government prosecution.

At the dedication of the Maeser Memorial Building in 1912, Reinhard paid tribute to the impact both women had on his father. He claimed that all the help Anna had been to bring out Karl's latent capacities were "not yet sufficient to call forth all the nobility and worth that abode in him. Another one was called and chosen, this noble woman here came into his life to be a helpmeet to him, and most faithfully has she done her part to persuade him into hitherto unexplored paths. . . . These women have made their sacrifices with him, and I feel that they are worthy to be remembered with him."³⁴ Karl and Emilie had one daughter together, and they named her Anna Christina Maeser.

Maeser's children also brought him unspeakable joy. He loved to perform for them, and he held high expectations of their accomplishments. As described in chapter 9, when Maeser left for his mission in 1867, he expected Reinhard to become "the head of this home" while he was away.³⁵ In many ways, their father's expectations and confidence inspired

them to achieve and, in turn, they revered their father. It should be no surprise that because of their father's example, most of the Maeser children also became professional teachers.

The Maeser family was constantly expanding to include more members or guests. Anna was especially effective in persuading her family in Germany to investigate the Church and to join the Maesers in Utah. Her father died before hearing about the Church, but other family members embraced it quite quickly. Her sisters, Ottilie and Camilla, and her mother, Henriette, joined in October 1855. Anna and Karl basically adopted Anna's sister Camilla when they first left Saxony. Thereafter she traveled, suffered, and served with them. In 1865, the Maesers welcomed the addition of Anna's mother into their home. Henriette Therese Backhaus Mieth had longed to come to Zion, but she decided to wait until the Maesers were settled. After immigrating to Utah, Henriette lived with the Maesers until her death in April 1875.



Maeser's family brought him great joy. This picture was taken before the celebration of Maeser's fifty years of teaching, May 1898. Anna had passed away, Emilie is seated on the right. The family has continued to be strong and active in Church and community affairs. Photographer unknown, courtesy of LTPSC.

Karl, on the other hand, was not so successful at convincing his side of the family of the truthfulness of his religion. To the end of his days, Karl felt disappointed that he was never able to interest his own brother, father, or other relatives in the Church. They loved him dearly and sought opportunities to spend time with him and his children—especially when these same children came to Germany as missionaries. They were even willing to pay for his family’s return to Saxony, but they wanted nothing to do with the Church. Karl’s mother died in 1861, and his father felt that Karl had abandoned his potential in Saxony by joining the American church.

The Man’s Virtues

As a truth seeker, Maeser had few peers. He was always open to new ideas, but he could not maintain the scholarly distance of curiosity that dominated the intellectual community. While a student at the *Kreuzschule*, he was put off by the elitism that could have promoted him into the upper social class. Perhaps he was a little impatient, but to him it wasn’t worth it to waste precious time reciting Greek and Latin while elsewhere new and practical knowledge was being discovered. Instead, he chose to forgo status for an enhanced exposure to new ideas. At the teacher college, he felt compelled to support the efforts of a more democratic constitution and unified Germany with the protection of basic human rights in direct opposition to the established government in Saxony. As an intern, he could not stand idly by while members of his church were forbidden to gather together in worship, so he took the initiative that no one else seemed willing or able to take. Freedom to seek truth and inspire students to do the same led him to join the Saxon Teachers’ Association even while it brought him into careful scrutiny by the civil authorities. His love of science and disdain of his own government’s religious coercion even pushed him to the brink of religious skepticism upon his return to Dresden. In Schoenfeld’s account, young Karl and Edward had decided, “what the world called ‘religion’ was not the truth. . . . We thought that science, and especially natural philosophy, was the only thing that might in some way fill the longing of the soul.”³⁶ As young teachers, Maeser

and Schoenfeld must have spent many hours discussing their frustrations regarding the demands made upon teachers by the Saxon government, but these discussions were far more than idle complaints. They felt compelled to act upon their observations.

It was one thing for Maeser to pick up an anti-Mormon text and to see through its rhetoric. But it was quite a different thing for this respected professor of a teacher college to feel driven to join a hated, ridiculed, and legally forbidden sect at the expense of losing all that he had painstakingly aspired to in his profession. Schoenfeld believed that it was because of their willingness to “drink deeper,” and even in the midst of skepticism, “the guiding hand of God came to our aid.”³⁷ Maeser was ready to join the Mormons even before he had met a member. His subsequent lifelong loyalty and faithfulness after joining makes his story all the more astounding, especially in light of the constant struggle he faced to support his family with even the basic necessities of life. His father was not the only one to think he must have lost his mind to give up the comforts he could have enjoyed had he remained in Germany.

Maeser accepted the doctrine of the Church readily, but he had his own struggles adjusting to the Mormon lifestyle. The Word of Wisdom, the Church’s health code, posed a particular challenge. Coffee had been a regular part of Maeser’s diet until he learned that the Word of Wisdom was more than a suggestion.³⁸ He began to drink Postum but found it to be a poor substitute. Mabel Maeser Tanner told of an occasion when Emilie discovered that the Postum was all gone just before Karl was to take a journey in the cold. She found some coffee that was in the cupboard for guests and thought he might not notice the difference. He finished it and exclaimed that it was excellent. He told his wife, “When you buy Bostum [sic] again, get this brand, it is so much



Postum, a drink made from grains, was used as a substitute for coffee.

better." When she confessed that it was actually coffee, he got a twinkle in his eye and teased, "You deceived me, so you go to the devil and I don't," but he wasn't very disappointed.³⁹

His struggle to give up his pipe was more difficult yet. As a young academic, he had become a regular smoker. The pipe was an ornate design made of costly material. The family shares the story of him throwing his pipe out of the window one day, only to see him searching the backyard garden to find it once again the next day. Finally, Anna came home one evening to hear him speaking very harshly to what she thought was one of his students. "I will be my own master. I will not be ruled by such as you. We will see who is boss!" Then she heard the oven door open and slam shut. She entered the room to find Karl by himself. She learned he had said his final farewell to his old friend. This time he could not retrieve it and he did not smoke again.⁴⁰

Upon joining the Church, Maeser continued to seek ideas on all subjects. It is not clear how he maintained such a broad understanding of so many topics, but he rarely missed an opportunity for further learning.⁴¹ He attended lectures, read the latest ideas, and followed carefully the political meanderings of current affairs. When visiting scholars came to Utah, he worked hard to be in attendance. It is true, however, that he was not as confident that others, including many of his students, could discern the true from the false in such presentations. He did not hesitate to point out what he considered to be errors in their positions.

Maeser was particularly suspicious of the learning in the East. Of course he was not alone in this concern, nor were his suspicions without grounds. There were a number of young Mormons who traveled east and returned with ideas out of harmony with the Church, not the least of which was the Godbeite movement itself. The subtle ways in which Godbe and Harrison began to undercut Brigham were developed during their travels and séances in the East. Maeser did not discourage his well-grounded students from studying at universities in the East, but was deeply concerned about relying upon eastern universities. He was not worried that the truth would not withstand careful scrutiny, but he was concerned that the subtleties of conniving men might derail the underprepared student.

Maeser was not very pleased with those who inaccurately represented his ideas. Following a lecture he gave in the Provo Tabernacle, a newspaper reporter attempted a summary of his address. In a letter to George Reynolds, secretary to the Church Board of Education, Maeser wrote that he disavowed the “everlastingness” of the production “by which I am represented as a muddle-brain. I shall protest again the murder of my speeches in that fashion, their style and form is poor enough without being torn to pieces and patched up promiscuously by some ignoramus.”⁴²

Maeser also had little patience with the arrogant people who closed their minds to the truth, but the slightest hint of humble repentance brought Maeser’s almost immediate forgiveness. Several authors have related the story of a poor widow in southern Utah who had a wayward son.⁴³ The boy had been wild and rebellious and was considered “the terror of the town.” The local bishop decided to sponsor him as a student at the academy because he wanted to get rid of him but also to see if something could possibly reform him. It did not take long before the BYA faculty came to the principal recommending that he be dismissed. Maeser knew that the widow had great hopes for her son—she had written several letters to the professor—and was praying that some intervention would work. Maeser convinced the faculty to keep trying, but it wasn’t long before they were back with the ultimatum that either he must go or they would. They were convinced he was incorrigible. Maeser told him to prepare his things to leave the next day. In an angry tone, the young man seemed to welcome the expulsion. That night Maeser did not sleep well and petitioned the Lord’s help on behalf of the widow. He made it a policy to spend the first hour of the day in his office to discuss any concerns students might have had. The next morning the young man quietly tapped on his door and pleaded for another chance. Maeser was thrilled to give him one and witnessed the turning point in the young man’s life. An article in the *Millennial Star* claims that the young man eventually became a counselor to the very bishop who wanted to rid himself of the problem boy.⁴⁴

Another of Maeser’s personal qualities was his willingness to start over again and again. Nearly every time he began to feel settled in his

work or life, something would cause him to start over. As he settled into his first job in Germany, he was given the opportunity to join the Budich Institute. After he began to be respected in his profession, he was introduced to Mormonism. Upon joining the Mormons, he was forced to begin anew in England. Then he went to Philadelphia, though soon thereafter he was forced to find work in Virginia. But, before long, he was called to return to Philadelphia, sell everything, and go to Salt Lake. In Salt Lake he started a new school but left for the Union Academy only to move back to the Twentieth Ward School. Then Brigham asked him to become the Young family teacher. When he felt settled doing that, he was called to leave for a mission to Switzerland and Germany. Upon his return, he began again at the university and the Twentieth Ward. After the Twentieth Ward School was damaged, he was called to the BYA, basically starting from scratch once again. As soon as he felt settled in Provo, the devastating fire forced him to start over yet again. It seemed so appropriate that he would be asked to help found so many new schools; starting anew was his life. He revealed much of his indomitable spirit as he maintained an optimistic spirit while being required to start over so often.

Faith to do what is right and let the consequences follow (to paraphrase one of the hymns he translated into German) was a foundational aspect of Maeser's character. An educational approach that distinguished Maeser from most other educators of the time was the deep trust he expressed in his students' ability to make their own choices. He regularly saw in them more than they could see in themselves and he found joy in expressing it. This faith in mankind connected with his faith in divine purpose showed itself in his view of the curriculum and in his unbounded faith that God answers the prayers of all those who humbly ask him in faith. Of course, this was an inherent principle of his educational philosophy, but even more importantly it was a characteristic of his personal experience. Educators at the time did not put much trust in their students. They felt that students must be controlled through rote memorization, corporal threats, and constant supervision.

Maeser's Unique Style

David F. Boone has suggested, "Perhaps it was Maeser's concern for, interest in, and a willingness to assist the individual that set him apart from other educators and educational systems of the day. Maeser went out of his way to touch the lives, the hearts, and the feelings."⁴⁵ Educators in his day relied almost exclusively upon coercion and control or by provoking feverish competition. Maeser's approach celebrated love and faith, but these were not merely pedagogical techniques; they were personal characteristics. In fact, to attempt to transform them into techniques would destroy their essence. Maeser believed they had to be the outgrowth of the teacher's heart.

Because of his profound love, Maeser was so revered by his students that he could discipline them with one quick, penetrating glance. He taught, "The teacher can say more with his eyes than he can with his lips in the matter of maintaining discipline, and the children can learn as much by reading in the teacher's eye as they can by hearing of the ear."⁴⁶ Therefore, he knew to watch their eyes as an indicator of the engagement of their minds⁴⁷ and when he ignored them, it was devastating. Susa Young Gates wrote of the profoundly spiritual impact when he disregarded them: "No one who has had a similar experience in the academy can ever forget the extremely peculiar feelings caused by Brother Maeser's severe but calm 'letting alone' method."⁴⁸ Without saying a spoken word his approach seemed spiritually to place them in a "disgraceful corner." She added, "It has never failed, however, in bringing the most hardened culprit to justice, and usually but a short time is needed to fling the penitent at the worthy Professor's feet with tears of past regret and future resolve."⁴⁹ He combined the respect of a commanding general with the affection of a tender parent.

Maeser loved his students deeply and found as many opportunities as possible to express his love. Annie Canfield recorded an example of Maeser's loving remarks during one of his theology classes:

I sometimes feel as if a map had been spread before me that I might take it all in at a glance. While I listen to your prayers and

watch the expression of your countenances, it causes me to rejoice and I wish I could express my ideas and the intense feeling within my heart, but it is not given to man to express the feeling of God that is within him. . . . When I look upon the youth of Zion my joy is so great it very nearly causes me pain. . . . When I have young men to deal with who are careless, as I often have, I watch them closely and when I see a sign of repentance I hail it with unspeakable joy. . . . There are many who waste their time and do not realize the responsibilities resting upon them. What can I do to make every one understand this? If by laying down my own life it would make you realize this, I would give it freely; but this cannot be done. . . . I would rather lay down my own life than see one of my children go astray.⁵⁰

Few students doubted that he truly meant these expressions. More importantly, he followed up with his former students, often years after they left his direct influence.

It has already been mentioned that when reading aloud or reciting passages, Maeser encouraged students to deliver passages with the same emotion that the author intended to communicate. He taught teachers that a balance should be sought between those who “read along in the same tone and never mind the inflections that should be observed,” and those who performed them “as though they were on the stage.”⁵¹ Maeser demonstrated how it could be done. Eva Maeser described her father as “an actor in spirit” and that his personality was too dynamic for those who attempted to imitate him.⁵² As a young girl, Mabel Maeser Tanner remembered witnessing Karl recite the alphabet with such dramatic flair that she never forgot the experience.⁵³ This performance was so impressive that its reputation spread and he was often called upon to repeat it. He believed the words of great literature should be shared with spirit and passion. He made it a practice to memorize his own public addresses, even for academic audiences, so that he could deliver them more dynamically and because he did not want to be guilty of “extemporaneous superficiality.”⁵⁴

Likewise, Maeser distinguished between different ways of singing. There were those trained in the “science and art of singing.” Their performances may even be technically beautiful and impressive but could also be devoid of the Spirit. Hymns, especially, should not be sung merely to demonstrate musical competence or even emotional drama. He taught his students, “If one, however, should perform it, who is possessed of the Spirit of God, then he puts his whole feeling into the spirit of the piece until he makes something out of his own spirit that really does not lie in the music itself. This kind of singing should alone be cultivated among the saints at their devotional exercises. . . . [Hymns] should be a prayer and not only the mechanical process of singing notes and sounds. It should be as much the expression of your sentiments as if it were a prayer.”⁵⁵

Maeser had a powerful appreciation for the spirit of a musical piece. This was demonstrated in his translation of English hymns into German. He knew that a hymn brought music and words together to deliver a message. He believed that the words, however, needed to match the meter and feeling of the music. Literal translations could rarely do this, so he found words that conveyed the same type of spirit with the same general theme—though departing from the precise meaning of the original words—so as to match the power of the music.

Maeser was a serious person, but not always. He loved to perform and was known at times to leave his audiences in stitches of laughter. Heber J. Grant wrote that in an instant, “Brother Maeser had the capacity to change from the sublime to the ridiculous.”⁵⁶ While traveling in Mexico, for example, Maeser “gave an exhibition of a college student’s emotional



Maeser loved music. A special concert was held to raise money for the Provo Tabernacle, May 1889. Maeser was the keynote speaker. The newspaper reported, “A synopsis of his remarks would be an injustice to the gentleman.” Detail of a photo taken in the Provo Tabernacle May 1, 1889. Photo by G. E. Anderson, courtesy of LTPSC.

style of preaching which fairly convulsed the entire audience.”⁵⁷ There was laughter and banter in his home.⁵⁸ Eva said that when people gathered in the Maeser home on Friday and Sunday nights, “they would sit on the floor at his feet, in rapt attention, swayed one moment by laughter, the next by tears, while this great teacher told the stories of the great plays and operas.”⁵⁹ The family loved his dramatic readings and humorous stories. Sometimes he even parted his hair down the middle and played a city dude.

Maeser’s wit was keen and quick. When faced with awkward or challenging circumstances, he would often respond with humor. For example, as a missionary Maeser found some English customs strange and uncomfortable. Germans generally used massive stoves to heat homes uniformly; English fire grates, on the other hand, radiated warmth directly in front of them but not evenly throughout the room. After finding himself sitting close to the fire until it became too hot, and then moving away until he was too cold he commented to his longtime friend Edward Schoenfeld, “O dear, these English people are never in their true element, unless they enjoy the sensation of a shaved poodle, sweating in front and shivering on the back.”⁶⁰

One day while teaching, Brother Maeser read aloud six or seven paragraphs in his thick German accent. He wanted to demonstrate to the students how to read with feeling. He then left to visit another class. In the teacher’s absence, a young man who was known to mimic others “arose, walked over where Dr. Maeser had stood and in perfect posture, gesture and accent read the same paragraphs to the class.” He was so deeply engaged in his performance that he didn’t notice the return of the teacher, who was also watching the performance from the doorframe. “Instantly the arms of the Old Master went about the boy and the horrified students expected to see their classmate soundly trounced or thrown downstairs head first.” But Maeser patted the young prankster on the back and congratulated him, “Excellent, my boy, excellent! I could not do better myself.”⁶¹

Zina Young Card described a time when some young men did not want to learn grammar. For three weeks Maeser let them consider their position. When they finally relented and decided they would study grammar,

Maeser replied, "Oh, you have just found out, young men, that every time you open your mouth you put your foot into it, eh?"⁶²

On another occasion, Maeser was detained before beginning his class. This was a rare occurrence, but several mischievous young men had seen a donkey outside of the school and used this opportunity to make fun of the teacher. They took the animal into the classroom and tied it to the lectern, and then the whole class waited in silence for the dramatic reaction. The seasoned Maeser, however, was unflappable and sized up the circumstances immediately. Rather than a lecture to ferret out the offending parties for deserved punishment, he defused the situation with his powerful sense of humor. "That is right," he quipped. "When I am not available, you should appoint the brightest among you to take my place."⁶³

The most important characteristic of Maeser the teacher and Maeser the man was his unflinching love of God and his fellows. Love was fundamental to his educational approach, but he taught that charity, or the pure love of Christ which ought to radiate to those around us, "cannot be learned except by experience; it cannot be taught in theory."⁶⁴ His students testified that his great love for them was transformative. D. E. Harris, for example, summarized Maeser's character as a combination of "child-like humility, implicit confidence in the Lord, reverence for and obedience to the priesthood, and his unbounded love for his students."⁶⁵ Maeser felt an obligation to all his students, even after they left his direct assignment. Wherever he traveled, he sought his former students and invited them to seek him out. He became a second father to hundreds. Many, including James Talmage and Reed Smoot, would not venture to make major decisions in their lives without first consulting Brother Maeser. Smoot wrote, "His words of counsel were words of wisdom and inspired in me a determination to live for a higher life."⁶⁶

His family testified of the same. Reinhard wrote of his father, "As you found Karl G. Maeser among you in his public life, energetic and zealous in his labors, so also we found him in his private life. At no time did he permit worldly allurements to detract his mind from the accomplishment of purposes God had called him to work out."⁶⁷ The words Karl wrote to Reinhard from Switzerland in 1868 might well stand as a prayer for all

of his future descendants: “O, my dear son, may your father’s testimony be to you a guiding star through all your life, that you may never depart therefrom, but adhere to it faithful and true even unto death, that lives everlasting be your crown and you be numbered with those whom the Lord has chosen, with your brothers and sisters that are and may be and all your fathers house for ever. Amen.”⁶⁸

Notes

1. Karl G. Maeser to Mabel Tanner, comment in Mabel Maeser Tanner, “My Grandfather: Karl G. Maeser” (circa 1968,) MSS SC 2905, LTPSC, 38.
2. Edward Schoenfeld, “A Character Sketch of Dr. Karl G. Maeser,” *Juvenile Instructor*, March 15, 1901, 181.
3. *The Autobiography of Bryant Stringham Hinckley* (n.p.: Ruth Hinckley Willes, 1971), 15.
4. Hickman became the principal of the Beaver Branch of the BYA. See “Dr. Karl G. Maeser: Tributes from His Students,” BX 8670.A1 no. 144, LTPSC.
5. George W. Middleton, *Memoirs of a Pioneer Surgeon* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1976), 53.
6. Smoot would have attended the Twentieth Ward school under William Willes until Maeser took over the school again late in 1870.
7. Karl G. Maeser, *School and Fireside* (Provo, UT: Skelton, 1898), 106–7.
8. Reed Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1937, 328. I am skeptical of this account recalled nearly seventy years after the event. At the same time, I do not doubt that he was much harsher before coming to the academy.
9. Alice Louise Reynolds, “Autobiography 1873–1938,” MS 5850, 3, CHL.
10. Reynolds, “Autobiography 1873–1938,” 6.
11. Alice Louise Reynolds, “Karl G. Maeser,” *Young Woman’s Journal*, July 1912, 363.
12. Most often he wore a black Prince Albert coat because that was nearly all he owned.
13. Amy Brown Lyman, “Karl G. Maeser,” BYU Emeritus Club 1956, MS 1070, 7, LTPSC.
14. Lyman, “Karl G. Maeser,” 8.
15. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 1:115.
16. Eva Maeser Crandall, cited in P. Bradford Westwood, “The Early Life and Career of Joseph Don Carlos Young” (master’s thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 120.

17. Hollis Scott, "Interview with Eva Maeser Crandall," June 26, 1964, 13, LTPSC. In another recording she quoted her father as calling it "paltry mimicry." "Recollections 1962," interview with Eva Maeser Crandall by Hollis Scott," UA OH 64, LTPSC, 3. These taped interviews were made when Eva was in her late 80s. They must have been wonderful to have heard in person, but they include so many factual errors that serious doubts are raised regarding the accuracy of many of her stories.
18. Schoenfeld, "A Character Sketch," 182.
19. Scott, "Interview with Eva Maeser Crandall," June 26, 1964, 30.
20. James E. Talmage, journals, July 14, 1881, MS 229, LTPSC.
21. Talmage, journals, July 24, 1881.
22. Reinhard Maeser, "His Son's Tribute," *Young Woman's Journal*, July 1912, 365. This address was given at the dedication of the Maeser Memorial Building on May 30, 1912.
23. Tanner, "My Grandfather," 12.
24. Eva M. Crandall, "The Biography of Anna Therese Mieth Maeser," family record in author's possession.
25. Mabel Maeser Tanner, "My Grandmother Maeser—Anna Henriette Therese Mieth Maeser," family history.
26. Eva Maeser, "Sharing Her Memories," June 21, 1963, LTPSC.
27. Lyman, "Karl G. Maeser," 13.
28. "Herr M. ist bis jetzt nur theoretischer Polygame." M. Lindeman, "Ein sächsischer Schulmeister im MormonenLande," *Gartenlaube*, no. 49, 1873, 796.
29. Karl G. Maeser to Brigham Young, June 2, 1861, Thompson file, LTPSC.
30. Karl G. Maeser to Brigham Young, September 28, 1866, UA 1094, box 1, folder 1, LTPSC.
31. Brigham Young, in "Brigham Young Copybook," September 28, 1866, 178, CHL.
32. Lindeman, "Ein sächsischer Schulmeister," 796.
33. Family record from Eva Crandall, in author's possession.
34. Maeser, "His Son's Tribute," 365.
35. Tanner, "My Grandfather," 20. See further discussion of Karl's counsel to Reinhard in chapter 9.
36. Schoenfeld, "A Character Sketch," 179.
37. Schoenfeld, "A Character Sketch," 179.
38. The Word of Wisdom was a revelation to Joseph Smith in 1833. Originally, it was not considered a commandment or requirement for all members of the Church. In 1880 the section was added to the Doctrine and Covenants, but how binding it was to be seen by members

- of the Church was not clear well into the twentieth century. At some point in Maeser's life, he decided it was binding on him.
39. Tanner, "My Grandfather," 40.
 40. See, for example, Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1928), 39.
 41. The evidence of his life and testimonials of his students deny the unsubstantiated claim by Bergera and Priddis that "Maeser made little attempt to keep abreast of current of developments." He shunned neither evolution nor psychology as they claimed. Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 6. Others have taken snippets of Maeser's works and attributed to him theories or positions that he did not support. For example, in *School and Fireside* he made one passing reference to phrenology, and John T. Miller concluded that Maeser was a phrenologist. See Bitton, Davis and Gary L. Bunker, "Phrenology Among the Mormons," *Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 42–61. Miller then attempted to appeal to Reed Smoot to throw support for phrenology based on Maeser, but without success. Maeser knew of phrenology, but nowhere does he suggest that he believed it had an important scientific basis. In 1878, a number of his students were going to attend a lecture on phrenology, so he attended it "in order to rectify any wrong notions afterwards, they might be told there." He found nothing there to add new support for it, and when the speaker began a lecture on mind reading and mesmerism, Maeser called it "a sham and a fraud." Maeser's awareness of various opinions should not be interpreted as support for them. Karl G. Maeser to John Taylor, December 27, 1878, UA 1094, LTPSC.
 42. Karl G. Maeser to George Reynolds, April 14, 1890, UA 1094, box 1, folder 6, no. 26, LTPSC.
 43. See, for example, Heber J. Grant, "Honoring Karl G. Maeser," *Improvement Era*, June 1935, 342, and Heber J. Grant, "Memory of Karl G. Maeser Honored," *Improvement Era*, February 1927, 309.
 44. W. A. M., "Dr. Karl G. Maeser—Some of His Sentence Sermons," *Millemmial Star*, July 16, 1908, 451.
 45. David F. Boone, "Karl G. Maeser's Educating for Eternity," in *Proceedings of the Laying the Foundations Symposium, March 20–21, 1992*, ed. A. LeGrand Richards (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1992), 116.
 46. Cited in "Sunday School Union Meeting," *Deseret News*, March 20, 1900, 8.
 47. Karl G. Maeser, *School and Fireside* (Provo, UT: Skelton, 1898), 116.

48. Susan Young Gates, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser," *Young Woman's Journal*, 3, August 1892, 484–85.
49. Gates, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser," 484–85.
50. Karl G. Maeser, in "Theo. Notes recorded by Allie Canfield," March 9, 1884, 210–12, LTPSC.
51. Melvin M. Harmon, "Notes of the BYA Normal Class," October 9, 1884, UA 100, LTPSC.
52. Scott, "Interview with Eva Maeser Crandall," June 26, 1964, 9.
53. Tanner, "My Grandfather," 3.
54. He apologized, for example, while addressing the Territorial Teachers' Association that he would have to read his address because he had had no time to memorize his ideas. See Karl G. Maeser, "The Teacher," *Juvenile Instructor*, July 1, 1891, 414–16.
55. James E. Talmage, reporter, "Theology Notes," November 26, 1878, 39, LTPSC.
56. Heber J. Grant, "Honoring Karl G. Maeser," 342.
57. See "With the Sunday Schools," *Deseret Weekly News*, March 16, 1895, 410.
58. Lyman, "Karl G. Maeser," 11.
59. Tanner, "My Grandfather," 24.
60. Schoenfeld, "A Character Sketch of Dr. Karl G. Maeser," 181.
61. Referred to by William R. Palmer in Swen Teresed, "Another Maeser Story," *Deseret News*, October 21, 1949.
62. Zina Y. Card, "Karl G. Maeser," *Young Woman's Journal*, April 1901, 148–49.
63. Other versions phrase it differently: "When I am detained always choose the brightest one among you," in Tanner, "My Grandfather." "Dat is right, dat is right, when I cannot be present at our meetings, appoint one of your own number to preside," in Eva Maeser Crandall, interview with Alma Burton, March 25, 1950 (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1950), 94.
64. "Sunday Services," *Provo Daily Enquirer*, December 24, 1894, 4.
65. D. E. Harris, "Dr. Karl G. Maeser: Tributes from His Students," no. 144, LTPSC.
66. Smoot, in Conference Report, October 1937, 328.
67. R. Maeser, "His Son's Tribute," 366.
68. Karl G. Maeser to Reinhard Maeser, May 18, 1868, Eileen Thompson Papers, LTPSC.