
The Master Teacher

The true teacher educates the soul.

—Karl G. Maeser¹

In 1935, Heber J. Grant, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, reported a visit he had with George Sutherland, justice of the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC. Most of their two-hour conversation was spent reflecting on the experiences Sutherland had while attending the Brigham Young Academy nearly sixty years previous, “in connection with the wonderful character, ability, knowledge, and spirit of Karl G. Maeser.”² Sutherland, who never joined the Mormon Church, spoke of the high esteem he held for Maeser, who one biographer referred to as Sutherland’s “revered and seemingly omniscient teacher.”³ President Grant related an experience that Sutherland had as a new student to the academy. Since he was not a member of the LDS Church, Sutherland did not want to take the Book of Mormon course and apparently some of his fellow students began to tease him about it. The pestering became so severe that George finally swore at them. He knew that such a response violated one of the academy rules and expected that it would mean expulsion from the school. At the devotional the next morning he expected to hear his name read with the consequences but was surprised



Senator George Sutherland. Photo by Baines News Service, courtesy of Library of Congress/Wiki.

to see Brother Maeser arise and quote the eleventh article of faith: “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.” And he gave a lecture to those boys who had been heckling Sutherland, and said, “What is the good of your coming to this school, if you cannot even learn to live up to the Articles of Faith?” He further said, “If I hear again of your heckling this young man somebody will be expelled from school.”⁴

After the meeting, the future senator and judge rushed up to Maeser to promise that he would enroll in the Book of Mormon class and do well in it. Sutherland’s biographer Joel Paschal insisted, “The nonconforming Sutherland was never made to feel that his dissent made the slightest difference in the attention he received or the esteem in which he was held.”⁵ The effect that Maeser had on Sutherland was deep and permanent; for example, in 1941 Sutherland submitted a commencement address to be read at the graduation of Brigham Young University, explaining how Maeser had taught him to believe that the US Constitution was a divinely inspired document.⁶

Maeser’s talents never shone brighter than when he was teaching. He did not set out to develop a systematic method of teaching, but rather he held to carefully developed principles.

Teach Them Correct Principles

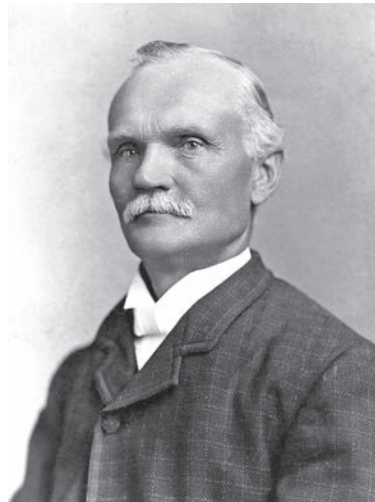
The BYA was grounded on two prophetic injunctions: Joseph’s directive to teach correct principles and let students govern themselves, and

Brigham’s counsel to teach all subjects with the spirit of God. Likewise, Maeser’s personal philosophy of teaching was built upon these principles. He drew from the important educational theories and practices that he believed were consistent with modern revelation. For him, individuals were essentially spiritual beings—literal children of God with the potential to become like him. This potential defined the ultimate aim of education as well as the guiding criterion for selecting educational practices.

Divine Mission

Maeser believed that within man are placed “impulses that cause him unceasingly to seek after the origin, the nature, and the ultimate aim of himself and everything around him.”⁷ Each person possesses special gifts that have been “placed there by an all-wise Creator, for the working out of each one’s individual mission upon the earth.”⁸ The educational system, then, should awaken these impulses that will lead students to the fulfillment of this mission: “Every human being is a world in miniature. It has its own centre of observation, its own way of forming concepts and of arriving at conclusions, its own degree of sensibility, its own life’s work to do, and its own destiny to reach. All these features may be encompassed by general conditions, governed by general laws, and subject to unforeseen influences and incidents, but within the sphere of their own activity, they constitute that great principle which we call individuality.”⁹

Maeser was a master at identifying the divine potential of his students and inspiring them to reach for more from themselves than they knew they had in them. For example, on November 27, 1878, Eunice Stewart, future teacher and mother to Brigham Young University president Franklin Harris, was assigned



Portrait of Karl G. Maeser. Photo by C. R. Savage, courtesy of Eilene Thompson.

to keep the minutes of the theology class. She recorded Maeser's instruction regarding the future of Primary children:

In listening to the recitation of that little girl from the Primary Department telling her little Bible story I was contemplating what may grow out of these little things and circumstances as well and I ask myself what wonderful manifestations of the Holy Spirit we will see when these little ones take the responsibility of this work upon their shoulders. The Bible says the young men shall dream dreams and see visions, and the maidens shall prophecy and speak in tongues. I can look around me here today and see children, yes I could call them by name that will in future time stand forth and prophecy in the name of Israel's God, and proclaim the glory of his name in a loud voice completely surpassing that of the prophets of old in power and glory.¹⁰

He would regularly declare to his students, "Among us are to be bishops, governors & lawgivers and a man cannot be called to such a position unless he has a public spirit."¹¹

Maeser was constant in reminding his students to "live up to their divine privileges." He became well known for warning them against becoming "scrubs." For him, a scrub was one who drifted along with the crowd without a sense of a divine mission. These were those who did the minimum to get by, or who could not be depended upon.¹² They were heading on a downward moral path and had an uncanny way of attracting others like themselves. Josiah E. Hickman, future principal and professor, recorded, "He has often been heard to say that two 'scrubs,' arriving at the Academy the same day, one from Arizona and the other from Idaho would meet and know each other before night." Hickman continued that he watched Maeser separate these scrubs and then plant in them much higher aims. Maeser soon became to them a "man whom they afterwards learned to know and love as few men have ever been loved."¹³

George Brimhall, future president of the university, remembered Maeser teaching, "Boys, don't be scrubs, and whatever you do maintain

your honor, for some time in your life you will come to forks in the road, and ever pray that you may in such times choose to secure God.”¹⁴ As a stake president, S. L. Chipman remembered, “He also impressed me with the fact that I should not only be good, but be ‘good for something.’”¹⁵

Genders: Equal But Different

From his early days at the Budich Institute, Maeser was constant in his support for the potential of both women and men, a position uncommon during his lifetime. He believed that “it is as necessary for young ladies to be instructed as it is the young men.”¹⁶ He taught, “No people on the face of the earth that will be called upon to defend this cause and to stand as firm in the maintenance of the same as the Latter-day Saints and in this the women will have to fill a most important part. No cause has ever been successfully maintained except by assistance of the women. It is necessary therefore that the sisters learn to speak, and to address assemblies while they have the privilege.”¹⁷

Calling himself “an uncompromising suffragist,”¹⁸ he believed that too many social institutions had been “hermetically closed to women” and that too often “the education of women has been subjected to limitations, prejudices, and obstructions, based upon traditions of the past.”¹⁹ Therefore, he ensured that young women were called upon to offer prayers, to give talks, and to participate in leadership opportunities. He advocated that “women should have a direct vote in the management and government of educational affairs,”²⁰ and that they should be well represented on school boards



A bookkeeping class. Maeser was constant in his support for the potential of both women and men, a position uncommon during his lifetime. Photo by B. F. Larsen, ca. 1895, courtesy of LTPSC.

and throughout all levels of the educational process. However, he did believe that, while women could be successful in various occupations “in the arts, in literature, in medicine, in education, etc.,” “the focus of woman’s activity ought to be the home and family circle.” Anything done at the expense of home and family “would be too dearly paid for.”²¹

At the same time, Maeser warned teachers not to neglect young men. He observed that from age six to fourteen or fifteen, girls tended to be more advanced in comprehension, in expressing ideas, and in “appreciation of what is good and beautiful, than boys.” He observed that it tends to take longer for boys to develop willpower, “preventing boys from keeping an even pace with the girls.” Therefore, teachers may need to make an extra effort to avoid favoritism.²²

While both men and women should be well educated, Maeser also believed the roles of men and women were different—They “have to operate in different spheres of activity.” Though these spheres were distinct, he insisted they were “parallel in such a manner as to exclude any claim of superiority of one over the other.”²³ If women neglected home and family, Maeser believed they would “sacrifice the prestige of true and noble womanhood.” He also wrote, “The man’s sphere of activity extends far beyond the home circle.” By this he meant men were expected to prepare themselves as missionaries and to have greater responsibilities in the professions: “He should gather from the outside the honey of comfort and prosperity and bring it into the hive of his home.”²⁴ Whatever else they did, Maeser taught that both men and women should prepare themselves to become instruments in the hands of the Lord for whatever he would call them to do.

Maeser taught that both men and women should be prepared in a well-rounded education, including appropriate manual labor. “The education of the hand, is as essential to the wellbeing of any man and woman, as the education of the head and the heart.”²⁵

Higher education offered great advantages, but in obtaining it students should be protected from “a corresponding self-conceit” or “a contempt for mechanical labor” or the idea “that their education places them above their less-favored companions and entitles them to more marked



Students working with their hands. Maeser believed in education of the hand as well as the mind and heart. Technical skills continued to be taught as part of a well-rounded education. Top: woodworking class. Photo by B. F. Larsen, ca. 1900, courtesy of LTPSC. Bottom: sewing class at BYA, Domestic Department under Susa Young Gates. Photo by B. F. Larsen, ca. 1896, courtesy of LTPSC.

consideration.”²⁶ Such arrogance would demonstrate that their “real intellectual growth” had been “stunted.”

Moral Agents with Eternal Accountability

For Maeser, the most important task of education for students was to learn their divine missions and freely choose to fulfill them. He taught: “The

life of man can be compared to a ship going down a river. That ship must follow up the windings of the river; and so there is a great deal of scope of free agency remaining. It can turn to the right or to the left; it can go fast or slow. Our life's river is measured out to each one of us; but still plenty of scope for our own responsibilities is left." The path is ours to choose: "There is no power in the heavens, on the earth or in hell that can force us to do either one or the other. This choice is left to every Son and Daughter of Adam and Eve, here on the earth. . . . It takes a stout heart to serve the Lord," but the opposite course is much easier: "It will take you to destruction on velvet cushions."²⁷

Maeser believed the only way to teach the proper use of agency was by coaching individuals to make their own wise choices. Coercive approaches to education cannot do this. Our agency does not develop if others decide for us. He taught, "It is impossible to drag a man into heaven by the hair."²⁸ Perhaps physical compliance could be compelled, but not the human mind and certainly not the spiritual character, or in his words, "A slave does a thing because he must, a free man because he wills to do it."²⁹ Therefore, only slaves need masters; "free men need leaders."³⁰ Morality requires personal commitment, and people who are coerced or compelled lose their moral capacity.

He also believed that children could be trained "step by step in the exercise of this free agency." This could be done by measuring out to them "in exact proportion to the grade of accountability which age, intelligence, will power, and moral disposition have developed in them. No more, no less."³¹ "Thus a judicious educator, whether in a school or at the fireside, measures out the amount of discretion allowed to the yet immature young minds in exact proportion to their gradually developing judgment."³²

Karl even made it a regular practice "to leave with the class the choice of the amount of preparation for the next recitation."³³ In math, for example, he would periodically ask the students to propose the number of practice problems they should do as homework for the next day. "Some would say twelve, some six, or some, perhaps only one. The least number proposed would be the required amount of preparation, but would not prevent any one from doing more, if any should so choose."³⁴ The students were

then placed on their honor to complete the task. Those who failed to be prepared, having given their word, would lose privileges until they had sufficiently demonstrated that their word could be depended upon. Maeser believed that when the teacher placed great confidence in the agency of the students they rarely set low expectations for themselves.

Maeser's Style of Emulation

Maeser taught that there were two approaches to influencing students: the "coercive" and the "emulative." Coercive approaches followed the lower Mosaic law of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." Such approaches evoked the lower response, "Okay, if I must." The schools of the time depended on this lesser means of influence. Even in the Utah Territory, the most loving school teachers tended to rely upon threats, beatings, and fines to control their classrooms.³⁵ Adopting Pestalozzi's ideas, Maeser denounced corporal punishment: "Whenever a teacher raises his hand or a stick to strike a child it shows that he is morally defeated."³⁶ Likewise, Maeser also discouraged psychological punishments (such as public shaming, dunce caps, and public reprimands) to compel students. He taught that these methods tended to create malice between the teacher and the offender. Maeser believed that teachers should establish a holy and sacred atmosphere. He taught, "Scolding is not a good thing to do; better speak kindly and use that potent influence for gentleness and love; but scolding arouses feelings of anger, contempt and hate. The spirit used always begets its own kind."³⁷ Even schoolwork was also not to be given as a punishment, for fear of transforming the joy of learning into drudgery.

He taught that the emulative teaching style, on the other hand, should grow out of Christ's higher invitation, "Come follow me," with its higher response of "the beautiful 'I will' of the striving for free agency."³⁸ The German phrase *ich will* connotes more than an expectation or determination to do something (which would be *ich werde*); rather, its meaning is closer to "I want" and represents a person's desires. The English "I will" may not always convey how fundamental the desires were in Maeser's view.

Maeser was quick to point out that not all forms of enticement or desires were appropriate. To seek learning in hopes of obtaining some prize or external reward might engender “vanity and conceit in the hearts of the recipients and jealousy and bitterness among the rest. They are apt to substitute mercenary or ambitious motives for the genuine appreciation of, and love for, virtue and rightful action.” Every virtue was its own reward, so Maeser taught that even praise should be bestowed moderately.³⁹ “Those who work merely for the sake of reward do not comprehend the purpose of their living here upon the earth.”⁴⁰ He taught that the teacher “has to cultivate in the minds of the students a desire to observe order and do right because it is proper to do so.”⁴¹ One of his students recorded a maxim he gave: “Give no prize and virtue will arise.”⁴²

Anything that would distract students from this primary motive for learning should, therefore, be discouraged. “Mere ordering about, scolding, coaxing, or promises of reward are lacking the elevating tendency, which the consciousness of free choice with a corresponding sense of responsibility exercises.”⁴³ Maeser was realistic enough to recognize that not all students would be motivated by the highest reasons and that young children in particular needed more thorough guidance than those who were more mature. However, he made it a policy to presume that his students would exercise their agency correctly unless they proved themselves otherwise. In his words, “I will believe you till I know you cannot be trusted.”⁴⁴

Christ as the Highest Ideal to Emulate

For Maeser, the highest ideal to emulate was the life of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ His life stood as a divine object lesson to all who had the eyes to see. In 1889, Maeser attempted a formal character sketch of the Savior, not as the Redeemer, because Maeser did not believe his mind capable of grasping that role sufficiently, but rather of Jesus’ “character as a man, a fellow being, a brother of ours, greater and nobler than we, but still a brother, endowed like we are with feelings susceptible of joy and grief, anger and sympathy; with capacities for intellectual development; with the full scope of his free agency to choose for himself his course of life.”⁴⁶

The main aim of education, then, was to help the student obtain a living testimony of Jesus Christ and then “to cause the pupil to shape all his feelings, thoughts, words, and actions in conformity with this testimony.”⁴⁷ Emulating any lesser example would fail to strive for the highest human potential.

For Maeser, the highest motives for learning were, therefore, religious or spiritual. Developing spirituality was necessary to awaken a proper sense of mission. It could become the greatest incentive underlying education, if it were properly developed. Maeser believed that students who were motivated primarily by religious reasons in fulfillment of their divine potential would work harder, seek greater independence of thought, and act with greater concern for each other than they would upon any other basis.

The Disadvantages of Secular Schools

According to Maeser, then, public schools were at a great disadvantage because they had removed the religious from the basis of learning. Therefore, they were left to draw upon lesser motives. Maeser wrote, “With the removal of religion as the fundamental principle of education, our public school system has been deprived of the most effective motive power.” They were disregarding both the highest motive for learning as well as the best example to emulate. “To cover this defect,” Maeser argued, “emulation and ambition have been called into requisition as substitutes.” The emulative approaches they relied on, however, fostered competition and tended to feed vanity. He continued, “These substitutes would be absolutely dangerous if they were not sought to be counteracted by a diluted form of religion, called ethics.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately, however, ethics not built on a foundation of “positive religion” was too often determined merely by popular opinion and was likely to replace “respectability for character” and “decorum for virtue.” Such a system of morality “measures purity of the soul by a utilitarian standard.”⁴⁹ Emulation, then, “propped up by the ‘soft and pliant pillow’ ethics,” offers little more than “spiritual pabulum to the needy souls of childhood.”⁵⁰ It would, therefore, prove incapable of preparing the next generation for its ultimate destiny.

Teach All Subjects by the Spirit of God

Maeser knew that it was only through personal revelation from the “Spirit of God” that a person could learn what his or her divine mission was. This was as true for the teachers as it was for the students. Maeser wrote: “The first requisite is the Spirit of God, that should imbue the minds of teachers and parents. . . . There is no substitute for this indispensable factor in religious training. Erudition, eloquence, and personal influence may captivate or charm for a season, their transitory nature will manifest itself invariably in hours that try men’s souls.”⁵¹



In the nineteenth century, pabulum was a bland cereal for infants that had little taste or nutritional value. For Maeser, education based on ethics devoid of religion offered little more than “spiritual pabulum.” Courtesy of A. LeGrand. Richards.

Karl understood that we might be able to philosophize with the best scholars, but without the

Spirit of God, we won’t be able to accomplish our purpose “any more than the electric light can take the place of the sun light in giving life to the things of the world.”⁵²

Available to All

Brigham’s injunction that no teaching should be done in the academy without the “Spirit of God” would only be effective if the students were learning by that same Spirit.⁵³ Therefore, Maeser made every effort to encourage students to live in such a way that they might avail themselves of the Lord’s Spirit in all subject areas. He promised them that the door to personal revelation was open to all who are worthy and seek diligently. He wrote, “When Israel stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they put bounds around the mountain, allowing none but Moses to go up and speak with Jehovah. There is no fence around the mountain any more, and the road is open to all.”⁵⁴ He believed that God would yet reveal important ideas to

those who diligently sought him in all areas of knowledge. He continued, “There are higher objects yet to be attained; other truths to be learned, and greater works to be done, all of which are indicated by successive stakes of continuous revelation stretching into the endless perspective of eternity.”⁵⁵ With confidence in this divine potential he encouraged his students to “seek ye the spirit of heaven. This I have done and the spirit of God has been with me, so will he be with you if you accept this advice, which you should do above everything else, not only while in religious meeting but while studying penmanship, grammar, etc.”⁵⁶

Maeser used an object lesson to describe how important it is to prepare yourself for the Spirit: “If I take a lot of sand, shavings, saw dust and iron filings, and spread them out upon a sheet of paper and then take a magnet and draw it over them, the sand would not move, the shavings would not be affected by it, the saw dust would lie still, but the iron filings would straighten up and fly to the magnet. It is same with the Spirit of God. Every soul in a congregation is not affected by the Holy Ghost. Only the heart that is prepared will receive the word gladly and profit by it.”⁵⁷



Maeser compared those in a congregation who were spiritually prepared with iron filings mixed in sand and sawdust. The spiritually prepared are drawn to the spirit of the message, while the others remain unmoved. Courtesy of A. LeGrand Richards.

Learning by the Spirit required spiritual exertion, whether the student was studying the scriptures or physical science. Maeser gave counsel regarding this type of exertion: “If you only read what is before your eyes, if you only hear what enters the ear, you will never be able to understand; but to have the spirit of revelation from God is necessary in order to understand anything correctly that God ever has done or said. Therefore, mere science in the worldly application of the term is no more capable of interpreting nature and nature’s God than we could see the condition of distant worlds with the naked eye.”⁵⁸

Maeser taught his students that if pursued spiritually, the study of any worthy subject could help reveal a person's divine mission. At the same time, however, he taught that without the Spirit, their missions would be a failure regardless of the number of scriptures they could quote or the theological treatises they had published. Therefore, he told them they should "go right to work from this very minute and pray for [the Spirit], and keep to work until you do get it."⁵⁹ By doing this, the students would fully develop their bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits until they had a "true education which finds its crowning glory in the attainment of the divine attributes."⁶⁰

Character over Content

The range of subjects on which Maeser held public lectures or published articles was astounding: geography, history, geology, botany, astronomy, mechanics, science, architecture, accounting, politics, Latin, Greek, German, mathematics, drawing, rhetoric, pedagogy, educational administration, social problems, child development, reading, linguistics, sociology, missionary work, religion, theology, philosophy, and more. He was constantly learning. Maeser taught that "as soon as a teacher ceases to learn he becomes unfit for the school room."⁶¹ Even just months before his death, Maeser reported that he attended his church meetings "for the purpose of learning something and gaining some point of information."⁶² He advocated that "a good teacher should know something about everything and everything about something."⁶³ The true teacher would never permit his expertise in his specialized area to become an intellectual "hobby" imposed "to the detriment of his pupils," but would always be seeking truth "by listening to the voices of nature, by diligently following the researches in scientific progress, and by obeying the commands of divine revelation."⁶⁴

In 1941, George Sutherland expressed his opinion of Maeser's intellect. As a seasoned US Supreme Court justice, he had intimate association with some of the keenest minds in the country. He wrote: "I have never known a man whose learning covered so wide a range of subjects, and was at the same time so thorough in all. His ability to teach ran from the Kindergarten to the highest branches of pedagogy. In all my

acquaintance with him I never knew a question to be submitted upon any topic that he did not readily and fully answer.”⁶⁵ As important as knowledge may be, however, it was not Maeser’s prime educational goal. For him, content was not as important as character. He taught that Bacon’s famous maxim, “Knowledge is power,” was not quite complete. Maeser argued, “Knowledge is not power unless it is sustained by a character.”⁶⁶ He explained that it is with people as it is with furniture:

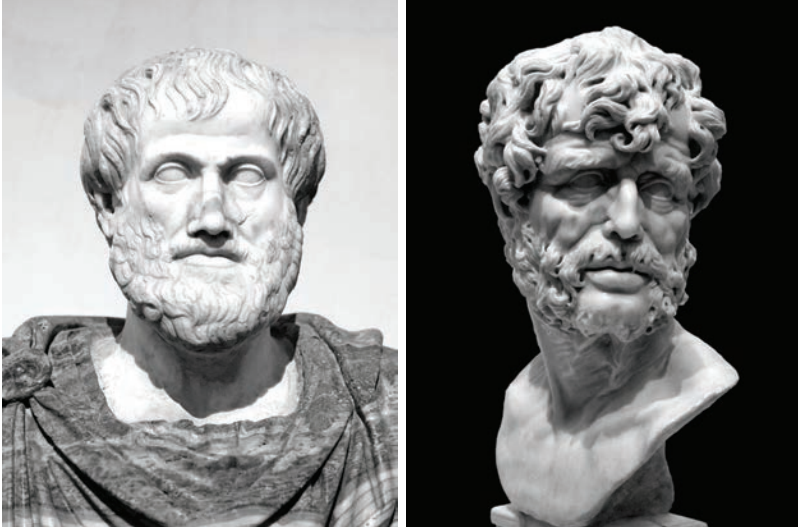
A piece of furniture may be beautifully painted, splendidly varnished, elaborately ornamented, and gotten up in exquisite taste, and still prove worthless on account of the rotten timber in it. Another piece far less showy may be of greater value because it is proven to consist of solid wood.

Thus it is with man. No outward refinement of manners, no acquired accomplishments, no excellence in the arts or sciences, no mastership in mechanical pursuits, no high position in society—can recompense for the lack of a virtuous character.⁶⁷

Maeser often contrasted two celebrated teachers, Aristotle and Seneca. Both wrote philosophical books on ethics; both stood in great social prominence in their day; both were masters of rhetoric and literature, but Aristotle was a pure teacher and inspired his pupil, Alexander, with the highest code of morals. Seneca, on the other hand, mentored Nero with a superficial and gilded, “drawing-room” morality. For Maeser, a drawing room morality lacked practical depth; it was little more than superficial posturing like a varnish that could not withstand the temptations of Roman corruption.⁶⁸ “The teacher could not give to his pupil a pure heart unless he himself possessed one.”⁶⁹ At the same time, there was no technique that could compensate for the teachings of a corrupt heart, and “in the hands of an indolent or careless teacher, every method will prove a failure.”⁷⁰

Teacher as Example

Maeser’s “golden rule of education” was “We can never give what we ourselves do not possess.” Those who don’t enjoy freedom cannot teach



Left to right, Aristotle and Seneca. Aristotle prepared Alexander the Great, while Seneca trained Nero. Aristotle Copy of Lysippus, 330 BC, Museo nazionale romano di palazzo, Rome, Italy. Seneca artist unknown, Musee du Prado de Madrid. Photos by Jean-Pol Grandmont, 2013, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

freedom; undemocratic teachers cannot teach democracy; those without faith cannot teach faith; and teachers who lack virtue cannot teach it. A school administrator, he continued, “must keep this maxim before him. Whatever he desires his teachers to do, and to be, whatever he desires his pupils to do and become he himself must set the example.”⁷¹ On numerous occasions, Maeser declared, “It is better to expose a child to a contagion of small pox or any other disease than into the care of an impure teacher.”⁷² Just because a person is exposed to small pox does not guarantee they will get the disease; likewise, mere exposure to an impure teacher would not ensure that the student would die spiritually. But Maeser believed it was much better to get a physical disease than a spiritual one. In his words, “it was infinitely better to take chances with an ignorant but pure minded teacher than with the greatest philosopher who was impure.”⁷³

The teacher, then, had the task of awakening the spiritual influences within the individual in both secular and religious institutions; though public schools were not to teach religious doctrine, divine potential was to be taught far more by the eye than the ear anyway. He taught that “children

hear better with their eyes than with their ears.”⁷⁴ So for Maeser, “the great lever that moves the hearts of the children”⁷⁵ was the personal example of the parent or teacher. Children, especially those trained in a Pestalozzian perspective, were keen observers of nature and could quickly discern the sincere example from the “sanctimonious face . . . with an oily tongue.”⁷⁶ Slogans and catchy phrases might have had their place but only when demonstrated by a teacher who lived them.

Confidence and Love

Maeser believed that a teacher’s example was the great lever that moved hearts, but the fulcrum that grounded the leverage in the student was the love and confidence expressed by the teacher. Confidence expressed by a poor example was mere flattery, but from a pure example, “the strongest incentives to discipline are love and confidence. These two almost omnipotent agents in education cannot be bought, commanded, enjoined, or prescribed.”⁷⁷ No coercion, manipulation, flattery, or bribery could move a student as powerfully.

Because of Maeser’s deep love for and confidence in his students, they responded to him with high performance. His influence left deep impressions. For example, Eunice S. Harris wrote in her autobiography, “Now in my seventy-second year, my heart swells with gratitude and my eyes are blurred with tears of thanksgiving when I think how blessed I was in having had the opportunity of attending that wonderful school where I was privileged to be under the influence of Karl G. Maeser, that great educator and character builder.”⁷⁸

Maeser’s love for his students has become almost legendary. There were hundreds of former students who sought out his counsel and expressed gratitude for the little ways in which Maeser reached out to them even years after they left the academy. He held a regular open office hour for students to meet with him and held private interviews when he felt special correction was needed. The next chapter will illustrate more instances of this.

Maeser believed it was particularly important for teachers to love and pray for those students most neglected by their homes. On numerous

occasions while training teachers, he would encourage them to spend extra time on those not so easy to love:

Perhaps there may be some in your class who are determined not to abide by what you say; they may pass out with a yell, a sneer or a mumbling remark; watch them as they leave the building and offer up a silent prayer to God—"God bless those dear little ones—Bless Johnny, he is wild; rough; I wonder what will become of him; he goes home and receives no kind word of welcome, no smile; what dangers his immortal soul is exposed to—he is left to cultivate it himself or go without. Father, is there no help for him? Will you not let angels guard him or protect him from evil? Bless all these children, that they may grow up in Thy fear and grace." And don't you think our Father will listen to that prayer?

. . . God has rescued many a one from unavoidable destruction in answer to my prayers that I have sent up concerning some of these. I have learned more of the characteristics of my students in watching them after they left the room and got on the playground than for weeks before me in the classroom. I have prayed many hundreds of times for God to guard this or that one safely from destruction and He has done it; He will do it for you; I know this is the truth. I have witnessed it myself. Yes, you will feel that sweet influence of an answered prayer many times if you do this.⁷⁹

Maeser taught that teachers would encounter two kinds of children. One kind was the child that "grows up in an atmosphere of love, tenderness, where kind words, gentle and tender care and loving hands are always seen and heard, their nature shows it by their sweet smile and ways." It is easy to love these children. They tend to be obedient and helpful, willing to receive instruction and happy to be there. It is also true that they are likely to be successful whether or not you are a great teacher.

There is another type of child, however, that teachers come across in a school. This type is "starving for love, for a kind word, a loving expression. The atmosphere in which they have grown up is cold, chilly—many

times unpleasant. There is no one at home who gives them a kind word. These are like the flowers that grow up in the cellar, where the rays of sunlight never smile on them. No wonder they lack the sweet smile, gentle ways and bright countenances and heads of those who grew up under that paternal love of God's sunlight. These starving children are the ones that need our care, our love, our devotion."⁸⁰ Brother Maeser had seen children of this type "by the hundreds." These were the ones on whose behalf he pled with teachers and superintendents.



Detail from first grade class, 1890. Some children grow up in tender support; they are easy to teach and to love. Others are like flowers growing in a cellar, starving for God's sunlight. Maeser pleaded for support for the latter. Courtesy of LTPSC.

Honor

Maeser believed proper love and confidence cultivated a personal sense of honor within the student. The sense of honor Maeser hoped to develop in his students has become his most frequently cited principle. In a 1950 interview, Richard Lyman quoted Maeser as having said: "My young friends, I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first."⁸¹

While this quotation was attributed to Maeser long after he had died, it portrayed the importance that he placed on self-discipline. In *School and Fireside*, he wrote: "Let the principle of honor be cultivated in every school and at every fireside, by example as well as by precept. Let that divine plant of the heart be nursed by love and confidence, parents and



Maeser believed honor was one of the most important educational objectives. "Stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first." Courtesy of A. LeGrand Richards.

teachers becoming living object-lessons in this regard, and there will be no need for the adoption of many more emulative methods of discipline."⁸²

For Maeser, self-discipline was inherent in the meaning of honor. He contrasted the attitude of the hireling with that of the good son. The hireling may come to work on time and perform his duty with efficiency, but "the good son of a man does much more than this. He is up before sunrise and works after dark not because he has to, but for the interest of his father." He then asked, "Do we wish to be sons of God or servants?"⁸³ The difference between the two positions was defined by the motives and the sense of purpose one chooses. To choose the higher, students must be able to reflect upon their own experience, evaluate themselves, make and keep personal commitments, and report on their own progress.

Let Them Govern Themselves

Maeser believed a properly developed sense of personal honor enabled students to fulfill Joseph's injunction to govern themselves. He wrote, "Every child ought to have a chance to develop its moral, mental, and spiritual faculties to their utmost capacity. This can be accomplished only by a judicious distribution of the principles of obedience and

discretion.”⁸⁴ He summed up his view of discipline as “an iron hand in a velvet glove.”⁸⁵

Balance between Agency and Obedience to Authority

In the schools, a balance must be sought in the development of self-will. On one hand, students needed the discipline of “obedience to given instructions,” and on the other, “the cultivation of free agency.” Maeser taught that the series of psychological considerations separating these two objectives stood like the colors of the rainbow, so close to one another that “it is difficult at first sight to determine where one ends and the other begins.”⁸⁶



Maeser believed that proper education walks a careful balance between guidance from the teacher and personal agency from the student. Agency does not develop without choices. The teacher offers a hand, but the student must choose to grasp it or not. © Lizi Fesler, 2014.

At one extreme were the overindulgent teachers (or parents), who exercised too little influence upon their students. This group allowed students to “have their own way in almost everything.” Through weakness or a false concept of free agency, they neglected to give the gentle guidance that children needed. Maeser noted that too often such children “fall victims to unrestrained evil inclinations and temptations,”⁸⁷ and they failed to develop proper respect for sacred things and for parental authority. He saw this as a particularly foreboding problem in American “domestic education” that was showing itself in the “laxity of public morals and political integrity, in the frivolous ease with which matrimonial ties may be dissolved, and in the open defiance of law and authority.”⁸⁸

At the other extreme, however, were the over-controlling educators or parents, who exercised too much dominion to allow children proper responsibility and growth. These educators had “the habit of enforcing an implicit obedience to even arbitrary commands regardless of the feelings, capacities and real interests of their children.”⁸⁹ Maeser taught, “Anything flavored with arbitrary or despotic rule always counteracts the best efforts made, though such disposition of authority may mean well.”⁹⁰ He had experienced this extreme in Germany and vowed to never treat his students with arbitrary harshness.⁹¹ For children with weak willpower, such treatment would produce “characterless individuals, slavishly subservient to stronger minds” and “helpless when thrown upon their own resources.”⁹² On the other hand, however, strong-willed children under such a relationship would resent the teacher and would seek ways to sabotage the effort.

Maeser declared, “There are other influences for guidance than the mere exercise of authority, and other incentives to progress than thoughtless submission to unsympathetic dictates. The exercise of authority without intelligent justice and kind consideration is tyranny, and obedience without consent of heart or brain is slavery.”⁹³ He observed that resentment to authoritative treatment may even “break out into open defiance” or “incurable estrangement.”⁹⁴ Maeser taught that a tyrannical teacher would raise “a goodly crop of spies, traitors and liars”⁹⁵ but could not provide an inspiring example of virtue. “The true interests of the pupils are too often sacrificed to the vanity or personal interests of teachers.”⁹⁶

Maeser was offended by dictatorial approaches to learning that would presume to squeeze “immortal souls” into a “common mold” through “schedules, theories, systems, methods and rules.” He warned that “a strict, methodical course is too apt to degenerate into pedantry . . . whenever the inspiration of love is supplanted by the pursuance of cast-iron rules.”⁹⁷ He thought that the curriculum should be sufficiently flexible to engage the student’s own initiative: “Going by text books, mechanical execution of theories and rules, acting as if the pupils were made for the plans, and not the plans for the pupils, may be drilling, but it is not teaching.”⁹⁸

Maeser criticized teachers who mechanically followed their textbooks; they should develop their own methods and expressions and use books only as a reference. He believed it would be inappropriate for students to look upon the textbook as in infallible source. Therefore teachers should show that they know the subject matter aside from any textbook, and by their example “the pupils will likewise learn to think independently.”⁹⁹

In the spirit of Pestalozzi, Maeser wrote, “It is the fashion in Chinese gardening to force trees and shrubs out of their natural way of growing,



Bonsai at the “Foire du Valais” Martigny, Switzerland. Maeser did not believe that Chinese gardening that forced plants to grow in unnatural ways was an appropriate model for raising children. Photo by Dake, 2005, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

into all kinds of fantastic shapes according to the fancy and notion of their master. There is a great deal of Chinese gardening going on in education."¹⁰⁰ To neutralize this problem, he taught, "Teachers and parents ought to keep in mind this incontrovertible fact, and urge upon their charges the necessity for self-activity, self-investigation, and self-research, and cultivate the spirit of inquiry within them."¹⁰¹

Individuality was to be respected, not only because it built character but also because it enhanced the quality of the learning. Maeser taught that "God did not create two flowers or two blades of grass exactly the same."¹⁰² He then reasoned that it made no more sense to assume that all students should be assigned the same amount and type of learning material than it would to prescribe the same "patent medicine" to all people regardless of their ailments.¹⁰³ Maeser believed that "the spirit which the children put into their work and the delight they experience in showing their little achievements to those whom they love" was far more important than "the amount of work" they did to satisfy an assignment given them by someone else.¹⁰⁴

As one grounded in Pestalozzi, Maeser knew "the lasting impressions and influences of play, and consequently their educational value," and he encouraged teachers and parents not to underestimate this value.¹⁰⁵ Play opens the imagination and "gives the child an opportunity for practicing invention."¹⁰⁶ Maeser taught that, as we grow older, "play and recreation are more than mere diversions, they are recuperative requisites in the process of the physical, intellectual, and moral development of man."¹⁰⁷

Legitimate Authority

For Maeser, reverence for legitimate authority was one of the essential aims of both public and church schools.¹⁰⁸ Too much emphasis on self-direction might overlook the place for any authority. The proper sense of authority must begin in the home. The foundation was respect for parents, and it grew out of the divine commandment to honor father and mother as well as "the irresistible power of natural affection."¹⁰⁹ He wrote that out of a disregard for parental authority "grows disloyalty to the laws of our country, disregard for the feelings and rights of fellowmen, and a growing discontent

with the conditions of society. No man can ever be true to his God that has not learned to be true to his home, his country, and his fellow-men."¹¹⁰ Neither parent nor teacher should arbitrarily impose requirements on children to prove they have authority, and all requirements without good reason Maeser viewed as arbitrary.

Students were to learn respect for law, for teachers, and for proper priesthood authority. "The school house" he continued, "presents to the teacher endless opportunities for cultivating the principle of reverence for law, authority, principles, and persons . . . for all that is true, noble, righteous, and pure."¹¹¹

Far more by example than even by precept, Maeser demonstrated his loyalty to proper priesthood authority. He declared, "It is a well known maxim among the Latter-day Saints, that the Spirit of God manifests itself through the channels of inspiration and revelation; that it is the only source of true religious knowledge, and that the Elders and teachers of the Church have to depend upon such guidance according to the revealed order of the Priesthood."¹¹² Those who presumed or pretended to exercise authority contrary to proper priesthood authorization were guilty of priestcraft.

Self-Directed Learning

Maeser wanted students to generate and pursue their own meaningful questions much more than to stuff their heads with memorized answers to other people's questions. "One good question is often as good as ten answers,"¹¹³ he declared, "Book answers' could be learned even by parrots and magpies."¹¹⁴ The arithmetic teachers at the academy, for example, were instructed to teach three sets of problems to be solved: first, the problems in the book; second, those composed by the teacher; and third, those composed by the students themselves. They were to teach "nothing for which the student can find no practical use."¹¹⁵

Maeser taught that children of God should be expected to ask reflective questions, to use their own language in their answers, and to generate their own thoughts and observations. Maeser would regularly coach the students at the academy on how to strengthen the quality of their own

questions. Their questions should contain a single idea, should be tied practically to some aspect of their life, should be sincere, should avoid contentiousness or frivolous speculation, and should lead to strengthened faith. He recognized that often teachers wanted short common answers to the questions they raised, but he encouraged them that “every answer should be the inward expression of the student’s knowledge and understanding.”¹¹⁶

Confidence in his students’ potential to address their own questions permeated the climate of the academy. On Wednesday afternoons, for example, the entire school gathered for the “Grand Theology” course. Each week, every student was assigned to submit a question that could be addressed. A committee of students in collaboration with Brother Maeser selected the questions to be addressed and decided who would address them. Students were assigned to conduct the class, read the minutes of the previous class, take the minutes, pray, and perform special numbers and short recitations. Maeser sat on the stand and usually added a few “incidental” comments or corrections, but it was student driven.¹¹⁷

Maeser even warned his teachers to be cautious about the amount of material they assigned. He taught, “The teacher has no right to give the students more work than they are willing to take. The amount of work is always left in the hands of the student so that they will not be overloaded.”¹¹⁸ He reminded them that an overburdened animal refuses to rise.¹¹⁹ There was as much danger in overfeeding students as there was in starving them. Maeser wanted every teacher to adopt the Latin proverb “*Non multa sed multum*” (not many, but much); each must know that “the quality of his knowledge precedes the quantity.”¹²⁰ Students should not be expected to sacrifice sleep or health in order to fulfill assignments. He encouraged students to go to bed early and arise early: “One hour of sleep before midnight is worth two after.”¹²¹

Application of Principles at the Academy

Upon enrollment in the academy, each student was interviewed by Professor Maeser. As a part of the interview, Maeser reviewed the



Maeser warned teachers not to load too much information or assigned work onto their students, reminding them that an overburdened animal refuses to rise. Photo by Leslie Clifford, 1920, courtesy of State Library of South Australia.

academy rules and had the student give his or her word of honor to obey them. Then a short examination was held to determine to which grade the student should be assigned (primary, intermediate, academic, grammar, or collegiate), and he or she was welcomed as a new member of the community.¹²²

Academy Rules

Among other things, students at the academy specifically promised to refrain from profanity and obscenity, to abstain from using tobacco and alcohol, to avoid “irregularity in habits” (by keeping late hours or improper associates or by visiting places of “questionable repute”), to attend their classes and “be diligent in their studies,” and to “deport themselves in a manner becoming true ladies and gentlemen.”¹²³ These rules were not intended to be a complete moral code or rigid exercise in authority, but the students were expected to live up to them on and off campus.

Much has been written about the rules of the academy, but for Maeser, the rules had far more to do with developing character and teaching students to keep covenants than they had to do with maintaining order at

the school or attempting to control behavior. Maeser wrote, "An absolutely quiet school, or a family life that moves along with the mechanical regularity of clock-work, may be good enough for parade purposes, but can certainly not be considered a model example in education. Restriction or suppression of the legitimate manifestations and development of individuality is not discipline."¹²⁴ On another occasion he taught, "A quiet school may be a failure. A graveyard, too, is quiet."¹²⁵

Unless obedience to the rules of the Academy was viewed as a personal commitment, they were not accomplishing their real purpose. "The students are not here for the purpose of serving the rules of the Academy, but the rules are for the benefit of the students."¹²⁶ Maeser believed that "one hundred eyes watching a bad student would not keep him out of mischief; while no eye is necessary but the student's own conscience to keep a good student right."¹²⁷ He explained, "Because a man does not steal while in prison does not make him honest."¹²⁸ He believed that the rules of the academy had the Lord's endorsement and he invited the students to find out for themselves. "You must not believe these things, because I tell you they are true. You should find out for yourselves whether they are true or not."¹²⁹ If properly viewed, the rules would be seen as guideposts, not as chains nor as "walls or anything put in your way, but . . . merely stakes by which you may walk."¹³⁰ He reminded them that "the law is not made for true men and women, but for criminals."¹³¹ If they followed because they believed in them, the rules would be liberating.

Maeser traveled throughout the Territory and promised parents that he "would be responsible for their sons and daughters and keep them from evil and to have them live nearer to their God."¹³² These parents had placed in his trust their most prized possessions, sometimes at great sacrifice, and it was his solemn duty to provide them the greatest opportunity possible. It should also be remembered that many of his students were still children and needed greater supervision. He taught them that they could help repay their parents "by improving every opportunity for learning the things which are taught here."¹³³ "Lost opportunities," he declared, "will be as fiery coals upon your heads."¹³⁴ He challenged them

to allow "no one to say truthfully that they have got more good from this institution than you in the same length of time."¹³⁵

Daily Self-Preparation Scores

Maeser knew that "in a hundred years from now many of the things which you are now learning in the different sciences will be proved to be untrue, but the characters you form here ages cannot wipe from existence."¹³⁶ To help develop their sense of honor, students were asked to evaluate their own preparation in each class daily. They reported a preparation score from one to ten in each class. These scores were recorded and totaled for the reports sent home to their parents. If the "repetitors" or monitors discovered that a student had lied or over-estimated his or her preparation, the report would be adjusted, but by and large the teachers trusted the self-reports.¹³⁷ They gave special help to students whose scores were consistently low. Maeser saw

BRIGHAM YOUNG ACADEMY DAILY RECORD

OF David Smith, Int DEPT. 2nd TERM.

Commencing _____ 1886. Ending Dec 24 1886.

J. G. GRAM, PRINTER, PEOU.

	1st Week				2nd Week				3rd Week				4th Week				5th Week				Total
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	
Punctuality.....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Order.....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Reading.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Orthography.....	5	10	7	6					10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Theology.....																					
Grammar.....																					
Arithmetic.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Geography.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Pennmanship.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	

	6th Week				7th Week				8th Week				9th Week				10th Week				Total
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Fri	
Punctuality.....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Order.....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Reading.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Orthography.....	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Theology.....	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	
Grammar.....																					
Arithmetic.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Geography.....	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
Pennmanship.....	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	
	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8, 0, 6
																					10

Report cards were sent to parents recording their daily self-scores on a scale from 1 to 10. This was a report from December 1886. Courtesy of LTPSC.

these numbers as more than an indicator of learning; they served as a “barometer of [the students’] character.”¹³⁸

Maeser’s Monitorial System to Cultivate a Public Spirit

Maeser taught, “By discarding mere dictatorial methods in discipline and by adopting instead judiciously applied principles of democracy, self-reliant and intelligent citizens may be educated.”¹³⁹ For him, democracy was a natural result of moral and spiritual maturity. It required an educated populace, but a populace also imbued with a “public spirit.” This sense of service and responsibility to one’s peers was also a natural extension of Maeser’s concept of personal character. As such, it became an important educational objective. In a land where so much emphasis had been placed on individual initiative, Maeser warned that the public attitude could easily become impregnated “with selfishness, vanity, greedy partisanship, office-hunting for ‘what is in it,’ indifference, or even worse motives.” He was convinced, however, that the schools had made “no sufficient provisions for the cultivation of public spirit in the hearts of their pupils.”¹⁴⁰

Maeser believed that a “monitorial system” could be adapted for use at the academy, if it were based on a different foundation than Lancaster and Bell held. The monitorial system of the world set up a highly competitive system to extend the efficiency of instruction by rewarding more advanced students with the privilege of overseeing the rest, but it did not focus on developing personal responsibility to bless others. Rather, “the prevailing system of feverish competition in our public school, emphasizing, as it does, intellectual advancement to the almost entire neglect of every other requirement, engenders a spirit of selfish ambition, an evil that sadly mars the characters of many of our most prominent public men today.”¹⁴¹

In contrast, Maeser’s monitorial system was based on the belief that students needed to learn “trustworthiness in public affairs.” He wrote, “Whatever can be done by students should never be done by the teacher, unless it be done by way of illustration.”¹⁴² This was not intended to merely lighten the role of the teacher but to help teach a public spirit and escape the self-centered what’s-in-it-for-me lifestyle so

easily prevalent in schools. Believing that “a student who is faithful in small things . . . will be so in large ones,”¹⁴³ Maeser set the goal “to give every pupil something to be responsible for outside and beyond his own individual concerns”:¹⁴⁴

Let the teacher invent, if need be, all kinds of offices for his pupils to fill, and distribute them according to his best judgment, or by the selection of the pupils, with occasional rotation in office, and thus give the young people a chance to cultivate the sense of devotion to the necessities and well-being of their comrades, and to learn to appreciate the sense of public responsibility. They will habituate themselves in the performance of public duties without apparent remuneration; they will cultivate integrity, honor, and reliability; they will gain an experience that will be of incalculable value not only to themselves but to the people at large among whom their lot may be cast in the future.¹⁴⁵

In each department at the academy, monitors were called to assist in classes and committees were organized to manage various activities: to regulate noise levels between classes, to make certain coal was gathered for the furnace, and so forth. Students checked the ventilation, cleaned the desks and chalkboards, picked up litter, kept the class rolls, hosted visitors, and conducted services. Secretaries and recorders were called from the students of each class to keep minutes and collect the self-preparation scores. The student leadership received their training in the weekly priesthood meetings to which all were invited (including the young women).

Students were assigned to keep careful minutes regarding the classes and meetings. On November 23, 1878, for example, Zerah P. Terry transcribed Maeser’s almost prophetic counsel to the recorders: “Be careful in your spelling and writing. Your turn will not come more than twice or three times in a term and I think you can afford to take pains. These notes will stand as a record after you have been perhaps long away from this Academy, and this might be the only record left of you. But these notes will stand with your name affixed and be as a greater testimony

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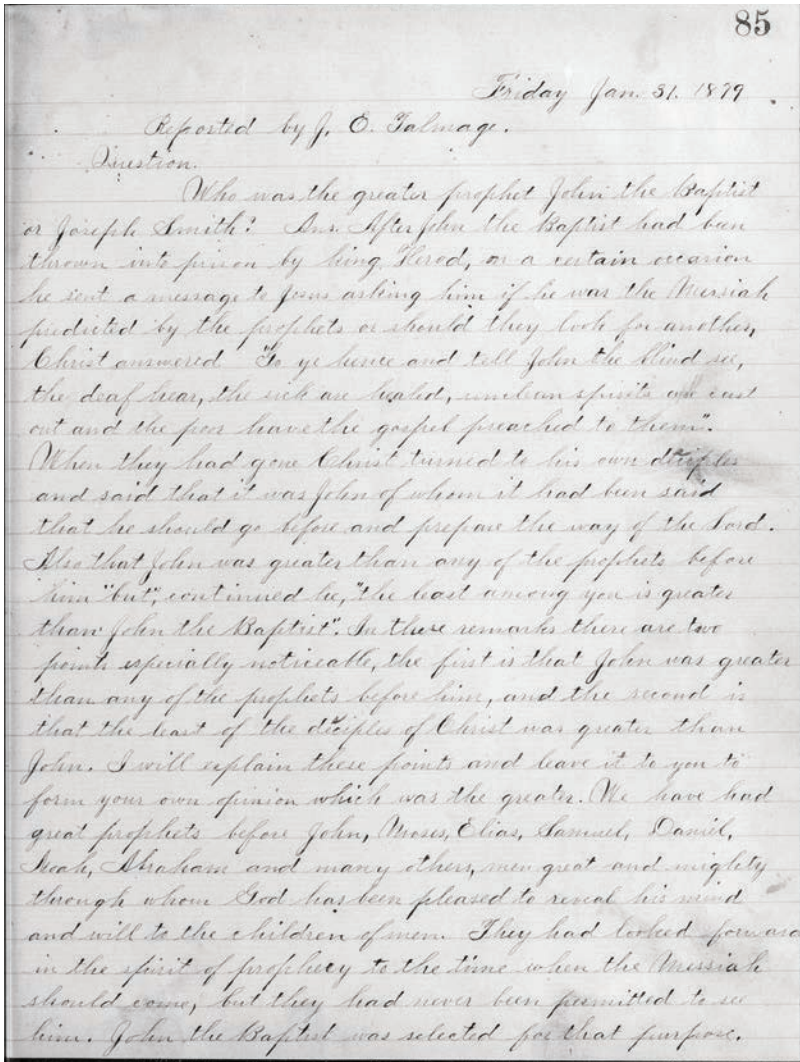
could be forced upon you ever, God would not accept it. For instance, I can only force my family to kneel with me in prayer, but whether they lift up their hearts to God in prayer or not I can not help. The form I insist upon, the rest remains between them and their God. I once said to Pres. Van what shall I do if a student asks me to excuse him from Theological class? He replied, "if any student asks you to excuse him from this exercise, tell him he is excused from the Academy altogether." I have received no other instructions, and I shall carry these out to the letter. I have some students, who have been very near to me, who have not been members of the Church. Be honest about all things, pretend to be one thing, and be another. If you are not a member say so. There will be no reward for a hypocrite, but an honest man is sure of some degree of reward in Eternity. Another point I wish to speak of, when you are going away from the Academy for good, come and say good bye. Be a gentleman or lady about it, and don't sneak off. Some have left us this way and their names will remain forever on the records as "run away with out any given cause." Don't let this occur again.

Recorded by
Zina Smoot.

Students were involved in the administration of courses. The assignment to record the minutes of the "Grand Theology" class was rotated among the students. Notes on the left were kept by Zina Smoot and on the right by James E. Talmage, January 1879. Courtesy of LTPSC.

than if they spoke with a hundred voices. Then see that that testimony is a good one."¹⁴⁶

With so many young people arriving in Provo in need of housing, Maeser felt to reach out to them. He wanted to see to it that they were being treated well, that they were progressing in their studies, and that



Right page of the "Grand Theology" class minutes, kept by James E. Talmage, January 1879. Courtesy of LTPSC.

they were not suffering from homesickness or neglect. To monitor these concerns, he organized the Domestic Department. Senior students were assigned to mentor younger students by making biweekly visits. They would make certain that the younger students' living conditions were adequate, and they would check on their progress in their studies, including



BYU faculty, 1888. Nearly all faculty members at BYA were former students mentored by Maeser. Photographer unknown, courtesy of LTPSC.

completing their homework, keeping the school rules, being good tenants, living the Word of Wisdom, and supporting their fellow students.

Some of Maeser's most valuable insights were given as counsel to student leaders. For example, he warned them against becoming dictators. They were not sent out to be spies, but they were called to be loving and observant, to learn if their mentees were getting along with their roommates, eating properly, getting sufficient rest, holding their prayers, paying their bills, and conducting themselves as ladies and gentlemen.¹⁴⁷ Maeser encouraged boarding students to show gratitude to their landlords, do chores as a favor, chop wood, fetch water, and do dishes, always leaving the places where they stayed in better shape than when they arrived.¹⁴⁸ To the mentors who thought they weren't making much of a difference, he taught, "One might think this did no good, but if the insects of the ocean would cease their labor, there would be no coral reefs."¹⁴⁹

Maeser's mentors (monitors, "repetitors," and "seniors") were selected not as a reward for superior achievement but to learn to fulfill assignments and to develop a sense of responsibility for others.¹⁵⁰ The *Deseret News*

suggested that it was not uncommon to “select the most disorderly pupil in the school for the monitor, with such good results as to accomplish his immediate reformation.”¹⁵¹ It was a religious appointment and was rotated periodically to give more individuals the opportunity to serve. This taught a principle even higher than democratic participation and self-government; it introduced the theocratic principles of Zion with priesthood stewardship and responsibility. As undershepherds, they were expected to demonstrate how to take proper notes and to organize their day. Maeser encouraged them to “be gentle and kind, from you it will come with a greater weight if properly spoken than from your teachers.” They were to avoid “high flown language”¹⁵² and were reminded that “the students who leave the academy are our only advertisement and if they fail to conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen it would not only be an injustice to themselves, but ingratitude to their teachers.”¹⁵³

The Legacy of a Master Teacher

E. S. Harris summarized her experience with Maeser: “He labored unceasingly to keep the school thoroughly democratic. He strove to make simplicity, humility, and a common brotherhood and sisterhood the slogan of the school. He wanted all to be peers while in school. He used to say to the girls, ‘If any of you have jewelry, please leave it home.’ His students almost deified him. In his child-like humility and devotion to his religion, to me he seemed really divine. Even the walls of the old B.Y.A. seemed sacred.”¹⁵⁴

These were the principles that defined the “Maeseric” approach to education. They were colored by the child-centered, prerevolutionary German *Reformpädagogik* that eventually crossed the ocean, and they were adopted by the American progressive education movement. The progressive educators from the States who would later visit the Church schools were surprised by how positively their ideas were received among the Mormons. At the same time, however, these principles were infused thoroughly with the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

Maeser was convinced that “the moment we take charge of a class we are as messengers from our heavenly Father—as His representatives—and we have the mission of an angel to perform.”¹⁵⁵ “A teacher should not be selected unless he has the principles of divinity within him to lead his pupils upward and onward, in the ultimate consequences of his teachings, to God . . . he must be what he is. His heart responds to the call for knowledge and he cannot refuse.” Angels are sent to deliver specific messages to specific people. Likewise, Maeser challenged teachers to remain spiritually alert to the messages the Lord would send and promised that “the results of their labors will not perish, but will stand forever. . . imbedded for all time in the minds and lives of their pupils. It was eternal, and their calling immortal.”¹⁵⁶

Notes

1. James E. Talmage, “A Series of Normal Notes Taken by J. E. Talmage from Lectures by K. G. Maeser, B.Y.A., Provo 1878–9,” MSS 229, box 9, folder 4, 35, LTPSC.
2. Heber J. Grant, “Honoring Karl G. Maeser,” *Improvement Era*, June 1935, 343.
3. Joel Francis Paschal, *Mr. Justice Sutherland: A Man Against the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 9.
4. Grant, “Honoring Karl G. Maeser,” 343.
5. Paschal, *Mr. Justice Sutherland*, 6.
6. George Sutherland, “A Message to the 1941 Graduating Class of Brigham Young University from Mr. Justice George Sutherland” (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1941, UA 497, LTPSC). The description says it was “read by Judge George S. Ballif, ’21, in the Sixty fifth Commencement Exercises in the Joseph Smith building, June 4, 1941.” Sutherland attended the school from 1879 to 1881.
7. Karl G. Maeser, *School and Fireside* (Provo, UT: Skelton, 1898), 44.
8. Karl G. Maeser, “Life and Theory,” *Juvenile Instructor*, June 1, 1891, 352 (address given at the Utah County Institute).
9. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 243.
10. Eunice Stewart, recorder, “Theological Minutes,” November 27, 1878, UA 228, 45, LTPSC.
11. Richard R. Lyman, recorder, “Theological Minutes,” March 7, 1879, UA 228, 45, 75, LTPSC.
12. “Excelsior,” *Deseret News Weekly*, March 3, 1893, 6.

13. J. E. Hickman, "A Eulogy on the Life of Dr. Maeser," *Deseret News Weekly*, March 23, 1901, 21.
14. "Dr. Maeser Is Laid to Rest," *Deseret News Weekly*, February 19, 1901, 1. The article quotes Brimhall's funeral address.
15. S. L. Chipman, *Dr. Karl G. Maeser: Tributes from His Students, A Pictorial History of the Brigham Young University, including the Maeser Memorial Building*, BX 8670.A1 no. 144, LTPSC.
16. J. L. Jensen, recorder, "Theological Minutes," January 29, 1882, UA 228, 236, LTPSC.
17. D. E. Harris, recorder, "Theological Minutes," January 8, 1879, MSS SC 2980, 57, 61–62, LTPSC.
18. See "The Suffragists," *Enquirer*, May 2, 1895, 4.
19. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 207.
20. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 72.
21. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 102.
22. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 101.
23. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 102.
24. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 103.
25. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 104.
26. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 337.
27. L. Loughiry, recorder, and J. E. T., reporter, "Theological Minutes," September 5, 1879, 187–89, LTPSC.
28. Richard R. Lyman, recorder, "Domestic Notes," May 16, 1889, 80–81, LTPSC.
29. Robert Anderson, recorder, "Domestic Dept Notes," February 27, 1890, UA 195, 96–97, LTPSC.
30. Cited in "Col. Parker—Dr. Maeser's Nuggets," *Utah Enquirer*, August 10, 1892, 4.
31. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 65.
32. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 247.
33. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 269.
34. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 269–70.
35. Louisa Lula Greene Richards, for example, recorded in her journal how heartbroken she was when as a teacher she first whipped her brother in 1867. Martha Cragun Cox was horrified as a visiting student to see "a boy hanging by his feet from one of the joints in the room, his face red and his eyes bulging. This was given as punishment for some unruly act." Later she complained how her students in St. George were constantly "evoking a band from Mac's

- mahogany ruler." Joyce Kinkead, ed., *A Schoolmarm All My Life* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 77, 91–92, 98–99.
36. Philip Houtz, recorder, "Papers, 1884–1939," November 18, 1885, UA 1135, 161, LTPSC. This contained his notes of his "Theory of Teaching Class" by Karl G. Maeser.
 37. Karl G. Maeser, "Lectures," *Deseret News Weekly*, June 25, 1892, 20.
 38. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 116.
 39. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 265.
 40. S. Young, recorder, "Theology Notes," November 2, 1878, MS 12913, 17, CHL.
 41. Talmage, "Normal Notes," 59.
 42. Houtz, "Domestic Notes," November 23, 1885, 162, LTPSC.
 43. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 270.
 44. J. L. R., "Domestic Notes," March 11, 1880, 106, LTPSC. The students reported their preparation scores to the "repetitor." If a repetitor believed that a student was not telling the truth, he or she could ask to review the student's notes or give the student a "repetition" (a type of quiz).
 45. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 264.
 46. Karl G. Maeser, "Character Sketch of Jesus Christ," *Contributor*, August 1889, 367–70.
 47. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 304.
 48. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 56.
 49. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 155.
 50. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 303.
 51. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 305–6.
 52. "Utah Stake S. S. Conference," *Deseret News Weekly*, November 30, 1895, 26.
 53. See Doctrine and Covenants 50, especially verses 13–24.
 54. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 57.
 55. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 42.
 56. Annie Clark, recorder, "Theological Minutes," November 5, 1882, MSS SC 2980, 263, LTPSC.
 57. Karl G. Maeser, "Stake Conference: The Proceedings of the Second Day," *Daily Enquirer*, September 3, 1889, 2.
 58. Jane Patten, recorder, "Theological Minutes," religious lecture minutes, June 2, 1879, MSS SC 2980, 165, LTPSC.
 59. Athena Rogers, recorder, "Priesthood Meeting Minutes," September 11, 1883, 112, LTPSC.
 60. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 55.

61. "Baccalaureate Sermon Delivered by Dr. Karl G. Maeser," *Utah Enquirer*, May 22, 1893, 4.
62. See "Stake Conferences: Beaver Stake," *Deseret News*, March 31, 1900, 26.
63. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 89.
64. Karl G. Maeser, "The Teacher," *Juvenile Instructor*, July 1, 1891, 414. This was an address delivered before the Territorial Teachers' Association.
65. Sutherland, "A Message to the 1941 Class."
66. Richard R. Lyman, reporter, BYA Domestic Department minutes, February 14, 1889, UA 195, 74, LTPSC. For minutes of meetings at the Academy, a reporter took notes in pencil, and then a recorder transcribed them into the official minute book.
67. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 43.
68. See Karl G. Maeser, "The Teacher," *Deseret News Weekly*, June 30, 1886. This was a lecture he delivered at the Fourteenth Ward.
69. "Professor Maeser's Lecture," *Deseret News Weekly*, June 30, 1886, 1.
70. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 311.
71. Maeser, "Lectures," 17.
72. Cited in "Col. Parker—Dr. Maeser's Nuggets," *Utah Enquirer*, August 10, 1892, 4. See also "Minutes from the Utah Constitutional Convention," April 22, 1895; *School and Fireside*, 57, 156.
73. Karl G. Maeser, "The Teacher," *Daily Enquirer*, June 25, 1886, 1.
74. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 116.
75. Maeser, "Lectures," 17.
76. Maeser, "Lectures," 18.
77. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 265.
78. Joyce Kinkead, ed., "Eunice Stewart Harris," in *A Schoolmarm All My Life* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 119.
79. "Dr. Maeser's Lecture," *Deseret News Weekly*, June 25, 1892, 21.
80. "Dr. Maeser's Lecture," 14.
81. Richard R. Lyman, interview by Alma P. Burton, February 1950, in Alma P. Burton, "Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator" (master's thesis, BYU, 1950), 50. I have not found this quotation in any of Maeser's actual writings or as recorded by any contemporary secretary. Lyman had been a secretary and kept the minutes of the domestic department in 1888–89 but did not record it in the extant notes. It is not out of character, however, and similar statements are found in the minutes and in *School and Fireside*: "A young man once asked me, what the Word of Honor meant. I answered him: 'If I should give you my Word of Honor about

- anything, I would die before I would break it” (*School and Fireside*, 291). On September 27, 1888, Richard R. Lyman recorded that Maeser gave some “incidental” instruction: “Wished he could let us know how he felt when he lost confidence in a student, that he would rather lose his life than his honor. Honor is easily broken but very hard to restore, and we should undergo any inconvenience rather than break ours.” “Records 1879–1900,” Richard R. Lyman, recorder, UA 195, 45, LTPSC.
82. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 265.
 83. R. R. Lyman, recorder, “Domestic Dept Notes,” April 11, 1889, 77–78, LTPSC.
 84. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 245.
 85. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 264. Talmage writes it as “an iron fist in a kid glove; not all kid else they play with it; not all iron else they crush under it.” Talmage, “Normal Notes,” 59.
 86. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 115.
 87. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 271.
 88. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 67.
 89. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 270.
 90. Maeser, “Lectures,” 14.
 91. RA, recorder, “Domestic Dept notes,” December 6, 1889, RA, UA 195, 92, LTPSC.
 92. RA, recorder, “Domestic Dept notes,” 92.
 93. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 245.
 94. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 271.
 95. Houtz, “Normal Class Notes,” November 18, 1885, LTPSC.
 96. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 311.
 97. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 66.
 98. Karl G. Maeser, “Life and Theory,” *Juvenile Instructor*, June 1, 1891, 352.
 99. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 287
 100. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 244.
 101. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 291.
 102. James E. Talmage, “Theological Notes,” October 1878, MS 12913, 5, Church History Library.
 103. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 244.
 104. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 296.
 105. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 100.
 106. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 238.
 107. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 285.

108. The other two aims of school were “development of individuality . . . and the cultivation of public spirit.” See Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 243–53.
109. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 251.
110. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 46.
111. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 252.
112. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 339.
113. Cited in *Utah Enquirer*, August 10, 1892.
114. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 278.
115. Faculty Meeting Minutes, August 27, 1884, UA 5, box 1, vol. 3, 53, LTPSC.
116. “Dr. Maeser’s Lecture,” 27.
117. See “Genuine Education,” *Deseret News Weekly*, March 28, 1877, 9.
118. Robert Anderson, “Domestic Dept Notes,” September 3, 1889, UA 195, 85, LTPSC.
119. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 278.
120. Karl G. Maeser, “The Teacher,” *Juvenile Instructor*, July 1, 1891, 415; and Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 302.
121. William Rydalch, recorder, “Domestic Department Minutes,” September 13, 1888, UA 195, 44, LTPSC.
122. Burton, “Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator,” 79, or Willard Done, “The Old Brigham Young Academy,” *Young Woman’s Journal*, June 1892, 385.
123. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 173.
124. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 264.
125. Karl G. Maeser, cited in “The Teachers’ Association,” *Daily Enquirer*, October 8, 1886, 3.
126. Robert Anderson, recorder, “Minutes of the Domestic Department,” December 6, 1889, UA 195, folder 2, 92, LTPSC.
127. “Theological Minutes,” January 20, 1879, MSS SC 2980, LTPSC.
128. R. R. Lyman, recorder, “Domestic Dept Notes,” April 11, 1889, 77, LTPSC.
129. M. H. Dalley, recorder, “Theo lect.,” August 26, 1879, 174, LTPSC.
130. Edna Lyman, recorder, “Domestic Dept Notes,” September 4, 1884, 9, LTPSC.
131. J. L. Robinson, recorder, “Domestic Dept Notes,” February 19, 1880, 103, LTPSC.
132. Jennie Card, recorder, “Domestic Dept,” October 2, 1884, 12, LTPSC.
133. Rachel Evans, recorder, “Domestic Dept,” December 11, 1884, 15, LTPSC.
134. Josephine Snow, recorder, “Theo lect.,” March 19, 1884, 133, LTPSC.
135. Rbt. Anderson, recorder, “Domestic Dept,” October 9, 1889, 87–88, LTPSC.
136. R. A., recorder, “Domestic Dept.,” November 21, 1889, 291, LTPSC.

137. See "Genuine Education," *Deseret News Weekly*, March 28, 1877, 9.
138. S. Young, References to Religious Instruction, November 2, 1878, MS 12913, 17, LTPSC.
139. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 37.
140. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 248–49.
141. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 37.
142. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 272.
143. S. Young, recorder, MSS SC 2980, November 5, 1878, 16, LTPSC.
144. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 249.
145. Maeser, *School and Fireside*, 250.
146. Zerah P. Terry, recorder, and James E. Talmage, reporter, "Theology Notes," November 23, 1878, 35, LTPSC.
147. See R. R. Lyman, recorder, "Domestic Dept Notes," October 25, 1888, 68–69, LTPSC.
148. J. L. Robinson, recorder, "Domestic Dept," January 15, 1880, 100–101, LTPSC.
149. Josie King, recorder, "Domestic Dept," May 29, 1884, 158, LTPSC.
150. See Edna Shepherd, recorder, "Domestic Dept," April 27, 1883, 144–45, LTPSC.
151. "Brigham Young Academy," *Deseret Evening News*, April 25, 1879; see also *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 25, 1879, CHL, 3–4.
152. Athena Rogers, recorder, "Theology Notes," September 18, 1883, 113, LTPSC.
153. Aretta Young "Theology Notes," December 19, 1883, 126, LTPSC.
154. Joyce Kinkead, "Eunice Stewart Harris," in *A Schoolmarm All My Life* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 119.
155. "Dr. Maeser's lecture," 15.
156. Maeser, "The Teacher," *Daily Enquirer*, June 25, 1886, 1.