

CHARLES A. SALTER VETERAN HEAD OF OMAHA FIREMEN

Something About the Man Who Has Served for Thirty-One Years in the Omaha Fire Department and Has Risen from Bottom to Top, Serving Faithfully in Every Grade

IF YOU go to a certain office on the second floor of the city hall you will find seated at a desk a man of ordinary size with dark hair and a black moustache which covers his lips and flows out to either side in graceful lines. You will note a firm jaw, a strong, aggressive nose and dark eyes which show singleness of purpose, determination, fearlessness. Underneath these predominant characteristics is discernible also the light of geniality and of consideration for fellow men.

If you want to see this man at the desk it makes little difference when you go to the office, for he is there most of the time. One almost finds himself wondering when the man sleeps and eats and vaguely fancies that maybe he exists without these needful diversions of ordinary mortals. For when one realizes who he is and what he does he seems to be something more than the ordinary citizen or official.

The man is Charles A. Salter, chief of the Omaha fire department. Did you ever consider the responsibilities which weigh upon the chief of a fire department in a city like Omaha, a man upon whose shoulders is placed the weight of protecting millions of property and thousands of lives from the ravages of fire? Did you ever compare the weight of his burden with your own, with that of a business man or the professional man? Does a general at the head of an army have a greater responsibility? The average man in business or profession carries his burden through the day of perhaps eight or ten hours. It is probably his boast that he can leave his office affairs in the office; that when he locks his desk he locks business cares in with papers and account books and that he goes home to his family care-free and happy and thinks no more of business until the next morning when he opens his desk.

Eternal Vigilance the Price

But there is no such boast for the chief of the Omaha fire department. He never lays his burden down. Night and day, every minute of every hour and every second of every minute there hovers over him the possibility of fire, as tantalizingly torturing as the sword of Damocles hanging by a thread and threatening to break at any moment. Eternal vigilance is the price of escape from the devouring element and this price is paid by Chief Salter. He is in his office all day long and frequently spends the evening there working until late hours. He lives close by, so as not to lose much time in going to and from home and in order to be in a position even when eating his meals and sleeping to rush forth at a second's notice to direct his brave army against the only foe that army has—the flames.

Fire has helped man in advancement, but it has also been the great enemy of civilization. Savage man found it only an advantage. By it he cooked his food and warmed his body. He had no possessions which the fire could attack. But when man advanced in civilization and began to build himself houses of wood and other combustible material fire immediately became an object of great danger. An old legend relates that the fire fiend became violently jealous of the houses in which civilized man protected himself from the cold. And it attacked and consumed them. It also retaliated upon the trees from which the houses were built by consuming great forests. When man began building towns and cities fire continued its ravages. History of even modern times, when fire fighting apparatus had been brought to a high state of perfection and organization of men was almost perfect, is full of great conflagrations. The big fire of Chicago in 1871 consumed \$200,000,000 worth of property. The great fire in Boston in 1872 burned property worth more than \$75,000,000. The recent fires in Baltimore and San Francisco are fresh examples of the revenge which the fire fiend is taking at every opportunity upon civilized man.

Poet's Vision of the Flames

Here is a poet's vision of the horrors of the flames, taken from "The Fire Fiend," by C. D. Gardette:

Then as in death's seeming shadow, in the icy pall of fear
I lay stricken, came a hoarse and hideous murmur in my ear—
Came a murmur like the murmur of assassins in their sleep,
Muttering, "higher! higher! higher! I am demon of the fire!
I am arch-fiend of the fire and each blazing roof's my pyre,
And my sweetest incense is the blood and tears my victims weep.

How I revel on the prairie! How I roar among the pines!
How I laugh when from the village o'er the snow the red flame
shines.

And I hear the shrieks of terror with a life in every breath!
How I scream with lambent laughter as I hurl each crackling rafter
down the fell abyss of fire until higher! higher! higher!

Leap the high priests of my altar in their merry dance of death.

This is a vivid personification of the fire fiend hovering like a hungry wolf on the outskirts of every city seeking the least chance when it may invade the habitations of men and convert beautiful homes and magnificent buildings into black and hideous masses of ruin and spread them with the charred bodies of human victims. As Horatius stood at the bridge and protected Rome against the threatening hordes of the terrible Lars Porsenna, so Chief Salter stands and protects Omaha against the threatening legions of the fire fiend. So he has stood as chief for six years, before that as assistant chief for fifteen years and for ten years before that in different minor capacities. He has been in the fire department of the city continuously for thirty-one years and is the oldest man in point of service in the department.

Charles A. Salter was born in Readington, N. J. His father was a physician, Dr. Henry Frederick Salter. The parents moved from New Jersey to the west soon after the birth of Charles and settled in Moline, Ill. There he grew up, attending the schools, and in his young manhood he went farther west in search of work. He lived in several towns in Iowa, the last of which was Wilton Junction. From that place he came to Omaha in 1871. Upon arriving here he secured a position in the old Herald office, then located at Thirtieth and Douglas streets. His work was the running of an old engine used to operate the printing press.

Early on the Department

Young Salter took an interest in the city volunteer fire department almost at once. It seemed to be almost an instinct in him to put out fires. "It used to be said that he hurried as instinctively to put out a blaze as a beaver does to dam up a stream. He soon became one of the leading spirits in the ranks of the early fire fighters of the city. In 1876 he formally became a member of the department and enjoyed the distinction of wearing the blue shirt and running to fires with the rest of the boys. Within three months the position of stoker on No. 3 engine in the paid fire department became vacant and Salter took it, resigning his place with the Herald in order to do so. Three years later the engineer of this company resigned and Salter was appointed to succeed him and was also made superintendent of the entire fire alarm telegraph system of the city.

The steamers were taken out of commission when the water works were established in 1880, there being sufficient pressure to throw a stream of water to the top of any building in Omaha at that time. Salter's position as engineer was, therefore, no longer in existence. He was too good a man to lose, however, and he was made captain of hose company No. 2, retaining his place as superintendent of fire alarm telegraph. Shortly thereafter he was made acting second assistant chief of the entire department, a position which he held until J. J. Galligan was made chief in 1886. He was then appointed first assistant chief and continued in that position until 1901, when he was appointed chief.

Career One of Advancement

Chief Salter's career has been one of continuous advancement. He served a valuable apprenticeship under that famous old fire fighter, "Jack" Galligan, and his long continuance in the position of assistant chief under him is indicative of the eminent qualities he has for fire fighting. He was a very valuable assistant—always "there" when he was needed, and by the time he secured his next



CHARLES A. SALTER.

boost the ladder of promotion his calm, even temperament under the most trying, dangerous and death-defying circumstances and his unswerving attention to duty and the end to be accomplished had won for him a respect alike in the eyes of his superiors and subordinates which has endured and found expression in his advancement to his present position.

Day and night, summer and winter, always Chief Salter is within hearing of the alarm bell, and he is invariably among the first to answer every alarm that sounds from within a radius which includes all the larger buildings of the city. When he reaches the scene of the fire his mind is all centered upon the work before him. Scores of times he has planned maneuvers in his office to meet all manner of conditions. As a prudent and skillful general anticipates the battle and plans to outwit, outmaneuver and defeat the opposing army, so Chief Salter plans to defeat and drive out the fire fiend when it seeks to invade the city.

Chief Salter believes in getting close to a fire. "Get up to it,

there; up closer, closer!" is a common command often heard since he has been at the head of the department. And in response the brave fellows rush in, taking the fire fiend as it were by storm, charging his battleworks, pouring in such a volley of water bullets as to put him to flight or drive the last sign of life out of his hideous body. No one can accuse the chief of a dilatory policy in attacking the fires which threaten the city. And it is this which is largely responsible for the freedom of Omaha from devastating fires and the prompt checking of threatening flames in some of the most dangerous fire districts of the city.

Often in his career of danger Chief Salter has trodden in dangerous places where death stalked abroad, where walls fell without warning, where floors treacherously gave way to the foot, where smoke conspired to veil the roaring pit of flame beneath. He has ventured into suffocating cellars, up ladders coated with ice, upon the flimsy, high roofs of burning buildings. He knows the dangers of the terrible fight and he knows that the fire fiend, his arch enemy,

gives no quarter—fights to the death and laughs in glee when he has brought an enemy low. This may be the reason why Chief Salter never swears at his men when directing them in fighting flames. Some chiefs forget in the excitement of the hour that the brave fellows may be walking to their death. But Chief Salter feels with his men, not having forgotten the time when he was one of them.

He was one of the fighters at the several fires in Omaha where firemen lost their lives. During the time he was a member of the department fifteen men have met death while performing their perilous duties. But it has not come nigh him. Aside from a few burns and minor injuries he has been unscathed. Some of the big fires which he helped to fight in his various capacities during his long career on the department are the following:

- September 24, 1878, Grand Central hotel, Fourteenth and Farnam streets; loss, \$125,000.
- January 18, 1880, Boyd Packing house; loss, \$127,000.
- November 5, 1886, Barker block, Fifteenth and Farnam streets.
- March 27, 1892, Omaha Hardware company, Ninth and Jones streets; loss, \$110,000.
- December 27, 1892, Orchard Carpet company and Continental Clothing company, Fifteenth and Douglas streets; loss, \$152,000.
- February 3, 1894, Boston store, Sixteenth and Douglas streets; loss, \$175,000.
- December 4, 1894, Exposition building, Fifteenth Street theater and First Baptist church; loss, \$125,000.
- January 28, 1905, Mercer block, Eleventh and Howard streets; loss, \$447,270.
- June 3, 1906, Hayden Bros., Sixteenth and Dodge streets; loss, \$105,000.
- August 10, 1906, Dietz Lumber company; loss, \$130,000.

"On the Square" with All

Among the brave men who compose the subofficers and the rank and file which the city maintains for fighting the fire fiend Chief Salter is a prime favorite. He has the reputation of treating the men "square." There is no false pride about him. He has risen from the ranks, but he esteems himself no better than the men under him.

"I aim to treat the men like men, that's all," he says. "Each must respect the orders of the officers over him and give strict obedience, but outside of that one is as good as another and any of them are as good as I."

The love of the men for their chief was illustrated during a brief illness which he suffered several months ago. His room was filled with flowers and most of "the boys" took occasion to visit him whenever the opportunity offered. The chief in turn is proud of "the boys" and of their accomplishments.

Until two years ago Chief Salter was a bachelor. On March 23, 1906, he married Miss Adelaide Parrish. They had been sweethearts when boy and girl. Then she had married. When she became a widow the old love returned and culminated happily in marriage. They have a cozy home at 1914 Douglas street, just two blocks from the chief's office. There he is conveniently located, when not at his office, to rush out at any hour of the day or night whether he be eating, drinking or sleeping when the fire fiend invades and threatens the city. The chief's mother, Mrs. Carol Salter, 87 years of age, is still living and resides in her own home, 2452 South Seventeenth street.

In His Home Life

The chief likes pets, and there are two dogs and two cats members of the household. He is a great reader of books and periodicals bearing upon fire fighting. Often he will read a part which pleases him especially to his wife or visitors. When he does not spend the evening in his office he often takes work home and does it, and sometimes Mrs. Salter takes a hand and helps out on these occasions.

The fire department has been built up and strengthened during Chief Salter's incumbency, not through purchase of new apparatus so much as by strict discipline among the men, strict attention to the condition of the buildings of the city, strict enforcement of the regulations with regard to combustible material. The result has been that the National Board of Fire Underwriters has given Omaha a leading place in the list of good risks in spite of the fact that its fire equipment is by no means equal to that of many other cities of the same size.

Will the fire fiend creep into Omaha some time? "How great a matter a little fire kindleth." A cow kicked over a lantern and the Chicago fire was the result with \$200,000,000 loss. Anyone of a hundred thousand individuals inadvertently leaving a bit of fire in some out-of-the-way place may give the fire fiend the opportunity he is waiting for. All that man can do Chief Salter does. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty and of victory over the hungry flames. And Chief Salter is conscientiously paying this price.

Easy Marks Are Readily Spotted by Confidence Men

IT'S BEEN my experience," said the brakeman, crumpling his pipe with cut plug, "that, no matter what you put on your hook, the farmer man will always rise to the bait."

"Or to the occasion," sagely added the Cincinnati drummer. "I've zigzagged around this country for twenty years, mostly trying to beguile the one-galled Rube into a child-like faith in the word pictures I painted concerning the feverish eagerness of the rural millions to buy my particular line-up, and I've found that, while the hayseed'll believe every funny story you tell him, he's mighty skeptical as to statements that tend to divert him from his coin. Also, I've put it down in my rules of the road that bunko is just as liable to lurk under a dirty shirt in the quiet hamlets where the true manhood of the nation is nurtured as under the dress suit in the vicious throngs of the great city.

"There was one experience with the Rube that crowded itself upon me in which I played the part of interested audience instead of the role of leading sucker simply because my section was farthest from the door of the sleeper.

"It happened a short time ago that, as I boarded the westbound train, I found in the section just ahead an old friend of my boyhood, Tom Goad, who had achieved success as a mining engineer, and was employed by great mining syndicates to protect their interests against fraud and thievery in South Africa and Booloomooloo and other such foreign places where gold grows. He was just returning from a successful trip to Australia, where he had been sent to locate some big tracks in a mining company operating in that land of kangaroos and convicts. Two days after he got there, he said, he had put his finger on the sore spot. Locating leaks framed up by subtle-minded men of an oblique moral trend was Tom's strong point. He spun me a ball of many yarns about the sharps he had circumvented and exposed. He'd yet one to find who could beat him out, so he confided to me. He wasn't conceited about it, he admitted, but he'd like to see the crook smooth enough to dish up anything he couldn't see through like a plate glass mirror. I sat all day listening to his exploits and watching the muddy little crowds come down to the muddy little station to see the train go by.

"About dusk we reached a little village in the heart of the chinwhisker belt, a regular Rialto for rubes. The scenery from the car window was a background of shanties with a wilderness of corrugated bootlegs in the middle distance. As we hunched on the dining car there we were just reaching for our hats to go out and stretch our legs a spell, when an elongated son of the soil, clad in dingy garments, shambled into the car. In one hand he held a bundle of greasy bank notes and in the other was an envelope. He stood a moment wide-eyed and mouth agape as though overcome by the glistening marvels of the sleeper, and then, pulling off a dirty slouch, began to unbutton himself.

"'Scuse me, gents,' he stammered, timid as a school boy in his first try at Casablanca, 'but I'm in a heap o' trouble an' maybe some o' you kin help me out. My ole 'oman went up ter Hanksville this mornin' 'ith the money fer ter pay the trust on the morgidge on our place what's due today an' the man said o' 'twarn't paid right off he'd sell us out. She telegraph me that she'd done lost the money and fer me ter git mo' an' send it on this train. I so! the cow and borried 'uff mo' ter make up the \$40, but ther postoffice was closed, and I'm skeered ter sen' all these here \$1 bills in jest er plain letter. It'd git stole. Ef any o' you all gents kin gimme two \$20 bills for these little ones I'll sholy be much 'bleeged t' yer, fer I've got ter git the money thar on this here train.'

"Touched by the poor fellow's predicament, I was just pulling out my pocketbook when Tom Goad, who was nearer the rube than I, opened his wallet and lifted out a couple of twenties.

"Here they are," he said, handing them over to the hayseed as the latter passed over the bulky bunch of dirty bills.

"Thanky, mister," said Rube, with extravagant thankfulness, 'I wish ye'd count 'em so's to make sho. I've been so upset that maybe I made a mistake.'

"Tom proceeded to count the bills. "Thirty-six, thirty-seven," he said, laying them carefully over the back of the seat; "thirty-eight, thirty-nine—I make only thirty-nine dollars, my friend," he said amiably, 'I'll count again.'

"An anxious look wrinkled the Rube's face as

Tom made the second count. It tallied with the first; there were only thirty-nine bills.

"I sho thought I had forty dollars," exclaimed the countryman in distress. 'Lemme count 'em, please, mister.'

"He told over the bills with painful clumsiness. There were only thirty-nine. He stood the picture of misery with the dirty slouch in one hand and the crumpled bills in the other.

"I don't know how it comes about," he sighed, 'I borried \$2 fum Cy Allen and two fum Tie Haskin, an' er dollar fum Doc—gosh, I clean forgot 'twas a silver dollar what I got fum ole Doc Shores!' he cried in joy, and ramming his hand in his trousers pocket, groped there a moment and then triumphantly brought forth a silver dollar, tightly clutched in his fist with the roll of bills.

"Thar's yer other dollar, mister," he laughed in hysterical joy, as he crammed the bunch of paper and silver into Tom's hand. 'I've got to hurry now fer ter git this in the mail car; thanky again, mister,' and with that he shambled hurriedly out of the sleeper.

"It was too late for our stroll, so after a couple of preliminary drams from Tom's bottle of rum we went back for dinner.

"The drinks warmed Tom's heart. He began to talk about the deep satisfaction a real man feels in helping the unfortunate until he began to believe he'd given that jay money instead of merely making change. When we'd finished our meal Tom suggested that we'd shake for the bill. So we marked up a couple of sugar lumps for dice and rolled them out of a tumbler. Tom was stuck. That brought on a reaction from his former placid frame of mind and he grew irritated. He grumbled as he called the waiter, grumbled as he looked over the bill, grumbled some more as he pulled out the Rube's bunch of money and grumbled still louder as he started to count off the price.

"Then suddenly he stopped grumbling, sat in stiff, frozen silence for five long seconds, and then, with eyes glued on the Rube's roll, commenced to swear. For versatile and vitriolic cuss words he unboomed himself of a varied assortment that gloomed the lights and established a new record in profanity. There were ladies two tables down, so Tom had to operate under his breath, which

made the feat more noteworthy. At last he ran down, and without a word hauded me over the roll of the distressed hayseed. As I looked at it I felt a thrill of admiration for that untutored countryman. There, neatly wrapped in a one-dollar bill, was a bunch of old revenue stamps, evidently soaked off a beer keg and cunningly mixed through it a number of confederate notes printed in 1862, the whole mass worthless for anything but to wad a gun.

"'Let's get out of here,' said Tom, thickly, as he fixed a dull eye on me. 'I want air.'

"In silence we sought the rear platform, and beneath the stars watched the rails reel and rocket away from beneath the flying wheels and disappear into the night. But we weren't thinking of stars and reeling rails. At length Tom spoke:

"'How 'n h—'d do it?'

"'Address that to the puzzle editor,' I replied. 'It's plain that that simple denizen of the back districts has been reading something besides the Farmer's Own Paper and the Bible.'

"Just then we pulled up at a switch and a brakeman climbed aboard. Thinking he might be wise as to the manners and customs of the inhabitants, Tom inquired as to the integrity of the hayseeds one met at the various villages. The brakeman laughed a harsh, unsympathetic laugh that grated on our nerves.

"Been up against Stinging Billy, have you?" he inquired, without deigning to notice the question. 'I guess you ain't never traveled through this country much before, or you'd have knowed of him. He's got a pizen eye for suckers, even if he is a hayseed.'

"Tom winced under the remark, but asked the brakeman what sort of a fellow was this Stinging Billy.

"'He's a long, slab-sided rube. He didn't come into the car and say he wanted to get some big bills for a lot of little ones for to send his old mother, or some such person, did he?'

"Tom admitted that he had.

"'And when the money was counted it wasn't a dollar shy, was it? And he didn't remember that he had a silver dollar in his pocket and dive down after it, did he?'

continued the brakeman.

(Continued on Page Four.)