

THE LIFE OF
MATTHEW SIMPSON



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The Life of
MATTHEW
SIMPSON

by

ROBERT D. CLARK

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FIRST PRINTING

FOREWORD

MATTHEW SIMPSON, nineteenth century Methodist preacher and bishop, was a political figure of some importance, a friend of Lincoln, Grant, Hayes, and others. Among his admirers great claims have been made concerning his influence on Lincoln, particularly in the writing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Much less is said of the resolution he forced through the General Conference of 1868 designed to aid in the impeachment of Andrew Johnson. And scarcely noted at all is the amazing transition of the Methodism he served from a body which, in 1830, disdained politics and preached only a simple theology of salvation or damnation, to a denomination which, in 1870, was proud of the political influence of its leading bishop.

Altogether, Matthew Simpson was a remarkable man. Born on the Ohio frontier, denied an opportunity for formal study, he acquired a measure of learning that evokes admiration and prompts reappraisal of the rudeness of our forefathers. Trained in medicine, he practiced religion. Awkward and uncouth, so unsure of himself in the presence of people that he dared not study law, he won distinction as one of the most eloquent preachers of his country and his times.

Much of the writing on nineteenth century American Methodism has been antiquarian in its emphasis—an exploitation of the public's interest in the eccentric Peter Cartwright and his fellows, or in the strange phenomena of camp meetings and love feasts. Matthew Simpson might be forced into this stereotype: he was converted in a camp meeting, inducted into the ministry as a circuit rider, and widely acclaimed for the sensational effects of his sermons.

But the story of Matthew Simpson is more than remarkable incident or phenomenal success. It is as much the story of Methodism

intellectually far above most of his contemporaries in the church, he helped to prepare the way for men like the late Francis J. McConnell and present-day liberals of the Methodist church. A far cry, all this, from Matthew Simpson, the simple, evangelical itinerant of 1833.

The most important single source for this study has been the Bishop Matthew Simpson Papers in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress. Of almost equal importance have been the official Methodist newspapers, the several Christian Advocates, and the two unofficial papers, *Zion's Herald* and *The Methodist*, all but the latter of which were published during almost the entire period of Simpson's ministry. Of the large number of writers of biography and general history to whom I have turned for both interpretation and facts, I owe most to William Warren Sweet, the historian of the church in American history.

I am chiefly indebted to William Best Hesseltine who suggested the topic, gave valuable advice in the course of preparation, and read and criticized parts of two drafts of the manuscript. I wish also to thank Professor Hesseltine's graduate seminar which, in the spring of 1951, allowing the intrusion of an outsider, read the entire manuscript and offered unsparing and valuable criticisms. The late Bishop Francis J. McConnell read parts of the manuscript and, in conversation and correspondence, offered encouragement and made many helpful suggestions. I am indebted also to Professor Alan Nichols and the late Professor Frank Garver, both of the University of Southern California, to Mrs. Dolores Renze of the Colorado Historical Society, to Dr. Wallace Smeltzer, historian of the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Church, to H. B. McConnell and Milton Ronsheim of the Cadiz (Ohio) *Republican*, and to a host of others.

I cannot here mention all of the libraries which rendered service to me: chief among these, in addition to the Library of Congress, are the libraries of Allegheny College, the Colorado Historical Society, Drew Theological Seminary, Emory University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Oregon, West Virginia University, the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore, and the libraries of the Baltimore and Pittsburgh conferences of the Methodist Church, and of the Methodist Publishing House at Nashville, Tennessee.

The generosity of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foun-

dation made it possible for me to spend one year, free from academic responsibilities, in study and writing. The Graduate School Research Fund of the University of Oregon provided me with funds for the purchase of microfilm and photostats and for clerical services in the collection of data and the typing of the manuscript.

The *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and the *Indiana Magazine of History* have permitted me to incorporate parts of articles into chapters IX and XX.

Finally, I owe much to Opal Routh Clark for her sympathetic and critical reading, her protective regard for research and writing, and her good-natured tolerance of my neglect of domestic duties.

R. D. C.

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THE LIFE OF
MATTHEW SIMPSON

I

LIFE IN CADIZ

MATTHEW SIMPSON, young doctor of medicine in Cadiz, Ohio, closed his office and discontinued his practice late in March, 1834. On April 5, astride a horse, his saddlebags behind him, he rode from the village as a Methodist itinerant to the first of thirty-four appointments on a six-weeks' circuit. For several months he had been preaching alternate Sundays at Cadiz and St. Clairsville; but this day marked a signal decision. Against the advice of many friends and neighbors, he had renounced his original profession and yielded with inner satisfaction to a peculiar development of circumstances which he called "Providence." Henceforth, no ordinary physician, he was to be a healer of souls.

Fifteen miles from Cadiz, on a hill overlooking Perrine's mill and farmhouse, he pulled up his horse before the small stone house where he had arranged his first appointment. Poised there on the hillside, he may have weighed once again his recent decision, painfully balancing his growing success as a physician—the financial security, the high esteem, the contribution which a Methodist doctor could make to his church—against the homeless life of the itinerant minister, the hardship and danger of the western saddle trails and the backwoods roads, the meager and uncertain income, and above all the fear of failure, of moving lips that could not speak.

Or he may have dreamed of success—of camp meetings and revivals, of the messenger of God confronting a multitude, and of a torrent of words, a flood of eloquence, a surging emotional tide engulfing the awe-stricken people.

He was aware that he had more than usual talents, but he knew also of his limitations. Not one of the young men of Cadiz could match him in ciphering and spelling, in rendering Latin into English, or in explaining the wonders of natural science. But he lacked

social graces. He was tall—over six feet—gangling, and stoop-shouldered. His low forehead, made lower by the deep V of his hairline, his high cheekbones, his thin, serious lips, his small pointed face—these features, his neighbors said, did not suggest great oratory. He was timid—so timid that he sometimes crossed the street to avoid meeting people, so nervous in the presence of strangers that his small hand trembled when he passed the collection plate at quarterly conference. Even after he had become a young physician, he wore clothes that fitted him so oddly that Cadiz could not forget the awkward boy who had slouched along its streets, his short pantaloons hitched up by one gallus.

Only the sudden impetuous rush of his speech, or the brightness of his blue eyes—now sparkling with animation, now flashing in anger, now moist with sympathy—caught the attention of his neighbors and stayed their judgment. Long years of surprised observance of the development of his talents made them wary. Still they shook their heads over the closing of the doctor's office. He scarcely looked the part of a preacher. He could write, they admitted. But could he speak?

As he sat now overlooking Perrine's, he himself would have been astonished at his own dream had it projected the man he was to become: college professor and president, editor, bishop, friend of Presidents and statesmen, shrewd politician, patriotic orator, the most eloquent preacher in Methodism, and chief architect of the century in building America's largest Protestant church.

He would have smiled in amusement had his reverie included the men he was to know: President Lincoln, General Grant, Secretary Stanton, and a host of others. His brows would have drawn together in quick self-reproach had his dreams anticipated, even fleetingly, the role he was to play in changing the frontier ways of his church, in chipping away and leveling the barrier between the united cause of Methodism and the American people.

Whatever thoughts may have troubled him on that April afternoon, he did not long heed. Simple in his faith, he believed only that the providence of God was plainly written for him in the unfolding of events, and that his responsibility was to obey. Digging his heels into the ribs of his horse, he rode down into the valley to the first of his appointments.

That night, after preaching to four men and eleven women

on the text, "Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?" he wrote at some length in his journal: marking the route he had taken from Cadiz to Perrine's, describing the wooded hills and the smiling meadow, the creek and the "handsome mill" that ran three pair of stones, and noticing the household's "sprightly young damsel . . . just seventeen, neat in her person . . . and amiable in her manners." But he had no word for his thoughts of the day.¹

Matthew Simpson was born in the little village of Cadiz, Ohio, in 1811, to parents who a decade earlier, with their respective families, had slashed and chopped their way into the frontier wilderness. The Simpsons were Scotch-Irish. James, the father, had been a boy in his early teens, the youngest member of his family, when he sailed in 1793 with his widowed mother, his sister, and his older brothers from Londonderry to Baltimore. They had lived briefly in eastern Pennsylvania and then had joined the westward-moving horde to cross the Alleghenies to Pittsburgh and settle finally in Harrison County, Ohio.

James suffered from sciatic lameness and was troubled by a recurring hacking cough. Frontier farming and outdoor life did not appeal to him. Genial and warm-hearted, he liked to talk, and he was quick at driving a bargain. So he clerked in a store at Pittsburgh until he was able to persuade his employer to set him up in business on a partnership basis.

As a likely place, he selected Cadiz, the county seat of Harrison County. It was but a clearing in the forest, a village of a dozen houses, mostly of log chinked with yellow clay; but it was strategically located at the juncture of two of the principal roads from the east: one from Pittsburgh by way of Steubenville, and the other from Washington, Pennsylvania, by way of Wellsburg, (West) Virginia. The roads joined on the Cadiz hillside, near the courthouse square, and proceeded thence to Zanesville. James, with his brother Matthew, opened a store and began to sell and trade and to manufacture weavers' reeds.

In 1806 at Short Creek, Jefferson County, James met and fell in love with Sarah Tingley. She also was a Methodist, and listened with the same subdued but eager feeling to the exciting tales and the stirring exhortations of the itinerant preachers. The first of the

Tingley family to experience conversion in a frontier meeting, she was the first also to join the Methodist Church.

James and Sarah were married that year and went at once to Cadiz to share the log house and store building with his mother and his brother Matthew. Their daughters Hetty and Elizabeth were born in 1807 and 1809; young Matthew, in 1811.

Shortly after the birth of his son, James Simpson became seriously ill. His face flushed with fever and his body convulsed with coughing, he went with his family to Pittsburgh to seek the aid of physicians. "Consumption," they said, diagnosing his illness with a term which in early Ohio was more literal than figurative in its certain fate. The frontier remedies were not equal to the need. A few weeks later James Simpson died. But first he and Sarah, distraught by worry and grief yet ruled by one dominant purpose, consecrated young Matthew to their God and prayed that he might become a preacher.

Sarah Simpson took her three children back to the small log house in Cadiz which James had built for her, and which she continued to share with her husband's aging mother and his unmarried brother Matthew.

Young Matthew's earliest memories were of the roaring fire on the stone hearth, the menacing shadows on the wall, and the stories of Grandma Simpson. On long winter evenings she told the children of her girlhood experiences in northern Ireland, of the simple ways of the Irish village, of the exacting standards of the Scotch Presbyterians; of her marriage, her family, and the tragic accident which had resulted in the death of her husband. She told them of Mr. Wesley and his visit to Ireland—how he stood before the people and talked to them about knowing God, and how she, a widow of a few months, felt her heart strangely moved. She recounted in vivid and angry detail the persecution of the Protestants by the Catholics, the abuse heaped upon Mr. Wesley, the threats and violence, and the burning of Methodist chapels. And with these stories she interspersed those of fairy and elf and ghost, told with such realism that Matthew, in the half-dark room, could feel his hackles rising and panic seizing him as he was sent from the fireside to his bed.

He was three years old when he learned to read. His sisters

Hetty, who was seven, and Elizabeth, five, had their books, and he must have his. So they taught him, painfully spelling out the letters, and demanding that he spell them back. They taught him simple arithmetic, too. When he was five his mother and uncle moved from the log house to a new frame building down the street from the courthouse square. In gathering up his belongings he ran across an old multiplication table his sister had set for him—which seemed, as he reviewed it, a task long since mastered and half forgot.

Matthew was embarrassed and astonished when the itinerant preachers, who frequently stopped overnight at his mother's house, asked him, a boy of six, if he could read. But in general he liked them. His spirit might grow faint and wilt in the thick miasma of religious talk, but it revived again at night by the fireside. For even the preacher—when the solemn prayers and the preaching were done—had wonderful stories to tell: of riding into the wilderness, his trail marked only by the blazes on the trees; of swimming his horse across the churning, rain-swollen rivers; of the wildcat's scream, or the bear's great bulk blocking his trail; of camp meetings in the brush arbor, and the flickering torches, the singing and shouting and moaning of the people, the rough, boastful talk of the drunken rowdies; and fights, battles for the Lord, not with prayers only, but with clubs and fists. Preaching was a good life for those who were called.

Only a little less vivid than the stories of Grandma Simpson and the preachers were his mother's teachings about the God above the skies who heard all his words, even saw every one of his thoughts. If he loved God and served him, she said, he would go to heaven; but if he did not love God he would be forever separated from Him, and from his own mother and all of his friends and loved ones. If there was food on the table God had given it to him; and if the larder ran low he was comforted by his mother's assurance that God would provide. When a cousin sickened and died he heard from his mother that it was God's will; and when another drew close to death but recovered he learned that God in His providence had spared the boy for a special purpose.²

After they moved to the new house Matthew began to study with his uncle. Scarcely any one in Harrison County knew so much as Uncle Matthew. A small, frail man, he shunned the vigorous outdoor life of the frontier; but he read a great deal, books on his-

out for him before he was allowed to turn to his books. Then he read voraciously, poring over the volumes of biography, history, travel, and science which he was able to borrow from the lawyers and the preachers, or from the small public library of which Cadiz was so proud.

In the Puritan Methodist household there was little opportunity to play for play's sake. Uncle Matthew did not believe in it at all; but oftentimes the exasperated mother, worried over her boy's poor health, drove him out of doors, away from his books. Once outside, he delighted in running, jumping, wrestling with his fellows, and striving constantly to outdo them. He made kites in the spring of the year, and felt the exciting tug of the March winds; he ran with the boys to the bottom of the hill and paddled about in the shallow waters of Short Creek; he made a bow and arrow—stripped the bark from the branch of an ash; carefully shaped and notched the elastic wood; balanced and feathered his arrow—and practiced on targets in a forest quite as primeval as that of the stories to which he had listened.

Even more than the play, he liked to walk alone in the woods, or with his Uncle Matthew, to hear the sound of the wind in the trees, to fling himself down in a clearing, to pull and chew the long stems of the blue grass, and to think. To drink in the beauty of the woods—the pale spring greens of the beech, the linden, and the maple; to wonder at the trunk of the great white oak which lightning had shattered; to marvel at the late afternoon sun and its way, after it had dropped behind the hill, of lighting up the tops of eastern trees. And, prompted by Uncle Matthew, to moralize a little, to begin to apprehend the goodness and greatness of God and marvel at it. To retrace the argument of the preachers in his mother's house, and to wonder what he must do to be saved, but to think, also, of the stirring drama he had witnessed in the county court, and to picture young Matthew Simpson, attorney at law, pleading for the life of his client.⁵

Nothing pleased Matthew so much as the shop where Uncle Joseph Tingley every week published the four-page *Harrison County Telegraph*. He could swagger a little at the shop. It gave him a kind of status he could never claim from turning the crank of Uncle Matthew's machine. He loved the acrid smell of the ink; the tedious, yet amazingly fast, picking out and setting of the type

against his composing stick; the hard pressure of the locked form of type against the heel of his hand; the rapid drumming on the type with the leather inking balls; the heavy lever of the hand press, and best of all, perhaps, the thrill that came in taking the printed page from the tympan.

He knew the secrets of the town and of the nation, most of them before they were broadcast by word of mouth—the names of the people whose letters lay unclaimed in the post office at Cadiz or Freeport, the notices of the sheriff's sales, the theft of a horse at Jefferson, the date of the general muster and the tax collection, the new law partnership at Cadiz, the latest items in the stock of goods at Thomas Bingham's store; he read and sometimes set the national news, stories of floods and fires and other disasters, excerpts from foreign papers, the President's message to Congress, the arguments of Webster and Clay, news of the campaign for President, and arguments on the merits of Clay, Jackson, and John Quincy Adams. He learned, from strong-minded Uncle Tingley, to hate slavery as inconsistent with American principles of "liberty, freedom, justice and equality," and to favor Mr. Adams for the Presidency (even though he was not a western man), because he had never been connected either with slavery or with dueling.⁶ He wrote some "pieces" for the paper himself, mostly verses which Uncle Joseph or his successor, David Christy, published in the poetry column.

In addition to the common school of Uncle Matthew, Cadiz soon had an academy where young frontiersmen learned to translate the classical languages, to write orations, and to declaim. Matthew, not yet twelve years old, was determined to attend, to study Latin and Greek. He was encouraged by two boys from the country, students at the academy, who boarded with his Uncle Matthew's partner. Following them about, he often went up to their room, questioned them concerning their studies, and fondly thumbed through the pages of their Latin books. After a time he tried his hand at translation, and so amazed them with his facility that they went to his mother and Uncle Matthew to urge that he be enrolled in the academy. Uncle Matthew demurred, mindful of the cost.

Some weeks later, illness of their hostess brought the two

students into Matthew's own home, to remain until she should recover. Eagerly welcoming them, Matthew again turned over the pages of his friends' Latin books, pausing now and then to try his skill at rendering a sentence into English. Again he begged his uncle's permission to study the language. If he could not attend the academy, he could get the boys to help him. He could learn to translate by comparing the text to the English, as he had done with the German. No cost was involved; it was late in November, the days were short, and the evenings long. Besides, Uncle Matthew was about to leave for the session of the legislature, and could not supervise the boy's study himself. It looked like the working of Providence. So the uncle yielded, provided that his nephew would first do half a man's work each day in the shop. The boy quickly agreed, and began at once to memorize the Latin declensions and conjugations.

It was extraordinary how easily he could fix the Latin words and forms in his mind. Bending over his books night after night, unmindful of the fire as it flamed or died down on the hearth, or of the flicker of the candle on the fine print of the page, he sought only to learn—and to excel; to satisfy in some manner his gnawing desire for knowledge—and recognition.

In the weeks before his uncle's return in February, he completed the study of the grammar, read *Historica Sacra* (a collection of Latin essays), four books of Caesar, and a large part of Sallust's *Catiline*—in short, he overtook the friends who had begun some eighteen months before.

Uncle Matthew wanted to know at once what his nephew had learned, and demanded that he read for him. Amazed at the boy's progress, he agreed to send him to the academy.

During the remainder of the four months, young Matthew finished the first volume of *Graeca Majora* (bristling with its Latin notes, some of them as tough for a boy as the Greek itself), a part of the poetry of the second volume, and a number of books of Homer. He completed in the three terms all that was required in the entire Greek and Latin courses of the neighboring colleges.

In the months that followed he studied advanced algebra, French, Spanish, a little Italian, botany, geology, and chemistry. All the while he worked in his uncle's shop; and as soon as he was

large enough he began to assist in the common school. So he busied himself until his seventeenth year, in the summer of 1828. That year he became acquainted with Charles Elliott.

II

Mr. Elliott had come to Cadiz in the interest of Madison College, the newly established Methodist institution at Uniontown, Pennsylvania, where he was professor of languages. Young Matthew looked on him with awe and admiration. He was a college professor; and he was one of the two classically educated preachers in the entire Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. A stockily built Irishman, thirty-six years of age, with a huge blond head and friendly blue eyes, Professor Elliott was impressive. He abounded in good humor, pithy sayings, and learned saws. His thick Irish brogue, straight from county Donegal, his pious sentiments, and his deep suspicion of the Catholic Church made him quite at home in a family reared at the fireside of Grandma Simpson.⁷

Passionately devoted to the Methodist church, and jealous of the welfare of Madison College, Mr. Elliott was in search of just such young men as Matthew Simpson. They were needed for the college and church alike. So he listened attentively to Uncle Matthew's recital of the boy's accomplishments. Questioning young Matthew himself, he noted his skill in Latin and Greek. A boy like that ought to be in college, in a Methodist college. A way could be found. He would listen to no objections, financial or otherwise. He himself needed an assistant (how little he could afford one, he well knew); he would take Matthew into his home and let him help with the instruction in Latin and Greek. There was no resisting Professor Elliott, especially, as Uncle Matthew said, when it was such a clear case of the working of Providence.

On the first Monday in November, 1828, young Matthew, with \$11.25 in cash, and with his clothes and a few books rolled into a bundle, set out on foot for Uniontown, some ninety miles away. Uncle Matthew, reluctant at last to see him go, this boy whom he loved like a son, walked down the road with him an hour's distance, to Craig's Plantation.

A quick goodbye at Craig's, and Matthew went on alone down

the pike toward Uniontown. Ahead of him as he swung along rapidly and steadily, he could see at any moment only a short stretch of the road before it turned left or right into the wooded ridge or dropped over the hillside into the narrow valley beyond. Short distances, those, to a boy whose head was filled with thoughts of college. Underfoot the road was rough with November frost, the caked earth resistant to the weight of a man's foot. But he walked all the way—save a few miles' ride on horseback out of Wellsburg, Virginia.

At half-past four on Wednesday afternoon of the third day he reached Uniontown and went to Mr. Elliott's home. The professor came in a few minutes later and welcomed him warmly. The next morning Matthew enrolled as student number 46 in the classical department. He paid \$4.62½ on his tuition, \$1.00 for a Greek book, and 62½ cents for a Latin grammar, 9¼ cents for paper. He spent also 37½ cents for stockings, 18¾ cents for a pen-knife, and 6¼ cents for a comb.⁸

At the Elliotts' he had a bed in a room with four other students and a place at the family table. He received his "victuals" free for assisting Mr. Elliott; but he paid for everything else—his coal, candles, washing, and the sleeping room. He found the boarding good, and Mr. and Mrs. Elliott "quite agreeable." He was delighted with the arrangement for family prayers. Professor Elliott and the students, each taking his turn, read and compared the Vulgate, Septuagint, Hebrew, French, and German Bibles.

Mr. Elliott put him to work at once reviewing Latin, Greek, Euclid, and Hebrew, the latter of which he had hastily studied at home. In addition to his own studies, he heard Mr. Elliott's classes in Cicero and the Greek New Testament, and on rainy days and days when the professor was away from home on business, he conducted the classes in Latin and Greek grammar, "Mair's Introduction," *Virgil*, and *Graeca Majora*.

For his own reading in Latin, he was, at the end of the first month, half through Livy ("fine print, about 300 pages").

"Read as much and as rapidly as you can," Mr. Elliott said, "and you will become perfect by practice. You will need no instruction from me in Latin and Greek."⁹

Matthew was strongly inclined to agree with him. The passages in Livy which he found difficult for himself were scarcely less

so for Mr. Elliott. And he soon discovered that his professor knew little if any more Hebrew than he did himself.

Mr. Fielding, the instructor in mathematics, was a little more skeptical about Matthew's abilities.

"What progress have you made in the sciences?" he asked.

"I read Euclid at home, with Uncle Matthew," Simpson replied, "and studied some algebra and learnt surveying."

That sounded a little like boasting to Mr. Fielding. "Which did you study first, Euclid or surveying?" he asked.

"Surveying."

"Surveying? I'm afraid you haven't studied it to so good an advantage as had you read Euclid first. I advise you to commence with Euclid again."

He began with Euclid; but after two or three lessons Mr. Fielding put him into an advanced class which was reviewing the text in preparation for the term examination. With no little satisfaction Matthew discovered that he could easily keep pace with the class. On the instructor's advice, he then began the study of algebra at home, reporting only when he was confronted by a problem he could not solve.

As the Christmas holidays and the end of the fall term approached, the rumor spread that the college tutor was going to resign. The position paid eighty dollars for the year, forty dollars for each of the five-month terms. Matthew did not doubt for a moment that he could get the appointment, but he was not at all certain that he should apply. On the whole he had found college disappointing. Expecting to meet young men of "superior minds and large attainments," and professors who "would take me by the hand as a giant would lead a child," he had discovered instead that "teachers are but men, and if the United States can parade no smarter young men than what comes to this college, Alas for the times."¹⁰

None the less, he would like to stay if he could do so without causing undue hardship to the family at home. His expenses would be considerable. With boarding at \$1.50 per week (high because of the cost of grain) and washing twenty-five cents, the costs for a month of four and one-half weeks would be \$7.87½, "leaving only twelve and a half cents for incidental expenses, such as shoe-blackening, mending, &c." The family then would have to pay for such

items as shoes, hat, stockings, coat, pantaloons, vests, about fifty dollars for the year, of which he could earn only a part during the summer.

He doubted that he could enjoy or profit from college if it were to work a hardship at home. He had already gained much, including confidence in his own ability. Besides, he had paid strict attention to all the forms and rules, and he had learned something about both studying and teaching. If he had a good common school with a few Latin or Greek scholars, could he not advance as much in real learning as he could as tutor?

Classes were dismissed on Christmas Day. Matthew rose early, before daybreak, to attend prayer meeting. The day was beautiful—clear and crisp and cold. At eleven o'clock Matthew went to the chapel to hear the preaching of Dr. Henry Bascom, former president of the college and now occasional lecturer on belles-lettres. But Matthew's mind was not on the sermon. He was to be tutor—Matthew Simpson, tutor, Madison College. All the eloquence of Dr. Bascom could not crowd that fact out of his thinking. A few days later, the fall term having ended, he started for home, walking over the same road he had taken two months before.

When the excitement of his return had subsided he surveyed the situation at home. Uncle Matthew was unwell, and his sister Betsey was suffering again from the disease which had taken their father's life. Hetty, who had been teaching in Uncle Matthew's school, was soon to be married. There was no doubt about it—he was needed at home. He resigned the tutorship, and so, after two months at Madison, concluded his college student days. He and his uncle, before the opening of the winter term, moved the school to the old academy building and added higher classes in languages and mathematics.

II

AMONG THE LITERATI

MATTHEW SIMPSON did not mind going back to Cadiz. It was a town to be proud of. Eastern nabobs might suppose that they were intellectually superior to backwoodsmen who were fed on corn pone and skimmed milk, or who could lie in bed at night and look up through apertures in their roofs at the laughing stars. Some of the westerners themselves might tamely stand with their hats under their arms worshiping eastern excellency and saying "Please your honor & I mean no offence."¹ But in general the spirit of independence had been at work. Ohio was throbbing with energy and power. Thirty years ago a wilderness, it stood in 1829 fourth in population among the states—with more people than Massachusetts and Connecticut combined.

Harrison County with a population of 20,000 was, next to Cincinnati, the most densely settled area of the state. Coal and limestone were plentiful, corn and wheat grew rank in the clearings, the peach and apple orchards every summer and fall were heavy with fruit, and great numbers of sheep grazed on the hillsides. Cadiz had a large brick courthouse, only a block from Matthew's home, a printing office, ten stores, six taverns, two large brick Presbyterian churches, a Methodist meetinghouse (how well he knew that plain, unpainted, rectangular hall, stained a nut-brown with age!), a steam gristmill, about 140 dwelling houses, and 820 inhabitants.²

The National Road went through St. Clairsville, a dozen miles to the south, but the Cadiz route was well traveled. From early spring until late fall families poured through the little town on their way west. Great freighters, creaking and groaning with their loads, drawn by four or six or even nine head of horses, ground to a stop before the crowded taverns; and drovers, raising thick clouds

of dust, herded their cattle and sheep and hogs along the road to the eastern market.

There was already some talk of a railroad in this bustling town; and young men, too impatient to wait for steam and rail, had built a trial road on the hillside. Passengers could ride down, but they had to walk up! Uncle Matthew had invented a new machine for making men's neckties, an ingenious device to weave the bristles into the high stock; Hetty and her husband, taking over the business of manufacturing the stocks, were making a great success. The village had organized a volunteer fire company and purchased a new engine—Matthew Simpson was assigned to the crank. The young men of the town interested in intellectual pursuits had banded together to form the Juvenile Literary Society; and New Athens, a half-dozen miles away, boasted of its new Franklin College.³

For Matthew it was the library and the Juvenile Literary Society that gave variety to the village life and the routine of Uncle Matthew's school. He dug into volumes on natural science, astronomy, and botany, read poetry, history, and biography, pored over the almanacs and the newspapers; and out of them all he sifted odd nuggets of information, short bits of history, explanations for the wonders of things—whatever would satisfy the ravenous appetite of the literary society. He wrote essays, stories, verse, and was in turn erudite, clever, melodramatic, and pious. He discussed conductors and nonconductors, Franklin's experiments, the invention of the lightning rod, and he gave advice on what to do in case of an electrical storm. He described in detail the movement of the earth and its relation to other planets and the sun, and he reviewed the history of astronomy. He explained at length the laws of reflection and refraction, and the workings of spectacles; he described the human eye and the telescope and the microscope.⁴

On the occasion of the falling of stars in 1833, when much of the American continent was frightened into a frantic calling upon God and temporary repentance, the people of Cadiz gathered around him for an explanation. That morning he had arisen earlier than usual, about four o'clock, awakened perhaps by the shouts of his neighbors, and had stepped out into the yard to look up into the sky. The sight was "truly sublime." From the upper reaches of the heavens the meteors "appeared to flow without ces-

sation in all directions towards the horizon . . . some quite faint, others extremely brilliant. There was no cross shooting . . . or flying from one point of the compass to another."

A few neighbors pressed about him, anxious to hear what he had to say. There was no cause for alarm, he assured them—the phenomenon had occurred before in history, according to books on astronomy. It was "phosphuretted hydrogen-gas," he said, giving the explanation he had read. The gas, he went on, was generated on the earth and rose in long columns; it took fire spontaneously in the air after having passed through water or vapor, and then the flames descended along the column.

When he came to write up the incident for the literary society, he was not so sure that the scientists were right. Why, he asked, if the phenomenon were caused by the igniting of columns of gas, did it occur so infrequently? ⁵

Writing was good for a young man, Matthew told the society. Certainly, it was good for him. Tall, thin and stooped, and frail-looking, he was so painfully self-conscious he could scarcely talk with strangers or young women. Public speaking? Quite out of the question. He could not declaim, his friends said; but he could write. Writing was good for a man: it improved his style. As politeness and good manners made a man attractive and popular, so good style made matter more readable; without it the writing might lie "neglected and forgotten, to slumber in the archives of oblivion." A man's style ought to be "sententious and not obscure, explicit & not prolix, pointed and not inelegant, polished & not spiritless, sublime & not turgid, familiar & not vulgar." Difficult ends, those, to be achieved only by a study of language, a "careful perusal of those eminent authors whose style is considered the Model," and practice. Practice was especially important, for there were always critics to attack the best of writers; and, no matter how finely polished the writing, there would be errors which "the glasses of Jealousy will magnify & distort beyond description."

Matthew's own style was frequently grandiose, embellished by figures calculated to "excite an interest which could never be produced by an unornamented narration." "Perhaps you may remember," he said to the young literati of the frontier, "the beauty of the evening, how the moon's pale beams quivered through the nocturnal atmosphere & the stars disappearing to add variety and

beauty to the scenery. . . . Virgil happily expresses the stillness which prevails on such occasions by saying, '*Omnia Noctis Erant*,' All was night." And he described an ambitious but unsuccessful writer who had hindered his prospects by too great a devotion to his domestic responsibilities as "chained with the adamantine hands of affection to the wheel-barrow of matrimonial life."

He wrote for the sheer joy of writing. No matter if the subject was trivial. Pens? Good! Ideally suited for digression, display of erudition, and declamation. A treatise on any subject ought to begin with a concise history of ancestors or antecedents. So with pens: how introduce the topic save with detailed observations on the use of the quill to the goose and a denunciation of man's tendency to describe that noble bird with "ridiculous epithet"? Then to the main disquisition, the importance of the pen in conveying ideas: the "scientific writings of Euclid, Pythagoras & Achimedes . . . the Histories of Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy & Sallust; the orations of Demosthenes, Lysicous & Cicero, & the poems of Homer & Pindar, of Horace, Virgil & Ovid."

Was it with such a simple instrument as the pen that he held in his hand that all of the late celebrated authors had written? Were their pens any better than his? Might his pen, too, prove "as volatile as Sterne's, as satiric as Swift's, & as easy as Scott's?" If time but allowed, could he not with that remarkable pen "write essays as polished & instructive as the [Illinois] Rambler, translate the yet untranslated poems of the ancients into verse as smooth & agreeable as Pope's Homer and write original Poems as Luxuriant in thought, in imagery, and in language as the Paradise lost . . ." He would indulge his fancy in descriptions of nature "as wild and fascinating as the Lady of the Lake, or Don Juan," he would write upon scientific subjects "with the ability of Newton, or Cavallo, Hutton, Bonnycastle, or Ryan," and describe the vegetable kingdom "with the attention of Linneus, Smith or Barton." He would—but already he had "planned too much!" *

He could not declaim, but he could write—and he could read what he had written. The words came easily enough when he could look down and see them clearly engrossed in brown ink. Even sentiments of love were easy on paper. "Dunce," the Cadiz boys called him, making fun of his bashful attempts at romance. "Plague on them." They were "fit for nothing but to bray." They could not

understand his feelings of "honour," his embarrassment and self-consciousness—how in spite of himself in company his eyes would "roll in quest of hers," and yet how "unwilling diffident and shy" he became when it was his lot to speak. But he could put his feelings down on paper; he could write about star-eyed Susan, haughty Nancy, and "sweet Matilda Jane," her on whom he could not gaze (save now and then a stolen glance) lest he meet her eye. If only he were a painter! But that would not do, either, for

canvass never can delight
Like her bright eyes of blue
They look like crystal windows
Her soul is peeping through.

He had his revenge with the village dandy, however, in a thinly disguised and rollicking narrative of the "Courtship of Burd." Burd, having preened himself and groomed his horse, called upon three sisters who

like the ships whose keel outweighs
The masts & cordage which they raise
So they are heavier everywhere
Than in their head, for little's there.

They were, nevertheless, clever enough to plot a vicious prank to play on Burd. When

Miss Jane the pretty girl
Had caught his heart within a curl

one of the others slipped out into the night and loosened the girth of the saddle of the young gallant's horse. At last the swain arose to depart. The girls accompanied him to his horse and invited him to return, to which he quickly cried, "I will, I will."

While in his ear such music rung
Into the air himself he flung
Upon the saddle firmly lands
The reigns & whip are in his hands
And then to show his horsemanship
He flourishes then cracks his whip
The noise resounded through the air
The horse swings off & he goes—where!

How should a poet remember what then happened—save that the “strong rebuff and laughter of the girls” sounded like thunder in the hero’s head? ⁷

II

In the summer of 1829 Matthew decided to walk to Wheeling, (West) Virginia, to the session of the Pittsburgh Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The conference was for preachers, but Mr. Elliott, and Dr. Bascom, and other members of the Madison College faculty would be there. William McKendree, first of the western men to be elected to the episcopacy, would preside over the deliberations and appoint the men to their churches and circuits; and, barring sickness or accident, all the preachers would be present—men who had preached in his mother’s parlor and in the meetinghouse at Cadiz, and even the great Dr. Martin Ruter of Pittsburgh.

Matthew was surprised to discover how old and frail Bishop McKendree was. White-haired and stooped, he could scarcely bear his sixty-nine years. Twenty-one years he had been a bishop, elected from the great Western Conference which once had embraced the circuits of Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee, and western Virginia. Like Bishop Francis Asbury, he had made all Methodism his circuit and, like Asbury, he had sought to unite Methodism into one family. In a voice which was low but seemed to Matthew to be exceptionally sweet and musical, he told of the work in the other conferences which he had visited, of the revivals which were in process, of the joy and victory and peace he found in preaching Christ; and at last, in climax, he pleaded with his brethren to give their entire devotion to spreading the gospel. Matthew was stirred deeply. Following this frail old man on the long, hard trail from conference to conference, he caught for the first time a glimpse of the vastness and the oneness of Methodism.⁸

Charles Elliott preached the ordination sermon on Sunday afternoon, and again Matthew was strangely moved. The sermon was not addressed to him but to the candidates for the ministry; and yet he felt oddly uncomfortable, quite as if it were spoken directly to him. Afterward, he talked with Mr. Elliott and Dr. Bascom,

who told him that there had been a great revival at the college, and that students who had been uninterested in religion or the church had become marvelously converted and gave promise of "deep piety" and of "great usefulness." Turning the matter over in his mind on the way home, he found it peculiar that he had rejoiced to hear the good news about the students when he himself was not a Christian, nor a member of the church.

Reared in a Methodist family, under the influence of a widowed mother, two older sisters, and a deeply religious uncle, he had early acquired the outward accouterments of religion, a heavy and dark garment which he rarely put off. Even as a child he had felt a "deep reverence for God," and often when "conscious of any error or act of impropriety, did . . . pass through seasons of severe mental sufferings." He had learned from his mother the habit of prayer; he regularly read "God's holy word" and attended "God's house"; and, though he had "a heart as prone to evil as any other," he "was restrained from every word or act of either profanity or licentiousness, and never engaged in what are termed by Christians sinful amusements." But he had not been "saved." He had grown to young manhood, attended a Methodist college, and returned home without the experience of conversion.⁹

In the fall of 1829 the preachers on the circuits announced a camp meeting for Dickerson's grove, three miles south of Cadiz. On Sunday morning Matthew and his sister Betsey walked to the camp. The scene was a familiar one: the tents and wagons ranged in rows like streets; the dust rising above the milling crowds and settling, a gray stain, on leaves already turning from green to yellow; the rude square platform for the preacher, the stumps and hewn trunks of the trees where the people sat; the sound of exhortations, prayers, shouts, issuing from several of the tents, the swelling chorus of Wesleyan hymns; the low nasal voice of the preacher, gaining strength and resonance as he warmed to his subject; the simple argument, the gripping stories, and the dramatic climax of the sermon, a veritable struggle with the powers of hell; the awful stillness, broken only by an occasional sob, or a suppressed amen, or the groaning of the wind in the trees; and presently, like a rushing night wind, the screaming of sinners for mercy, the loud exhortations of a score of ministers and class leaders, and the shouts of the saints.

All day long Matthew and Betsey went from public meeting to prayer circles in the tents and back to public meeting, stopping now and then at the little clusters of people to talk about the progress of the camp, the most recent "awakenings," and the comparative "power" of the preachers. It was not particularly exciting; but Betsey desired to remain overnight with friends who had pitched a tent on the grounds, and her brother agreed to return after school the following day to walk home with her.

On Monday, Matthew found that the camp had been stirred by a "remarkable religious interest." Several boys and young men, some of whom had been the wild boys of Cadiz, had been marvelously awakened and converted. He talked with some of them, and was amazed at their forthright declarations of religious experience and purpose. These boys, village dandies and no-goods—why should they, who had never been subjected to Christian influences, be so deeply moved when he, who had been reared in a Methodist home, felt no conviction of sin, no prompting to repentance? And how, going back to Cadiz, could they escape falling into the old ways?

The questions troubled him all through the sermon that followed. As the preacher developed his text the darkness gathered in the grove and moved out into the clearing. Men tossed pine boughs and knots on the fires near the platform, and the leaping flames lighted the faces of the people as they sat hunched on the logs. The preacher's voice rang out, but Matthew scarcely heard what he had to say. He could not get away from the question, Why should these boys be so stirred and wrought upon and awakened when he was not moved at all?

At last the preacher ceased his preaching and began to plead, to call the people to repentance. The effect was hypnotic. The great crowd surged toward the railing which set aside a space for "mourners." Matthew followed, mechanically, and stood with his hand on the rail, absorbed in his own thoughts. A short distance away he saw a friend, a boy who like himself had been reared in a Christian home but had never "professed" to be a Christian. Impulsively, Matthew edged his way through the crowd to the young man, put his hand on his shoulder, and asked, "Would you like to go forward for prayers?"

The boy dropped his head, and the tears started from his eyes. "I will go," he said, "if you will go with me."¹⁰

They went together, stooping to crawl under the rail. Stepping over or around the people who knelt or lay prostrate on the ground, they found an open spot and dropped to their knees. All about them people were sobbing and crying, and the preachers were exhorting them to pray on; but Matthew had no desire to weep or pray. For him the matter was settled. Without any special "feeling," he purposed to be religious and resolved to join the church at the first opportunity.

At the next visit of the circuit rider to Cadiz, some four weeks later, Matthew "gave in" his name for membership. He immediately felt a new sense of obligation, an increased concern for the new converts, and an intense anxiety to participate in the affairs of the church. He suggested that the young men, converts at the recent camp, organize a special prayer meeting; and, driven by feelings of duty and doubts of his own ability to extemporize, he wrote out, memorized, and promptly forgot his first public prayer. He organized a Sunday school, against some resistance from older Methodists who doubted that teaching on the Sabbath was proper, or that boys should be allowed to mess up the building; he taught the pupils himself, and he solicited some sixty dollars to purchase a library of religious books for the pupils. In all this he found a new satisfaction, a sense of worthiness and accomplishment that he had never experienced in Uncle Matthew's school or in the exercises of the Juvenile Literary Society.

By the summer of 1830, absorbed in his religious activities, his literary society, and his reading, and exhausted from teaching in Uncle Matthew's school and studying or attending meetings late at night, he fell ill, his health "seriously affected." It was time, Uncle Matthew said, for him to halt some of these diverse activities, and to begin to expend his energies more purposefully.¹¹

III

Matthew was inclined to agree with his uncle that he should study with more purpose. Teaching in a subscription school certainly was not a satisfactory lifelong profession. It was too irregular, too tedious, and it did not pay well enough.

Law appealed to him: for years he had attended the sessions of the county court, where Uncle William Tingley was clerk, and

had listened with rapt attention while the lawyers harangued the jury. But his mother and uncle and the preachers who visited them doubted how far a good Methodist could engage in the practice of law. Even more important to his mind was the knowledge that he could not speak, that he never would be able to face a jury and plead for a client's life, or to wrangle with opposing counsel over the points of the law.

At last he decided upon medicine and entered upon the study in the office of Dr. McBean, under whom he had studied the classics in the academy. For the next three years he pored over medical books, memorizing the terms, the medical descriptions, definitions, and remedies. He studied Cooper's *Principles and Practice of Surgery* and *Surgical Dictionary*, Hufeland's *Treatise on the Scrofulous Disease*, Gibson's *Surgery*, Good's *Study of Medicine*, and Dewees's *A Compendious System of Midwifery*. Now and then he noted in his diary the volume he was studying, and for a brief period he took extensive notes to assist his memory; but he stopped the note-taking when his eyes began to trouble him—it was unnecessary labor, anyway, when he could remember without the notes. Occasionally he walked into the woods to gather medicinal herbs, boneset and lobelia, or simply to "botanize." Periodically, he rode six miles to Dr. McBean's home in Freeport, to be examined on the books he had studied.

Long before he completed his course he plugged teeth for his brother-in-law, attended a friend who was ill with the bilious fever, repaired the galvanic battery "electric machine" for his sister Betsey, and prescribed powders for an aunt. To build up his body he walked frequently, and worked summers in the harvest fields. One September he bought a horse—for forty dollars, payable in April—so that he might ride for his health.

To pay his tuition and the cost of the expensive medical books, he taught school and turned the big crank in the factory until Uncle William Tingley offered him twenty-five dollars a month for three months to copy records in the county court. He accepted the offer gratefully. There were exciting cases in the Harrison Court of Common Pleas: indictments for the selling of spirituous liquors without license, for unlawfully "playing with each other at cards at a certain game called seven up," for assault and battery; suits for the recovery of debts, for collection of property damages, for

slandorous accusations of unchaste and immoral conduct. So day by day, in the hours he could take from his medical studies, Matthew sat at the high counter in the courthouse, copying the records his Uncle Tingley had laid out for him. "This," he said, "I would prefer to school-keeping."¹²

In general he adhered to the more conservative medical theories of the period. After the manner of Dr. Benjamin Rush and the Philadelphia school, he employed the lancet, prescribed calomel, and applied "blisters." But, like other frontier doctors confronted with the high cost of drugs, he also depended upon herbs and folklore. He even gathered a few prescriptions from that arch adversary of physic, the founder of patent medicines, Dr. Samuel Thomson: "Spear Mint," he noted, after Thomson, is "good to stop vomiting—sits pleasantly on the stomach." "Penny Royal—may be used in all sickness—good for the stomach & warming & cleansing & sweetening." For cough powder: "four tea spoons of Skunk cabbage, two of hoarhound, one of Wake Robbin, one of No. 1, one of No. 2, one of Bay Berry, one of bitter Root & one of . . . powder—make fine mixture. Take half a Teaspoon before going to bed."¹³

In April of 1833 Matthew went to Freeport for the last two or three months of his study with Dr. McBean. He traveled with the doctor on his rounds, reviewed his studies with him, and finally, as required by the state law, appeared before and was approved by a local board of examiners. Dr. McBean issued the certificate in his own handwriting, a small scrap of paper dated at Cadiz, July 25, 1833:

Mr. Matthew Simpson Jr has studied the science of medicine under my direction, for the period prescribed by the state medical law; and I have no hesitancy in saying that I consider him an eminently qualified member of the medical profession, and altogether deserving of the public patronage.

John McBean¹⁴

Matthew immediately opened an office at Cadiz.