

III

CROWS AND METHODIST PREACHERS

WHILE Matthew studied medicine he practiced religion. He read the Methodist weekly newspaper, the *New York Christian Advocate and Journal*, the sermons and *Journal* of John Wesley, the letters of John Fletcher, and such other volumes as he could put his hands on. He attended Sunday school teachers' meetings, and prayer meetings; gave his testimony at class meeting and answered the prodding questions of the leader. On Fridays he fasted, being careful to record in his journal, "Usual abstinence." He visited other communities for the quarterly conferences of his church, fasting before he went. At one such session he was "particularly struck" by the testimony of a young man, a confirmed Deist on Monday last, who had been "awakened and convinced" on Tuesday at a prayer meeting. At the same conference he saw a pair of celestial maps, and gazed for the first time on the wonders of a Miltonic heaven.¹

His thoughts on religion spilled over into his study and practice of medicine. "How striking a difference," he said, noting the calm suffering of his sister Hetty when she was ill, "exists between the religious and the thoughtless." Called to military muster at near-by Rumley, he deplored the "strange habits, outlandish customs; licentiousness, drunkenness, and blasphemy . . . everywhere prevalent." "Fiddling and dancing," he said, documenting his charge, "were going on at almost every wagon of provisions." When a "powerful stir broke out" among the three or four thousand present at a camp meeting, he yielded a little to the emotional tide; and, if he did not experience the ecstatic joy of some of the others, a sense of peace flowed over him.

Uncle Matthew looked on and was pleased. Often he had heard

from Sarah Simpson's lips how James and she, in the last days before his death, had consecrated the baby Matthew, and had prayed that he would become a preacher. But neither Sarah nor Uncle Matthew would tell the boy of their hope, lest they interfere with the divine call. Matthew had thoughts on the subject himself, even before his conversion. As he worked in the church he felt a growing conviction that he must preach. It was a despairing thought, a haunting fear. How could he preach when he could not speak? ²

Yet he could not shake the sense of responsibility; it pursued him into his medical studies as well as into the prayer meeting; it seemed to be indissolubly connected with his own salvation. He longed for some one to tell him his duty; he fasted, and prayed, and begged for divine direction, but he found no rest. Now and then, when he had spoken well at class meeting, or when the words, molten with his own need, had flowed freely at public prayers, he felt an awareness of God, an assurance of His approval—the same awe-stricken sense of the presence of God that he had felt as a boy when, lying on a hillside, he had seen the western sun reach over the shadows to light up the tops of the trees.

But hope quickly turned to despair. He did not have the heart cleansed from sin so clearly described in Mr. Wesley's *Journal*. Uncle Tingley, even when he was ill, might be cheerful, and hopeful, and gentle of spirit; but he himself was not dead to the world as he ought to be, he did not feel the continual fervency of spirit that he had once felt, he had not put away all his old evil days. Week by week, month by month, his life was a continual inward searching, a morbid probing, a despairing cry, "O God! create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me." How could he preach when he had neither the ability to speak nor the grace to do God's will?

In the agony of conflict, he suddenly discovered the key to all the problems which confronted him. It lay in his abiding belief in Providence. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart," he read in the Scripture; "and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." The verse seemed to have been written especially for him. It was the proof of his mother's simple faith, of his uncle's reliance on the mysteries of God. It was to trust God and events, not arguments—blindly if necessary. He could preach if Providence clearly indicated that he must.

To others he gave no intimation of his intended course of action; but in a short time he had opportunity to test his faith. One Sunday, when no preacher was present and a prayer meeting was scheduled for the evening, he felt strongly impressed that he should speak. But he dreaded the opinions of his friends—those who knew that he could not speak—and even more the keen appraisal of Uncle Matthew.

As he sat debating the matter with himself, his uncle entered the room and said, after a moment of silence, "Matthew, don't you think you could speak to the people tonight?"

Surprised and startled, he replied hesitatingly, "Do you—think that I ought to?"

"Yes," said his uncle simply. "I think you might do good."

That settled the matter for Matthew. It was clearly the working of Providence. That night, by some strange coincidence, he thought, the meetinghouse was crowded as he rose to make his first religious address. He had not written out what he had to say, nor had he thought it through very well; but he was deeply stirred, and the words came easily, gushing forth from some inner resource he had not hitherto tapped. The people, amazed by his performance, began to press upon him to preach; but he evaded all conversation on the subject.

None the less, more responsibilities were heaped upon him. He was called upon with increasing frequency to speak at prayer meetings and other functions; and much to his surprise, and in spite of his protests and embarrassment, he was named leader of a "female" class. "If it be the will of the Lord," he said resignedly, "I pray him to enable me to perform my duty."

His successes or failures in speaking, he equated with his religious experience. When he was able to talk freely and with liberty he praised God for His goodness; but when he searched for words that would not come, when he stood perspiring with fear, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, he condemned himself for his little religion, for his lack of power in prayer, and he begged for the "awakening energy of the Holy Spirit."

Whatever his own misgivings, the people of Cadiz thought well of his efforts. They named him an officer in the local Temperance Society and called upon him to deliver an address on temperance at the Presbyterian church. Matthew was not a little pleased when

the editor of the *Harrison County Telegraph* published his remarks. His church gave him charge of a class of new converts and Sunday school teachers and pupils; and in the spring of 1833, when he was absent from meeting, it voted him a license to exhort. If he would not enter the ministry of his own accord, the people would at least make a lay preacher out of him.

So, possessed of an exhorter's license, he went down to Dr. Mc-Bean's at Freeport for his final medical examinations.

There, Charles Elliott found him. Professor Elliott had not been able to get his mind off Matthew, the awkward boy with the brilliant mind who had passed so brief a time in his home and at college. When family interests took him to Ohio in the spring of 1833 he rode over to Cadiz to call on the Simpsons. Uncle Matthew related to him the succession of events which had crowded his nephew's life: his independent study and the exercises in the literary society; his three-year study of medicine; his conversion; and his activities in the church.

That was enough for Elliott; he must ride over to Freeport. He arrived early in the morning and was just alighting in front of the inn when Matthew saw him from across the street and hurried over to greet him. For an hour they talked, chiefly of Madison College and the educational need of the Methodist Church. Elliott outlined his hopes and dreams, his vision for Methodism and Christian education. He talked earnestly of Matthew's talents, praised him for his activities in the Juvenile Literary Society and in the church, and at last begged him to devote his life to learning and the church.

When the talk had run out and it was time to go, Elliott turned impulsively, his voice and his deep blue eyes pleading as much as his words: "Matthew," he said, "don't you think you are called to preach?"

"Well," Matthew replied, a little uneasily, "I've had thoughts on the subject." After a moment he went on. "But if the church wants me to preach, I believe the way will open without any agency of mine. I design simply to follow the openings of Providence."

Charles Elliott had no hesitation about becoming an agent of Providence; he had played the role before. Hurrying back to Cadiz, he stopped to see the preacher and arranged for Matthew to be examined for license by the next quarterly conference.

At the conference the presiding elder precipitated a crisis by demanding a trial sermon.

"You must excuse me," Matthew said, "but there is no rule in the Discipline authorizing persons to preach before they are licensed, and I don't wish to take any step toward the ministry unless called out by the church."

The elder, not at all impressed by this modestly clothed arrogance, opposed the license. Some of the people voiced their fears that Matthew's health was not strong enough for the rigors of the circuit, and others doubted that his speaking would be satisfactory. But in the end the quarterly conference granted the license and recommended that he be admitted on trial to the Pittsburgh Annual Conference. Perhaps, said a layman from Cadiz, God had work for him to do: "He has always been the child of Providence."

The action of the quarterly conference served only to intensify Matthew's inward struggle. Was his health equal to the rough, itinerant life? Could he preach? How could he abandon the practice of medicine before he had fairly begun? How could he support his mother on the \$100 annual salary allowed to a preacher? What would his mother say? With both his sisters married and gone, how could he leave her alone? Would he not break her heart?

He dreaded the necessity of talking to her; but one day, finding her alone, he went into the room and dropped to the floor beside her chair. His speech was scarcely coherent—the recounting of his long struggle, the fears and the doubts; but at last he blurted out his purpose plainly. He could not help it—he did not want to preach—but he believed God required it of him.

He paused, waiting for her to speak. She turned toward him, her eyes suffused with tears even as she smiled.

"My son," she said, "I have been looking for this hour since you were born."³

Matthew's mind was at rest. He must and would preach—if not at once, then as soon as the way opened. For the present, however, the difficulties seemed to be insuperable: he had just begun medical practice; he was still employed in the county court; his mother needed his support; and his sister Betsey had come home, dying from consumption. He therefore wrote to the presiding elder that he would not be able to accept an appointment, and requested that

the elder withhold the recommendation of the quarterly conference.

Elliott would have none of it. The presiding elder, he told the conference, had no right to withhold the recommendation; and he went to the bishop to argue the point and to set forth the unusual merits of young Simpson. A way could be found to overcome the family difficulties. Matthew could be made third preacher on the circuit, assigned to pulpits close to his home until he could better arrange his personal affairs. A heated discussion ensued; but in the end the bishop and the conference agreed, and Matthew Simpson was admitted on trial to the Pittsburgh Annual Conference. His presiding elder directed him to preach at Cadiz and St. Clairsville on alternate Sundays until he could close out his practice of medicine and devote full time to the ministry.

The action of the conference seemed to be providential, and Matthew resolved to get ready as soon as possible.

II

In the spring of 1834, after eight months of practicing medicine through the week and preaching on Sundays, Matthew Simpson closed his office and joined the ranks of itinerant preachers. His sister Hetty McCullough and her family had come to live with their mother and Uncle Matthew. And the younger sister, Betsey, racked by a consumptive cough until her frail body could no longer bear the struggle, had died late in 1833. Matthew was free to enter the ministry.

There was something relentless, as certain as Providence itself, about the life of a Methodist circuit rider. In the early settlement of the trans-Allegheny West no more romantic figure had appeared. With his Bible, his saddlebags, and his horse he rode the frontier trails, a challenger of nature's wilderness and man's unbelief.

The trails were often dim, sometimes indicated only by notches in the bark of trees; but he followed them to the very edge of settlement, where not infrequently he encountered men who had moved there "especially to get rid of those wretched people called Methodists," but who scarcely had completed their rude cabins before "here was the Methodist preacher preaching hell fire and damnation, as they always did." The bad-weather proverb of

the Ohio River valley was, "There's nobody out today but crows and Methodist preachers."⁴

When Matthew Simpson strapped the bags on his saddle and rode out of Cadiz one April day in 1834, the severe hardships of the circuit in eastern Ohio had largely disappeared. The Methodists, with more than 70,000 communicants and nearly 500 meeting-houses, had grown to be the most numerous religious body in the state, and Harrison and Belmont counties, in which the circuit lay, boasted a population of 50,000.⁵ Matthew and his two colleagues had thirty-four appointments on their circuit, the farthest of which was less than twenty-five miles from Cadiz. None the less, the romance of the circuit rider lingered on. The preacher was still engaged in an endless battle with nature and a relentless pursuit of sin. So Matthew rode forth in the manner and tradition and with the trappings of the forefathers.

Most of his preaching places were small meetinghouses in villages or on a Methodist brother's farm; but now and then he met his congregation in a home, and on one occasion, the "congregation being very large," he preached to them out of doors and "had considerable liberty." He introduced preaching into Morristown, speaking in the schoolhouse and attracting the lodgers from a near-by hotel, some of them "tipsy" and controversial. He was once misdirected and traveled thirteen miles instead of seven, over "a very bad road"; but he amused himself by "examining the strata of limestone, coal, etc.," and arrived at his appointment in time for preaching.

He preached only for results, believing that, at the peril of his soul, he must get men converted. His texts were imperative. At St. Clairsville one Sunday evening he preached on "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." The next day in the home of James Eaton he chose the text, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday he was preaching from the solemn themes: "For God sent his only beloved son, that whosoever believeth on him might be saved"; "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"; and "Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

The most discouraging point in his whole ministerial career

came in these first few weeks. An eminent minister, called in for the dedication of a church, preached a series of five sermons, "full of thought most forcibly expressed, and accompanied with a divine unction." There was a stirring as of a mighty wind, and the people felt a strange sense of the presence of God in their midst.

Simpson, comparing the eloquent visitor's preaching to his own, became discouraged and humiliated. As the series continued his humiliation deepened. What right had he to stand in the sacred desk and utter "feeble thoughts like the lisps of childhood" when the services of such men could be secured? He resolved to quit the circuit, support himself by medicine, and continue his speaking only as a local preacher. A prominent layman, a class leader and steward, in whom he confided his intentions was utterly astonished and urged him not to think of making the change.

His depression was relieved in a manner not unlike that in which it had come on. At an appointment where he had a very large congregation, he was visited by another minister of the conference, a little older and more experienced than himself. Simpson invited him to preach. The young visitor's thoughts were "crude and disjointed," he mispronounced words, violated the commonest rules of grammar and in general gave such an exhibition of ignorance that Simpson was "deeply mortified," but cured of his own discouragement.

Following the tradition of the saddlebags, he carried with him his books and writing materials, diligently continued his studies, and prepared for his conference examinations. Sometimes he was so exhausted that he "would have lain down"; but, steeped in the *Journal* of John Wesley, he sought to emulate Wesley's rigorous itinerancy and so denied himself rest until he had spent some time in reading and writing. The "way of duty," he moralized, after climbing a hill above one of his preaching places, was "steep and arduous, but the effect delightful."

From April until July, when the Annual Conference met at Washington, Pennsylvania, Simpson traveled the circuit. For his services he was able to collect only \$17.75 of the \$25 allotted for the quarter's work.

At the conference he passed his examinations, preached at one of the morning sessions, and mingled with his fellows to discuss the

probable appointments for the next year. Prompted by Uncle Matthew and by his own fears, he consulted with his presiding elder.

"I would prefer an appointment in a healthy region," he said, citing Uncle Matthew's concern, "and not far from home."

He hastened to add, however, that he wished "to take his place among his brethren," and that he sought no special favors.

The presiding elder assured him that he had "just such a circuit as would be best" for him, and Matthew, as was the custom, went home to await the announcement of the appointments. The bishop, far from giving him a healthy, out-of-door circuit, assigned him to a station, as junior minister to the largest church in the conference, in smoky, soot-filled Pittsburgh!

He received the news of his appointment with objections which he enumerated in his journal: "1st. My little experience in the ministry; 2d. My health might not suit confinement; 3d. I feared that I could not please the people." None the less, he sold his horse, laid aside his saddlebags, and after preaching a sermon in the Presbyterian church took the stage for Pittsburgh.⁶

IV

STATIONED AT PITTSBURGH

THE traveler en route to Pittsburgh in 1834 could locate the city by the cloud of thick brown smoke which hung above it, long before he could discern shops and dwellings. When he alighted from the packet or stage, he stepped into a smoke-filled atmosphere. The black soot drifted down in flakes, settled on the people, and clung to the exterior of the dingy and ancient-looking dwellings and business houses. The "dirtiest town in the United States," a Frenchman wrote of it.¹ The streets were half darkened by the heavy pall, and men read by candlelight in hours that should have been lighted by the sun.

But the smoke was a symbol of activity. "Nowhere in the world," wrote the critical Frenchman, "is everybody so regularly and continually busy as in the city of Pittsburgh." He found "no interruption of business for six days in the week, except during the three meals, the longest of which occupies hardly ten minutes."

The Birmingham of America already boasted a population of thirty thousand. Steamboats lined the two sides of the Golden Triangle which marked the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. Boxes, bales, and barrels were piled six feet high all along the cobblestone wharf. The city was proud of its rolling mills, forges, and foundries, as well as of its cotton mills, glass factories, distilleries, and scores of other small manufactories. At night the row of coke ovens at the base of Coal Hill glared into the darkness, giving off more light than the sperm-oil lamps along the streets. The Pennsylvania Canal system and two trans-state turnpikes emptied their traffic into the city and carried the western produce to eastern markets. Only recently the town pump had given way to a great reservoir from which water was piped into houses.²

Matthew Simpson reached the bustling city on August 1, 1834. Stepping from the stage at a point not far from the Golden Triangle, he made his way to the home of James Verner on Penn Street. Verner, an immigrant from Scotland, was a prosperous lumberman and brewer. A stanch Methodist and a church steward, he maintained an elegant home and supplied generous hospitality to itinerant preachers. Matthew found him warm-hearted and genial and eager to discuss the affairs of the church.

Even more diverting than Verner was his sixteen-year-old daughter Ellen. Tall and slender, her light brown hair tightly rolled in braided coils at the side of her head, she was quick to blush, yet ready to question or challenge with her flashing blue eyes. Her speech was free yet modestly pious. Ellen Holmes Verner—the name was as well poised and stately as its owner.³

Matthew learned quickly that Methodism and the city of Pittsburgh were at one in enterprise and growth. Although divided in 1828 by a disastrous quarrel which had led to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church, the Pittsburgh station in 1834 had more than 800 members, with two churches and two other regular preaching places, requiring the services of three preachers.⁴ Moreover, Dr. Charles Elliott was in the city as the editor of the newly established weekly newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Conference Journal*.

The other preachers arrived within a few days: Thomas Hudson, senior minister in charge of the station, a man of middle age, a revivalist, and an exhorter of unusual ability; and William O. Hunter, a man of Simpson's age and, like him, a student of the classics and of Hebrew. The official board decreed that the two junior preachers should live with Mr. Hudson. They were to receive the \$100 per year allowed by the conference; Mr. Hudson \$600 for the support of his family and for the board and room of the younger preachers.⁵

The men began at once to arrange their appointments. The two larger churches, Smithfield and Liberty, regularly held three services on Sunday; Birmingham had preaching morning and evening, and Bayardstown in the afternoon. Each minister must preach two or three times on Sunday as well as conduct other exercises of the day and week. By the third Sunday Matthew had adjusted himself to the new routine. He walked that day to Birmingham, preached at eleven, had dinner, read "fifty or 60 pages" from the

biography of the "first female missionary from America to Burmah," spoke to the "Sabbath scholars" at two, held class at three, preached at Liberty Street at night. It was, he said, "a sabbath day to my soul."

The heavy demands of the pulpit called for a strictly imposed self-discipline. With his overacute sense of duty Matthew was soon prescribing a rigid daily routine and lashing himself for failures. In the manner approved by John Wesley, he arose early, from four to five o'clock, studied biblical and theological matters until ten, and then busied himself with calling on the people. For formal sermon preparation he had little time, and Saturday night or Sunday morning frequently found him with "comparatively slight preparation."⁶

His preaching was an overflow of his emotions, a venting of the fears and hopes, of the struggles and triumphs he had experienced himself or had encountered in his daily talks with the people. His words came with an impetuous rush; and as his excitement increased, flecks of foam gathered at the corners of his mouth. He had only one thought: to reconcile men to God. If the people were deeply stirred he knew himself in the will of God; if they were indifferent he was sure that he had failed, and sought relief in penitence.⁷

In the intensity of his emotion he soon fell into the preacher's habit of sustaining his words with the pious suffix "uh": "Shall we do evil-uh, that good may come-uh?"

Dr. Henry D. Sellers, brother-in-law of Bishop John Emory and a prominent layman, sent for him and discoursed on the evils of the habit. "You must quit it," he said. Matthew agreed, and arranged to return for further criticisms. In a short time he was reporting every Monday morning to discuss the sermon of the preceding day.⁸ He was a little discouraged, however, by his poor preaching, and Uncle Matthew comforted him with the thought that "very few of those popular orators will rate high in God's account when the day of reckoning comes."⁹

His colleague William Hunter was quite as eager for self-improvement and quickly accepted the proposal that they write skeletons of sermons on the same text and compare notes. Matthew began to jot down outlines of the sermons he preached, simple ideas in topical sequence. He sometimes employed major divisions,

rhetorical categories he had borrowed from John Wesley: *Nature of, Design of, Precepts for, Examples of, Duration, Manner*. More often he used a simple listing of points, a series of pictures, a sequence of situations. Aroused by the derelicts on the streets and fortified by the growing temperance sentiment of the conference, he preached one night to the Drinker. Every argument was etched clearly and vividly on his mind. He had no need in the pulpit for an outline, nor for a scrap of paper, but he jotted down a skeleton, a list of arguments, warnings, pictures, each one direct and blunt, clearly designed to make the intemperate see themselves in a most unfavorable light.

1. Where are you going?
2. Do you not *believe* there is poison in the glass?
3. Look, first, at your *companions*.
4. Look at your *property*.
5. Look at your *money*.
6. Look at your *wife*.
7. Look at your *children*.
8. Look at yourself.
9. Look at your poor soul.
10. Do you ask, what shall I do?
11. Do you answer 'I would so if [I] was only able' (stop from this moment). You are able through Divine strength.¹⁰

When he enlarged upon a simple theme he did so with a blunt urgency, a naïve directness. When he called his congregation to repentance he warned, "Time shall be no longer," and asked, "Are we prepared?"

Remember time shall soon be no longer— This year is nearly gone and with it have fled many hopes & joys. Should this year close your life how would it be with you? God may soon say to you Time shall be no longer. Thou fool this night shall thy soul be required of thee. The lady dying at her toilette— Sargent fell in the pulpit. Where will you be in another year, some here, some abroad, some sick, some dying, some in heaven, some in hell—I every second, then in 2 hours 24/60/1440 2880 have died since we came here. Hundreds have fallen while [I] have been exhorting, listen to their voices, one cries Glory to God—another . . . Oh God I can't die—I won't die & dies with the words in his mouth. Oh! Sinner Time shall be no more . . . now you may repent, now you may be saved. Oh! be saved to night.¹¹

Some of his sermon ideas, he took directly from Uncle Matthew, who often had criticized the preachers on the circuit, not for their poor grammar only, but for their poor exegesis. So he wrote to Uncle Matthew, begging for interpretations of the Scriptures. "Query . . . does the expression 'the stones should cry out,' etc. mean any more than that it was impossible for the Jews to be silent—like the camel & needle's eye?" And how should he interpret such stories as that of Saul and the witch of Endor?¹²

Uncle Matthew answered the inquiries and suggested interpretations of the Scripture in long exegetical accounts. He believed that a naturalistic interpretation of Saul and the witch was "attended by fewer difficulties than any other." He cautioned against using a text to prove what it did not say. "Remember how Euclid would argue." He warned against the error of "philosophical theologians" who turned to the Bible in a vain attempt to establish "every principle of geology and natural philosophy." He praised knowledge and argued the importance of learning for the preacher, and he suggested as a proposition for a missionary sermon, "Those nations who have not the Scripture are more sunk in ignorance and crime than those who have it."¹³ The union of learning and Christian piety was a tempting theme to young Matthew Simpson, enamored as he was of both books and pulpit.

II

When Charles Elliott learned that the bishop had put down Matthew Simpson as junior preacher for Pittsburgh, he was delighted. It was good to have the most brilliant and best educated young preacher in the conference stationed in Pittsburgh where he, Elliott, could look after him. "My boy, Mattie," he liked to call him, and was pleased when Simpson reciprocated with "Father Elliott."¹⁴ He thought it regrettable, however, that Matthew had not been able to finish at Madison College. A young man so gifted in languages and mathematics, and trained likewise as a physician, ought to have a college degree. It would make him more useful to the church. Moreover, with all his learning, he was entitled to it. Some day he might make a college president or a Methodist editor.

In the months that Matthew was still practicing medicine at Cadiz, Elliott had talked with Dr. Martin Ruter, president of Alle-

gheny College, the Methodist school at Meadville. Allegheny ought to do something for Simpson. Ruter had first responded, some weeks before Matthew went on the circuit, by offering him a tutorship. Elliott was disgusted. "The best professorship they have there or elsewhere is not too good for you," he wrote, "and I would regret much to place you a kind of underling under persons who will require 7 long years study . . . to accomplish what you, through God's blessing, have accomplished." Matthew immediately declined the offer.¹⁵

Once aroused over the importance of the degree, Matthew was not satisfied to let the matter rest. The conference, having recently undergone an exciting campaign which led to the acquisition of Allegheny College from the Presbyterians, was astir over the importance of education. College graduates began to have a prestige which was new to Methodism. Ruter, said to be the best educated man in the Methodist denomination, had also been the first to receive the doctor of divinity degree. Simpson, mingling with these men, felt keenly the need for recognition of his own studies.

Shortly after his removal to Pittsburgh, Matthew applied to the faculty of Allegheny College for the privilege of qualifying for the degree by examination. Dr. Ruter promptly offered him an honorary degree of master of arts. Matthew, after consulting with Elliott, refused. He preferred to take the regular degree. Ruter consented, suggesting that he visit the campus for two weeks at the end of the fall term of 1834 to be examined on the senior courses. He stipulated that Simpson should deliver a commencement oration in Hebrew.¹⁶

Matthew began at once to review his Greek and Latin and Hebrew. He reflected on a theme for the oration. It must be of the most solemn kind, a description of the attributes of God, or of his wonderful works of nature, of Providence, or perhaps a scriptural account of the Messiah's kingdom. He would write it in English, in his best style, and translate it into Hebrew. He ought, advised Uncle Matthew, to deliver it slowly and impressively, pronouncing each word in a manner which would seem as natural as possible.¹⁷

The review for the examinations and the writing of the oration proved to be more difficult than Matthew had expected. He had too many sermons to preach, too many calls to make. He was here, there, and almost everywhere, with the well and with the

sick, and had no time to compose an oration and translate it into Hebrew. Besides, it was so many years since he had studied the Hebrew that he had to start afresh. Uncle Matthew advised him to discuss the situation frankly with Dr. Ruter, even at the risk of damaging his reputation.¹⁸

Dr. Sellers thought the whole matter of his going to Meadville a waste of time and money. The Presbyterians had a good college, Western University, in Pittsburgh. Why should he not take his degree there? It was a good idea, Matthew thought.

The interview which Dr. Sellers arranged with the president of Western University quickly became an examination. President Bruce discussed the course of study, inquired what branches of knowledge Matthew had pursued, and questioned him on what he had mastered.

At last he said: "You have learned much more than our college requires. If you will enroll as a student and attend my lectures in moral science twice a week until the end of the term, you shall receive the degree at the next commencement."¹⁹

Matthew was jubilant. Mr. Elliott and Dr. Sellers agreed that he must accept the proposition. He wrote at once to Dr. Ruter, explaining that camp meeting, quarterly conference, and other church duties made it impossible to go to Meadville for his examinations, and he had therefore, on the advice of others, arranged to enroll at Western University.

A few days later a letter from Dr. Ruter reported that the Board of Trustees of Allegheny College had met and, without delay, had conferred on him the honorary degree *Magister Artium*. "I felt dissatisfied with the plan of your going to the Pittsburgh Seminary," he wrote, "for reasons I have not time to mention in this communication."²⁰

Matthew was indignant. He did not want an honorary degree when he was entitled to an earned one. Dr. Sellers thought that he should pay no attention to it, and Charles Elliott advised him to continue his study at Western University. When the word came that Allegheny College had bestowed the same honorary degree upon Alfred Brunson, rustic Methodist preacher of the saddlebags and muscle era who was serving as agent for the college, Matthew was even more disturbed. He did not care to have his name "coupled along with *Alfred Brunson*—a man in no way qualified."²¹

But Matthew Simpson was not one to deal lightly with the workings of Providence. Was it not to the interest of the church to sustain the work of its own seminary? Would he not discourage other young men of his church conference by showing scorn for the honor of a Methodist institution? He had not sought the honor, but the duties of which he had written had interfered with his going to Meadville; and now that he was offered a higher degree he would not have to take the examinations or prepare the Hebrew oration. Might it not after all be the working of Providence? When Uncle Matthew, although stating his preference for the earned degree, chided his nephew for his contempt for Alfred Brunson (who after all was a self-educated man of considerable ability as a preacher and a pamphleteer, and was the one most responsible for the acquisition of Allegheny College by the Methodists), Matthew suddenly made up his mind. He would accept the degree.²²

And so he became Matthew Simpson, *Magister Artium*.

In a short time Dr. Ruter invited him to join his faculty at Allegheny: "What would you think of coming as professor of chemistry on a partial salary, and depending for the rest upon your lancet? You would have plenty of business, as there is no Methodist physician at Meadville."

"I do not think much about it," Matthew wrote back.

He had closed the door on his life as a physician and he did not propose to open it again. "I charge you before God," Charles Elliott had said, "not to think of being any thing else than a traveling Preacher." He still must serve nearly three years of his itinerancy before completing the four years his church required of elders; and not until then could he think of the classroom.²³

He was busy enough in a church which approached its task with all the enterprise that characterized Pittsburgh. Early in the fall he and his colleagues had conducted a camp meeting which, despite considerable opposition, had resulted in a large number of conversions. The revival thus begun spread to other churches in the city and continued week after week until some three hundred members were added to the rolls.

Matthew had only one objection to the constant round of religious activity: it interfered with his reading and study. A man who was a sincere follower of John Wesley must study not the Bible

only, and religious matter, but literature and natural science. "The bible," wrote Uncle Matthew, "being the most learned of all books those who wish fully to understand it must become the most learned."²⁴

So, in addition to his study of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament "in regular order," the nephew, complaining to his diary that he had no time for it, read books on travel, theology, mental philosophy, and natural science. He discovered Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and read and reread it. He studied French and German pronunciation ("You ought not to hesitate about the expence," wrote Uncle Matthew); and he gathered together a group of young men with whom he met each week, endeavoring to "direct them in their course of reading and to inspire them with a thirst for knowledge." At the suggestion of Charles Elliott, he opened a book depository for the Methodist Publishing House; and he began the collection of materials for a history of Methodism in Pittsburgh (which activity his Uncle Matthew thought a bit unnecessary with all the other responsibilities he had).²⁵

Encouraged by Dr. Ruter and Charles Elliott (who needed articles to fill his *Journal*), Matthew organized the Preacher's Lyceum of the Pittsburgh Annual Conference: Dr. Martin Ruter, president; M. Simpson, first vice president. The Lyceum was to meet for the reading of essays, for examinations, discussions, and devotion, on the occasion of annual conferences. Between these, members were to write essays, limited to "two pages of ruled or letter paper," and submit them to the editor of the *Journal*, signed—in that day of acrimonious anonymity—with "proper signatures."²⁶ Matthew Simpson, although not a frequent contributor, wrote on music in olden times, attacked the Baptist theory of immersion, appealed for a more appropriate celebration of Easter than the current fad of eating colored eggs, and propounded a series of questions which should serve as a guide for the leaders' reports at quarterly conference.²⁷

Not given to controversy, he rarely participated in the journalistic warfare which filled the columns of the *Conference Journal* and other religious newspapers; but when the issue was Methodism or the conference course of study he lashed out with biting ridicule

in a sudden exhibition of temper which was in strange contrast to his generally even disposition.

The course of study for young preachers, planned by Charles Elliott and Dr. Ruter, was rigorous—much more so than that generally required in Methodism. Each year the candidate for ordination must study the Bible, with commentaries and notes; at various times he must read Wesley's sermons, and Watson's *Bible Dictionary* and *Theological Institutes*; he must study church history, Bible history, and the discipline of the Methodist Church; he must master Blair's *Rhetoric* and, to prove his ability in composition, must submit each year a written sermon. Simpson's topic for 1835 was "The Intellectual and Moral State of the Heathen World"; and the following year he wrote a practical homily on "Self-Denial."²⁸ In addition to these studies immediately related to the pulpit, the candidate must read books in geography, zoology, botany, "moral and political philosophy," "moral science," logic, natural philosophy, and chemistry. On all of these studies he was supposed to undergo "a strict examination, not merely on . . . having read, but having carefully *studied* them."²⁹

Johannes, anonymous writer in the *Conference Journal*, complained of the burdensomeness of the course of study for young preachers. Too much reading was required. It interfered with the more important business of saving souls. Besides, it was un-Methodistic. What was needed was a return to "old Methodism," where the circuit riders read as they rode, and composed their sermons from their experiences and not from books which other men had written.

Simpson was indignant. Writing under the name Fenelon, he held up Johannes's complaint to ridicule and scorn: The course of study was little enough to expect of the Methodist preacher. Estimating the required reading for the first two years at 2,920 pages (without allowance for the fine print and the double columns), he calculated that in the 730 days of two years the preacher would have to read only four pages per day, and that local preachers, who had four years to complete the course, would have only two pages to read per day!

As for "old Methodism": what was "old" but the Methodism of John Wesley? Wesley's Methodism was simply this: "*That no man*

may administer the ordinances without a collegiate education, and Theological instruction." If perhaps Johannes did not mean Wesley's Methodism but simply referred to the discipline then in use, very well: there he would find "every minister enjoined to read 5 hours per day—now allow him one hour to read the Bible. Here is 4 hours left, that is 1 page to the hour— Oh, tell it not in Gath—publish it not in Askelon that a Methodist preacher can be found who thus opposes duty." ²⁰

V

SENTIMENTS HAVE NO BLOOD

ALL through that first year old Uncle Matthew worried about his boy in Pittsburgh: his sermon preparation, his relations with the people and with the other preachers, his study program, and, above all, his health. Almost every letter admonished him to be careful. "Use charcoal," the uncle advised, or "Continue to sponge skin dayly"; "Be sure to wear your over coat and over socks," and "Warm your feet before the fire before going to bed at night." He fretted when there was no letter—"You promised to write soon, but your mother thinks it is a long soon"—and begged the young man, if he could not find time to write, to mark an *H* or an *S* on the copies of the *Conference Journal* sent home—to show whether he was in health or was sick.¹

The bond of affection was strong, but Uncle Matthew complained once of unappreciativeness or forgetfulness. Stung to the quick, the younger man replied with impassioned avowal of love and fidelity. Surely his uncle could not think that, "while this heart beats or this mind acts," he would forget one who had been so long the object of his warmest regard: that uncle who had held him frequently in his arms, had sung to him in gleeful mood, had turned his infant mind to science, had given him books, had filled his mind with "moral & religious sentiments"! No, not "while life or thought or being lasts, or immortality endures." ²

As the end of the conference year approached, Uncle Matthew became increasingly concerned over the younger man's relations with the other preachers and the people. It was a critical time in a Methodist minister's career, especially a young minister's. The itinerant system, which required the bishop to limit all appointments to one or two years, was highly competitive. There was no open bidding; but the larger stations and circuits, by devious means,

sought the best preachers, and the better preachers expected the bishop to reward them for their abilities and their years of service. Tensions mounted, whisperings and speculations increased, the people criticized this minister and praised that one, and the preachers themselves forgot their high calling. Did young Matthew remember what he had been taught in his youth, that one who excelled in piety or learning would become an especial object of envy? that others would find and impute sinister motives to any man who did more than the common drones? that even men who were above character detraction would countenance it in the belief that young men frequently needed a taking down? "You are to expect all this from preachers of the gospel of your own order, and that, too, from men who really do love you," and must watch diligently and pray much: "Be meek and patient under opposition."³

However, the young minister was not particularly anxious. He had no thought of seeking a return to Pittsburgh. Dr. Sellers might call him "bishop" among friends, and praise him for his preaching; and his friend and colleague William Hunter might bemoan the fact that he was doomed "like a wounded snake" to drag his slow length along while Matthew drove ahead; and parishioners might praise the sweet sound of his voice; but he had preached himself out and knew it. He looked forward to a change in pulpits.⁴

Long before the meeting of the conference, however, he began to speculate on the place to which he should be sent. The presiding elder told him that there had been requests for him in Blairsville and Williamsport. Birmingham was to be set off from Pittsburgh as a separate station, and he knew that the people there wanted him. What did Uncle Matthew think? As for himself, he felt sure that the presiding elder intended to send him to Blairsville, a small place forty-nine miles away.⁵

The conference met in July at Pittsburgh. In the great buzz of speculation Matthew soon learned that he had been set down for Williamsport (now Monongahela City), a station not far from Pittsburgh. With its 200 members it was a good church—an exceptionally good church for a young preacher; but Dr. Sellers would have none of it. The people at Liberty Street church in Pittsburgh wanted Simpson and must have him, and they petitioned the presiding bishop, James A. Andrew. Dr. Sellers, a brother-in-law to Bishop John Emory, presented the petition. Both the presiding el-

ders and the Smithfield church, however, were opposed. Matthew was set down for Hudson, a little place on Lake Erie, damp and cold, "109 miles from this place . . . where nearly all are Presbyterians."

When the word reached the Liberty Street officials they dispatched a note which the bishop received just before the reading of the appointments. He hurriedly called together the presiding elders, retired for consultation, and returned in a few minutes to read off Simpson's name for Liberty Street. He arranged that an older man, Charles Cooke, should be in charge of the Pittsburgh churches, unless the two congregations chose to divide, and he recommended that there be a frequent exchange of pulpits.⁶

Simpson at once became the center, if not the victim, of a bitter and prolonged church quarrel. The congregations voted to divide; but Smithfield, hoping to place the rival church at a disadvantage, refused to receive the younger man into its pulpit. None the less, the division of members proved to be about equal, and in a few weeks Matthew was enumerating to his uncle his reasons for bright prospects: First, he had received more members than he had anticipated, "2d . . . my congregations are as large as ever. 3d, I have many warm & attached friends . . . 4th, my officary is said to be superior to any ever in the city . . . 5th, our class & prayer meetings are lively and profitable. 6th, my own liberty in preaching is very good."⁷

In one matter, at least, Matthew was glad to be returned to Pittsburgh. From the day when he had arrived, in the previous summer, he had felt irresistibly attracted to the home of James Verner on Penn Street. Ellen Holmes Verner! How often he had tasted her name on the tip of his tongue. Ellen, tall, slender, almost regal in bearing, quick to blush, reserved, sometimes shy, and yet how free and easy in speech among those whom she knew.

Winter nights, he had gone to her house often to dine or sit in the parlor and talk with the family, and to gaze on Ellen. Her very presence shocked him like a galvanic battery, and the sensation, a strange warmth diffused over his whole being, lingered long after he left her home. Back in his room he could see her still, hunched close to the fire on the hearth, warming her feet, or half reclining against the black cushion of the sofa, her blushes deepened by the flame of the fire; or he could feel her presence beside him

on the sofa, the rhythm of her breathing disturbing the pattern of his own.⁸

The church frowned on the marriage of young preachers until they should complete four years in the ministry and receive ordination. Marriage made them less available for the more difficult circuits: it increased the cost of maintaining the preacher, and there were not stations enough to bear the burden.

None the less, Simpson determined to marry, once he was settled at Liberty Street. On September 19, a little over a month after his return to Pittsburgh, he proposed marriage, and Ellen accepted. Jubilant and yet somewhat fearful, he wrote to Uncle Matthew. Dared he marry right away? What would his brethren, and the officary in the church, and the people say? Would it be better to wait?⁹

Uncle Matthew was delighted to learn that his nephew had at last come to his moorings. There would be no further cause for fear or anxiety on that subject! The news would no doubt create some little sensation in the society; but to delay the marriage would not decrease the sensation, unless he waited until the end of the conference year. Luther and Wesley had married and had displeased some of their people, but soon all went on as before; and so it would be with Matthew.¹⁰

There was no doubt about Uncle Matthew's wisdom when he concurred in a matter on which young Matthew felt so keenly! So, on Tuesday November 3, 1835, he and Ellen were married. A little group gathered in the parlor of the Verner home at six o'clock to see them stand together and repeat the vows: Matthew, tall, awkward, and self-conscious, and Ellen, trembling beside him.¹¹

On Wednesday they took passage on the *Beaver* down the Ohio River to Wellsville, where his mother and Uncle Matthew were living with Hetty and her family. After two short days they returned to Pittsburgh on Friday afternoon, ecstatically happy even though they arrived at the Golden Triangle in a shower of rain. Matthew held his quarterly conference at five o'clock the next morning, an hour so early that the thoroughly disgusted presiding elder refused to attend.¹²

On Sunday he preached twice; and rarely had he "enjoyed more liberty." For that he was thankful—it should prevent any

one's thinking that his marriage might make him "less useful and devoted than formerly." ¹³

After some months at the Liberty Street church, Matthew Simpson was greatly encouraged. He had secured more than half the members in the division; and although the quarrel with Smithfield continued an occasional exchange had been allowed. His own preaching was much improved, and Dr. Sellers had said that if marrying had that effect on preachers he wished they all would get married. Matthew modestly confessed, however, that he thought it would be better for the congregation if he preached only twice on Sunday! ¹⁴

As the winter wore on, a few were converted and added to the church roll. "The Spirit of the Lord came down," and a growing seriousness prevailed in the congregation. Matthew called in another young preacher to assist him in a protracted meeting. The altar was crowded with mourners, many were converted, and fifty-four joined the church, bringing the total to more than a hundred new members since conference.

"To God be all the glory," said Matthew. But he was not unaware that he himself had played a major role in God's success. Providence had surely designed a very short life for him, he thought, "or else one marked with peculiar incidents of an arduous and responsible character." ¹⁵

There was no doubt that Matthew Simpson, in his many enterprises, was highly successful; but through all of his success ran a tiny rivulet of despair which sometimes, as he sat writing in his diary, rose to flood and overflowed. His writing was a catharsis, a purging of the faults and shortcomings consequent upon the rigorous standard he had set. He scourged himself not only for failures in the pulpit but for failing to live enough in the "spirit of prayer and self-examination." He conversed "too freely respecting the imperfections of absent persons," he did not visit enough from house to house, he did not talk enough "upon religious subjects." Occasionally he enumerated his "hinderances": "First, indolence—I do not fill up my time as carefully as I ought. Secondly, Timidity—I suffer myself for fear of offending people to have my time run away with as it ought not to be. I pray too little, & visit too little, and when I do first do not converse as closely as I ought." ¹⁶

With all his self-abasement, however, he was still the child of Providence. He did not expect ever to become a Calvinist, but he was more and more satisfied that he could detect the "government of God" even in the smallest matters. Lightning struck the house in which he boarded, and that portion of the house in which he lived; but "providentially" he was not in. He was returning from camp meeting when the driver of his hack, challenged by another driver, began racing his horses. The rear axle broke and dropped the hack to the ground, but "providentially the horses stopt & no injury was sustained by us—*Deo gratio.*"¹⁷

Providence failed him, however, in regard to a wrongly executed marriage. The father of the young man brought suit and won the decision, and Matthew was fined one hundred and forty dollars and twenty-five cents. "A pretty considerable sum for one marriage scrape," he confessed to his diary.¹⁸

II

After the quarrel with Johannes in the *Pittsburgh Conference Journal*, Matthew had resolved not to engage again in journalistic controversy. Some of his brethren had reproved him for dealing too severely with the unlettered Johannes. Such sharp words about so small a matter as the correct use of Latin and English might prove to be divisive. Even Uncle Matthew feared that his nephew had been saucy, and that his display of superior learning might "abate that brotherly love which ought to subsist between preachers."¹⁹

But it was one matter to quarrel with a Methodist colleague and quite another to defend his Methodism against the onslaughts of the Calvinists. In the West the Presbyterians found it difficult to defend the strict Calvinist doctrine of election against the Methodist preaching of a "full and free salvation." Humiliated by the success which accompanied the illiterate and theologically perverse riders of the Methodist circuit, they poured their anger and contempt into the columns of several religious weeklies, among them, the *Pittsburgh Christian Herald*.

In the winter of 1836, William Annan, a Presbyterian preacher, announced his determination to hold up Methodism to "public scorn" until he should "break down its influence." A particularly

vicious attack on one of Wesley's tracts accused the founder of Methodism of having selected passages which not only exhibited Calvin in an unfavorable light but actually misrepresented him. By "foreordination" Calvin meant "permission," Annan argued.²⁰

The editor of the *Conference Journal* selected Matthew Simpson to reply. For weeks Matthew studied Wesley and Calvin, compared the Latin texts and the standard editions of Calvin's *Institutes* with Wesley's translated passages, and finally wrote a series of articles that he signed, "A Wesleyan." He quoted extensively from the *Institutes* to show that Calvin really believed in foreordination, and that Wesley had cited the passages honestly. The conclusion seemed to be "irresistible" that Wesley was much better acquainted with the works of Calvin and had stated their substance more fairly than Annan had done with all his pretense at research!²¹

Warfare in the religious press, as in the political, was often waged not to demolish the enemy but to improve the morale of the faithful. Annan, therefore, did not hear of the attack in the *Conference Journal* for six months. When he did, he challenged "A Wesleyan" to meet the charges which he straightway would sustain: that Wesley was guilty of "*false reference, false translation, pious fraud, &c.* with other things 'so palpable and scandalous as should redden with shame the cheeks of their advocates.'" Ignoring Wesley, he proceeded at once to discuss the "palpable and scandalous" conduct of some of the "intolerant and arrogant" Methodists whom he knew.²²

Because his statement was published in the Presbyterian *Herald*, it did not meet his opponent's eye for another month. Time did not cool the burning words, however, and Matthew, his own temper ignited by what he read, went home to write a reply. In what manner had the Methodists ever been intolerant? Had they, he asked (distributing his argument over four centuries), "ever been accused of *burning their enemies*," had they "*ever made laws compelling others to support them*," had they "ever advanced the idea of carrying their religion into politics"? Knowing that these arguments constituted a strong appeal in the democratic West, he pressed the point. The intolerance which worried Mr. Annan was that the Methodists preached the Gospel "in the same neighborhood with himself" and, despite the "bolts of Geneva logic which he has

hurled," had "dared to proclaim that Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man not just the elect and have invited even the *reprobate* to come and be saved." 23

He never published his reply. When he pointed out to the *Herald* that Annan's attack had appeared in its columns, and demanded that they be opened to him for defense, the editor demurred, stating that the controversy was too personal: its merits depended too much upon the correct use of language and the fairness of translations, and it would afford little "advantage to souls, or to the cause of Christ."

However, he did not hesitate to attack in turn. The argument was then transferred to the editorial columns of the two papers. The charges of the Presbyterian editor, wrote William Hunter in the *Journal*, could not injure Matthew Simpson—he was "too extensively, and too favorably known for that." In fact, the editor of the *Herald* could scarcely injure anyone. He had attacked too often and too indiscriminately. "His pen, like some people's tongues, has ceased to be a scandal." 24

III

On moving to Pittsburgh in the summer of 1834, Matthew had been quite unconcerned with the problem of slavery or the growing agitation in the North for emancipation. He subscribed heartily to the antislavery position of the Methodists and had done so since childhood, when Uncle Joseph Tingley had denounced the evil in the pages of the *Harrison County Telegraph*. Uncle William Tingley, Uncle Matthew, Charles Elliott, and all the Methodist preachers whom he knew held the same views.

The church, from its first organization in 1784, had forbidden the "buying or selling the bodies and souls of men, women, or children, with an intention to enslave them": a rule which reflected not only the opinion of John Wesley, but the Revolutionary doctrines of liberty and equality and the non-slaveholding status of the early Methodists.

In no great time the church, yielding to the demands of its members, made all its legislation on slavery "conformable to the laws of the state." This provision was of no great importance in 1800, when emancipation was almost universally permitted; but it

was of first significance a generation later, when many southern states forbade the freeing of slaves. Ministers as well as laymen became owners of slaves, and the church increasingly shifted its emphasis from emancipation to evangelization.

In the early 1830's the radical Abolitionist movement sprang up almost simultaneously in New England and the West—incited in New England by the fanatical and acrimonious pen of William Lloyd Garrison, inspired in the West by the evangelical preaching of Theodore Weld. Among the converts of Weld's revival in 1834 was Orange Scott, firebrand evangelist and a presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New England. Like Weld and the antislavery men of the West, Scott fused abolitionism and salvation into one persuasive appeal; and, like Garrison, he vilified men who did not agree with him. Scott's approach was simple: he pleaded for men to be saved, and he argued that when they had, by the grace of God, become brothers in Christ they could no longer endure the enslavement of their brethren. To the alarm of the church officials Scott's doctrine infected Methodist societies from New England to Ohio.²⁶

Shortly after Matthew went to Pittsburgh, some one placed in Uncle Matthew's hand a copy of Garrison's attack on the American Colonization Society. Uncle Matthew was moved, but not quite convinced by his argument for equal privileges and amalgamation. He advised young Matthew to say very little for or against either the Colonization Society or Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society. If duty called, he should present his own views on what ought to be done for the unfortunate blacks.²⁶

In October, 1834, an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society spoke at Cadiz and organized a society of twenty-two members. Uncle Matthew was secretly pleased. If the society conducted itself prudently, and stuck to the main question, he might join. A few weeks later he handed in his name, and so did Uncle William Tingley; but young Matthew held his own counsel.²⁷

Meanwhile, Orange Scott's vigorous campaigns vexed the church greatly. The South, which had been silent on the question for many years, raised an angry protest, and the church began to pull apart along the Mason-Dixon line. The bishops admonished Scott and his fellows not to disturb the peace of the church. The New York weekly *Christian Advocate and Journal*, the chief organ of

Methodism, closed its columns to all agitation on the subject, and the publishing house, while abusing the abolitionists and printing accounts of the happiness of the slaves, refused to publish anti-slavery tracts or books. When the publishing house burned in a disastrous fire in the spring of 1835 Uncle Matthew thought it the judgment of God on the editors for their abuse of the abolitionists. "I tell you, my son," he wrote, "it is not safe to rail at such men to slander or oppose them or ill treat them."²⁸

At the quadrennial General Conference in Cincinnati in 1836 the whole church was in a high fever over the abolitionist issue. Angered by the vituperation heaped upon them and alarmed at the threat to their institutions, the southern delegates came breathing threats of disunion. There were only two abolitionists among more than a hundred delegates, and so the alarm of the southerners was out of proportion. The South and the conservative North, in complete control of the deliberations, exhorted the ministers of the church generally to abstain from abolition movements and associations and to refrain from encouraging their publications; they declared that slavery was beyond the control of ecclesiastical and federal government, that only the state legislatures could deal with it. Shocked by Orange Scott and his agitations, and outraged by his attendance at an abolitionist rally in Cincinnati, the conference denounced his published defense as "palpably false," and his conduct as meriting "unqualified reprehension."²⁹

William Lloyd Garrison, looking on the proceedings from his retreat in Boston, pronounced the conference "a cage of unclean birds and a synagogue of Satan."³⁰

Uncle Matthew was scarcely less outraged by the incident, and Uncle William Tingley resigned all his offices in the church. When preachers went so far as to apologize for slaveholding members and rail at men who thought it their duty to say that slavery was wrong, Uncle Matthew thought it time that all men, "preachers as well as others," must either accept slavery as compatible with religion, or speak out against it. There could be no middle course.³¹

Young Matthew agreed. Prodded by his uncle, he had begun to reflect on the question. He was impressed by the fact that Cicero, Jefferson, Franklin, Wesley, Clarke, and Watson (the latter three, Methodists), all were opposed to slavery. Santo Domingo seemed to be proof enough of the "capability of the blacks for improvement

and self government." As for threats of open warfare, ridiculous! The abolitionists had nothing to fight with but sentiments and words. Sentiments had no blood, words had none, paper had none. Abolitionists would spill no blood; if it were spilled, it would be spilled by their opponents. The fact was that the slaveholders were afraid—afraid of moral force. They were afraid that public opinion would force the repeal of the slave laws, afraid that they would have to live by the sweat of their own brows.³²

Once persuaded, Matthew wrote to La Roy Sunderland, editor of Orange Scott's *Zion's Watchman*, praising the course of the editor and condemning the action of the General Conference. He spoke out boldly: The church should be held together if possible, but if the South continued in its course the North must "let them go."³³

In the meantime, the bishops, fortified by the action of the General Conference, began to take strong measures against the abolitionists. They outlawed discussion of the slavery question in the sessions of the annual conferences, they refused to admit petitions against slavery, they removed Orange Scott from his presiding eldership, and swept other abolitionists out of places of influence. We must not, said Bishop Beverly Waugh, "hazard the unity of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . by agitating those fearfully exciting topics."³⁴

Uncle Matthew was caustic. He thought the tyranny of the bishops would do little to promote harmony in the church, but he had no doubt that the South would regard it as a defense of slavery. If any person heretofore had scruples about holding slaves, he would be "eased of his doubts."³⁵

Young Matthew, however, was somewhat shaken. He still could not bring himself to approve of the proslavery extremists of the South; but with his friend William Hunter, who had succeeded Charles Elliott as editor of the *Conference Journal*, he began to believe that the bishops were right, or partly so—it was not necessary, or good for the church, for the abolitionists to agitate the question so vigorously.

He began to believe, also, that abolitionism was essentially un-Methodistic, that it was a tool of the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists for interference in the affairs of the state. Theodore Weld, eloquent evangelist who had pleaded so recently in

Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania for emancipation, with the same fervency that he might have pleaded for the salvation of their souls, was one of the Lane Seminary rebels, turned out in Cincinnati by Dr. Lyman Beecher. Weld preached his antislavery sermons in Presbyterian churches; his converts were chiefly Presbyterian preachers and laymen, and his colleagues were fellow rebels from Lane Seminary.

To Matthew it soon became perfectly clear that abolitionism was cut from the same cloth, dominated by the same leadership, as the anti-Methodist benevolence societies of the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians. The Calvinists had been very sly in their benevolences: the Home Missionary Society, the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, and others, all bore general names to "excite the public liberality," but were conducted by and for the benefit of Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Having failed to enlist the Methodists in support of their enterprises, they had labeled them schismatics and denounced them for their uneducated preachers and their popish government.⁸⁶

Matthew did not doubt the evil of slavery, and he suspected with his friend William Hunter that the South itself might be conspiring to split the church. But he feared the abolitionists even more than the fire-eating southerners. The longer he studied the subject the more he came to see that sentiments, far from being bloodless, were ruddy and sanguine, eager for the fight. And so he came to believe that the only hope for the glory of God and the unity of the church lay in the conservative party. When La Roy Sunderland cordially invited him to write a second time for the abolitionist *Zion's Watchman* he did not accept.⁸⁷

Early in 1837 Dr. Martin Ruter, in offering Matthew a position at Allegheny College, probed carefully to learn his view on slavery. Abolitionism had caused great excitement at the Presbyterian Church in Meadville, but the authorities were trying to keep it out of the college. "I should be glad to be able to say—not what your *sentiments are*," he wrote to Matthew, "for every one has a right to his own—but that you are not a member of any abolition, or anti-slavery society."⁸⁸

No, he was not a member of any such society. That much he could say, at least.

IV

In the summer of 1836 Simpson, Hunter, and Charles Elliott, all received new appointments. Elliott became editor of the denominational weekly at Cincinnati, the *Western Christian Advocate*. Hunter, with the vigorous support of Simpson, won election to the editorial chair of the *Conference Journal* at Pittsburgh, succeeding Elliott. Simpson, having served his limit of two years in Pittsburgh, succeeded Hunter at Williamsport and moved there late in the summer.

Houses were scarce, but Matthew and Ellen found a small one-story place with a sitting room, two very small bedrooms, and a kitchen at fifty dollars a year. It was badly run down, but they swept and scrubbed and painted, and brought in their scanty furnishings.³⁹

In the fall Matthew went back to Cadiz, alone, for the dedication of a new church. It was the first time he had returned since his marriage, but he did not take Ellen with him. His friends were displeased and slightly suspicious. He had been married a year, and they had not met his wife.

Matthew, hugely amused over their sly inquiries, reported to Ellen in great glee: "They wanted to know if you were *unwell!* but I thanked them all that you were in good health." Then they wanted to know "how my *family* were." "All well," he told them, and "left them just as wise as they were before for they did not like to ask plainly what I saw they wanted to know."⁴⁰

At Williamsport he entered upon his duties with the vigor he had exhibited at Pittsburgh. He drew up a plan to relieve the church of its debt, arranged a cancellation of a part of it and pledges for the rest; he reestablished the Sunday school, scheduled prayer meetings in different parts of the town, one for each night in the week, preached twice on Sunday at Williamsport, and filled two appointments in the country on Sunday afternoons.

Lest he not be faithful to his responsibilities, he drew up a scheme of moral discipline, listing first what he should refrain from, and second what he should do. He should "never injure the feelings of any person"; he should "speak evil of no one"; nor should he "give

way to a jesting or jocose spirit, or to talk upon unimportant subjects," or to "lengthy conversations with my family and intimates." On the other hand, he should:

Rise at 4 every morning . . . Dress as expeditiously as possible . . . Fill up all my leisure hours with useful reading . . . Visit & pray from house to house, & talk pointed and faithfully . . . Always endeavor . . . to give a religious direction to every conversation . . . never suffer conversation to turn upon me . . . If commended to pray for humility . . . if apparently successful, be thankful to God.

As if this were not burden enough for mortal man, he proposed to examine himself regularly on such questions as:

Do I feel the Spirit of prayer? . . . Can I think of any plan which will enable me to live more holy? . . . Am I using all the means of improvement? . . . Is my heart given to God? Am I placing my affections upon anything on the earth? . . . Do I feel humbled under a view of my unworthiness & unfaithfulness? ⁴¹

In the spring of 1837, when Simpson was about to complete his fourth year in the ministry, Allegheny College again importuned him to join its staff. Dr. Ruter was leaving to accept a commission as missionary to the Indians of Arkansas and Texas. Competently trained professors were few in the Methodist church. The college regarded its need as desperate. Simpson had traveled his four years in the conference and would be ordained at the next session. If he were ever to join the faculty, he no longer had reason to delay.

He pondered the question at length. The decision was a critical one. Among Methodists, honor and preferment heretofore had been with the church, not with the educational institutions. No other major religious denomination in America had been so slow to recognize the value of education, no other had been so suspicious of a learned ministry. To preachers reared on the frontier and schooled in saddlebag theology, the fear of the Lord was the beginning and the end of wisdom.

Progress, however, was in the direction of learning and through the institutions. For Methodists it would be a difficult struggle; but the battle against the old ways and ideas had already well begun. Matthew Simpson's preferences and sympathies were overwhelmingly on the side of learning. From his youth up, he had had "an insatiable thirst for knowledge" and an anxiety to "improve every

opportunity." ⁴² The call of the college was irresistible. Therefore he accepted a professorship in natural sciences and stepped out of the pulpit, never again to be a pastor. Four months he had spent on the circuit, three years at a station. It was not merely to the college classroom that he was now moving. He had discovered the vanguard of his church; he was exchanging the pulpit of the local society for the rostrum of the conference.