

VIII

HOOSIER SCHOOLMASTER

IN August, 1839, President Simpson's first catalogue of courses, a twelve-page leaflet with a bright yellow cover, listed the twenty-five trustees of the University, the nine members of the visiting committee, the three professors, including himself, and the 86 students, only twelve of whom were in the college. It itemized the student expenses, outlined entrance requirements and the course of study for each year, and set forth the general rules and regulations governing conduct.¹

The school year, two terms of twenty-one weeks each, opened on the first Monday of November, and ran, with a spring vacation of four weeks, until mid-September. Tuition per term in the college was \$12, in the preparatory department, \$8.50. Janitor's fees, including fuel, were \$1.50 for the winter session, \$1 for the summer. Boarding in private families cost from \$1.50 to \$2 per week, exclusive of light, fuel, and washing. Parents were not to furnish their sons with pocket money. Such funds should be placed in the care of a faculty member or a citizen of the community, to be dispensed as needs for stationery, clothing, and books might arise.

Students, to be admitted to the freshman class, must demonstrate a knowledge of geography, English grammar, arithmetic, first lessons in algebra, Latin grammar, *Historica Sacra*, Caesar's Commentaries, Virgil, Greek grammar, and Greek Testament. Only eight men qualified for freshman status in the summer of 1839; twenty-four others, designated "irregular," were making up their deficiencies while they pursued a "partial College course."

Once a student was admitted he followed a neatly arranged course of study, three classes per term with no elections. His first two and one-half years were devoted to language and mathematics. He studied Greek and Latin history, poetry, oratory, and philoso-

phy, all from the original texts. He continued in algebra and geometry and advanced to trigonometry, mensuration, surveying, differential and integral calculus. At the beginning of his junior year he entered the study, in translation, of ancient and modern history with chronology, and at mid-year he delved into the mysteries of experimental philosophy and chemistry, and learned the artifices of rhetoric-logic-criticism. Not until his senior year did he turn to political economy and grammar, the law of nations, and the capstone to all of his studies, Paley's *Theology*, moral science, evidences of Christianity, and astronomy, which, although a natural science, served but to confirm the omniscience of the God whom he had studied in Paley.

President Simpson was especially proud of one radical departure from the traditional curriculum: he had convinced the members of the board of the practical value and the wide appeal of scientific training. The catalogue announced, therefore, that Indiana Asbury University would award the degree of Bachelor of Science to students who became "thoroughly acquainted with the Scientific and Literary course," embracing all the collegiate requirements except Latin and Greek.

The university had three instructors, the Reverend Matthew Simpson, A.M., president and professor of mathematics and natural science, the Reverend Cyrus Nutt, A.B., professor of the Latin and Greek languages, and the Reverend John W. Weakley, A.B., principal of the preparatory department. Of the 86 students enrolled in the summer of 1839, 50 were in the preparatory school, 24 in the irregular course, and the remaining 12 in the college proper. Enrollment climbed steadily, and by the opening of the fall term in 1840 the president was able to add another instructor.

William C. Larrabee, professor of mathematics and natural science, was an important addition to the faculty. The best trained of Simpson's appointees, he had received his A.B. from Bowdoin College in 1828, and had served as teacher and principal in several Methodist academies in New England and New York. He had once been state geologist in Maine and had acquired a large private collection of mineral specimens which he brought with him.²

President Simpson, happy to yield the test tubes, equations, triangles, conic sections, and differentials, attended to the mental

and moral needs of the students. He heard recitations in logic, rhetoric, moral science, political economy, mental philosophy, natural theology, and evidences of Christianity. On Sunday afternoons at three o'clock, acting on a directive from the board, he lectured to the entire student body on topics as various as anatomy and physiology, envy, errors of thinking and how to guard against them, beauty, the value of national days of celebration, and the ministry. The lectures constituted one of his more important contributions to student thinking.

Speaking for twenty or thirty minutes, he ranged as widely in his materials and proofs as he did in his choice of topics. He alluded to classical mythology, to biblical narratives, to ancient history, and to modern literature. He cautioned the student about the necessity of exercising, keeping clean, watching the diet; he warned that emotions often arise because of the condition of the body, and that many a man had alienated friends because his liver excreted "a little more bile one day than it did another." He recognized that there might be some truth in phrenology—respecting functions of various parts of the brain—but declared that "it must ever be impossible to tell from the external form of the cranium the . . . internal development."⁵

He enlarged upon his favorite educational theme: knowledge is requisite to happiness. "Man must know where he is, and what are his instruments before he can acquire contentment or success." Students must learn to act upon evidence, not impressions, they must get over childhood dependence upon others for their conclusions. He accepted the authenticity of the Old Testament without question, and he regarded "revelation" as a sound test of subjects suitable for the student to think upon; but he lashed out at the fanciful thinking of religious people, ridiculing those who wrote learned articles on the kind of fruit Eve plucked from the tree and stated their reasons as confidently as if they "had stood in the garden and beheld the beautiful fruit or tasted its luscious sweets." No subject, he insisted, was suitable for serious reflection unless the student could answer affirmatively the question, "Have I any powers by the exercise and attention of which I can acquire any knowledge of it?" He cautioned against the tendency of some "overly eager persons" to read too rapidly, and thus to fail in digesting what they

had read; and he warned equally against the desire of others to have an opinion on every topic and "so to circumvent careful thinking."

He praised his age as one of active enterprise ("The good old days of leisure are forever gone"); he lauded the constitution, which "contains so many of the elementary principles of liberty and order"; and in impassioned frontier oratory he eulogized the flag:

that cluster of stars—of equal, beautiful, brilliant stars . . . undying, unchangeable, unextinguishable stars that smile on in their own inherent brightness without even a twinkling of jealousy at the thousand other bright orbs that are beaming all around them.

He advised the students to be simple and plain in manners, to avoid select associations, to feel themselves "identified with the body of the Community." He charged them to labor for "the elevation of the masses." It was an object unknown to Athens, "the Paradise of Antiquity," with its thirty-one thousand citizens and four hundred thousand slaves, but was the "legitimate design of Christianity"; it was "in peculiar harmony with American Institutions," and it reflected the "tendency of the improvements and discoveries of the age." This great object, once realized, would "employ the wealth of the world productively . . . effectually remove all causes of war," and be "the crowning glory of humanity."

He adapted his lectures to student audiences. His divisions were sharp and clear, with the "first," "secondly," and "thirdly" usually called out unabashedly, and the framework well supported with illustration. With humor he was generous and natural. Did the lecture on the cranium seem abstract? He lightened it. There was an ancient theory, he said, which supposed that ideas were like little particles floating around in the back of the brain: when stirred up they were in consciousness, when settled like sediment they were in memory. The theory must yet be much more widely accepted than is commonly believed, for the schoolmaster—thinking the ideas of his pupil settled—makes his head fairly ring with a brisk cuff and so sets the particles into motion until they dash against one another so furiously as to shine like stars. He, of course, would omit reference to that other process of "stirring them up with a long rod" because he could not "anatomically trace any very great connection between the ideas and the parts to which the

rod is applied." He chided the students who, rather than study, put forth their efforts in cultivating a hearing sharp enough to catch the whisperings of their classmates, and warned them that if Lamarck's "philosophical theory" that animal organs, like the elephant's trunk, the hog's nose, the squirrel's forelegs and claws, develop to meet their needs, then these students, by their great desire to hear would "by and by give rise to a race of animals with most dreadful long ears." 4

It was the duty of the university, President Simpson believed, not only to impart knowledge but to teach the students to speak to others. "Few can be writers, but all may be orators." He expected Indiana Asbury graduates to achieve eminence; and every man who aspired to eminence must seek such a mastery of language as should enable him "to pour forth truth in all its strength and beauty." He therefore set up, in addition to the classroom readings in oratory and rhetoric, a rigorous system of exercises in speaking. At chapel service every morning three or four students, taking turns in alphabetical order, delivered declamations, and thus in the early years declaimed about once a month. Each month, on the "Public Saturday," selected students declaimed; and each week every college student had to read an original essay before one of his professors.

Simpson highly approved of the two literary societies which the students had organized before his arrival: the Platonian and the Philological. They were "well calculated to improve young men in public speaking, and also to familiarize them with the forms of the transactions of most deliberative assemblies." The societies met regularly, held public "exhibitions" on occasion, and debated such topics as "Should Roman Catholics be admitted into our Republic?" "Is the extension of territory opposed to the prosperity of this Union?" and "Are writings addressed chiefly to the imagination injurious in their tendency?" The faculty approved dialogues and colloquies as a variant of the traditional debate but frowned upon all "theatrical" representations and forbade "the wearing of female attire." 5

The principal speech occasion of the year was commencement day. Friends of the university gathered from far and near; preachers arranged their circuits so as to be at the college and yet save themselves long rides and "severe tax on horse flesh"; and people

of Greencastle were asked to make "large arrangements for men and horses." Each member of the graduating class was required to deliver an oration. The people would sit from eight o'clock in the morning until twelve, then eat lunch in their seats in the chapel so as not to lose their places. One year when the president was absent Professor Larrabee wrote an enthusiastic letter describing the exercises: "The audience was chained down by their deep interest till past one o'clock. A slight catastrophe happened, but nobody was hurt. A yard or two of plastering tumbled on some dozen heads . . . Dickerson was speaking . . . We thought it likely some of the great high sounding words which Dickerson so freely uses proved too much for the plastering." ⁶

II

To the founders of Indiana Asbury University the practice of religion was quite as important as the acquisition of knowledge. Daily chapel services were a matter of course. President Simpson and his staff led in the prayers and delivered brief exhortations. At intervals the college altars were crowded with penitents. Students wrote to their parents whenever a revival occurred, and the word spread quickly. The news "meets me everywhere," wrote William Daily, presiding elder and Simpson's close friend. "May God bless you and the University . . . and may the culture of the heart keep pace with the culture of the head." Professor Caleb Mills of the New School Presbyterian Wabash College rejoiced with Simpson on learning "that God has visited your institution with the blessed influences of his Spirit"; his own school had been "refreshed from the same source." ⁷

One year, during a "wonderful season," the faculty suspended classes, some of the Greencastle stores closed, and college and town united in three public services each day. No one was more active than President Simpson, who wept like a father with the penitent or mounted the pulpit to pour forth his eloquence.

Revivals and daily chapel meetings, however, failed to satisfy the board of trustees, who in the year of the big revival decreed that students should rise a half-hour before sunrise to attend public prayers. The rule, adopted in July, was mercifully amended in October to read five o'clock for summer, eight-thirty for winter! ⁸

The faculty required students seeking admission to present testimonials of "good moral character." The discipline of the school was "mild but strict," for the faculty desired "to gain the affections of the students, and . . . to manifest the kindness of friends, rather than the cold attention of mere instructors." So said Matthew Simpson in his first catalogue. However, he warned that any student "disposed to indulge in immoral or disorderly habits" would be "dismissed with as little disgrace as possible."

The students thought him a rigid disciplinarian and early dubbed him "old Doc." Some "strongly suspected" that he had a well developed system of espionage. Certainly he was ingenious in finding out their faults.

One dark night one of the students, son of a prominent citizen, being slightly in his cups, failed to recognize the president and accosted him gruffly at a muddy street crossing.

"Buck up here and carry me across the street."

Without a word, the president obeyed. On the other side of the street, he called the student by name and said, "I think you have ridden far enough." Recognizing the voice, the student hurried to his room and gave no further cause for disciplinary action!

On another occasion Simpson shocked the students in chapel by a dramatic reprimand for the "rude disorder" which had occurred on the streets the night before and had caused him deep "mortification." He would not investigate to learn the names of the guilty. He knew who they were. He had gone with them, and he knew their names as well as their deeds. But he would not expose them. He would trust to their honor that there would be no repetition.

Recognizing the keen sense of humor which lay behind the president's austere exterior, students sometimes took liberty with him that they dared not take with others. One day, before the third story of the building was completed, a group of preparatory school boys, disobeying an express faculty rule, crawled up to inspect the area. Simpson, coming upon them unexpectedly, seized a lath and applied it to the boy nearest him while the rest scampered to safety.

A few days later, Simpson, the boy, and several of his companions sat together at dinner.

"Dr. Simpson," said the boy, with sudden impudent polite-

ness, "you lathed me the other day; I'd like to know when you are going to plaster me."

The color rose on Simpson's face as he fought briefly for composure, and then he yielded to the boys and joined them in hearty laughter.⁹

The students liked the president and his wife. Lonely and embarrassed farm boys, away from home for the first time, they went reluctantly to the door of the imposing two-story brick house where the Simpsons lived, after the first two or three years. They were astonished and then pleased when the president met them in his blue homespun suit and his shock of uncropped hair, looking quite as much a farmer as they. They never forgot his hearty greeting and insistence that they come in; the quiet friendliness of the tall and slender young wife who at his call hurried in from the kitchen to meet the new students; the talk about Asbury and the studies they would pursue; the president's sparkling manner and his lively wit mixed in with pious sentiments; and finally the warm invitation to come again. If they thought Mrs. Simpson a little reserved, somewhat overnice in manner and dress, they soon learned that she was a good cook, given to heaping the food on the plates of guests, and was thoughtful of students who were ill, to whom she would often carry hot cornbread and steaming rice.¹⁰

Parents, anxious for the well-being of their sons, sought the president's personal supervision. Would he see to it that the boy boarded with a "religious family who would have special regard to his morals"? Would it be possible for a boy from Washington, D.C., to live in the Simpson home? Would he talk to Allen Wiley's son about one thing: "he sits in a kind of doubled up posture, which will injure him, for as he is now growing he will become permanently crooked."¹¹

Matthew Simpson loved the boys of his school, but he had favorites, chief among them John Wheeler and James Harlan.

Wheeler, who had followed him from Allegheny College, lived with the family and became one of the three graduates of the first class. He went to Indianapolis after his graduation and opened a common school, delivered public lectures on natural philosophy, began the publication of a meteorological journal, and, with the help of equipment borrowed from Indiana Asbury, delivered public lectures on natural philosophy. To the great displeasure of Henry

Ward Beecher, he also fell in love with Mary Yanders, member of a prominent family in the Second Presbyterian Church. Mr. Beecher preferred to have his young parishioners marry within their own congregation, especially when the alternate choice was a Methodist. When the girl's father inquired about the young man Simpson wrote reassuringly of his religious and intellectual character, his amiability, energy, and industry. The father consented to the marriage. A year later, Wheeler became professor of Latin at Indiana Asbury. He was on the way to a college presidency in his own right.¹²

Harlan, an Indiana farm boy, entered the university in 1841. In homespun cotton clothes and homemade shoes without stockings, he had walked the eighteen miles from his father's farm with his belongings, including a few books, tied in a bundle and carried on a stick over his shoulder. He sought out the president and inquired, "Are you the man who keeps school here?"

Simpson, his blue eyes dancing, answered in the affirmative. Quizzing the new scholar, he found him alert and well informed but deficient in some prescribed courses. He therefore placed him in the preparatory department and recommended that he board at a farm home three miles from the campus, so that he could walk back and forth for his health.

Even the pittance required for his room and meals was, however, more than Harlan could afford, and so he begged permission to live in one of the unused rooms on the third floor of the college building and to cook for himself.

Harlan was no country bumpkin. Although his formal schooling was limited, he had borrowed books on history, geography, natural philosophy, and mechanics from the Park County Public Library at Rockville; and he had studied surveying and logarithms under a lawyer who boarded with his parents. He had even taught the district school for several terms. In the exciting political campaign of 1840 he had joined the pilgrimage to the battlefield of Tippecanoe and had listened eagerly to the great Whig orators. He had taught school one year in Rockville, had noted the superior air of the town-bred boys, and had felt discomfort in their presence.

At Indiana Asbury, after tremblingly surviving the first ordeal of declaiming in chapel, Harlan rapidly acquired self-confidence and poise, and skill in public speaking. Soon chosen for the public

debate between the literary societies, he was twice named the president of his own society; he was much in demand as a speaker at Whig political rallies, and was active in the organization and instruction of Sunday schools. An outstanding student, he graduated with honors in 1845.

When Simpson promptly offered to name him as agent to collect funds for the college, Harlan declined. A year later a delegation of Methodists from Iowa appeared on the campus, seeking a principal for the new school and college they were establishing, and Simpson recommended Harlan. The committee offered him a position, which he accepted. The next year the people of Iowa elected him as the first state superintendent of public instruction, and he was launched on a political career which led precipitantly to the United States Senate and in 1865 to Abraham Lincoln's cabinet.¹³

III

As was his manner, Simpson crowded his Indiana hours and days with activities and new undertakings. Did he have a trip to make? He tucked a book into his saddlebags or satchel and read or journalized along the way. A preacher of camp-meeting sermons and an observer of the excited behavior of people at religious revivals, he was absorbed in Benjamin Rush's discussion of the effects of excessive joy, which, he noted, "produced madness in many of the successful adventures in the South Sea speculation in England in the year 1720," and sometimes caused Swiss soldiers in foreign countries to become "deranged" when they heard their native songs. He read Gibbon on the Roman Empire, Hallam on the history of literature, Bacon's *Organon*, Plato, Longinus *On the Sublime*, Lucretius, Fénelon, Scott, Byron.¹⁴

Early in his first year at Greencastle, while he was still preparing his inaugural address and searching for proof of the superiority of Christianity, he decided impulsively to study Arabic, and asked Uncle Matthew, who was in Cincinnati, to see if he could secure a grammar and lexicon. They could be had in Philadelphia, was the answer; but the grammar, lexicon, and a copy of the Scriptures would cost fifty to a hundred dollars. The price ought not to deter him from the purchase, Uncle Matthew thought, if he had

the health and leisure to study a new language. Health and leisure he might have; but of money he had little. He had to abandon the project.¹⁵

If he could not study Arabic, he would write a book. What would Uncle Matthew think of a preacher's manual, a text on proper pulpit conduct, as well as the management of the society and the circuit?

Uncle Matthew did not think much of it. He doubted that any work on such a subject would be popular enough to defray the expense of printing. He feared, moreover, that neither Professor Simpson nor anyone else would have the courage to tell the truth. Would he not be tempted to "avoid enforcing unpopular truths," to overlook wrong thinking and bad practices in the pulpit, "especially if held or done by men of great influence?" It would be much better if the nephew's health permitted taking on such extra burdens, to write an answer to Mr. Annan, the Presbyterian, with whom he had quarreled at Pittsburgh, and who had since put his bitter diatribes against Methodism into a book, *The Methodists at least would wish such a work success.*¹⁶

As far as Uncle Matthew could see, attending to the business of the college was burden enough, and the "incessant labor" involved in attempting other projects would wear the young man down. A protest that Wesley had done much more brought down the rebuke: "Wesley's example proves nothing in your case; he was raised for a special purpose, to reform Protestantism . . . And for this purpose he was held up by a power far above human."¹⁷

None the less, young Matthew, not yet freed from youth's cycles of ambition and failure, introspection and self-scourging, planned projects which he could not complete, and rigid schedules to which he could not adhere. "Rose at four o'clock," he noted in his journal, and, on successive mornings: "Rose at 5 minutes after 4," "Rose 5 minutes before 5— By some means I am prone to become irregular in my habits."¹⁸

Charles Elliott, as much interested as Uncle Matthew in President Simpson, and still his benefactor and the instrument of Providence, undertook to induce Wesleyan University in Connecticut to confer the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree on his young protégé. Although much pleased with the prospect, Simpson was impatient with the long delay which ensued, and then, in turn,

a little vain when he was finally notified that the degree had been bestowed. In the meantime, Professor Charles Anthon, author of an able and popular Latin prosody, dedicated the volume to him—an honor which Simpson was negligent in acknowledging. Uncle Matthew chided him: "A doctorate is a fine thing, but I should set a higher value on Mr. Anthon's dedication of the Latin Prosody, for that implies that he considers you at least a judge of that work. But D. D. is as empty as an acorn shell and often conferred on those that know but little about Theology."¹⁹

On the whole, these early years in Indiana were rich and rewarding. Sometimes Matthew Simpson seemed to forget himself, his old feeling of "weakness" and "inability," the morbid, introspective fears of his young manhood. Faced with the increasing success of the college, he dared to "lay large plans for future action . . . to enjoy the idea of mingling with the world, and moulding to some extent the public mind." He even dreamed of success in all his "enterprises."²⁰

There was the college itself. Travelers to Greencastle, when they came to the first break in the dense forest, expressed astonishment at the red-brick building rising three stories high. Matthew, too, after his long trips into the countryside, knew the thrill of coming suddenly upon the clearing and seeing the great red wall and white cupola against the green woods and the blue sky; but he knew even better the wild ringing of the bell when some student, learning of his return, called the others to shake his hand and welcome him back to the campus. He knew, also, the slower peal of the bell, calling students to prayer, its imperious tones announcing the beginning of classes, or its gay call to dinner.²¹

He was as well pleased with his home life as with the college. After a year or two in rented houses, he and Ellen built a high-gabled, two-story brick building adjacent to the campus. The students called frequently, visiting preachers stayed with them at commencement time, John and Mary Wheeler were in and out like members of the family. Edward R. Ames, who at the General Conference of 1840 was elected Missionary Secretary for the West, moved his family to Greencastle, and he and "Sister" Ames became frequent callers. Brother Ames, back now and then from travels in the West, brought news and gossip of the church and its officials,

and grave talk of politics and the Methodist difficulties with the Presbyterians.

Matthew Simpson liked best the long winter evenings when he sat before the fire with "some musty old volume" in his hand, and his feet on the fender. There was Jimmy, his oldest son, in the light of the flaming fire on the hearth, "earnestly engaged in fathoming the awful mysteries of a-b-ab," and on the floor, all about the room, little Charley, his second son, cutting antics. Ellen would sit, work basket in her lap, rocking to and fro, stitching a garment for one of the children, or knitting a sweater for her husband. Now and then she would interrupt to ask about some household matter or to tease from Matthew some bit of gossip concerning the college or the church. Charley had been born in the first summer at Green-castle; in the next four years Ellen gave birth to two daughters, Anna and Mathilda. Matthew jiggled them on his knee and cooed to them when they were well and happy, pressed their warm, soft bodies to his own when they were hurt and cried for comfort, sat up nights with them when they suffered with the croup, even stayed home from his classes and the office when the croup was serious.²²

In January of 1842, before the birth of the little girls, tragedy struck swiftly and unexpectedly. Four-year-old Jimmy, active and healthy, was suddenly stricken ill, and died. The great bell of the college tolled out a solemn dirge, and the neighbors gathered to stand or sit quietly, and to mourn with Matthew and Ellen.

Uncle Matthew tried to give comfort with the thought that little James had been "placed beyond the reach of sin or pain and of death among the spirits of just men made perfect,"²³ but the young college president would not be comforted. He could read in his loss only the judgment of God. He had been wrong to dream of success, to believe that he had achieved so much. He was after all "a mere drone in the great human hive." It was wrong for him, possessed of a nature "so defective and impure," to live upon the resources of the church, to talk of things that he knew so little about, to instruct when most of all he needed to be taught.

Ellen, unable to bear the sorrow, went home to Pittsburgh, taking little Charles. Her husband remained at his duties, mourning over his loss, perplexed by the contradictions of God, overwhelmed by loneliness.

He could not get out of his mind the little boy climbing upon his knee, begging for a story; the round, rosy cheeks, the soft voice; and then, in the box at home, the forehead "so smooth and cold," that he and Ellen had kissed before they laid him away.

He could not comprehend his loneliness. It was as though there were not one heart in the universe that beat in unison with his own, as though he stood alone, "like some solitary tree on a little island with the wild waves . . . washing away the evil" from about his roots, or like "a tree struck in mid-summer by the scathing lightning which has torn the bark and turned to yellow paleness the leaves that but yesterday were beautifully green." Granted only the presence of Ellen and Charles, he could perhaps have had brighter thoughts—even of a fairer world, of a "grace which may make it possible even for me to become an heir of a joyful immortality."²⁴

IX

"BLUE PUP" AND INDIANA POLITICS

WHEN Matthew Simpson moved to Indiana in 1839 he was cheered by the financial prospect of Indiana Asbury University. The total subscription of funds stood at \$60,000, and the two agents of the college confidently expected another \$20,000 by the fall. Construction costs were low, brick for the new building was to be burned on the campus, and a large percentage of the subscriptions could go into a permanent endowment fund. Simpson, unable to collect his salary at Allegheny, or even to sell the few household goods he had left behind, looked upon his new circumstances with relief and satisfaction.¹

Indiana, feverishly engaged in building canals, railroads, and turnpikes, had suffered less from the staggering Panic of 1837 than most of the nation; but the effect had been postponed, not averted. Legislation authorizing internal improvements, a gigantic pork barrel which promised a railroad, a turnpike, or a canal to nearly every county in Indiana, overtaxed the resources of the state. In August, four months after Simpson's arrival, the board in control of internal improvements had to suspend work on all projects. Depression spread, paralyzing trade and darkening the doors of business. The currency, bolstered by the legislature, held reasonably firm until 1842 but then suddenly depreciated from 40 to 50 per cent. The market was flooded with bank notes, bank scrip, and canal scrip—the last variously called "white dog," "red dog," "blue dog," and "blue pup."²

The promising subscription to the university shrank until it was scarcely enough to pay for the building. The "permanent" endowment vanished like a spark from Matthew's electric machine, a spectacular but fleeting phenomenon: subscribers, unable to secure

specie or even bank notes, wrote off their pledges in the worthless scrip of the Wabash and Erie Canal. Concluding his first year as president, Simpson had to report a deficit of \$449.02; and the indebtedness grew by 1842 to \$4,610.26. The board had to pay the professors in its own scrip.

Professor Larrabee began to look about for another position, and arrogant young Professor Benjamin Tefft, whom Simpson had brought from upstate New York and New England to teach Greek, threatened to resign. The president himself, in a "great pinch" for money, now and then borrowed from his uncle on a strictly business basis, promising to pay on demand, with interest. He even ventured briefly into the merchandise business—hard-shell almonds, plows, rock candy, and other items which Uncle Matthew sent out from Cincinnati; and, caught up in the feverish excitement of Indiana promotional schemes, he began to speculate a little with his wife's money in real estate, railroad stock, and short-term loans.³

Although the professors suffered from the depression they did as well as the preachers, or better. In southern Indiana, Isaac Owen, agent for the university and "the greatest beggar on earth," obtained nearly seven hundred dollars in subscriptions for the college while the junior preacher on the circuit could collect only \$7.50 for the first quarter of his year's salary. The people, Owen reported, would subscribe for the college when they would do nothing for the church, and scarcely anything for the preachers.⁴

Acting on this observation, Simpson prepared a plan for raising money, and an address to whip his brethren into action. Applying the lash where the flesh was still tender, he reminded them that there had been a time when the Methodists of Indiana had no college, when, in spite of being the most numerous religious body in the state, they had no part in the management of the public institution. Even now, when Asbury enrolled more students than any other college in Indiana, critics stigmatized it as the "Poor Man's College," or denounced it as "sectarian." "Ah, brethren, I have misjudged both your intelligence and piety if such a course will have any other effect than to awaken pity for your enemies, and to show them by your acts that you are both able and willing to rally unitedly around your own university." There were more than 50,000 Methodists in Indiana; if each gave forty cents, there would be enough at least to buy philosophical equipment and a magnificent

library. Every preacher must become an agent, must request every friend and member to give. Quite aside from the forty cents, they could raise \$20,000 if two hundred would give \$25, a thousand give \$10, and another thousand give \$5.⁵

The board, impressed with the need and with Simpson's plan, adopted it in modified form. Each Methodist was asked to contribute a dollar a year for ten years, and, after 1844, each of the two conferences to raise \$2,000.⁶

II

The preachers quickly saw, however, that the key to the success of any fund-raising plan was not the presence of agents in the field, nor their own pleas to members, but the preaching of Matthew Simpson. He was not only a remarkable preacher but, what the college agents were not, a man of learning and an able combatant for the anti-Methodist forces.

The Presbyterian colleges at Wabash and Hanover, as hard put by the depression as was Indiana Asbury, also had agents out seeking support from the people; these men, who were college-educated, did not hesitate to raise doubts about Methodist learning, and to revive Senator Bigger's question as to the ability of the Methodists to conduct a college. The only answer was to let the people listen to Simpson.

The preachers overwhelmed him with invitations to quarterly meetings, camp meetings, dedications, Sabbath-school conventions, debates against Calvinists. They tried to bribe him: one thought his presence would increase donations for the library and philosophical apparatus; another had "three boys on the stocks" ready to launch for Asbury; a third had to have his help against "this Crawfordsville thing." Up in Fort Wayne, the people were mightily stirred and the harvest was ripe, but the Methodist preacher was "unable to gather it": Simpson must come immediately, or the Beechers—Lyman, Henry Ward, and all the rest—who were due soon, "must reap the advantage."⁷

In the fall of 1841, the annual conference petitioned the Indiana Asbury board of trustees to make arrangements for its president to travel in the state during the summer months. The

trustees approved, and, in the summer of 1842, he set out on horseback, riding north through Crawfordsville and Lafayette to South Bend, and on into Michigan. In 1843, traveling by horse and buggy, and frequently attended by circuit riders and Methodist businessmen and their "ladies," he toured the southwest section of Indiana. On a circuit of six hundred miles he delivered forty-three sermons and thirty-three lectures on education.⁸

Whatever the effect of his travels upon the university and the people of Indiana, the benefits to himself were incalculable. The Methodists had long believed that the itinerant ministry was ideally suited to the training of preachers and pulpit orators. Traveling from place to place, the circuit rider preached the same sermon over and over, enlarging, polishing, and refining. "It is very seldom," Simpson said to the Yale College students many years later, "that a sermon can be very ably wrought out by the first effort of either speaker or writer."⁹ There on the Indiana frontier he began to test the themes which later marked him as the most eloquent voice of Methodism.

Out in the state the people who came to hear him ran the same gamut of emotions that the congregation at Greencastle had experienced on his first Sunday morning in Indiana. Eager to hear the new president, they were shocked and disappointed by his appearance. Tall, stooped, and ungainly, he was dressed not in the broadcloth store clothes worn by E. R. Ames and William M. Daily, but in the homespun blue jeans of the farmer. When he began to speak the effect was heightened by the contrast between his "unpromising appearance" and his "over-powering eloquence." The people listened with an apprehension which soon changed to pleasure and then quickened to exhilaration and occasionally to unrestrained shouting and weeping.

He preached different sermons from different texts, but always with the same theme and in the same manner: over against the hardships of the Christian church, and of Methodism and Methodists in particular, he set the glorious triumph of the church eternal and the life everlasting. He had learned to paint with words—pictures with such sharp detail and vivid color that the people cried out in pain or anguish, in joy or ecstasy. Argument played little part: like the fabled artist, he painted with the blood of life, taking his colors from the stream of human experience. The people,

watching him at work and viewing the portraits, were prostrated with joy or grief.

He developed a pattern of eloquence which audiences came to recognize and expect. He began indifferently, but soon was transformed: he appeared to grow in stature, his stooping shoulders straightened, his face lighted up until it became "radiant with thought," his high thin voice deepened into tones of "wonderful pathos," and his eye kindled and flashed.¹⁰

Men who had sat under his spell were not able, in other circumstances, to divest him of the aura which surrounded him in the pulpit. On his travels about the state laymen and preachers alike extended the hospitality of the "better" homes. Joseph A. Wright, successful lawyer and aspiring politician of Rockville, became his friend. John Evans, young and enterprising Quaker physician from Fountain County, first "turned thought to God" one night in a mill house where President Simpson preached on "Lord, Show Me Thy Glory." Impressed by the speaker's views on education and religion, Evans soon became a Methodist. Thus began a warm friendship which extended over nearly half a century, and a union of interests which was exerted time and again in behalf of Methodism and its institutions.¹¹

Lucien Berry, tall and dark, a brilliant preacher famous for a three-day debate with a Universalist preacher, was drawn to Simpson by an intellectual compatibility, a common hunger for knowledge, and a common evangelical zeal. Together they planned and plotted for the welfare of Indiana Asbury and looked forward to the day when the prejudice of the church against preacher training institutions would relax sufficiently to permit Berry to join the college as professor of theology.¹²

Closest among the president's friends, next to Berry, was the impetuous William M. Daily. In sharp contrast to the staid and circumspect Simpson, he was frequently under suspicion in the conference of conduct unbecoming a minister. Once he was censured for "unministerial and unchristian intimacy" with a married woman; namely, "laying your arms around her and kissing her in the absence of company." But he could preach, and he was a man of some learning. Entering the pulpit at sixteen, he had become famous as the "boy preacher"; and he had been admitted to the conference at nineteen. In his youth he had made it a practice to rise

early to study; and he had read his books diligently as he traveled on horseback on the circuit. A graduate of Indiana University, he had taught one year at St. Charles College in Missouri. Simpson defended him once, vigorously, when suspicious members of the conference wrongly charged him with infractions of the code. Daily, who was used to fighting his own battles, was overcome with emotion. Simpson had made an impression on his heart which could "never be effaced"—he had found at last the man who "dared to do right," the "loving, generous hearted christian, and Methodist Preacher."¹³

There were other close friends and admirers: the Reverend John Bayless, who advised him on his land speculations; John L. Smith, preacher and agent for the university, who saw a great future for its president; Thomas M. Eddy, junior preacher and future editor of the church, who, knowing and admiring Simpson's power as a preacher, once raised a plank to the window of a church and crawled up it to secure a seat before the doors opened; Father James Havens, who had been on the committee to establish a "conference seminary"; and even Edward R. Ames, Missionary Secretary for the western area and resident of Greencastle, who would be Simpson's chief competitor for the honors of the church.

The people of the state, the Methodists who filled the pews and crowded the benches at camp meeting, learned to admire and love Simpson not only for his oratory but for his commonness. College president though he was, and eloquent speaker, he was one of them in the simplicity of his manners and the coarseness of his clothes. They liked to hear and to tell the story of his dedication of a church in Ohio, where the responsible citizens, anxious to make an impression upon the visiting college president, had arranged for him to be the guest in the home of Thomas Parrott, one of the wealthier residents. Parrott had invited in a number of community leaders to have supper with the eminent visitor that evening.

The stage was late, no one was waiting to meet him. Dr. Simpson walked to Parrott's home, his valise in hand. The oldest daughter answered the bell. Assuming the tall, uncouth stranger before her was one of the local preachers also assigned to the Parrotts, she invited him in and announced that there was a "plain-looking man" in the parlor.

"Prepare him a place at the corner of the table," her father said, "and I will come down and see him."

As the stranger sat eating the food that was brought Parrott approached and said:

"We are expecting Dr. Simpson to arrive from Greencastle to dedicate our church tomorrow, and we have delayed supper for him."

The stranger looked up, with a characteristic twinkle in his eye.

"That," he said, "is the name they call me by at home."

After a moment of embarrassed silence the host called in his other guests, and they all sat down to a pleasant evening.

The next day Parrott accompanied the illustrious if ill-favored guest to the dedication exercises, and fell under the spell of his eloquence. "There is no judging from people's looks," he said, "what they can do or who they are."¹⁴

III

The denominational jealousy toward the state university, the bitter sectarian rivalries among the church schools, the desperate financial struggle of Indiana Asbury, and Matthew Simpson's growing eminence as preacher and orator—these factors acting and reacting upon one another constituted a polygon of forces which propelled him irresistibly into state politics.

He was extremely sensitive to Presbyterian contempt of Methodist learning and was incurably suspicious of Presbyterian motives. In September, 1839, fire destroyed the main building of the New School Presbyterian college. Unable to raise the money for reconstruction, the Wabash College authorities cast about for a loan and hit upon a happy idea. The sinking fund set up by the state to stabilize the banks, was to go to the support of public education when the banks fully repaid their loans. Why should not a small part of the more than a million dollars in it be loaned to the college? Wabash College promptly applied to the commissioners of the fund and received a loan of \$8,000 on which interest was to be paid annually, in advance. When the college defaulted on its interest payments in the financial collapse of 1842, friends rushed

to the legislature and obtained the suspension of interest payments until December 31, 1846.¹⁵

In the meantime, the Presbyterians inflamed Methodist suspicions by what seemed to be an open attempt to gain control of the common schools and the sinking fund. While the legislature of 1842-1843 was in session Henry Ward Beecher, Samuel Merrill, James M. Ray, and others sponsored a convention on education. Beecher was pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis, and Merrill was the president of the State Bank and the leading member of his church; both were trustees of Wabash College. Ray, also a Presbyterian, was the cashier of the bank. On the day before the convention, Beecher, Merrill, and Ray met secretly in the bank, named themselves the principal officers of the convention, and invited Governor Samuel Bigger, a Presbyterian, to preside over it.

Simpson's friends now began to create a considerable disturbance, and the organizers of the convention thought well to request him to address it. He promptly declined, and the word went forth among the Methodists that he had been publicly insulted.¹⁶

Bigger, elected governor in 1840, was the member of the state legislature who had spoken so derisively of Methodist educators in 1834. Simpson began to suspect influence and favoritism in high places. Bigger, he reminded his Methodist friends, had said there was "not a Methodist in America with sufficient learning to fill a professor's chair."¹⁷

Simpson's dissatisfaction spread like an irritating rash among the Methodists; but it was catching among the Whigs, too, and soon reached the governor. Alarmed at the prospect of losing Methodist support in the coming summer's campaign for reelection, Bigger called for help. L. G. Thompson of Fort Wayne, a prominent Methodist physician who was also a Whig, brought Simpson, E. R. Ames, S. C. Cooper (Indiana Asbury agent), to a meeting in the governor's office. Simpson repeated his charges, and Bigger hotly denied having been moved by contempt, or having uttered derogatory remarks about Methodist educators such as had been attributed to him. Scarcely convinced, but unwilling to call the governor a liar, Simpson promised not to repeat the charges. Ames, an ardent Democrat and a skillful politician, looked on with satisfaction while

he began to calculate the political power of the "Amen corner" of the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁸

In the spring of 1843 the Whigs, as expected, nominated Bigger for reelection. To oppose him, the Democrats named James Whitcomb, who attended a Methodist church and was a strong supporter of the Methodist cause. It was generally assumed by the Whigs, and conceded by the Democrats, that Methodists and Presbyterians alike were predominantly Whigs. In this campaign, however, the Democrats, noting the tenseness of the denominational struggle, saw an opportunity to break a large segment of the Methodist vote off from the Whig party.

The *State Sentinel*, a Democratic paper published in Indianapolis, opened the campaign with a cleverly conceived rumor that the Whigs were attacking Whitcomb because he was a Methodist. The *Lafayette Advertiser*, also Democratic, added that his being a Methodist ought to be "a recommendation instead of an objection." "What," it exclaimed piously, "has it come to that, that a desperate political press shall urge it as an objection to James Whitcomb . . . that he is a Christian!"¹⁹

The Whigs, alarmed by the turn of affairs, wheeled out their biggest gun, Noah Noble, former governor and a worshiper in Lucien Berry's Methodist chapel in Indianapolis. Noble and others issued an "Appeal to Methodists" in the Whig *Indiana State Journal*, denying that the Whig press had ever made any such objection to Whitcomb, and calling on the *State Sentinel* and the *Advertiser* to produce their evidence.²⁰

The *State Sentinel* answered by taunting the Whigs. Subtly reviving the anti-Methodist charge against Bigger, it opined that "enlightened" Methodists were not "to be insulted to their faces by the highest dignitary in the State, and then do the bidding of men, one of whom, at least, had been refused admission, even on a probationary basis," to the Methodist Church.²¹

President Simpson, on a speaking tour in southeastern Indiana in behalf of his university, found himself embroiled in the political battle. A literalist when the occasion demanded, he adhered strictly to his pledge not to repeat the charges against Governor Bigger. But in his conversation and in his lecture on education he gave the definite impression that Methodists were "competent" to con-

duct their own educational enterprises, notwithstanding the opinion of persons "high in authority." Some who sat in his audience or heard reports of his speeches thought that his allusions to the governor were plain enough. Ready to magnify their significance, or to read into them what he had not said, they reported to Bigger that the president of Indiana Asbury, ostensibly on the circuit to raise money for his college, was actually on an anti-Whig electioneering expedition.²²

The flame burned high in Indianapolis and lighted up the far corners of the state. The editor of the *Indiana State Journal* heard from twenty "veritable sources" that Simpson was trying to defeat Bigger. Lucien Berry, an ardent Whig but a more ardent Methodist, reported delightedly that in forty-eight hours there had been scarcely a half-hour in which he had not received a visit or a note from some leading Whig or Democrat, anxious to know the truth about Governor Bigger, Simpson, and the Methodists.²³

Beecher, Ray, Merrill, and company were incensed by Simpson's politicking. They denounced his electioneering; they discredited the Bigger stories; they denied that Simpson had been affronted at the educational convention; they affirmed that he had been invited early to address it but had refused "in order to create sympathy & make the publick believe he was overlooked." Beecher was goaded into the egregious blunder of castigating "P-r-e-s-i-d-e-n-t S-i-m-p-s-o-n" at the Wabash College commencement exercises for meddling with the educational convention and attempting to thwart its purpose.²⁴

A Methodist straightway reported this to the receptive *State Sentinel*. The editor of the Whiggish *Indiana State Journal* hastened to reply; but unhappily he revealed more than the public was supposed to know. Wise Methodists, he said, would regard the attempt to visit the supposed sins of Mr. Beecher upon Governor Bigger as "an insult to their sense." Besides, Mr. Beecher, who of course would not "notice, in the least degree, an anonymous correspondent," had assured the editor that the tale of his castigation of President Simpson was "false in every sense."²⁵

Lucien Berry could restrain himself no longer. In a cleverly written anonymous letter he exposed Beecher, Merrill, and Ray, gave further credence to the rumors about the governor, and accused the *Journal* of intrigue. Why did the editor of the *Journal*

connect Beecher's insult to President Simpson with the campaign of Governor Bigger? The public knew of no such connection. Was it because the editor knew that Beecher, Merrill, and Ray had met in the bank to elect themselves officers of the convention? Did he mean to insinuate that, because the governor "*happened* to be called to preside, therefore, they *all* conspired to insult Simpson, and Cooper, and Ames, and all of the Church, by forcibly excluding them from any participation?" Furthermore, Berry wrote with sarcasm, he was too well acquainted with Beecher's "character for veracity" to believe he had declared the story "false in every sense." Too many men who had heard Beecher at Crawfordsville were willing to say that the story was "TRUE IN NEARLY EVERY SENSE."²⁶

Democrats intrigued with Methodists to get the Beecher speech published. An excited Whig dared the Methodists "to vote against us. . . . if they do, THE WHIG PARTY WILL BLOW THEIR COLLEGE AND CHURCH TO HELL."²⁷

Simpson's interest in the campaign was quickened also by the political activities of his friends Joseph Wright and John Evans. Wright, a member of the state legislature and a trustee of Indiana Asbury, was a candidate for the United States Congress. Dr. Evans, having vainly tried to secure Governor Bigger's support for reform measures, particularly in the care of the insane, was directing a Whig revolt against him in Fountain County.

In the mid-August election, with a total of 110,000 votes, Whitcomb won over Bigger by the narrow margin of 2,000. It was the first Democratic victory in a decade. In Fountain County, where Dr. Evans, a Whig, had campaigned against his own party, Whitcomb led his opponent decisively. In the Seventh Congressional district Joseph Wright squeaked through by a majority of three votes.²⁸

The *Indiana Whig* charged the Methodists with voting "almost to a man" against Bigger, and the *Bloomington Post* warned the Methodists to "look well to the safety" of their college. An "insulted and exasperated" public would wreak vengeance upon an institution whose "holy head" would go through the country "making political speeches in behalf of so base a hypocrite" as James Whitcomb. The editor of the *State Journal*, perceiving that the Methodists must not be permanently alienated from the Whig party, repudiated the charges of the *Post*. The Locofocos might have kept a

few Methodists from voting for Bigger, he wrote, but an analysis of the returns would show that Whitcomb had received 6,000 votes fewer than the electorate had given to Bigger in 1840. The trouble was that the "slumbering mass" of Whigs had stayed at home, not bothering to vote.²⁹

That winter, when the legislature convened, the senate committee on education was "pleased" to invite President Simpson to deliver a "public address" on education, and he accepted. In January a Methodist member of the Whig nominating committee proposed Simpson for a place on the Whig Electoral ticket; he declined. When the new governor entered upon his duties he promptly recommended the establishment of a hospital for the insane and named Dr. Evans as the first superintendent; and he appointed Simpson to the board of directors of a proposed school for the deaf and dumb.³⁰

In the meantime, Joseph Wright discovered seven other Methodists in Congress and organized a weekly prayer meeting and a class meeting which convened at sunrise on the Sabbath. He pleaded with Simpson to travel through Washington on his trip East next spring and preach at the Methodist chapel there. When Simpson and Berry sought the exercise of his influence with President Tyler for the appointment of Samuel Henderson (who had so warmly "espoused the cause of Methodism *versus* Bigger") to the Indianapolis postmastership, Wright happily complied. In a short time he was able to report that the President had sent Henderson's name to the United States Senate for confirmation.³¹ The Methodists were doing well in Indiana politics.

However, the matter which had precipitated the whole struggle, the Wabash College loan from the sinking fund, had not been settled. The grace period extended to December, 1846, and the convening of the legislature after Whitcomb's second gubernatorial campaign. Whitcomb being reelected and political affairs settled, friends of Wabash College in the legislature brought in a bill to write off the college's indebtedness, now grown to \$10,600. The college, in lieu of payment of the debt, would surrender bonds (which were worthless) and would give five years' free instruction to some one hundred young men, one from each county, who wished to become common-school teachers.³²

Berry, in accordance with Methodist practice, had been sent

on to another station, but John Bayless, his successor at Indianapolis, had quite as deep a concern for Methodist interests. Alarmed at the prospect of establishing all over the state one hundred "preparatory departments" for Wabash (an advantage he would give ten years' labor to secure for Asbury), he begged Simpson to come to Indianapolis "without delay."³³

Simpson and Ames (of whom it was said that he ruled the governor) hurried to the capital to try to defeat the bill. It was soon rumored that, although the legislature had passed the Wabash bill, Governor Whitcomb would veto it. The rumors were correct. The governor vetoed the bill, and there was loud talk about the "influence" which had been brought to bear upon him, and murmurs about the Bigger affair. The Methodists were jubilant, but the "visage of Mr. Beecher" was ghastly.³⁴

It was not long before the blood returned to Beecher's face. In rejecting the bill, the wily governor had held his veto until the last moment allotted him by law; it arrived at the legislature at a doubtful hour, and the senate overrode it. The "iniquitous" Wabash College bill became law.³⁵

Berry, in his new post at Oxford, Ohio, was furious with the legislature and not a little surprised at the failure of Simpson, Ames, and Bayless to defeat the New School Presbyterians. He could find only one consoling thought in the transaction: The next common-school convention would recommend the appointment of a state superintendent of public instruction, and the legislature, after having "petted and favored" the New School Presbyterians, would not dare deny the superintendency to the Methodists.

He was wrong in the details but right in the results. Five years later when the state of Indiana was ready to name its first superintendent of public instruction, it chose William C. Larrabee, Methodist preacher and professor of mathematics at Indiana Asbury University.