

XXIII

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

MATTHEW SIMPSON did not wear well the cloak of the politician. A little embarrassed by his own occasional forays into practical politics, he rationalized his conduct as being in the interest of the church. Whenever possible he worked through Harlan. To importuning office seekers he now and then denied that he had any political influence.

His fellow Methodists agreed in the belief that he was above politics. They were quick to recognize that Ames was a politician, "a strong man . . . never noted for meekness in his public life," and they were ready to boast that he "guided the political and military spirit" of the war. They knew that Simpson's temper could flare up like a lighted match, but they more often thought of him for his kindness and gentleness, his humility, and even his "Christ-likeness."¹ They knew that he was frequently in Washington, and that the doors of great men were open to him. They believed that his influence was great, but they knew also that there were times when he was reluctant to use it for political bargaining. So the rumor grew and persisted that he was an adviser, a counselor to men in high places, a man of God who occasionally brought his spiritual insight to bear upon affairs of state.

His preaching and his politics operated reciprocally to enhance his prestige in both areas. If his name was one to conjure with in Washington, it was because the politicians knew his popularity and strength in the church. At the same time, the whispered rumors of his influence at Washington increased his power in the pulpit and the church.

His war address and his Lincoln oration had won great acclaim. But his fellow Methodists, proud as they were of his patriotic zeal, were somewhat scornful of those who praised his public address with-

out having heard him preach.² His great triumphs in the pulpit came in the years immediately before and shortly after the close of the war.

Traditionally, the successful Methodist preacher was expected to "put on the rousements." If he could include emotional excitement he had "power—legitimate and glorious power." It was in this sense of the word that Simpson was popular: he was "powerful."

As a preacher, Simpson departed widely from the tradition of the Methodist pulpit. His importance and appeal lay not only in his dramatic qualities but in his message. He believed it was his duty to counteract fanaticism and to preach the truth not only of the Bible, but of all knowledge. "Science," he said, "is nothing more than catching a glimpse of some of the thoughts of God."³ His underlying theme—the providence of God in the affairs of men—he adapted from Wesley. But by and large the preaching of Wesley's followers was evangelistic—the call of the sinner to repentance. When it was not evangelistic it was didactic. The bishops, especially, were given to instruction on the doctrines and economy of the church, homilies on stewardship, the importance of class meetings, Christian perfection. Simpson's preaching was neither evangelistic nor didactic. It was epideictic. He called men not so much to repentance as to praise.

In his doctrine of providence he was not a Calvinist. He did not teach the stern and ancient dogmas of depravity and election but the more humanistic, if more delusive, doctrine of human progress—under the providence of God. His hypothesis was simple, but his insights were shrewd. His ideas were a product both of the optimism of the day and of his own excursions into learning. Most of his brethren had the faith to believe what he preached, but few had the knowledge or the eloquence to duplicate his efforts.

He believed first of all in design, the doctrine popularized by William Paley and known to all nineteenth century Protestantism. There was "one God supreme," as revealed not only by the Bible but by the voice of science. "We may take the contents of the earth, the materials of all the strata of rocks," said Simpson, "and though we may make our excavations in Asia, America, Europe, or Africa, we shall find the same conformation, the union of the particles under the same laws—evincing that the mind that planted the western hemi-

sphere must have laid the foundations of the eastern." Or one might take the wing of the smallest insect, "which has breath for but a day, and that wing, when inspected under the microscope, shows a wonderful network of filaments, of vessels and cords, arrangements to fit it for the purpose for which God designed it." 4

He believed also, as he had preached in the War Address, that God was manifest in history. The strange succession of events, the rise and fall of nations, the pride and degradation of man, these were understandable only in the light of God's purposes.

He did not go along with Wesley, however, in believing that God would interfere with the laws of nature for the benefit of his followers. He sought his explanations of unusual happenings, not by rejecting what he knew of science, but by adapting his theology to the findings of science. If a man ride under a falling mountain, he asked, shall God stay the law of gravitation and save him? If he go to sea in a broken vessel, shall God reach out His hand and save him, while the others perish? No, that was not his understanding of the workings of providence. Nor did he believe that men were pawns in the hands of God, some designated from the beginning of time to be saved, others to be damned.

God, he believed, was *Mind*. How else explain the universe? The "laws" of nature were but a recognition of an existing order, not a statement of causality. If then God was *Mind*, was it not logical that He should operate through the mind or the soul of men? Even among men ultimate power resided chiefly in thought. A strong arm might break in pieces the flinty rock—yet what gave the arm its power but thought? "And in the clash of armies, it is the thought of the general which has led to victory." 5

A Christian, then, ought to see that his thoughts were God's thoughts. Here again the bishop did not leap to the commonplace assumption that the Bible contained the whole truth. To him all thought was ultimately God's thought. But how then could a Christian give himself up to the providence of God? In the first place, he must make every effort to understand and utilize the laws of God's universe. "If we have the opportunity to learn," he said, "it is our duty to learn. . . . If he has given us minds capable of research; if he has given us leisure and facilities for research, then it is his will that we should understand this world in which we dwell." "There is

not," he said, "a current of air that can drive the sails of the ships on the seas of this globe but God hath made it possible for man to understand its laws." ⁶

Again, if a man were in the providence of God, he would utilize his learning and his wealth to spread the gospel and to do good. "The purposes of God are all in harmony with the happiness of man." The whole design of revelation was "to produce universal good-will, to fill the hearts of men with the love of God, and with love to each other, to banish strife, discord, jealousy, hatred, and war from the face of this earth." "Where was there a man," he asked, "who ever sought to alleviate suffering as Christ did? He went about always doing good." The social gospel had not yet wrought its effect upon the American conscience, and the bishop had few tools to recommend or techniques to offer; but he pleaded his point again and again. "Here is a reform society, a society to care for the poor, for drunkards and lunatics, for the disabled, for the aged—that is doing Christ's work; but the work is done through Christian men and women. They are carrying out Christ's plans. And it is because Christ lived that these agencies live and flourish." ⁷

But was there not a particular way, some special means by which the Christian could lay hold upon the mind of God and know his will? Yes, he believed that a man could know the mind of God and could be aided by an Unseen Power. But even then, he must seek no special privilege; he must walk the avenues open to all mankind. He must cultivate the habit of thinking about God and of contemplating the truth as revealed in the Bible. "I may pass through the garden of a friend," he said, and

observe that there are walks tastefully laid out; that there is beautiful shrubbery on either hand; that there are flowers which may delight. But the friend may ask: "Did you notice that charming variety of pink? Did you notice that passion-flower, or that lily from Southern lands?" I had seen all the flowers as I passed, but I had not paused to look particularly at any one; I step back again, and before that flower I pause until I examine its petals, see the form of its leaves, and dwell on all its charms, and it becomes imprinted on my heart—'a thing of beauty,' which shall be a 'joy forever.' I *saw* it before; I have *looked* at it now.⁸

The power of God, thus cultivated, would yield joy and beauty, prompt men to greater learning, to utilization of resources, to acts of benevolence, and give them, individually, a stability of character.

Just as a man, when swimming in some swollen river, fixes his eye on the opposite bank and gains steadiness, so the "gaze upon the unseen enables one to hold on his course amid the attractions and the allurements of life."⁹

At times, however, the workings of providence were inexplicable. A man of wealth and goodness might suddenly be stripped of his possessions, a pious mother left a widow without means of support, Christian parents bereaved by the loss of a child, a little one "into whose eyes we looked with love." In an age when the mortality rate was high, the bishop had himself known the agony death brings to a young parent. He had but one comfort to offer: one must think of "the invisible, the eternal, the angelic, the spiritual," then he could "soar away from these earthly scenes":

See the poor widow whose children are crying for bread. The winter's storm rages about her; the fuel is exhausted in her fire. Whither shall she turn? The charity of the world seems cold; but if she can look up and believe that a house is prepared for her, that all are hers, that she is a child of God and an heir of Glory, she can wipe away her tears, and point her children to the spirit-land; and she can be happy even in the midst of suffering, because she knows that earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot cure.¹⁰

A later generation would condemn him for such escapist doctrine, but the people who then sat in the pews had no thought of Marx's now famous cynicism, "Religion is the opiate of the people." If they were drugged by the preacher's doctrine, they felt not numbness nor sleepy unconcern with world affairs, but the wild ecstasy of release, the delirium of vision and mirage. In a society little concerned with social responsibility, the people found his portrayal of the *invisible* a catharsis, a release for their pent-up emotions, an escape from the hard realities of their lives.

II

Of Bishop Simpson's sermons, the one attended with the most extravagant response was "the Victory of Faith." The theme was the familiar one of the courage to be derived from the knowledge of Providence. Faith was "the view of the distant that steadies against the whirl of the present." To the educator faith was "not teaching

the number and forms of letters, or the marks upon a book," but "the companionship of the great and good and wise in distant lands and distant ages." It was the widening of the circle of thoughts until a man grew "greater and stronger." Faith, for the statesman, was seeing "the tops of far-off thoughts which common men never saw"; for the Christian, it was "a peace that cheers and strengthens," a victory over sin and the "dominion of passions," a joyous triumph over death and the grave.¹¹

These thoughts he embellished with illustrations of a sailor boy "sent, in a storm, up the mast . . . amidst the swinging cordage," a student sitting "in the corner of a hearth while the pine knots are blazing" but in his thoughts "crossing the Granicus with Alexander . . . climbing the Alps with Napoleon . . . driving into the depths of Russia with Charles XIII." He related the struggle of Leverrier, whose friends said to him, "Why prison yourself in your study? Come where beauty smiles and wit sparkles." But he "was deaf to their solicitations." He spent his hours looking "away out into the heavens where he had seen some planetary disturbance"; he pursued investigations, resolved formulas. At last he was able to say, "There is a new world and I have found it." "He had faith in the distant; in the immutability of the laws of science; and for that faith he rejected the pleasures of a moment."

Frances E. Willard heard him preach the sermon at the Des Plaines Camp Meeting in Illinois, at the outbreak of the Civil War, and wrote: "I have heard great preachers, Beecher, Talmage, Spurgeon in England, Père Hyacinthe in France, but, to my thought, no flight was ever so steady, so sustained, so lofty, as that of Bishop Simpson on that memorable day."¹²

Eight thousand people were present on that occasion. Two of the number, arriving too late to find seats in the huge auditorium, retreated to the ministers' board tent, which was just to the rear of the speaker's stand. There, although they could not see, they could listen through the cracks between the boards. When Simpson announced his text one of the two, a professor at Garrett Biblical Institute, "threw himself back on the couch in disappointment and vexation." He had heard the sermon before and now had come to the camp "to listen to a twice-told tale." But the bishop had spoken only a few sentences when the professor "rose to a sitting posture; a moment later he sprang to his feet, and stood, tense and strained in

his eagerness to catch every word through the screen of boards." He stood thus for an hour and a half, braced against the bunk, "tears often trickling down his cheeks unregarded . . . occasionally catching his breath in the intense excitement."¹³

In New England the bishop preached the same sermon on Sunday morning at an annual conference over which he was presiding. The large church was crowded, and many were compelled to stand. A "love-feast," preceding the sermon, gave many an opportunity to "testify," so that the "mental condition of most of the vast audience was . . . that of eager expectancy and deep spiritual preparation."¹⁴

When he began to speak he had, as men so often noted, "the languid and exhausted look of a hard-worked man." His voice was thin, nasal, high-pitched, almost feeble. As he gradually worked himself into his subject, as the feeling mounted and he became increasingly aware of the audience reaction, "his quavering tenor voice grew penetrating, resonant, sympathetic, and impassioned"; his stooping shoulders became erect, his gesture was no longer restrained, his dull eyes kindled into a blaze, and "his thoughts seemed to play over his face like a luminously radiating atmosphere."¹⁵

His climax, an allegorical reply to the objection of some people that religion was outmoded, was the very substance, in narrative form, of his belief in the oneness of science and religion. The genius of infidelity came near and offered him her hand. He took it cheerfully. She led him through the earth, showed him its blooming flowers, called them by name, took him through the forests, showed him the gigantic trees, roamed with him through the animal kingdom, pointed out the "exquisite adaptations of every part of nature." He learned it all with joy from her lips. She passed through society, explained its customs, its history, taught him its languages, and he learned them, eagerly. She dug into the earth and revealed the rocks "in their order of superposition," what the fossils taught of old catastrophes and of wonderful ages. She mounted with him into the heavens, opened up to him the solar system "so harmoniously and beautifully arranged," carried him beyond that system to numberless other systems whose suns were but the fixed stars he had seen. He went with her to the nebulae and looked at the vast worlds that composed them, "away to the fleecy cloud where light just trembles on the verge of shade; away to the suburbs of the universe."

But when he had reached the last star and had sat down he still

panted for more. He looked into the face of his guide and asked, "Is this all?" "Is this not enough?" she replied. "Are there not beauties of earth and beauties of heaven enough to satisfy the longing soul? Is there not wisdom and power and skill so manifold, so conspicuous everywhere as to occupy the thought and fill the heart?"

Perhaps. Yet still, somehow, he felt a great void.

Then the genius of Christianity came to his side. She, too, took him by the hand, and he went with her "through the same earth, past the same rocks and forests and hills." She taught him the same languages, took him through the same domain of the sciences, and added one more, "the science of salvation." She taught him the languages of the earth, and to them added another, "the language of heaven." She mounted with him to the skies, and he drank in light from the same sun, hurried past the same fixed stars, resolved the same nebulae, and out again to the last star where his former guide had left him.

He gazed into the face of the genius of Christianity and asked, "Is this all?" "Is this all!" she exclaimed. "This is but the portico; it is but the threshold; it is the entrance to the Father's house." And she put the glass of faith into his hand, and he looked through it, and "away beyond the stars, away beyond the multiplied systems," he saw the great center, the throne of God. And as he looked he saw that there was "One upon the throne; he is my brother; and I look again, and my name is written on his hands; and I cry out with ecstasy:

" 'Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on his hands.' "

The effect was "electric." "Hundreds shouted, clapped their hands; some rose to their feet; strong men and women wept and laughed at once . . . It was preaching to a full orchestra with the Hallelujah Chorus." ¹⁶

XXIV

"BISHOPS AS PARTISANS"

AS a bishop, Matthew Simpson traveled much. Everywhere the people sent him to the homes of the "better class" laymen. After the rigors of travel he found it agreeable to accept the comfort of a good home, and the convenience of a carriage—when the alternative was to walk. He was a brilliant conversationalist, much sought after as a guest. Urbane and friendly, he recounted anecdotes of his travel with sparkling wit and flashing eye.¹

Thus, Matthew Simpson was thrown into frequent association with the more prominent laymen of his church. What he saw pleased him. There was John Evans, whom he had known for years. Successful businessman, prominent in politics, Evans was also a sincere and devout churchman liberal with his money, a founder of colleges, a supporter of missions. And by the standards of his day he was rigorously honest in business dealings, even to the payment of debts—when his honor was at stake—that others had made in his name. There was Daniel Ross, gentle but shrewd, who, having made his fortune in San Francisco in the first years of the gold rush, had returned to New York to become president of the Tenth National Bank. A member of the Seventeenth Street Church (Hedding Church) and a leader in local affairs, he was a vice president of the denomination's missionary society. "I never expect to be a very bright light," he said once at prayer meeting, "but I hope to be a steady one."² Even Daniel Drew, wizened little Wall Street trader, said to have made a million dollars in a single "operation," wept at class meetings, was a local preacher, contributed liberally to missionary causes, and, before the seventies were over, would give an estate and pledge his fortune to found a theological seminary. James Harlan, Joseph A. Wright, Waitman Willey, Mark and Oliver Hoyt, Orrington Lunt, Washington DePauw—these and their kind contributed generously

to the support of the colleges, and made possible the magnificent Gothic structures which Simpson had urged upon the church ever since he entered the episcopacy.

Not only the church, but Simpson himself received their favors. Daniel Ross and others had raised a thousand dollars for him when he was ill in Pittsburgh, and a year later Oliver Hoyt had sent a like sum. Ross and Harlan and Evans looked after his investments and saw that he made a good return on his land and stocks. The laymen of Philadelphia purchased a house for him, and his friends of New York furnished it.

Never before had the Simpsons lived so well. Their two-storied brick home with its marble-faced fireplaces, ornate furnishings, and book-lined study, was a social center for Philadelphia Methodists. General and Mrs. Grant were entertained there and, a decade later, President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes.

Mrs. Simpson, active in welfare and benevolence, was an elegant hostess. With the children in school she was able to travel now and then with the bishop. On one occasion she brought consternation to a Presbyterian banker's wife who was entertaining them during the conference session. Thinking of the Methodists as plain, illiterate people, the hostess, wishing not to overawe her guests at their first dinner, twisted her hair in a tight knot, took off her rings, wore a "big-flowered tycoon-rep wrapper" and a white apron. She had not yet seen her guest, who had been shown to her room by a servant. At dinnertime Mrs. Simpson swept down the stairs, a tall, stately woman in black silk ruffled to the waist, with expensive laces and jewelry, and her hair done in the latest style. The banker's wife, embarrassed and chagrined, sat silent through the meal while Mrs. Simpson, a splendid talker, "charmed everybody."³

But while these honored laymen served Methodism and in turn were cultivated and pampered by the church, a voice in its official councils and representation in its government were denied to them. Methodism was ruled almost exclusively by the preachers.

In a democratic society the government of the Methodists was subject to criticism, and the critics were unsparing. The Baptists, particularly, heaped censure upon them, charging that they were anti-American, antirepublican, papists, victims of "clerical despotism," even taunting them with the words of John Wesley himself: "As long as I live the people shall have no share in choosing either

stewards or leaders . . . WE ARE NO REPUBLICANS, AND NEVER INTEND TO BE." ⁴

The more Simpson thought upon the excellence of Methodist laymen, the more embarrassed he was by their exclusion from the councils of the church—and the more determined he was that they should be given a voice. In 1860 he persuaded the board of bishops to insert a paragraph on lay representation in their address to the general conference. He wrote the section himself—a fact which the delegates generally knew.⁵ "We are of the opinion," said the bishops, "that lay delegation might be introduced in one form into the General Conference with safety, and perhaps advantage, that form being a separate house."⁶ After considerable discussion, the conference declared itself ready to sanction the change if the people and the preachers desired it.

II

The bishops began taking the vote at the annual conference in 1861. But the people, caught up in the wild fever of war, were indifferent to ecclesiastical reform. The ministers opposed the change, 3,069 to 1,338, and the people likewise turned it down, 47,885 to 28,884.⁷

At this juncture the movement gained support from another quarter. In 1860 a group of conservative preachers and influential laymen, including Daniel Ross and Oliver Hoyt, had established an independent religious weekly in New York, *The Methodist*. The immediate provocation for founding the journal had been the new chapter on slavery enacted by the general conference; but when the war broke out the *Methodist* abandoned its policy of friendliness toward the South and aligned itself with the official press in support of Lincoln and the war. Thus deprived of an issue, and of a reason for existence, it took up in good earnest the cause of lay representation.

Simpson had been both disappointed and troubled over the outcome of the 1860 vote on lay representation, but he was not at all sure that the support of the new journal helped. Everywhere he went, he found opposition to the *Methodist*—preachers loyal to the official *Advocates* would have nothing to do with this interloper in Methodist journalism or with any movement it sponsored.⁸ So notwithstand-

ing the support of the *Methodist*—or perhaps because of it—the cause of lay delegation languished. If it were to succeed it must have support from some leaders of the church. As bishop, Simpson had no right to act—or at least no precedent for action. Bishops were “mediators between contending parties” with the duty “to maintain the existing system in its integrity.”⁹ No one of them had ever broken the traditional neutrality and unanimity of the episcopal board on any issue before the church. Perhaps Abel Stevens had been right—a man who wished to lead ought not to be bishop.

Simpson made up his mind, none the less, to state his conviction publicly. He was at the apex of his popularity in the church. Constantly in demand for the lecture platform—at fees which considerably augmented his episcopal salary—he had remade the war address into an optimistic commentary on current affairs; he lectured also on Lincoln, on the Holy Land, on the Bible and languages. In American Methodism his name had come to stand next to Asbury. But, for the first time in the history of Methodism, he was about to bring severe criticism and censure upon a bishop.

Prompted by a sudden and severe illness when he was in California in 1862, he expressed his views to the one church paper friendly to lay delegation, the *Northwestern Christian Advocate*: “Though in a minority, my judgment and my sympathies are strongly in favor of lay representation.”¹⁰

The friends of lay delegation immediately took new hope. They planned to hold a big rally in New York City in the spring of 1863 and begged him and Bishop Janes to speak. Janes replied curtly: “I judge it inexpedient for me to identify myself with your proposed convention.” Daniel Ross importuned Simpson: “On other subjects you would not hesitate a moment.” Although it was not “Methodistical” for a bishop “to enter into a progressive movement,” it seemed to him that “we must carry on the thing bravely, or it will fail of success.”¹¹ Simpson accepted the invitation.

The rally was held in March, 1863. Simpson, cautious and conciliatory, praised the laymen for their patience and their “brotherly kindness.” He wanted this “state of things to continue,” so as “not to destroy a single element of Methodism.” In Chicago he had seen workmen elevate buildings by means of hundreds of screws, all of which were turned in perfect harmony. With no disturbance to the occupants, a house might go up an entire story. “So, that is what I

want to see you laymen do. I want to see the whole edifice raised up without jostling or jarring one single arrangement." ¹²

In May he spoke to a larger, more representative convention, arguing that Wesley's "great movement" had "called lay influence into exercise in the Church." "Class-leaders were appointed, stewards were called into action, exhorters were licensed, local preachers were selected, and there came up out of the ranks of the Church a body of laymen to spread personal holiness through the Church." Methodist people taught "to work, to pray, to sing, to exhort, to lead class, to preach, very naturally should inquire: 'Why should we not also have something to do in planning in the great arrangements of the Church?' " The opponents of lay delegation, he thought, were afraid to trust the people, the very people who had been brought into the church under their ministrations. ¹³

The laymen immediately ordered the printing of 50,000 copies of the speech. ¹⁴

The opponents of lay delegation quickly picked up the gauntlet that Simpson had thrown down; but they observed few of the other conventions of chivalry. A ministerial pamphleteer in Philadelphia was brutal in his attack. He thought the bishop's contention that preachers who opposed lay delegation were afraid to "trust the people" might pass for rhetoric but hardly rose to "the dignity of sober argument." The bishop's associations had led him astray: he imagined that he had heard the voice of the people, but he had not. Unhappily the bishops could not even mingle with the people. They were "monopolized by a class of persons whose *leisure* and *position*" gave them "facilities for extending an elegant hospitality." Hence, the bishops knew "but little of preachers or members beyond those who sparkle in the galaxy of Methodist aristocracy." The preacher, through "self-denial and wonderful skill," had built Methodism into a great church; and now self-seeking laymen, aided by a few of the clergy, sought to deny him the "fruit of his labor." ¹⁵

As the general conference of 1864 approached, some threatened to bring Simpson to judgment for his advocacy of a "revolutionary measure." ¹⁶ But it came and passed without incident. The bishops reiterated the stand they had taken in 1860, and the conference itself took no action. There was only one small cloud on the horizon, scarcely the size of a man's hand: the election of Daniel Curry as editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.

Curry and Simpson had been friends in times past. They had joined hands in 1848 to write the legislation which repealed the plan of separation. Simpson, elected editor of the *Western Christian Advocate* that year, had secured Curry as his New York correspondent. But Curry had grown austere with the years. He felt his responsibilities greatly, and he looked the part. He was tall, with a slender but rugged frame, thin, somber face, and shaggy, overhanging brows. His mouth and chin were narrow but firm as lines made with a carpenter's rule, and his ideas were as set as the thin line of his compressed lips.¹⁷

In the first year of his editorship Curry had no occasion to express his views on lay representation. In May, 1866, the general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, declared in favor of the admission of lay representatives. They were fully aware that in "being *first* in a good measure" they had "no mean" advantage over their northern brethren. Theodore Tilton's *Independent*, seizing upon the incident to urge lay representation on the northern Methodists, invoked the name of Simpson, who stood "fully and publicly committed to the reform."¹⁸ The next month Simpson renewed his support of the change at a laymen's convention in Boston.

Curry made a caustic appraisal of this new outbreak of the agitation. He thought the whole movement essentially in favor of a "church aristocracy." The leaders were disdainful of the "mediocre minds of the Church, the common herd"; they were concerned only with "'our best minds,' and those 'especially in the centers of opinion.'" ¹⁹

A year passed, and in the fall of 1867 Simpson again addressed a convention of laymen, in New York. Bishop Calvin Kingsley, who had been a student under Simpson at Allegheny College, also spoke in support of the reform, and Bishop Baker indicated his favor by his presence. Simpson praised the laymen for their moderate and judicious advocacy of the reform: "When history writes up the record, it will be this: that in the two years that the ministers and laymen were talking over this subject of Lay Representation, the Church added more than two hundred thousand to her communion." Whatever else might be said, it could not be asserted that discussion of the question had injured "either the piety of the Church, or its increase in numbers."²⁰

Curry, incensed to the point of misinterpreting Simpson's

remark, charged that "there never was a more palpable sophism" than the bishop's argument "that because the Church has greatly prospered during the pendency of this lay delegation discussion, therefore we are indebted to the healthful influence of that discussion for our prosperity." In a scorching editorial he denounced "Bishops as Partisans." Bishops had never been partisan. Not even in the days of the "righteous cause of antislavery" had any bishop ever been seen "in any Church antislavery meeting or convention even as a spectator, much less as a participant." He thought the office of bishop "one of great dignity and responsibility . . . beset about with very delicate relations." "A word, a gesture, a smile, an intonation, from a bishop" might become "painfully significant, and far reaching in its consequences." He could not do "as a bishop, what he might properly do as a man."²¹

The *Methodist* replied with spirit. It thought the church had "never intended that a preacher, in becoming a bishop, should abdicate his manhood." *Zion's Herald* of Boston quoted Charles Sumner's "God made me a man before the government made me a commissioner" and reminded Curry that even bishops were men before they were bishops. All of the other official Advocates lined up in support of Simpson.²²

In 1868 the friends of lay delegation obtained an almost unanimous vote that the general conference was ready to admit laymen, if the reform were voted by the people and by the requisite three-fourths of the ministers. The bishops were to lay the matter before the people in June, 1869, and before the ministers at the annual conferences of 1869 and 1870.

In June of 1869, shortly before the vote of the people, the laymen met in convention at Pittsburgh. Simpson, heretofore cautious and conciliatory, laid aside his wraps and stepped into the fight with his arms bared. The church, he said, was the "whole body of believers," and as such had "the right to form its own rules, instead of being governed by a hierarchy." He ridiculed those who feared revolutionary change and cried out, "Let well enough alone." He well remembered when people had considered it as rank heresy to allow a musical instrument in the church. Thirty-five years before, there in Pittsburgh at Liberty Street, the laying down of a carpet in the church "came very near driving away . . . half a dozen families." Was not progress a law of society?

It was said that lay delegation would cost too much. He laughed at the thought. Pittsburgh, for example, would be allowed to send two delegates to the quadrennial conference—at a cost of thirty or forty dollars each, fifty at the most. Double the estimated cost, and the total would be two hundred dollars. With forty thousand members in the Pittsburgh conference that would mean one-half cent per member, every four years. Yet that “half-cent argument” was “used by your doctors of divinity in New York and elsewhere.” His audience did not miss the allusion to Curry.

He ridiculed also the argument that “factious, ambitious, rich and ungodly men” might capture the high places of the church. Some such men might get in, he admitted, reminding his audience that Judas was among the twelve. But “If such be the general character of the laity, alas! for the work which ministers have been doing in the last century.”²³

A disappointingly small number of laymen (some 150,000) voted, but they favored the change, two to one. The friends of lay delegation claimed a victory morally obligating the ministers to vote the constitutional amendment.

Curry saw matters differently: The vote of the laymen demonstrated that they were not interested in the question—five-sixths of them had “declined the responsibility of advising” the clergy. As for himself, he was more than ever convinced that the movement was of the clergy and not of the laity, and therefore was inexpedient. “Accordingly, in the fear of God, and upon our fidelity to the Church, we must oppose it, and, if granted the opportunity, vote against it.”²⁴ The ministers were to vote in the fall and spring of 1869 and 1870. Both sides girded their loins for the final battle.

III

In the meantime, two other issues complicated the question of lay delegation: an attack upon the episcopacy itself, and the management of the Book Concern. The episcopacy had been under justifiable criticism since 1863, when Simpson moved from Evanston to Philadelphia and thus deprived the West of his extra-conference services. The following January E. R. Ames shifted his residence from Indianapolis to Baltimore. Only the superannuated senior bishop of the church, Thomas A. Morris, remained in the West.

The *Christian Advocate and Journal* promptly suggested that the church establish episcopal districts.²⁶

Curry, elected editor the following year, had little to say about this issue until after his broadside against bishops as partisans. Then he came out openly for episcopal districts with a requirement that bishops move from one district to another every four years. It was generally expected that the church would add two or three men to the episcopal board in 1868—there were only seven effective bishops to serve a million and a quarter members and eighty-five hundred ministers. The Church, South, with scarcely half the membership, had elected five new bishops at its last general conference. Thomas Morris, senior bishop of the northern church, called for an addition of three men to the episcopal board. Curry dissented. The church had all the bishops it needed, under the existing system. The proper work of the episcopacy, he said (without alluding directly to Simpson and the lure of politics and the lecture circuit), was to preside over the annual conferences and to appoint preachers to their stations. If the bishops limited their activities to the business of their office they would certainly not be overworked.²⁶

The performance of episcopal duties was an arduous task, despite the strictures of Curry. Each bishop presided over four or five annual conferences in the spring and a like number in the fall. Each conference lasted from four or five days to nearly two weeks. The entire period of official business was brief but intense. Mornings were given over to business; afternoons, to committee meetings, evenings, frequently, to preaching. The bishop met his advisers—the presiding elders of the conference—at whatever hours he could for determining the placement of the two hundred or so preachers, and often these sessions ran well past midnight. Simpson, believing that his power for good lay in the pulpit, often took on the additional assignment of preaching. And in the 1860's, in an effort to help the younger ministers, he introduced a series of morning lectures, scheduled at six o'clock, which were well attended and enthusiastically received.²⁷

The exhausting labor, the loss of sleep, the strain of conflict and decision, played havoc with the health of the bishops. In 1870, in the midst of the balloting on lay delegation, Bishop Edward Thomson, who had been elected in 1864, was stricken with pneumonia. Weakened by his exertions at the annual conference of West Vir-

ginia, he died before he could leave Wheeling. The church had scarcely recovered from the shock when the word was flashed that Bishop Kingsley had died suddenly from "neuralgic seizure" (apparently heart attack) on a trip to the Orient and the Holy Land, at Beirut.

Remorseful, the church began to reflect upon the advisability of calling a special session of the general conference to elect new bishops. Curry pooh-poohed the idea. The church still had five bishops, "every one of them able to do full work." They could, "without any very distressing overwork, get along with their necessary duties for two years."²⁸

That fall, Davis Clark, the third of the bishops elected in 1864, was stricken. He rallied sufficiently to meet two of his spring conferences, with the help of a colleague; but by May, 1871, he was dead. There remained only four effective bishops: Scott, Simpson, and Ames, elected in 1862; and Janes, elected in 1844.

The other issue which complicated the question of lay delegation was much more spectacular. John Lanahan, Simpson's lieutenant in the border struggle of 1860, had been named assistant book agent for New York at the general conference of 1868. Irascible and suspicious, almost paranoiac, he was quick to ferret out enemies of the church. In his new office he had ample reason to be suspicious. The book concern was big business: one of the largest publishing houses in America, with sales in 1867 amounting to over a half-million dollars. He had been in office only a few months when he discovered frauds amounting to several hundred thousand dollars. For ten years the son of the former assistant agent, serving as an unauthorized commissioner, had been making purchases for two of the departments at an annual profit to himself of ten to twenty thousand dollars. Two of the departments had been guilty of other fraudulent practices, including the drawing of money without vouchers, and the reselling of goods. When the senior agent, Thomas Carlton, showed no interest Lanahan immediately suspected him of being a party to the fraud and using the funds of the church to speculate in oil. Silenced by his colleagues, who denied him further access to the books, he broke the story in the columns of the *New York Times* in September, 1869. It was the sensation of the year.²⁹

The *Methodist* immediately made capital of the story. Lana-

han's revelations proved the need for lay participation in the affairs of the church: Preachers were not businessmen, and they were not competent to oversee a huge operation like the book concern.³⁰

Curry in the *Christian Advocate* was scornful: Lanahan had presented no proof; and even if his charges were true they proved no "defalcation"—only that purchases had not been made "with proper care and economy." He was "reprehensible" for airing the problems of the church through the public press. As for the *Methodist* and the laymen—if there were any fraud it was committed by laymen, and detected and corrected by preachers. Must the editors of the *Methodist*, in an effort to keep their sheet alive, seek always to find something wrong with the church? "Vulture like, they feast their voracious nostrils on the effluvia of putrid reputation, which, if none exists, they endeavor to produce."³¹

Nearly the whole of the official press raised an outcry against Lanahan, who, charged with misconduct, neglect of official duties, untruthfulness, irascibility, insubordination, want of business qualifications, was suspended from office. The bishops, in the official hearing, made short shrift of the unsupported charges and restored him. Still denied access to the books, and determined now to exonerate himself before the public, Lanahan appealed to the courts. It was un-Methodistical—contrary to the rule of the discipline—for a minister to go to court against his brethren. He was, therefore, again suspended and brought to trial.³²

IV

In the meantime, in the spring of 1870, the preachers voted on lay delegation. Bishop Janes, sweet-tempered and much loved but timid, had finally come out for the reform. Now that the laymen had expressed their preference for the change he thought the preachers were obligated to vote for it. The bishops, therefore, stood five to four for lay delegation—four to three after the deaths of Thomson and Kingsley.

Simpson hoped for the support of Bishop Ames; but in the fall of 1869 a friend warned him that Ames was "doing more harm than any other twenty men in the church." He was opposed to lay delegation, and was speaking against it at every conference. As the votes came in they confirmed the report. Where Ames presided, lay

delegation lost. Simpson was despondent. Unless Ames's opposition could be "modified," he feared lay delegation was lost.³³

On the other hand, wherever Simpson conducted conferences that fall and spring the reform prospered. Southeast Indiana was 76 for, 4 against; Tennessee, 37 for, 0 against; Philadelphia, 142 for, 18 against; Vermont, 71 for, 14 against; and even New Jersey, under the very thumb of Daniel Curry, 80 for, 52 against. Simpson kept his own tabulations; the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, the *Methodist*, and the other papers ran box scores. As the results came in it was apparent that the vote would be very close.³⁴

In mid-April, Curry reported with some confidence that if the trend continued in about the same proportion lay delegation would lose by 200 votes. A month later the race was closer, but he was still confident. Maine, in a preliminary skirmish, had divided almost equally. If that vote could be taken as official, there were but two more conferences—East Maine and the foreign conference, in Germany—with 100 votes between them. To win, the reformers would have to secure 49 votes, not an easy task.³⁵

Simpson, presiding at the Maine conference, was "sore and sad" at heart. "We shall be beaten," he confessed to Ellen. "Lay-delegation is probably lost." Still the vote might be close enough for the question to be settled at the German conference. Ames had been scheduled to go to Germany but had gladly yielded to Kingsley, who could stop en route home from the Holy Land. Kingsley's presence would have assured a favorable vote; but with his death, Simpson saw that he himself must make the trip. James agreed, and the two plotted quietly to gain the assent of the board of bishops. Ames, who suffered from seasickness, agreed to the arrangement. However, when it became apparent that lay delegation might depend upon the German vote he was very "cross," and Simpson feared that he might yet change his mind and make the trip to Germany.³⁶

In the end, the crisis occurred at the Maine conference. As the brethren talked among themselves and with the bishop, they began to look more favorably upon lay delegation. Simpson took heart. The vote would not go so badly against them as he had feared. Day by day the situation improved. When the vote was taken, instead of being against lay delegation, it stood 60 for, 31 against. "And now," Simpson reported to Ellen, "there is no question as to our

entire success." A week later East Maine, with Simpson presiding, voted for the reform, 43 to 14. Lay delegation was approved without the German vote.³⁷

Curry muttered darkly about "influence": the manner in which the canvass had been conducted gave him "inexpressible sorrow." But Simpson found the reform "quietly accepted" by all save Curry, who could not "conquer his wrath."³⁸ The battle against the bishops, however, was not over.

In the spring of 1871 John Lanahan came to trial the second time. The book committee, angered by his indiscretion and his disregard of the discipline and the reputation of the church, was disposed to act quickly and with minimum interference from the bishops. Simpson, although he looked on Lanahan's act with "entire disapprobation," had no intention of being dictated to by the committee or of rendering judgment until he heard the evidence. He insisted that the bishops must act concurrently with the committee and demanded that they be permitted to employ a secretary and make a complete transcription of the proceedings. The other bishops concurred. In the end, the majority of the committee voted to remove Lanahan; Janes and Ames, delegated to act for the bishops, divided—Janes for removal, Ames against. Concurrence of both bishops was required for removal, and so Lanahan was left in office.³⁹

Curry, protesting vigorously against the action of the bishops, renewed his demand that they be assigned to districts; he went a step further: he proposed that they be elected not for life, but for a four-year term.⁴⁰

Simpson was grimly amused. He rather enjoyed the "hackling," he wrote to Ellen, for "this time my colleagues share it with me." As far as he was concerned, "they may elect me out, just as soon as they please." He fancied they would change their tune by the next general conference, even though it was rumored that Curry was opening a "long campaign." He understood, too, that this was to be "war to the knife."⁴¹

The rumor was well founded. In midsummer Curry released another broadside. The episcopacy must be limited to districts and to a four-year term, in order to protect it from "possible prostitution in worldly and ambitious purposes." In the past the emoluments of the office had been small, the associations humble, and it had

offered little but labor and privation. The salary, still far from extravagant (\$4,500 per year), was no longer "contemptibly small," and the "incidental emoluments accruing to a popular bishop" (lecture fees, railroad passes, gifts from opulent laymen) were "sufficient to stimulate the cupidity of any one inclined to be covetous." But there was an even greater danger. The Methodist Church was the largest denomination in America. An "able, worldly, and unscrupulous man," enjoying life tenure as chief officer of so large and strong a body, might use the office "to dictate the policy of the government, and to determine the election of Presidents." Curry confessed, lamely, that the episcopacy was yet "pure beyond a suspicion"—but was it not "wise to guard against what is foreseen to be a possible danger of great magnitude in the not remote future?"⁴²

Simpson was not without resources. Enlisting the cooperation of Janes, he began to prompt the annual conferences to give an expression of "attachment to the *Itinerancy* and the *Episcopacy* and to instruct their delegates to oppose any material modification in our system." He had no doubt that this stratagem would "excite" Curry; but he would "strain every nerve anyhow," and so more mischief could scarcely be done. The general conference of 1872 promised to be exciting.⁴³

As a matter of fact, the conference was an anticlimax to the roaring battles of the quadrennium. Lay delegates were seated without a ripple. A special committee sustained most of Lanahan's charges of fraud in the book concern, and the conference adopted its report without debate. Far from rebuking the bishops for wasting their energies outside the episcopacy, or hedging them about lest they corrupt the church, the conference elected eight new bishops, trebling the number who were effective. But, in the perverse manner of democratic assemblies, the same conference, having denied Curry his reforms, reelected him editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. The clergyman, as well as the philosopher, had good use for the gadfly.

XXV

EVEN THE EAGLE

ON June 21, 1871, Matthew Simpson, scarcely able to get out of his sickbed, bent over his pocket diary, tightened his fingers about his pen, and wrote in a rapid script: "This day I am 60 years old." It was a day to conjure with. Thomson, Kingsley, Clark, fellow bishops, two of them younger than he, all of them dead within these fifteen months. Three weeks before, he himself had suffered a chill, followed by severe palpitations of the heart and a bilious attack. For two weeks he had been confined to his room, and for several days he had been unable to leave his bed. Now, gripping his pen, he looked to the future: "I am admonished that my day is nearly over— The sun declines—the shadows lengthen. The night cometh What my hand finds to do should be done quickly—earnestly—faithfully."¹

The future was not so short for him as he feared. Despite his sixty years, his sun was still well above the horizon. In two months he would be back at his duties; and a dozen years of energetic and fruitful service stretched before him.

Still, sixty years was a long vista to look back upon. Year by year his friends and loved ones had dropped along the way. Charles Elliott, Father Haven, Allen Wiley—men who had directed his destiny in the Ohio-Indiana days—were gone. Lucien Berry, whom he had bound to his heart like a brother, had been taken in his prime by erysipelas thirteen years ago. Joe Wright was dead, too, the Honorable Joseph A. Wright, congressman from Indiana, governor, minister to Berlin, removed by Lincoln, restored by Andy Johnson in 1865, but dead at his post in less than two years. The irrepressible William M. Daily, friend of the Indiana days, brilliant and indiscreet, lovable and provoking, disgraced by his fondness for women, and removed from the presidency of Indiana University in

1859, had been worse than dead when a friend of Simpson found him early in the war, drunk in a Washington jail. But Daily was resilient. Fired from one government post, he secured another and was sent to New Orleans after the war. In 1869 Simpson had brought him back into the itinerancy, secured his admission to the Louisiana conference, and named him presiding elder for his district.²

Other friends had done well. John Wheeler, Simpson's first graduate at Indiana Asbury, not brilliant but steady and plodding, had made his way up to the presidency of Baldwin University in Ohio. John Evans, denied a political career, had settled down to being Colorado's first citizen and chief entrepreneur, and James Harlan was still in the United States Senate. Of more recent business and political friends, only Daniel L. Ross had been stricken. For him and his Methodist friends, death was a double tragedy. He was only forty-seven years old, and he had died in 1868, too soon to know of the winning campaign for lay delegation.³

The last deep personal sorrow to afflict Matthew Simpson had come in 1868 with the death from consumption of his elder son, Charles. He and Ellen had worried over him for months. He had taken him to Louisiana and the southern conferences in 1866, and had sent him to Cuba for six months in the warm sun; but the hacking cough and the persistent fever would not let go. The next summer, with Ellen, he had taken Charles to Minnesota, where the climate was said to be good for persons who suffered from diseases of the lungs. But Charles failed to rally, and died in the following spring, before his twenty-ninth birthday.⁴

Even so, there had been some assuaging of grief. As a child Charles had been devoted to the Sunday school and the church; as a young man he had been indifferent to both. But in August before his death he had gone to the camp meeting at Vineland. There, one afternoon, surrounded by importuning friends, he had dropped to his knees and raised his voice to plead for the assurance he had known in childhood. The aging bishop, with the tears streaming down his transparent face, had knelt by his son to welcome him back to the faith of his fathers. It was a satisfying experience to an old man who had given his life to preaching the glories of the Unseen. Still, now that Charles was dead he was shaken. What was it like, after all, in that Spirit World? How many times had he

asked himself the same question about Charles? "Does he see me?"⁶

He had lost his widowed mother too, at the advanced age of eighty-six, shortly before the death of Charles. Uncle Matthew was to live until 1874, before finally giving up, weary with the burden of ninety-eight years.

Matthew Simpson had much to look back on in 1871, much to make a man reminisce; but he was not ready to call himself old. The present was full of demands, and the future still an open road. His son Verner was eighteen, and about to enter Wesleyan University. Verner was something of a problem, too much interested in the girls, a little wild, and lacking in application to studies. The bishop worried about him (this son who was to be forty years a Methodist choir-master), warned him against evil, tobacco-using companions, taught him algebra, reviewed mechanics with him. Nor had the two younger girls, Ida, sixteen, and Libbie, twenty-one, been especially diligent about their school work. He had scolded Libbie once when she admitted that she had not applied herself closely but promised to make up for it. "Do you know, Libbie, we never can 'make up' what is past . . . No moment will ever come back again. That idea of 'making up' has ruined many a one. We must treasure the moments as they fly."⁶

His oldest daughter, Mathilda, was soon to be married to a Methodist preacher in Philadelphia; and Anna, his second daughter, was already married to Colonel James Riley Weaver, United States consul at Brindisi. Riley was a great favorite of the bishop's. After studies at Allegheny College and three and one-half years in the Union army, much of it in prison camps, he had taken a degree in theology at Garrett Biblical Institute and had taught at West Virginia College at Morgantown. His marriage to Anna in the Philadelphia home had been a great occasion. President and Mrs. Grant were there, and the President's appointment of the young colonel to Brindisi (at the bishop's urgent solicitation) had been a handsome wedding gift.⁷

Now, in 1871, Mrs. Simpson and the three girls had been abroad for months, visiting Consul Riley Weaver, his wife Anna, and their baby, and traveling about western Europe. The bishop had missed them greatly, had begged for details of their travel and personal life. What did they think? How did they feel? Did they sleep well at night? Did they dream? Did they think of *anybody*

across the sea? And what of Mr. Weaver, the consul? Did he put on airs, or was he "Riley" still? And Anna? Did she allow herself to be called Anna? or must she be addressed as *Madonna* Weaver? And what of Ida and Ella, and Libbie? Especially Libbie: did she talk most in her sleep about Johnny or Willie? ⁸

He himself had been too busy these months with conferences, dedications, lectures, and anniversaries to be lonely. Now and then when he did get home he had played at "make believe"—that he could "get along right pleasantly" without them. But it was terribly hard to win the game. Even the birds were lonely, though Mrs. Stiles, the housekeeper, said they seemed to know when he came home: the canary was once more lively and the mockingbird, which had been mute, had begun to whistle and sing. "That was a pretty welcome, was it not?" Oh, yes, one thing more: he had had all his clothes washed! And he had shaved nearly every other day, brushed his hair, and made an effort to look "tolerably decent." But one night in his terror he had dreamed that Ellen "had come at him with a brush and bottle." ⁹

How thankful he was that God had enabled him to give his family a trip to Europe, that their feet had been in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the Mount of Olives, that they had seen the lofty pyramids, had "walked among the ruins of the Parthenon at Athens, and had tasted the honey of Hymattus"! How times had changed since he was young! He had not even crossed the mountains until he was forty, and here his children were, rambling all over Europe.¹⁰

In one respect, at least, the opponents of lay delegation had been right: Matthew Simpson no longer knew the ways of the poor, nor walked the paths of the downtrodden. His \$4,500 salary as bishop was no mean sum, and he also received traveling expenses, fees for lectures, gifts for special sermons, railroad passes, and a mortgage-free house. Moreover, he and Ellen had begun to realize substantial returns on their investments. Who could have believed that Matthew Simpson, leaving Cadiz, Ohio, for Madison College with \$11.25 in his pocket, or the newly elected Bishop Simpson of Pittsburgh, too poor to live in the country because it "would require a carriage," would in time make his purchase and casually jot down in his diary, "Bought Phaeton"? Who could have imagined that the same Matthew Simpson would have a summer cottage

(purchased for him, it is true, by friends) at Long Branch—the largest, noisiest, and most garish of the summer watering places frequented by the opulent of Philadelphia and New York. And who could have supposed that, before the end of the 1870's, a Pittsburgh layman would bequeath him \$60,000, or that a dozen years later the bishop himself, by careful management, would leave a hundred-thousand-dollar estate to his widow? ¹¹

Matthew Simpson's day was not over in 1871; the darkness was not gathering so quickly as he allowed himself to suppose. Ellen and the girls, hearing of his illness, hurried home; but he rallied before they arrived, and in September was back at the business of conducting his conferences.

II

The declining years gave Matthew Simpson not only affluence but easy access to men in high places. He counted President Grant among his friends, entertaining him in Philadelphia, visiting him in Washington and Long Branch. He had first met the general in 1864 at Nashville and had found him "not very communicative." But Grant had gone along with the occupation of McKendree Chapel. And a little later, after both of them had gone over to the Radical party, the bishop thought Grant "one of the grandest names in all the land." ¹²

Grant also had reason to be cordial, outside political considerations. He was the son of a devout Methodist woman, and his wife was warmly sympathetic to the Methodists. If his relations to God were amicable rather than intimate, he none the less attended the Methodist church when he went, was quite often in the congregation when Simpson preached at Washington or at Long Branch. He served on the board of trustees of the Metropolitan Methodist Church in Washington, gave five hundred dollars to the building fund, made a dramatic, last-minute appearance in his pew for the dedication of the new building, contributed when the hat was passed for Simpson's cottage at Long Branch. In 1871 he named Simpson on the commission to investigate Santo Domingo with a view to annexation. For once, the bishop was tempted to step out of his ecclesiastical role; but he had to decline the appointment because of John Lanahan's trial. ¹³

In Grant's cabinet Postmaster-General Creswell, a graduate of Dickinson College, was "the friend of the Methodists" and of Simpson; Vice President Schuyler Colfax and Senator Daniel Webster Voorhees, both Indianans, made capital of their Indiana acquaintance with the bishop.¹⁴

The succession of Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency in 1877 only strengthened Simpson's tie with the White House. Lucy Webb Hayes was a Methodist, a graduate of the Wesleyan Female College in Cincinnati, an active leader in Methodist missionary societies, and a long-time friend of the Simpsons. The gentle Hayes, too meek to be devout, too conventional to rebel, had attended church regularly from his youth up. After his marriage he went with Lucy to the Methodist chapel in Cincinnati, and to the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington. In Philadelphia the President and his wife were now and then guests in the home of the bishop, and in Washington he sent his private carriage to meet the Simpsons at the depot, and Mrs. Hayes entertained them in the White House.¹⁵

The Methodist press, pleased by the growing prestige of the church, published an occasional note on General Grant's attendance at divine worship, on President Hayes's church activities, or on the courtesy which either of them may have extended to Simpson or other Methodists. The non-Methodist press complained of Methodist influence on Grant and Hayes, or accused Simpson of interfering in political appointments. Certainly there was reason for more than the lifting of eyebrows when Grant, in turning the administration of Indians over to the churches, gave the Methodists the lion's share of the agencies; and there was occasion for complaint, too, when he named John P. Newman—three times chaplain of the Senate, and pastor of the Metropolitan Methodist Church—Inspector of United States Consulates. The post was created, said the hostile press, in order to permit Grant's pastor to make "a tour of the world at public expense."¹⁶

Simpson's political activity was largely that of aiding friends to secure appointments. The word of his influence was abroad, and friends and strangers without number importuned his help. "Now it is said by those who profess to know that my old friend Bishop Simpson has as much influence with General Grant as any other living man . . ." "Knowing your influence with Genl U. S. Grant, I

make bold to ask you a favor . . ." Even the widow of an Episcopalian minister, seeking an appointment for her daughter, reported that officials in Washington had told her "if I could get you to write to our most excellent President . . . he would grant it with pleasure to you." A former governor wanted a post in China; the United States Consul at Belfast wanted an increase in salary and thought that Simpson might aid him; a preacher-postmaster, deprived of his office because he had "occasionally juggled money order sums" to repay the thefts of his brother-in-law, wanted the bishop to intercede with Postmaster-General Creswell, who had removed him.¹⁷

Simpson, more cautious than he had been a few years earlier, avoided written recommendations. He was pretty testy when a Presbyterian sheet wrongly accused him of influencing the transfer of a military detail from Western University (Presbyterian) to Dickinson College (Methodist) and labeled him "the wily Bishop." Such expressions, he thought, ought to be governed by "good taste & Christian charity." But he played his politics, none the less. He wrote warm, congratulatory notes to men newly appointed to high position; he now and then checked the "weather chart" in Congress (the members, he noted, "watch how the wind blows"); and he did battle for special friends. He and Harlan maneuvered the election of John P. Newman to the chaplaincy of the Senate; he intervened with Hayes to prevent the removal of the secretary of Arizona Territory; and he helped a good brother to a consulship in Central America. The last produced results which the President scarcely anticipated: the establishment of a Christian mission and scholars who "sing our beautiful hymns set to spanish music."¹⁸

When it came to his son-in-law, Riley Weaver, the bishop put aside all reticence. He defended him against criticism, urged his promotion, denied rumors of his resignation. When he thought "mischief was brewing" he appealed directly to Hamilton Fish, the Secretary of State, and sent the Methodist preacher in Washington to see the President. Grant was reassuring—he thought there was no danger from Fish, for he knew "how the appointment was made."¹⁹

In another matter, Simpson was less successful. He was unable to save his old friend James Harlan. Harlan's administration of the Interior Department, particularly of Indian affairs, had resulted in

charges (not established) against his personal integrity. He had alienated some ambitious friends in the Republican party by his seizure of the senatorial nomination in 1866, and he had prompted Methodist politicians to revive the charges brought against him in the church many years before. Defeated for renomination in 1872, he entered the lists again in 1875. But he was opposed, among others, by a fellow Methodist and former congressman, Hiram Price. There was, he realized, only one man in the country who could prevail upon Price to step out of the race, and that was Bishop Simpson. Could the bishop make a trip out West "for other business" and look into the matter? But it was no use. Price would not withdraw. Facing sure defeat, Harlan yielded. Simpson had already suggested to the President that he place the Iowan in his cabinet. Grant, characteristically neither offending his friends nor committing himself, had responded with "expressions of confidence" in Harlan, but had taken no action.²⁰ Simpson's one major political triumph—the placing of a fellow Methodist in the cabinet—had resulted in the end of a career.

III

One thing the war years had given Matthew Simpson was assurance. Whatever the traditions of the church, whatever the strictures of Daniel Curry, he felt a new freedom in speaking out on public policy. He did not always speak with insight, but he spoke. Without being a reformer, he helped to broaden the church's concept of things spiritual, and to prepare the way for social leadership.

His most popular lecture was the War Address, revised and brought up to date as a commentary on the times. He praised the reconstruction program of the Radicals, eulogized Bismarck, criticized the American minister to France for "toadyism" to Napoleon III, advocated compulsory education. Above all, he praised the nation's representative form of government as superior to absolute monarchy or any of the parliamentary systems, because the people were "equally represented no matter how far from our seat of government." The country had safely extended from Portland, Maine, to San Francisco, and there was no reason why it should not reach "from Montreal to Mexico." The growth and influence of the

country, he said, had only begun to be realized. With the free immigration policy, and "every avenue of labor . . . thrown open to all classes alike," and with freedom of worship preserved for all, the country would soon have not forty but a hundred million of people. Because all this vast multitude would speak the English language, and came from all nations, "the English tongue would become the diplomatic language of the globe." The mission of the United States, the future of the country, was to teach the world the wisdom of the republican form of government.

A Minneapolis paper thought these ideas "rather fanciful," although "truly eloquent and instructive." The *Boston Post* agreed that the mission of the United States was a "sublime one," and "highly hopeful and encouraging" even if "a little rose-colored." The *Boston Daily Advertiser* was caustic. It thought the bishop had "few equals" as a speaker but preached "a great deal too much 'buncombe.'" The American people had no great need of instruction in "self-glorification." What they needed was "to be taught wisdom in this time of their peril; to be told of their dangers and duties rather than of their greatness and virtues."²¹

Matthew Simpson was impervious to the criticism. He belonged to the new era, the age of capitalism ushered in by the Civil War. Never in the history of the nation had there been such exploitation of resources, such industrial and commercial enterprise, such amassing of fortunes, such hopes for expansion of political borders. The church, following in the wake of economic and social forces, sought not to stem but to interpret the new economy, to lend to it a moral and ethical suasion and responsibility. So were born in the Gilded Age the gospels of wealth and of imperialism. A man might rightly accumulate great riches if he became the steward of the Lord, a nation might with righteousness enlarge its borders and extend its powers if it protected the people's spiritual heritage of freedom.

It was inevitable in a society which produced such a church and doctrine that Matthew Simpson should be one of its prophets. No critic of men, no Amos shouting, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof," he was a eulogist of country and church. In a new era he found only new cause for praise.

He was sympathetic with the reform movements, remarkably so for a Methodist bishop of his age. He took the platform for

women's rights and for temperance, but not as a leader in the reform. From Indiana Asbury days, when he had urged better educational opportunities for young women, he had been sympathetic with women's rights. In the manner insisted upon by the leaders of the suffrage movement, he always addressed his own wife as Mrs. Ellen H. Simpson. He subscribed to Lucy Stone's *Woman's Journal*, and he was induced to write an introduction to her volume *Woman Man's Equal*. In 1873 he gave a rousing speech before the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, urging suffrage for women. He thought society, debauched and corrupt under the direction of men, needed the "purifying will" of women. And he was pleased to note that in Wyoming and Utah, where women had the suffrage, the sun still rose and set: "The men are still men, and women are women still." Moreover, in Utah, twenty-four hours after women received the vote "the gamblers had taken flight."²²

Delighted with his "brave appeal for justice to the powerless," the suffragists sought his continued support. They must have the "religious element" if they were to triumph. With a stubborn unawareness of the ways of Methodism, Lucy Stone tried to coax him to address the annual meeting of the American Woman Suffrage Association. They would pay expenses, and the report in the Boston papers would introduce his speech "to the public more widely than it had been heretofore, and so it would all the sooner be called for by the lyceums and become a paying lecture."²³ How should Lucy Stone know that it was not becoming for him to lead in reforms? or that Matthew Simpson's energies were already so diverted from episcopal duties that he gave Curry and others ample reason to criticize?

He was equally sympathetic toward the temperance movement. As editor of the *Western Christian Advocate* he had campaigned vigorously against the licensing of taverns and "tippling-places." In Philadelphia he was elected president of a temperance society. He indorsed Frances Willard's W.C.T.U. and once "eulogized the crusade" against alcohol. But he declined to ally himself with the Prohibition party, and he was not given to dramatic protests on public occasions. Once in 1874, in Mexico, he attended a banquet of American citizens where wine was served. Unembarrassed, he responded to his toast in a sprightly speech which the company approved with "Great Applause." A few years later he and Mrs. Simp-

son were guests of Chester A. Arthur at the White House when wine was served. A non-Methodist religious paper, happy with the opportunity to criticize both the politics and the morals of the sister denomination, thought that the Methodist brethren ought to be "scandalized and perplexed." They would be "scandalized at their bishop for going back on the temperance platform of Christianity, and perplexed whether to give their influence to Arthur for re-nomination because of his attention to their bishop, or to withdraw it from him because he pressed the wine cup to his brother's lips." 24

Simpson was much more interested in a less spectacular reform: the gradual transformation of his church. He had been a leader in the change. He had espoused the improvement in architecture, the introduction of musical instruments and choirs, lay participation in the government, learning among the people, seminaries for preachers, cooperation with other denominations, the utilization of the findings of science, the appropriation of all knowledge as coming from God. There were a few who criticized his views—a Baptist minister thought the cross was not sufficiently prominent in his lectures; but there were many who were proud of him. "You are so *broad*, Bishop, in your views," wrote one editor (who was himself to become a bishop), "so catholic, so full of humanity that we cannot afford to lose you. Why are not more of our ministers able to see beyond our own walls?" 25

He spoke out more boldly in these latter days. Men lived in a new era, and the young preachers of the church ought to recognize that fact. Once the "only test of Methodism was a desire to flee from the wrath to come and a desire to be saved from their sins"; but now Methodism had come to represent "great freedom of individual opinion," to stand as "the most liberal form of the Christian Church." The young minister must study human nature, "and especially the human nature of his locality." Great waves of thought swept over men. They were "under different influences at different times." For that reason "a sermon which possessed wonderful power twenty years ago may have little effect now." So the young men must study these influences. 26

One of the waves of thought was the doctrine of evolution. It was not popular among the churches in 1878 when Simpson, attempting to interpret it, made the headlines of the daily press. Methodists were almost uniformly unfriendly to Darwin, although

Professor Winchell had not yet been expelled from his teaching post for his mild espousal of the dogma. President James McCosh of Princeton had long since called upon a reluctant church to reconcile evolution and religion, but Henry Ward Beecher, however much he loved to shock his congregation with his unorthodox views, had not yet found the courage to speak up.²⁷

Characteristically, Simpson approached the subject by reasserting that God was in the hearts of the people, not in the creeds or the rituals. He neither abandoned the Bible nor defended it; nor did he argue for evolution. He simply appropriated the hypothesis as an illustration of his belief in progress. He found the doctrine "one of great comfort." It was permeating society, taking hold of the minds of the day. Although it might be advanced "sometimes in forms a little strange and strained," he believed it came out of the "word of God." Christianity was getting into scientific thought. "The conviction that there is to be a still more glorious state of being is growing. Christian thought is permeating the world." When he read of the "advancement of man from the animal to the intellectual," from the child to the "developed intellect and spirituality," then he saw "how in God's providence I may develop still more and more, in one eternal universal existence."

Nor was he troubled when the geologists asserted that the world had existed for myriads of ages: "I am willing to admit all of that." The "true spirit of Christianity welcomes all investigation." It was better for humanity "that inquiry should not be repressed." The result, he believed, would be that "Revelation and Nature would be found to be in harmony in the end."²⁸

IV

In the fall and winter of 1878-1879, Matthew Simpson delivered the annual Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale College. The several Christian Advocates, the *Methodist*, and Theodore Tilton's *Independent* arranged to print the ten lectures as they were delivered, and the Methodist Book Concern secured the rights to publish them in book form. The lectureship had been filled by such distinguished clergymen as Henry Ward Beecher, Phillips Brooks, and the Englishman R. W. Dale, and the invitation to fol-

low them was a great honor to Bishop Simpson and his church, of which he took notice in his first lecture: "I who am of Western birth and education and a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church am here to address you, who are chiefly sons of New England, and Congregationalists in creed and Church polity. Verily the world moves!"²⁹

He packed his lectures with common sense: the preacher should prepare thoroughly; he should master the Bible, Christian doctrine, church history; he should study the sermons of other men, particularly the masters, but should also keep abreast of the times and study the interests and the vocations of the people to whom he ministered—the skills of the assayer of metals, the cases of the attorney, the diseases and remedies of the physician, the economy and thrift of the housewife.

Training in the techniques of speech was good, so far as it helped the preacher to avoid improper gesture or a wrong use of his voice. It was bad if it produced affectation or display. The real source of eloquence rested in the man, not in his delivery. "People judge not so much of truth in its abstract as in its embodied form." So the minister must be circumspect in conduct. He must avoid stimulants, the use of tobacco, poor management of his money; he must eschew dogmatism and self-conceit, he should stay out of politics, he must have a genuine affection for the masses, he should keep his conversation "pure and instructive."³⁰

Above all, he must be a man of conviction. He must feel his divine commission so strongly, he must have so great a compassion for men, that he could at all times be assured of divine assistance. Only then could he move men to tears and repentance, only then could he preach with power and unction. He himself had been present when "whole congregations" rose to their feet and were "freely bathed in tears." He could not explain this power—it was known only by its results. "It is not learning, not rhetoric, nor logic, nor oratory; but it can use these for its one great end." It could "burn and shine in the highest periods of the most eloquent speaker," or it could "thrill in the accents of the unlettered man." It was a magnetic power which kindled in the eye and sparkled from the speaker to the audience and from the audience to the speaker. It was the baptism of fire, the reenacting of Pentecost, the

indwelling of God, the highest grace of the Christian pulpit. It was the gift which, above all things else, he coveted for the young preacher.⁸¹

This ministerial power was also the gift which Matthew Simpson all of his long life had most coveted for himself. How often had he played upon his audience like the director of a great choir, moving from a hushed and dramatic pianissimo to the grand swell of the hallelujah chorus!

Even when he reached an age at which other men gave up eloquence for instruction, he still attempted the grand style. He had so often felt the divine afflatus, so often drunk of the Pierian Spring, that he could not slake his thirst on the prose of didactic homilies. But it was no longer easy for him to reach the heights of eloquence. He took flight on broken wing. "He was often slow, sometimes dull, sometimes a failure." He looked "weary and overworked." Hearers who had "hung upon his ministrations in other days thought they could see some tracing of advancing age." Now and then he laid hold on the old power, his clear eye flashing, his white hair and white face transfigured by emotion.⁸²

One such occasion took place in San Francisco in 1878, when he spoke in the Opera House. Henry Ward Beecher, preaching in the same place two Sundays earlier, had created a sensation, on which the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented derisively, "The furor attending the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount was tame in comparison." More than three thousand tickets had been issued, and twice as many people crowded the doors to gain admission. The Methodists, not to be outdone, stormed the Opera House in equal numbers to hear their bishop.⁸³

Beecher had been iconoclastic. Christianity was to be measured not by doctrine but by goodness. An infidel or a "Brahmin," if he had the qualities of love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, faith, was "more truly a Christian than many a church member." He attempted no argument, assembled no proofs. His technique was simply to put into juxtaposition a scriptural text, a few unorthodox ideas, and a number of homely, telling illustrations—some humorous, some pathetic.⁸⁴

Simpson, nearly as liberal in his views, made no attempt to shock the audience or to entertain it with ridicule and unexpected sallies. Addressing himself to the question, "Is Christianity a Fail-

ure?" he marshaled his evidence and assembled his proofs like a lawyer—not a legalist arguing the petty issues, but a Jeremiah Black, drawing upon the great examples of history to make an eloquent plea.³⁵

The San Francisco papers, delighted with the opportunity, indulged freely in comparison. In the outward graces of oratory Beecher was "incomparably the superior"; but for "intellectual depth and grasp" the palm "must be accorded to the Bishop." The tall, lean, thin-faced old man with the shrill, piping voice was extraordinarily moving. As he began to speak his face lighted up, his eyes flashed, and he carried men away on a "sparkling stream of thought" that made them forget his ungainly figure and uncouth gesture. The great audience listened with deep attention, broken only by expressions of approval, sobs and shouts. He was the "old man eloquent."³⁶

The last great speech of Simpson's career was in England in 1881, when he was seventy. He had gone to London for the Methodist Ecumenical Conference, a gathering of twenty-eight British and American branches of Wesleyanism. On the 2nd of July, President James A. Garfield had been struck by an assassin's bullet. He had lingered until late September, and then, with all the world hoping for his recovery, had died.

James Russell Lowell, American minister to Great Britain, issued a call for memorial services at Exeter Hall, London, at which some three thousand people were present, mostly Americans. There were several speakers, including Lowell and Simpson. Both the man of letters and the bishop joined freely in the grief of the people, and both yielded to the characteristic overstatement of sorrow. Lowell's address, read from manuscript, was more sustained in beauty of language and more lofty in sentiment. Simpson lacked somewhat in the universal qualities demanded by such an occasion. He dwelt laboriously on the President's faithfulness in attending church and took pains to justify Providence for cutting off the life of the statesman; but many of his ideas were similar to those of Lowell. He handled rather better the tribute to the American democratic system, which, for a fourth time, had survived the loss of a President during his term of office.

Lowell was cheered several times during his remarks—once loudly; but in general his "polished eloquence" was restrained and

dignified, with "no oratorical climaxes, and no pitfalls for applause." Simpson, deeply moved himself, and supported by great numbers of American Methodists who were in London for the conference, called out "strong emotions." He had spoken but briefly when the audience burst out with long-sustained applause. And then, in a "few thrilling sentences," in tribute to Queen Victoria, he "set all hearts on fire."

Throughout the recent months, the Queen had demonstrated unusual compassion for Mrs. Garfield; and both speakers singled out and praised her expression of sympathy. Lowell was bookish and aloof, but he excited cheers. Simpson, with an equal economy of words, drew a quick, dramatic picture, and then with sudden solemnity pronounced a benediction. It was not America alone, he said, that mourned the death of her President. "Kings and princes gather round his bier, and the queen of the greatest empire in the world drops a tear of sympathy with his widow, and lays a wreath upon his tomb." There were loud cheers and a burst of applause, and then the bishop continued, "God bless Queen Victoria for her womanly sympathy and her queenly courtesy." The whole audience rose spontaneously, waved their handkerchiefs, and "almost convulsively" gave three cheers for Queen Victoria. When they finally sat down "hundreds of strong men and women burst into tears." It was, said an observer, "one of the most impressive scenes ever witnessed."²⁷

V

Returning from England, the bishop took up the routine of official duty, held annual conferences, and answered the calls of the churches for his services. Old friends, especially, were anxious to have him for one more conference. "I hope we may yet meet again ere we go hence," he wrote to an aging colleague who had begged him to return to Indiana. Then in reminiscence he called the roll of those who had gone. "Death has reaped a wonderful harvest," he said, "and his sickle has not lost its sharpness yet. . . . Still while we *live*, let us *live*. We need not be sad or indolent, even if death peeps at us through the window or doorway."²⁸

Obedient to his own admonition, the old churchman continued to attend his conferences, conduct the business of the church, and to

"preach the word." Ever sensitive to his audiences, he recorded now and then "Large congregation," "Very large congregation," "Rainy day but a good congregation," "Attentive audience and some feeling," "Large congregation—deep feeling."³⁹

His last public service was the opening of the People's Church in Boston, early in the spring of 1884. Pleased to see in conservative New England a church with free pews—a church for the people—he attempted to preach with the "old-time power"; but he was too feeble. His eloquence was more pathetic than rousing. He was none the less full of confidence in the sure spread of the gospel and the coming reign of peace. "I think I see the light shining now on the hilltop. Christ's kingdom is coming, and the song shall arise, 'Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!'"⁴⁰

The trip to Boston, where the cold of the winter yet lingered, overtaxed his strength, and a few weeks before the meeting of the general conference of 1884 at Philadelphia illness overtook him and confined him to bed. All his old colleagues in the episcopacy and several who had been elected after him, had preceded him in death; he was the senior bishop of the church. All Methodism, therefore, watched anxiously as the conference approached—fearful that he would be unable to attend it, or that, in attending, his iron will would demand more than his feeble body could bear.⁴¹

No one knew until the opening of the conference whether or not he would be present; but when the bishops entered the hall and walked onto the platform the tall, spare figure of Matthew Simpson was at their head. The buzzing of conversation abruptly stopped, and applause rang through the auditorium. Promptly at nine o'clock he rose and stepped to the front of the platform. His transparent skin was drawn tightly across his cheekbones, giving his face "an expression as if chastened by the suffering of the sickness which so nearly prevented his attendance." In a voice not strong but clear, he called out, "The Conference will please come to order."⁴²

He was not often at the deliberations; but he was able to take part in the consecration of the newly elected bishops and, much to the surprise and pleasure of the delegates, made the closing speech at the last session. Regretting that he had not been able "to mingle more intimately" with members of the conference, he paid respect to the only three men who, with himself, had attended either the conference of 1844 or of 1848. Then with the optimism which had

characterized his entire ministry he praised the delegates who were present. He thought there had never been assembled "a more distinguished, a more able, and a more cultured body of delegates in the Methodist Episcopal Church." There had never been a larger proportion of youthful members. It was exceedingly gratifying, as the shadows gathered about him, "to see young men, truly cultured and devoted to the cause of Christ, able to come forward and take the reins of the Church." Praying God to make them "greater than the fathers," and exhorting them to "go forward from this time" and "do more vigorous work than we have ever done," he pronounced a benediction.⁴³

The hearers were frightened by his pallor, his emaciated form, his tremulous voice, but "little thought that the dreaded time was so near." For several days after the conference he seemed to improve. He even planned and prepared to go to a near-by sanitarium and resort; but on the day before his scheduled departure his strength gave way, and his physicians reported to the family that there was "no reasonable ground to hope for any improvement."⁴⁴

For a week, suffering greatly, he struggled with death. The anxious family gathered about him, read to him, prayed, sang hymns. Only now and then did he respond, and then only to echo some bit of scripture or line of hymn they had spoken, or to move his hand in feeble gesture. He lingered until June 18. Had he lived three more days, he would have been seventy-three years upon earth.

"Even the eagle," said the *Western Christian Advocate*, "grows weary at last and must rest."⁴⁵