II

STUDENT LIFE

COLLEGE life fifty years ago was a very different thing from what it is to-day. Endowments were small, and revenues were scanty, and college professors, as a rule, led lives of self-sacrifice. There were no John D. Rockefellers, George Peabodys, and James B. Colgates to give millions properly to equip colleges for work. The facilities were poor and meagre compared with the advantages of the present day. Our country lad began his college course without money or wealthy patron, knowing that he must rely on industry, economy, and constant application if he succeeded in obtaining a collegiate education. The four years' course seemed to him almost a lifetime to spend in study, especially as he had struggled along for several years already to prepare for college. He had been taught in
early life that if you wish to fell a tree, it pays to take time to sharpen the axe before beginning work, and he applied this teaching to the great work of life, and felt that his axe needed much grinding before he was ready to begin a task that would take him a lifetime to complete, and during which there would be no opportunity to correct initial mistakes.

He entered the Freshman class in the summer of 1847, and soon took a good stand in the class, through indefatigable labour. It was the usual humdrum life of a college boy, and with odd jobs of work mornings and evenings and on Saturdays, he eked out his slender means. He rose Sophomore at the beginning of the next session, and pursued the course to half advanced, when the fame of Brown University, located at Providence, R. I., reached his ears. Dr. Francis Wayland, the president, was regarded as the ablest college man in the land, and students from all over the country, as far south as Georgia and South Carolina, were flocking to Brown. A young Carolinian had graduated a few years before who soon became
famous in his native State, and subsequently was known all over the United States as Dr. J. P. Boyce, the leader of the Southern Baptist hosts in the work of higher education. In the same class with Boyce was John Hill Luther, who as minister, editor, and college professor and president was beloved west of the Mississippi River from Missouri to Texas.

Young Simmons could not resist the inclination to avail himself of the great abilities of Dr. Wayland as a teacher, and with his beloved classmate, Robert J. Willingham, of South Carolina, set out from Hamilton for New York. He had never been in a great city, and was afraid lest he should be robbed of his trunk and books. Landing from a boat on North River, he and his companion agreed that it was best not to risk their baggage out of their sight, and so they hired a man with a hand barrow to wheel it across to a steamboat bound for Providence by way of Stonington,—and they accompanied him on foot. Their idea was that if he attempted to escape with their trunks, they could manage him, as they were two
to one. This prominent trait of character in Dr. Simmons, of wise forecast and caution, thus manifested itself at an early day.

The young men arrived safely at Providence and enquired for Brown University. The hackman could not tell them, but shouted out, "Does anybody here know where Brown's Universalist is?" Another hackman gave him directions to "Brown's Universalist," and after wandering around, lost occasionally in the darkness of the early morning, they found at last the college grounds, and were welcomed to its halls.

Young Simmons paid one dollar a month rent for his room, and bought and prepared his own food. He says, "I ate, principally, bread and milk, indulging myself in meat only twice a week. I had a bowl and fork, and would stick the fork in a piece of bread and dip it in the milk, withdrawing it quickly, lest it should absorb too much milk, for I had to be economical. My expense for provisions did not exceed $1.12 per week." The bowl and fork which he used are still preserved in the museum of Simmons College in Texas, as an inspiration to
poor boys who must struggle to educate themselves.

He had been licensed by his church at home to preach, and it was understood that he was preparing himself to enter upon mission work, either in the West or in a foreign land. He once related an amusing anecdote of himself when at home on a vacation, for Dr. Simmons enjoyed a good story even at his own expense. "During vacation, I was invited to preach at my old home church, and of course the whole community turned out to hear the home boy who had been to college. A day or two after, I met 'Aunt Harriet,' as she was called, an old maid who rendered herself generally useful in the community, of uncommon good hard sense, very pious and beloved and respected
by all. She said to me, 'James, Elder Gates speaks very well of your sermon Sunday.' (Elder Gates was a superannuated minister who lived in the neighbourhood.) 'He says the sermon was sound in doctrine, well worded, and well delivered, and I was glad to hear him praise it so, but if I were in your place, I would not think too much of what Elder Gates says. You know he is an old man, in his second childhood, and hard of hearing, and they think he has softening of the brain, and besides, you yourself know that Elder Gates never was a good judge of preaching anyway.' She wanted to encourage me, and yet she did not wish me to become too much puffed up."

Dr. Simmons used to tell, in speaking of his college days, of a time when President Wayland called him to book about being tardy in coming to recitation. The time of the recitation had been changed, and he was late. The President asked his reasons for his tardiness, and he replied that he had forgotten about the change, and was shaving when the bell rang. "At what time of day do you shave, Simmons?" asked Dr. Way-
land. "No particular time, sir, but when I think my face needs it." "And do you use hot or cold water?" "Warm water, sir, because it softens the beard." "Let me tell you two things: always classify your shaving with your toilet, and attend to it first thing in the morning. Always use cold water or you will never be a free man. Suppose you should settle as pastor and should be sent for quickly for some pastoral duty. Do you not see that if you should have to heat up water and shave before you could go, it would cause great delay? No, sir, be a free man, classify your shaving with your toilet, and always use cold water." These words became a saying on the college campus, and the lesson in system in small things was beneficial to others besides young Simmons.

In 1851 Dr. Simmons graduated in a class of thirty-one, among whom were many men who afterwards became distinguished. He did not take an honour, but was reckoned one of the upper third in the class. Among his classmates were Dr. Bates of Pennsylvania; Hon. John S. Brayton, LL.D., of Fall River,
Mass.; W. J. Morecock, a distinguished educator in Georgia; J. O. A. Clark, D.D., LL.D., perhaps, next to Bishop Pierce, the most distinguished Methodist minister in Georgia of his day; Warren Randolph, D.D., of Rhode Island, the lifelong friend of Dr. Simmons and his successor in the pastorate of the First Baptist church, Indianapolis, and of the Fifth church in Philadelphia, also; and Professor J. L. Diman, who held a chair in Brown University for many years.

Dr. Simmons was advised against taking a theological course, and applied to the American Baptist Home Mission Society for an appointment in the West. In the meantime, he was a captive to the wiles of Cupid, and was married to Miss Mary Eliza Stevens, a most excellent woman of Providence, who was ready to go with him to the West as a missionary's wife, and of whom a fuller account will be given in a subsequent chapter.

Dr. Benjamin M. Hill, the wise secretary of the Home Mission Society, wrote him advising a full theological course before he went West. Dr. Hill said that there was not
so much lack of quantity as of quality. "The brightest and most enterprising of our citizens go West; if you would succeed there, you will need all the preparation you can acquire."

What a mistake some boards make when they think that almost any kind of a man will do to send to a western mission field! An inferior man may get along in a staid old church in a community of fixed habits, but in a new, enterprising, crystallizing community, nothing short of the best can succeed. Others seconded Dr. Hill's advice, and young Simmons, after consulting with his young wife, decided to take a full Seminary course. She turned in some money that her father had given her to set up in housekeeping, and an unexpected event happened which made it possible for him to add enough means to give him a full three years' course in theology.

One of his early schoolmates, E. W. Clark, declined to go to college, and said he would go into business and get rich. He became the brother-in-law of Edward W. Simmons, and began business and succeeded rapidly,
but he was arrested by the Spirit of God, and impressed with his duty to preach the Gospel. About the time young Simmons was deciding the question of a theological course, young Clark appeared in Rhode Island to begin a course in Brown, and called on Simmons, the friend of his boyhood. Young Clark said to young Simmons, "Go ahead with your course, and draw on me for what money you need." Simmons and his wife at once went to Rochester where she took the same course with him, working side by side. Young Clark afterwards became the missionary who, with his wife, has made famous the work in the Naga Hills, Assam.

After a year at Rochester, Dr. Simmons went to Andover and spent a year under the famous Dr. Edward A. Park. He completed his course, however, at Newton Theological Institution, near Boston. His wife accompanied him at each place, and shared his studies. He afterward repaid Dr. Clark for the money advanced, both principal and interest, and made him a present besides.

He was soon ordained to the ministry,
and called to the Third church, Providence, R. I., and entered upon the duties of pastor at a salary of one thousand dollars a year. What a lesson to young men! Here is a poor country boy, struggling for nine long years to fit himself for the great duties of life, supporting himself at times by the labour of his hands, at times borrowing money and afterwards earning and repaying it, yet with commendable courage and undaunted perseverance continuing the even tenor of his way until he had prepared for college, graduated at Brown, and completed a full theological course, and was ready to begin life's career splendidly equipped for the work. Where there is a will there is a way. What this young man did, any other young man can do who has grit, grace, and sanctified common sense.