



MY TRANSCRIPT AND CREDENTIALS

When I entered the academy of Simmons College, I felt deeply a sense of inadequacy. Most of my companions had had more schooling than I and evidenced more of those qualities we unite in the word *culture*. I was a poor athlete, although I did improve in that respect. My background however was good, better than I then realized; for although I had not learned many of the refinements of gracious living, I had acquired qualities of integrity and genuine worth. For my age, I was, furthermore, well read. I had read scores of books by Washington Irving, James F. Cooper, Edgar A. Poe, Charles Dickens, and a dozen other good nineteenth century authors.

The log house in which I was born, on Little Sandy creek in Stephens County, was built by my father in 1879. My parents, with my eldest sister, then a baby, located on the site and camped for a period while the logs were cut, the foundations laid, and other beginnings made. Then followed the hard two-hundred-mile journey to Fort Worth and back with lumber for floors, shingles, and one or two windows and doors. Meanwhile land had to be cleared and plowed and other preparations made for starting to farm. A lean-to and side room were added to the cabin in later years, and near by a log kitchen and log smoke house were built. There three sisters, all older than I, were born: Alma, Vera, and Mabel. Erma, the eldest in the family, had been brought from Nacogdoches County in Mother's arms. In that house Mother had given birth to her second child altogether unattended, for father was away seeking the aid of neighbors and a doctor. There she had seen Laurence, a baby boy born two years before me, die of membranous croup at the age of seven months. Another great sorrow was to come to the family in 1902 when Alma, wife of George Tooms Sandidge,

II • *My Credentials*

died of typhoid fever. My sister Erma married Obed E. Dickinson, a dentist; Vera married DeLaska M. Matthews; and Mabel married Robert M. White.

Before the dawn of my memory, we had moved into the "big new house," an L-Shaped, two story building with gables, consisting of seven rooms. It was located three hundred feet west of the old cabin, and the lots were on a high well-drained site, so that we could sit on the porch of summer evenings without annoyance from mosquitoes.

We had good neighbors, but there were weeks and months when there was very little time for visiting. When I was a child, it was an event when another boy came on the place or when we visited where there were boys. A mile and a half to the east of us lived the Outlaws, and Redge and George were my great companions. Not far from the Outlaws lived the George Echols family, with Charley and Pate several years younger than I. A little farther east, on Bee Branch, were the Tom Corbetts, with Lee about my age. A few miles to the north, on Cedar Creek, were the A. W. Corbetts, with Quincy a little younger than I. Still farther away to the east lived the Copelands, with Silas, Russell, and Monroe who made good companions. It was a delightful experience to go and spend the day with the Copelands, as we did on a few occasions that I can recall. Besides the fun I had with the boys, Mr. Copeland generally robbed a bee hive, and I was very fond of honey. Even in those early years bees fascinated me. Nearer home lived Frank Deaver, a most interesting companion. Edgar Martin, another neighbor, was considerably younger than I. At times on the way to Caddo I visited Stoke Hamil.

A mile to the north lived the Moons, whose neighborly acts of kindness I remember through the years. The boys in the family were older than I. S. L. Moon and his wife belonged to the generation of my parents; A. M. (Fonnie) Moon and his wife,

Famous Are Thy Halls

Maude (Robinson) Moon, were of the age of my elder sisters, and I remember them as wonderful neighbors. With the Moons lived Charley Moore, a mulatto. Although he was older than I by a quarter of a century, he was my companion and treated me much as if I were an adult. I spent much time with Charley and count him among the people from whom I have learned most in life. He was a hunter and knew the habits of wild things. He explained to me the ways of the raccoon, the fox, and the coyote. He knew the habits of fish and fowl, the nature of grasses, trees, and flowers, and the rudiments of raising stock and farming. He would relate incidents — experiences of a wolf hunt, adventures with a wild cat, or the catching of a huge fish. He would explain to me things that we observed together and add details about them that were unforgettable. As I recall, he was illiterate, or almost so; but he had learned nature from observation, and from him I caught a love for it.

These neighbors were people of stamina and character. I took them for granted and was disposed to think that all men and women were of that fiber. I think of M. Luke Williams, a Milam County tenant who had been driven out by the boll weevils. With his family he came to our community almost penniless, owing hundreds of dollars to merchants in Cameron. There was no way under the sun that creditors could have forced payments of those debts, but to Williams they were debts of honor. With his family he toiled away in the fields and in a few years paid every cent of the debts. Later he bought a farm.

My mother was well educated for her day and time. She had spent two years in Henderson College under O. H. Cooper and had taught in the public schools. She taught me before I reached school age and at times thereafter. I cannot remember when I learned to read. My earliest recollection of reading was when Mother took me with her on a visit (to the kin) to Nacogdoches County when I was five, and I read the signs in the towns. My schooling had been desultory before I entered the

II • *My Credentials*

Simmons College academy. However, I attended school at Sandy, some three miles to the south of us, or at Bee Branch, three miles to the east, then at Eliasville, Breckenridge, Caddo, back to Sandy, and thence to Caddo again. The decision as to where I went was determined largely by the quality of the teachers and the convenience of the location. In part the changes may be explained by the fact that I was following my teacher sisters around. There was some compensation to all this rotation, but it taught me to make acquaintances readily and to know that boys and girls of the different communities were much alike when I got acquainted with them. Until I got into the village schools of Eliasville, Breckenridge, and Caddo, my school term was generally not more than four months of the year. And when school started in October, it might be necessary to lose a few weeks while gathering the crop.

I remember my early-day teachers with gratitude: Albert Gentry, a wholesome, inspiring teacher; Sam Terry, who became Dr. Terry, for some thirty years greatly loved by the people of Goodlet, Texas; and Clifton M. Caldwell, with whom it was my privilege to work for many years. I recall that the first time I ever heard Mr. Caldwell speak he was urging boys and girls to get an education and insisting that they could become educated if they were determined to do so. Thereafter as long as he lived he wrought without ceasing to make it possible for young people to secure an education.

Although he never gave me formal instruction, my father taught me a great deal also. He was a close observer, an avid reader, and adept at many things. Indeed, a farmer and rancher of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries had to be versatile, for the extension service was in its infancy, and there were no county agricultural agents. Through crop reporting my father, however, kept on the mailing list of the federal Department of Agriculture and received and read several books and bulletins each year. He taught me things more

Famous Are Thy Halls

important than good farm practices and raising improved livestock. Integrity and reverence were qualities that he emphasized both by precept and example. His sense of justice and loyalty to the truth were magnificent.

My mother also taught me much that was far more important than what we got out of books. Her life was an inspiring story of attainment in spite of difficulties and handicaps. She had lost her right hand in an accident in childhood; but with one hand and the elbow of the other arm she did her housework, looked after a large family, and at times went to the field with hoe or cotton sack to make a hand. There were no migratory laborers then, and when there was work to do, neighbors likely would be busy with their own crops. So if the crop were saved, the family would have to gather it.

It was said of my mother that she was an aristocrat, and that characterization seems sound. At any rate, she was very different from my hand-shaking father. There used to be told a highly sentimental story about a college graduate and his mother that illustrates forcefully what my mother was not. As the story goes, the graduate was awarded the "medal of excellence," but refusing to receive it he went to his mother in the audience, pinned it on her, and proclaimed to all the world how her sacrifice had made possible his accomplishments. I can imagine my mother being embarrassed and even humiliated by such a scene. True, with one hand she had done the housework for a large family, but why advertise the fact that we were too poor to hire domestic help, which could not be found anyhow? (And she did not want any reference made to her handicap.) In addition to home responsibilities, she had taught school to get extra money to help pay out the land. In an open hack, or on horseback, she had traveled from home to a country school at South Prairie, seven miles away, in winter weather. But other women had done as much, or would have done it, if there had been opportunity. At times she went into the fields

II • *My Credentials*

and made a hand, because it would have been foolish to let the crop waste after making it. People of breeding simply did not make a display of such things. Yes, my mother was a proud woman. She walked with resilient step almost to the end of her days, always with chin up and eyes straight ahead.

As the only boy in the family and with the youngest sister four years older, I was alone a great deal. My most annoying habit was running away, or just leaving without any notice of my intentions, thus creating alarm in the family by my absence. I never thought of it as running away and never developed the slightest sense of guilt about it. I was simply out seeing things. After I became a little older, the family made use of this wanderlust by sending me daily to the mail box, nearly two miles away. Although this was long before the age of rural free delivery, we lived near a star route from Ranger, by Caddo, to Eliasville and had the benefit of daily mail service. I thus had first access to the mail, and since now, at the ripe age of six or seven, I could read, I kept informed on the news. I recall vividly the accounts of the War with Spain. In my mind's eye I still see clearly the pictures of the starving Cubans that William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer distributed to the presses of the nation. Hearst always said that he set out to start a war; and with me he was successful, for I was fighting mad about the way they were treating those poor Cubans.

On all my jaunts I had a companion, my dog. My first dog was old Ring, a mastiff-like canine that was only tolerably friendly. Although we were companions, Ring and I were never real pals. Ring was something of a grouch. A puppy that grew up with me and had some tutelage from Ring, was named Earl. But Earl is not so good a dog name as Ring, so in speaking of my dogs I generally telescope them all into Ring. This second Ring had terrier blood in him. He was lion-hearted, and my boon companion, and we spent many happy hours together. Once Ring killed a coyote that was nearly as large as he. On one

Famous Are Thy Halls

occasion his barking led me to a bee tree that opened up for me a delightful hobby.

One evening John Upham, who was working for us, and I decided we would hunt deer in the wheat fields that night, using a lantern for a "fire cap." Since no domestic animals were running in the wheat and we had shut Ring up in the smoke house before we left, everything seemed in order and the hunting practice safe. In the middle of the field an eye shone, John fired, and we heard the whimpering of a dying dog. We had shot and killed Ring. He had broken out of confinement, and with characteristic cunning did not join us at once but sought to get in our good graces by going far around and ahead of us and stirring up game for us.

Since that sad accident I have avoided dogs and have seen to it that I never loved another animal as dearly as I loved Ring. For pets, I choose cats. There is more contentment in a cat's purr than in a box of sedatives. I would not say that a cat is friendly just for the cream, but he keeps you at paw's length. He never gives himself to you heart and soul like a dog. When the dog dies, or is killed, you grieve your heart out. When something happens to the cat, you just grieve and soon get another cat.

Life on a farm and ranch during the early Twentieth Century was strenuous and exacting. Before the use of tractors, breaking land and putting in crops was a time consuming process. In the midst of work on the row crops came the demand for harvesting small grain. When I was a lad it was my job to shock the wheat, rye, oats, cane or maize. Cane and maize bundles were heavy and it was hard work to keep up with the binder. Later I was promoted to the driver's saddle, riding one of the wheel team and driving the lead span. Such a task seemed easy, but to keep two span of mules working uniformly and a machine cutting at maximum width without waste called for unfagging alertness.

II • *My Credentials*

In those days small grain had to be cut, shocked, hauled to the lot, and stacked. Then came the great event of the farm season, the threshing. When the thresher reached the community, all hands gathered in. Since there was only a skeleton crew with the machine and there were no migratory laborers, neighbors had to exchange work. We generally started in at Hamil's, four miles away, or at Martins', two miles closer. Then, following a circuituous route, we threshed Frank Magers' crop, Fon Moon's, and sometimes Minus Kennedy's before the machine crew reached Richardson's. The coming of the thresher meant work for everybody. At least one meal had to be prepared. How much beef, bacon, beans, chicken, pie, cake, and half a dozen other staples or delicacies could a thresher force of fifteen or twenty eat? It was well that people in that day produced most of their food at home.

There was no surcease from labor on our place. We raised, harvested, and stacked thousands of bundles of cane and grain sorghums each season. Then when work with the crops slackened, work with cattle had to be done. This too was hard, but I loved it. If by chance work in the fields and work in the pastures should ever stop for a short time even, there was fencing, tank building, and any one of a dozen other needs demanding our efforts.

No, our work was never finished, but sometimes we quit and went to a picnic or went fishing. I recall working until well after midnight on Saturday night a few times, when ripe grain was calling for the binder; but otherwise there was never any work on Sunday. For all of its demands, I loved the ranch and the open spaces and I have wondered how I ever pulled myself away from it. On the other hand, I grew up with the idea of taking part in a profession. There was always the feeling that the farm and ranch days constituted just a period of transition. I enjoyed them and was thankful for them while I had them, but the main task was other work out ahead. And even today,

Famous Are Thy Halls

when I visit my stock farm near Abilene and stay longer than I had planned, there arises the feeling that this is delightful, but there are other things that I should be doing.