

# V

## THE INTERIM

1912-1917

My five golden student-years passed swiftly. My memories of Simmons are almost wholly happy ones. I had genuine affection for the college and left it with a measure of reluctance. It never occurred to me when I left with my prized diploma in June, 1912, that I should ever return as a member of the faculty. I expected to teach awhile and then to study law. Except for one period of a year or more when I was out of state, however, I kept in close touch with the college and visited it whenever I could find an excuse to do so. In those days many students remained on the campus during commencement week; I had always found it the period of most fun. So it was gratifying to be able to return for commencement and homecoming and visit with friends in succeeding classes. Pauline lived at Hamlin, furthermore. I went to see her whenever I could do so, and Abilene and Simmons College were invariably placed on my itinerary. That so many graduates who were loyal and enthusiastic students leave the college at graduation not to return for many years, and soon lose contact with their alma mater and their fellow students is inexplicable to me. I have always believed that there was something missing, something that somebody failed to do that made possible such a turn of affairs; but neither as an ex-student, as president of the alumni association, nor as the president of the university was I ever able to make much headway against such a trend.

Anyhow I did return as often as possible. I would visit with Tommy Carswell, Emmett Landers, or somebody else in Cowden Hall, spend a night with my friends, meet the new men and get the latest college news. Perhaps I was just using my friends and the college for my own selfish ends. Certainly I do not claim

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any credit for coming back so often. I could not stay away. And thus I kept in touch with Simmons during the five years that I was away from the campus.

With a diploma and a teacher's certificate, I set out to find employment. The certificate was not difficult to get, because President Sandefer had secured recognition of the work of the college by the State Department of Education. Getting a teaching position was not as easy as I had expected it to be. I applied at half a dozen places and either met with disappointment or interminable delay. At last I was elected to the principalship at Ivan, just six miles from home. The arrangement turned out to be a most happy one, for it enabled me to spend a school year with my parents for the first time since I had become a man. Furthermore, through their generosity I was able to save about all the salary that I was paid that year. A neighbor boy, Alvin Moon, and I drove or rode horseback together the five or six miles.

Physical conditions at Ivan hardly could have been worse, but the attitude of the children and patrons was so wholesome and cooperative that one forgot his difficulties. The school house was just one big room, with a curtain drawn over a wire separating the two compartments, and doors at one end only. How my colleague, Hettie Pratt, the elementary teacher, managed to carry on her work at one end of the building with my booming voice loosed at the other end, thirty feet away, I have never understood. She had the first four grades and did her work faithfully and well; and I had the remainder, which extended through the eighth grade. We began work at eight and taught till four-thirty. We used a teaching practice not unknown even at present, that of holding two or even three classes at the same time. There was much work but little that was unpleasant about this post. My most difficult moment was having to send a boy home because he had skinned a skunk on

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the way to school. "All right, I'll go," he said, "but if I couldn't stand a little skunk smell I'd take down my sign."

Notwithstanding long hours of teaching, we managed to have plays, music, or other public entertainment bi-monthly or more frequently. Most of the practicing for these programs had to be done at the noon hour or at recess. It was at Ivan that the thought first struck me of making teaching my profession.

By the end of the year I had saved some money, had a few head of livestock that could be exchanged for cash, and I was ready to go to school again. The University of Chicago had the foremost summer school of that time, and without delay I entered the University of Chicago in June, 1913. I found the University of Chicago much as I had expected it to be. Certainly the contrast with Simmons was great, the most pronounced being in the relationship between faculty and students. Likewise the attitude of the students was quite different. I made a few very good student friends in Chicago. T. W. Oliver was my roommate and we roomed in an apartment maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Sigler. Oliver and the Siglers were Kentuckians, all delightful people. Among the professors I had in Chicago were Charles Edward Merriam, in political science; J. Lawrence Laughlin in economics; and Ernest Freundt in legislation and public law. Merriam was then a member of the Chicago city council and had already attained stature in the field of politics and political theory; Laughlin had been economic adviser of the Republican national committee in the Presidential contest of 1896, when the subject of money was of first consideration; Freundt was not widely known except among scholars. I found Freundt a poor lecturer but encouraging and inspiring as a teacher and friend. I hardly knew the other men.

The lecture method was used at Chicago to a greater degree than it had been at Simmons, but I found no great difficulty in

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adjusting myself to that practice. Library facilities were far better than those I had known in preceding years. But one's accomplishment is measured not by books in the library but by books that he has read. I had not done so poorly in the small school. The teachers of Chicago were more highly specialized and better known in the world of scholars than those who had guided me at Simmons, but I never had any regrets about having cast my lot with Simmons. Because of a more select student body and keener competition, high grades were harder to make at Chicago. Some of my grades were mediocre because I had not yet determined to be a scholar. I must repeat that my experience at the University of Chicago taught me that there was no cause for a student from a poor little school feeling a sense of inferiority in a great university with impressive buildings and renowned professors.

The greatest inspiration that I got from the University of Chicago came in a manner somewhat novel. Amos Alonzo Stagg, the noted football coach, in 1913 called "Old Man," although he died in 1965 at the age of 102 and coached football almost to the end, had been greatly disappointed with the performance of a football team a few years before. The thing that was as gall in his mouth was that the men had the qualities of a great team, except for a poor attitude and dissipation on the part of some. What could he do to help a situation like that? He felt that the needs of the university were more spiritual than physical, so he and Mrs. Stagg presented to the school a set of chimes which were placed in Mitchell Tower.

Each night at a few minutes before ten, the chimes played. I could hear them plainly in my room, just two blocks from the campus and often at night I walked home from the library to their tones. Occasionally hymns or songs were played, but always the series ended with the Alma Mater. Its music is stately and its lines, which I can still repeat, are noble. One passage may well be the watchword of any university:

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Her mighty learning we would tell  
Though life is something more than lore  
She could not love her sons so well  
Loved she not truth and honor more.

I can vouch for the power of recall that music has. When I think of the University of Chicago even now, I think of the Alma Mater.

I took another bachelor's degree at the University of Chicago and started my graduate work. Meanwhile, as I could work it in to my course from time to time, I took law and in later years I completed a substantial part of a correspondence course in law, for I found it difficult to get away from the idea of law as a profession. Finally I came to the conclusion, however, that although I liked to study law I would not like to practice it.

Differences in the customs of people generally in Chicago and in West Texas impressed me more than differences in the University of Chicago and Simmons College. People there seemed much more reserved toward strangers. Also they either lacked a sense of humor or failed to comprehend my poor efforts at trying to be funny, and I gave up the effort. I am confident that even Bob Hope could not have coaxed a smile out of some Chicagoans that I knew. I recall just one man who seemed to have my idea about what was funny, and he was Paddy, the janitor, who had grown up in Ireland.

In Chicago I had lessons in the problems of integration, nearly half a century before the issue attained national proportions. A few Negro students in the university were gentle, worthy people, and there seemed to be nothing offensive about sitting in class with them. Also it was not uncommon to sit beside a Negro at a cafe counter or a table. I soon noticed, however, that many Chicago Negroes had atrocious manners. If in a crowd pressing toward a street car door somebody was

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pushing and shoving, the chances seemed to be ten to one that it was a Negro. Black people were not accepted at the leading hotels and often severe measures were used to keep them out of certain residential zones. I recall being awakened about four o'clock one morning by a sound that would today be likened to a sonic boom. When the papers appeared that afternoon, we learned that a few blocks from the apartment house where we were staying a bomb had been set off in the vestibule of a building into which certain Negro families had moved recently, over the protests of neighboring residents and property owners. Nobody was seriously hurt, but the building was badly damaged. It was then I came to realize that the North had a race problem more difficult in many ways than that of the South.

I taught a year in Caddo, my home community, and enjoyed the privilege of staying with my sister, Mabel, and her husband Robert M. White. No better community could be found in all the land than Caddo. Still, I seemed to miss some of the luster that I had found in my first year of teaching. We had some discipline problems, inconsequential but annoying. Perhaps I was impatient and wanted to get along too rapidly professionally. I was greatly tempted to take over the operation of our ranch, for my father was retiring and was leasing out the place.

It was at this juncture that an offer of two positions affected my career in an enduring way. The first was the opportunity to teach in the summer normal at Britton's Training School, the second was my election as principal of Cisco High School. I accepted both posts without delay. The high school position had been made possible for me largely through the influence of Mr. R. Q. Lee, a friend whom I had known at Caddo. Later, a resident of Cisco and a trustee, he vouched for me to Superintendent R. D. Green and the other trustees.

The summer normal school for teachers, in which I taught

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during some six weeks of the summer of 1915, was a venerable Texas institution. I did not then realize how soon it would be outmoded. The students were in the main relatively mature people. Indeed some were middle aged and seemed to me then quite old. Most of them had had a limited amount of elementary and high school training, and this normal course was designed to give them a review of various subjects — a dozen or more all told. Those enrolled for the second grade certificate examination studied the subjects now covered in elementary school, dipping over into junior high school a little. Candidates for first grade teachers' certificates did some of the work now covered in high school. One might obtain a permanent certificate by examination in those days, but few people did so. Most of our pupils were working for second grade certificates and, if successful, would teach mainly in the country schools. These people were sincere and mature, and the work with them was pleasant.

One of my fellow teachers in this normal school was J. E. Temple Peters, a veteran teacher highly gifted. From him I learned a great deal, for he was a master craftsman at getting along with students. I have often thought of one bit of admonition he gave me, half seriously. "Richardson," he said, "you worry too much." And then he went on to suggest that I let my pupils do some of the worrying. He admonished me also not to do things for people, but to have them do things for me. Whenever a person does something for you, he contended, he is likely to think more of you because of what he has done; but if you do things for him, he will expect you to keep doing them and may get offended when you stop.

With all of its work and responsibility, the principalship of Cisco High School was the most satisfying position that I had held. Superintendent R. D. Green was considerate and helpful, and the teachers uniformly were cooperative and pleasant. Our shortage of talent in the extra curricular fields was, however,

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lamentable. There was nobody to coach athletics — nobody except the principal. There was no debate coach — except the principal; and nobody except the principal would undertake to direct plays and choruses. If the students ever found out how little I knew about these things, they never revealed their discovery. Apparently they had so little tutelage in other years that they appreciated greatly my efforts and cooperated in marvelous fashion. I shall never forget a certain "quartette," that I tried to train at Cisco. It seemed that they would never learn that four men singing together do not necessarily make a male quartette.

In athletics we did very well until we brought our team to Abilene and matched it with one of the top flight high school aggregations in Texas. The result for us was almost slaughter. I had compensation, I might say even revenge, the following year when we brought a team from Sweetwater High School, where I was then principal, and beat the vaunted Abilene High School aggregation. Although I was titular coach, the Sweetwater team was in fact trained by Charles Lewis, an attorney and friend of mine and of the school. Without compensation and without any title or official connection with the school whatsoever, Lewis came daily and coached the team to a degree truly remarkable for a high school squad of that day. As long as he lived I never ceased to thank him for that generous and loyal service to the school and community.

Pauline Mayes and I were married at Christmas during my year at Cisco and set up housekeeping in a house we shared with the owner, Waddy Mancill. Pauline had been teaching at Hamlin and at Lubbock. Soon there was a vacancy at Cisco, and she accepted a teaching position there.

One day President Sandefer called on me and offered a professorship at Simmons in history, economics, and related fields at a salary substantially greater than I was receiving. The

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proposition opened up to me an entirely new vista, a career as a college teacher. I accepted the offer, subject to securing my release at Cisco. The place at Simmons had been made vacant by the resignation of my former professor, J. F. McDonald, who had discovered that his voice could not continue to endure the demands of classroom teaching. The Cisco school board did not see fit to release me; Professor C. F. Watts was selected for the post at Simmons, and I resolved to make public school work my career. The following spring I was elected principal of Sweetwater High School, a larger and better organized institution in a larger town; and that summer I enrolled in the University of Chicago School of Education.

Still Simmons College kept appearing in my crystal ball. Some people would deem it providential, others would say that it was just an unusual combination of circumstances. However that may be, the following year the same offer from Simmons came to me again. Professor Watts, who had succeeded Professor McDonald, had died of pneumonia, and the post had to be filled at the opening of the spring term (early March 1917). At first I declined the offer. It seemed unfair to interrupt the operation of a high school. I was, furthermore, making advancement as a school administrator. Why should I leave the field? After contemplating the matter, however, I was constrained to inquire of President Sandefer if the position were still open. On learning that it was, I laid the matter before my good friend, Superintendent J. A. Bright. The Sweetwater trustees released me, and I returned to my Alma Mater. Under the terms of my release, Mrs. Richardson took over a post in the high school and continued there until June.