Chapter 1

A Lad From the Irish Gentry

The chill November wind struck Marlfield House in temperamental gusts, pelting the windows with heavy raindrops; but the brick, stone, and well-seasoned wood in the walls stood bravely against the storm. The spacious three-storied mansion, with its thirteen bedrooms, staffed with a dozen house servants, was surrounded by woods and open fields bordered with yew hedges. The estate was less than four miles from the village of Gorey in County Wexford, which lies at the southeastern tip of Ireland.

Lights burned brightly in Marlfield House at this early morning hour, as nurse Ferguson opened the bedroom door to listen to the gasps of her mistress in the pains of labor. Catherine Ann Richards-Magan could be seen in the dim yellow light of the lamp when the nurse raised it above her head to catch a glimpse of the taut face of the expectant mother.

"May the saints rest you, ma'am," comforted the servant. "The doctor should be coming any moment now, providing the storm doesn't slow his horse."

A faint smile of recognition could be seen on Mistress Magan's face. This was not her first ordeal in childbirth, for there was little Emily, the elder child, who at this moment lay sleeping in the nursery on the floor below. The expected baby must be a boy, the woman decided in the minutes between her pains, for a son would please his father.

"Where is the master?" Catherine asked with a sigh.

"He's in the study, walking and fretting as all men do in such times," answered nurse Ferguson, a bit of acid in her voice.

Hearing footsteps in the hall, the servant turned to find the doctor with Rosie, the kitchen maid, close behind, carrying a kettle of hot water.

"It's a boy, master," announced nurse Ferguson, entering the library with a blanketed bundle in her arms.

"Then a happy day it is!" Percy Magan exclaimed. "He shall be called Percy Tilson Magan." With clumsy fingers the father pushed aside the edge of the blanket to look at the tiny face. "Quite a lad ye

are, Percy. Now don't pucker and cry; you've too much Irish spunk for that."

A Boy in the Family

Percy Tilson Magan, born November 13, 1867, came from a family of the Irish gentry. His grandfather, George Magan, had married Ellen O'Connor, a descendant of Ruaidri Va Conchubair, called Roderic (Rory) O'Connor, the king of Connaught and from 1166 high king of Ireland, who in the summer of 1170 rose to the defense of the Irish against a Norman invasion. When Henry II of England invaded Ireland with an imposing army in 1171, many tribal kings paid homage to him, but not the kings of Connaught and Ulster. It was four years before the Treaty of Windsor was signed, making O'Connor king of Connaught under the king of England.

Civil strife, war with England, and religious conflict flared again and again through the centuries, a constant unrest which gave Ireland the epithet "the trembling sod." The strong animosity between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, which seemed to thrive on Irish soil, was felt in the Magan family. When Percy's grandfather, George Magan, was wed to Ellen O'Connor, the marriage agreement stated that all sons born to the union should be raised as Protestants, while all daughters were to be Catholics. The story comes down in the family that when Percy (the father of Percy T.) was born, his zealous sister, Monica, surreptitiously bundled him up and rushed to the priest to have him christened a Roman Catholic; but when the Protestant father heard of his daughter's action, he thrashed her soundly and then took his newborn son to the Protestant bishop to be "deconsecrated." Thus the father of Percy T. began his days in conflict, and his life was ever tumultuous.

Deeply prejudiced against Catholicism, Percy became an introvert with few social interests. He fell in love with Catherine Ann Richards, whose ancestors were Huguenots. Her father was an Anglican bishop and her uncle, Solemn Richards, was president of the Royal Society of Surgeons of Ireland.

By the time Percy Tilson was born, his father owned only a small portion of the vast original estates that the Magans once possessed. Indeed, the senior Magan rented Marlfield House, whose stately shade trees and broad lawns, inviting paths and dusky woods, patios and rustic seats, made an ideal playground for the growing children. There

was a pond where young Percy, accompanied by Rosie, sailed his toy boat. In addition to the elder sister, there were younger girls, for Rachel, Muriel, and Violet were born during Percy's childhood. And when he was fourteen, another brother, Arthur T. Shaen, was added to the family.

On rainy days the young children played in the third-floor nursery, and Percy remembered the broad open stairway with its inviting banisters. There was a long scratch on the wood and a scar on the boy's anatomy after one particular slide when a button on his pants got in the way! On sunny days Percy sometimes walked to Courtown harbor, about five miles from Gorey, to watch the fishermen with their nets. Indeed, the lure of the sea infiltrated Marlfield House, for a piece of wreckage of a fishing boat the master once owned was set in an honored place on the front lawn. The vessel had been the victim of a storm, and old Paddy Doran, the keeper, who lived in a lodge near the gate of the estate, had been aboard the craft when it was wrecked.

The usual pranks of youth were attached to Percy's name. One day as he was looking out the nursery window, he knocked a potted geranium from the ledge, and it crashed on the walk, narrowly missing his sister. Again he almost caused a tragedy in the family when he let go of the baby carriage in which his sister Muriel was sleeping, and it rolled down the path toward the lily pond, stopping on the brink of the pool as if checked by a guardian angel.

Percy's father and mother sometimes gave elaborate dinners, and the boy and his sister would be allowed to come downstairs for dessert. With the soup, fish, game, and roast beef courses completed, and only the pudding course left, the hungry boy did not feel he shared much of the banquet. One night, when the feast was over, Percy and his sister were sent with the ladies into the drawing room, while the men sat in the large dining room. Finally, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing room, the lad and his sister were told to kiss everyone good-night and go to bed. The seven-year-old boy and six-year-old girl made their way to the huge sideboard in the dining room, on which were wines, champagne, and hard liquor. Percy pushed a dining-room chair over to the sideboard, climbed up on it, and solemnly asked his sister what she would like to drink. When she chose champagne, he filled two large goblets with the bubbly liquid and gave one to her and with the other clasped in both hands proceeded to fill himself with the beverage. Whalen, the butler, appeared at the dining room door, and in stentorian tones said, "Master Percy, I will tell your father on you."

The quick-witted boy answered back, "That's all right, Whalen, and I'll tell him I saw you under the lime tree the other night kissing and hugging Jane Belle, the cook. Then you'll get fired." Discipline was strict in those days, and lovemaking among servants was absolutely taboo. A quick compromise was reached, and the butler carried the boy and his sister, slightly intoxicated, up three flights of stairs to the nursery, where nurse Ferguson and Rosie tucked the adventurers into bed.

Discipline was necessary to restrain the lively Irish lad. In a fit of temper at his governess, whom he detested, Percy jumped on the woman's trailing skirt and loosened the waistband, which caused no end of embarrassment! His father, returning from a ride, happened on the scene and punished his son with a riding whip.

School Days in England

It was the custom for the Irish gentry to have a private tutor for their sons before they sent them to select schools in England. At the age of ten, Percy was informed that he was to go to a military school for a more formal education. It was not easy for the boy to break with his home, for he dearly loved his mother and nurse Ferguson, the widow of a British admiral, who gave young Magan a medal of honor that her husband had received for bravery in the Royal Navy.

The austere father took his son to Dublin, where they embarked on a ship sailing across the Irish Sea to England. It was Percy's first ocean voyage, and his eyes and ears absorbed the new and wondrous scenes and sounds of thriving cities, busy docks, ships in port, and the rolling sea. To the city of Chester traveled father and son to enroll Percy at Arnold House, a proprietary school for boys nine to twelve years of age. In addition to the headmaster, there were usually four other men on the teaching staff as well as "visiting masters." The lad was homesick and without friends or relatives. Indeed, his loneliness was so acute that for a time he went to his room each day for a "crying spell."

Chester, one of the oldest of English cities, was founded as the Roman station of Deva, about A.D. 48, on the river Dee, some sixteen miles south of Liverpool. This station became a bulwark against hostile tribes from North Wales, and a center of trade with Ireland. Still standing today around the old city is the Roman wall, twenty feet thick and two miles in length. The Tudor architecture of the ancient buildings interested Percy, and he enjoyed walking on the balconies

that extended from the second stories over the narrow streets. These unusual balconies were called "the Rows." The very atmosphere of the town breathed history, and here young Magan absorbed knowledge and reveled in the wonders of the past. From such stimulation, no doubt, grew much of his love for things historical.

As a student at Arnold House School, Percy stood second in his class. However, his petulant father was not pleased with his son's scholarship, for he maintained that if the lad were not lazy he could be first in his studies.

Young Magan's next school was St. George's near Huntingdon, about sixty miles north of London. This institution was presided over by "Old Wix," a typical hot-tempered disciplinarian of the time, who fed the hungry lads "maggoty" ham and stale bread doused in paraffin oil. Percy vividly remembered seeing his cousin flogged until he fainted because the poor lad could not correctly translate a Latin assignment. Later the unconscious boy was carried to the pump and doused with cold water to revive him. Percy barely escaped a flogging himself when he went on a bicycle trip to Huntingdon on an errand for a faculty member. The boy refused to give the names of several fellow students he had seen in town who were off the campus without permission. Young Magan was given the choice of divulging the names of the boys, taking a flogging, or translating Latin for a seemingly interminable number of hours. He chose the Latin!

Memories of the schoolmaster lingered in Magan's mind. Years later he wrote: "Poor Old Wix! I can see his violet nose yet (mauve, I believe you used to call it) as with a look that Satan could not imitate, he would say, 'Come here, little boy, come here; bend over, little boy, bend over,' and then that extended cane of his would whack down on my gluteus maximus muscle and raise great blood blisters upon that part of my anatomy which the Lord never intended to be treated that way." When he visited Old Wix in later years, Percy found the headmaster had married a kindhearted woman whose patient nature had influenced her husband to treat the lads with more consideration.

When Percy came home from school, he frequently stopped in Dublin at Marrion Square to visit his aunt and uncle, named Vereker, the parents of Field Marshal Viscount John S. Gort, who distinguished himself in the British army at Malta and Dunkirk during World War II. On one visit Percy was accompanied by a schoolmate, Charlie Waters (nicknamed Fatty), upon whom he played a joke. Years later the Irishman wrote: "I remember that I had kidded Fatty a lot about

seasickness. I don't think he had ever been on the sea before, and I told him if he put a piece of brown paper over his stomach, he would not get seasick. So he got a huge chunk of brown paper and wound it all over his belly. In spite of all that, I think he was sick as a dog. But in the morning when we were walking over to see the Verekers, I was a great swell, and for that matter so was Fatty. We had on our little Eton jackets, silk top hats, and slop bowl' collars. I had a swagger stick, and I think Fatty had another, and we were imagining that we were dashing young army officers. All of a sudden I heard a swishing noise. It kept up, and I could not think what it was. Fatty didn't seem to know. I noticed the crowd grinning, and I looked down and saw the brown paper coming out of Fatty's pant leg. Great was my humiliation. We had to stop and turn our backs to the crowd and get it out and get rid of it as best we could."

There were exciting days when Percy rode an old highwheeled bicycle, lent to him by a neighbor named Featherstone. "It was a rotten bike," according to the lad, but he went adventuring on it. He would ride to Athlone to watch the units of a British regiment in target practice on the shore of Lough Ree. Sometimes the soldiers took the youth to the barracks to show him guns and souvenirs and give him candy. It was then that he dreamed of becoming a lieutenant in the army so that he would have "the privilege of stopping bullets for Her Majesty the Queen."

Since the senior Magan had never known the meaning of work, his patrimony gradually slipped away. As political unrest swept over Ireland, landowners were threatened with loss of life and the confiscation of their property. When times grew more stringent for the father, he tended to make his son's existence a trying ordeal. What should be his vocation or profession? As to his training, Percy later said, "Our education was of the typical English sort. At the time I was sixteen, I had had five years of Latin and four of Greek, and had studied English literature but not much science."

Percy had no genuine interest in military things, so there was no point in preparing him for the army or navy. Neither was the master particularly enthusiastic about the lad's becoming a bishop in the church. However, since there was little choice, the father subjected his son to training under the supervision of a bishop of the Anglican Church. Percy pumped the bellows of the organ and acted as an altar boy; but he had no enthusiasm for the church.

An Apprenticeship in America

What should this distracted father do with his son who was seemingly a misfit? The boy, a student type of individual, had been schooled in hard circumstances and severe discipline; certainly he had not been pampered or spoiled. The master seemed always at odds with his energetic son. Percy had bitter memories of his last Christmas at Kilcreagh, for he wrote in later years: "That was a very miserable and a very unhappy Christmas for me. The master, against whom, however, I am thankful to say I bear no ill will, was determined I should have no part or thought in the presents and festivities, and I remember very well sitting halfway up the first flight of the stairs watching all of the rest of you, but the dear mistress couldn't stand it, and she came when the master was not looking and brought me down and got me into the ring a little bit at least. I shall never, as long as I live, forget her tender thoughtfulness. She had a wonderfully tender heart; and in those sad heart days that meant so much to me, the image of it all and her kind goodness has lain embedded in my poor old soul ever since, … and I am glad that I still cherish this sweet memory of Mother's unforgetfulness even although others may have felt that the earth would be better off without my presence."

About this time, while in Dublin, the father encountered a redheaded Irishman, Rotchford Edwards, who had crossed the Atlantic from America to recruit cheap labor for his farm near Red Cloud, Nebraska, and at the same time make a tidy sum of extra money. In colorful language he embroidered his stories of cattlemen making fortunes on the plains of Nebraska; and he promised that if Magan would pay him $650 to board and room the immigrant boy for two years, the farmer would make him a great cattleman. The bargain was completed, with the understanding in the senior Magan's mind that the sum would be deducted from the lad's rightful inheritance. Thus the master was relieved of the responsibility of rearing his teen-age son, and the youth was spurred to seek his fortune on the glamorous frontier of midwestern America.

Percy, sixteen and a half years old, bade a sorrowful farewell to his mother, sisters, and a little brother who was almost three years of age. Memories of the farewell flooded the mind of the man in later years when he described the scene photographically to his sister: "You were all standing on the steps of the limestone portico, as I was being loaded into the dogcart. I can remember how tall and stately the dear mother

looked - bless her heart and memory; Shaen had lovely golden curls down his back, or at least over his shoulders. He was a very handsome child. The master and I were perched in front, and Din or John Mooney, I don't remember which, sat behind. Jimmy, the gray cob, acted as motor, and functioned pretty well at that. We drove out the back way by the little millrace (where we used to try to catch minnows) and to the 'short road' to Moate, and over the Galvan hill, while Mother pressed her forehead against the window of the red dressing room and watched till we were out of sight."

Percy and his father made the journey to Dublin together, and stayed overnight at the Shelbourne Hotel. In the lobby they met a Mrs. W. J. Quan, the wife of a wholesale merchant in Chicago, and her daughter Alice, who, upon hearing of the master's plan for his son, pleaded that the boy be spared from the lonely venture. However, the bargain had been made, and the stubborn Irishman paid the money for Percy's passage on the Cunard liner that was sailing for New York. When Mrs. Quan found that her pleas were in vain and that the boy would arrive in a strange country where he was friendless, she gave him letters of introduction to her husband in Chicago, and to her son-in-law, named O'Donahue, a tea merchant in New York City.

With a ticket in his pocket for passage on the steamship Scythia, the lad went alone to Cobh to begin his sea voyage. A contract for an apprenticeship and $64 were all his assets as he set out on this strange adventure. When young Percy mounted the rope ladder to the ship's deck in "dirty weather," his thoughts were divided between sadness and exuberance. He shrugged his shoulders and said to himself, "Well, anyway, I won't have to go to church anymore!"

America

On Tuesday morning, May 14, 1884, the Scythia docked in New York harbor, eleven days' sailing from Liverpool. On shipboard Percy had made the acquaintance of an officer of the Canadian government, and when the ship docked, the two young men clasped hands as they sang Stephen Foster's song, "Hard Times, Come Again No More." The Irish lad did not know a soul in all America; but after registering at the Westminster Hotel, near Sixteenth Street, he set out at a brisk walk on the streets of New York to find Mr. Joseph J. O'Donahue, the tea and coffee merchant, whose office was near Wall Street.

Mr. O'Donahue was kind to this lad from his own country, and he saw to it that Percy was returned safely to the hotel in his private coach. The next morning the coachman took the lad from the hotel to the railroad station, where he boarded a train - with a seat in the parlor car - for Chicago. Arriving in the midwestern city, Magan went to the old Palmer House; and as a result of this contact, it was always his favorite hotel in Chicago.

After cleaning up from the dirty, tiresome trip, Percy started out to find Mr. Quan. He arrived at the home, 384 East Erie Street, in the evening, having made his way about the city riding on a horsecar and walking along muddy streets made passable here and there with sections of board sidewalks. The maid who came to the door was not inclined to welcome the strange boy; but after he had presented his letter of introduction, Mr. Quan welcomed him, and the visitor had an exciting evening with the family and several guests. The merchant offered Magan a position in his store; but the youth was determined to fulfill his apprenticeship contract. The experiences during the last five years, when his father had sent him off to school and forced him to sweat out his problems alone, were developing stamina and self-reliance in Percy. His tenacious Irish nature was asserting itself in a determination not to give up in a struggle.

West of the Mississippi River

After spending a few days in Chicago, Percy began the last lap of his journey - a ride on a Burlington and Missouri Railroad train from Chicago to Red Cloud. The narrow, wooden, boxlike cars of the emigrant train had hard, reed-covered seats, a potbellied coal stove in one end to give a semblance of heat in cold weather, and dim oil lamps overhead that shed a dying glimmer of light at night as they swung dizzily back and forth. The Irish lad had discovered the magnificent distances of America on his trip between New York and Chicago; but now he would find even broader expanses as the slow train rolled westward. When the coaches were not crowded, passengers could put boards and cushions, which they rented from the newsboy, across double seats to form a hard, creaking bed.

The long train of baggage and passenger coaches crossed the Mississippi River and chuffed on into Iowa. Percy arrived at the Council Bluffs transfer station late the second afternoon of the journey.

When he reached Omaha, a thriving town on the west bank of the Missouri River, he decided to go without his supper to save money.

That evening the only other passengers in the coach were a farmer's wife and her brood of children. As darkness fell, Percy became more and more lonely and his stomach grew more and more empty. When the mother brought out a basket of provisions to feed her flock, she told her eldest daughter to invite the lonely youth to eat with them. The girl approached Percy with the words, "Ma says, come and have a snack with us." "Snack" was a new word to the Irish lad, and he soon found, in this instance, at least, that it meant plenty of good food and cheerful companionship.

How that farmer's wife fed the gangling youngster! The "snack" included bread and butter with jelly and preserves, fried chicken, cookies, and fruit. As the hungry group ate the food, the woman questioned Percy, and he told her how he had come to leave home. Tears welled up in the woman's eyes, and she said, "Sonny, it doesn't seem right that your father should send you out to this strange country where you don't know a soul. It ain't right, it ain't right!" When it was time to sleep, Percy prepared his hard board for a bed, and the kind American mother placed a pillow under his head. She stooped down and kissed the homesick boy on the forehead as she said, "I wish, dear lad, that I could take you home with me; but I have so many in my own brood and so little room in our sod house."

Young Magan was touched by the kindness. Here on the broad plains of Nebraska was an expression of mother love the lad would never forget. How many times in later years he wished he might see this woman again! He often remarked that if they ever met in heaven, he would surely see his star in her crown!

Arrival at Red Cloud

The next evening the train pulled into Red Cloud, a town of 2,500 inhabitants about a mile north of the Republican River. The Burlington and Missouri Railroad had built its main line between Denver and Kansas City through the valley in 1878. There was a red station, a roundhouse, a restaurant, and a hotel situated at the north end of the town; but the other business establishments were almost a mile to the south. Since no one was at the station to meet the immigrant boy, he probably stayed all night at the railroad's hotel.

Red Cloud, a frontier settlement only fourteen years old, had its beginning in 1870, when ranchers built a stockade to protect the westward-moving settlers from Indian raids. Land seekers and buffalo hunters stopped at the stockade to buy food, and in this way the town began to grow. The first hotel was constructed of logs and a sod roof, and homes were either dugouts (pioneer dwellings usually built in the side of a hill which gave warmth in winter as well as coolness in summer) or sod houses.

A young girl came with her family to Nebraska from Virginia in 1883, and moved to Red Cloud the following year, only a few months after Percy Magan arrived. She was Willa Cather, who would become a noted American novelist. In many of her books and short stories she described the coming of immigrant families - the Swedes, Germans, Bohemians, French, and Russians.

It was in this melting pot of Nebraska that Percy found himself alone and homesick on an April night in 1884. The following morning he took a look at the town, probably stopping at Miner Brothers' General Store. Willa Cather described Red Cloud as it no doubt looked to Magan. She wrote in O Pioneers! "The main street was a deeply rutted road, now frozen hard, which ran from the squat red railway station and the grain 'elevator' at the north of the town to the lumberyard and the horse pound at the south end. On either side of this road straggled two uneven rows of wooden buildings; the general merchandise stores, the two banks, the drugstore, the feed store, the saloon, the post office."

The Edwards Ranch

Percy hired a horse and buggy at a livery stable to make the twelve-mile journey to the Edwards ranch. As the rig headed north across the rolling contours of the Republican Valley, the youth looked at the land, bare except for a few clumps of cottonwood trees. How strange was this country to eyes accustomed to green fields, neat hedges, and dense woodlands. Although he did not know it then, he was going to a ranch that was known as a "failure." Mildred Bennett declares that "Lord and Lady Edwards from Ireland" had "bought a ranch north of town, put up a rambling dwelling and advertised that they would teach young men of aristocratic European families how to ranch. Actually, the Edwardses knew nothing about farming, and their several young European proteges spent their time loafing in Red Cloud." If Percy

could have read these lines in later years, he would have assured the writer that he was not one of the loafing apprentices!

When Percy arrived at the two-room frame house with a lean-to on the south side, set on a bleak, treeless farm, he was greeted by Mrs. Edwards and "two smelly children." There was also a servant girl who did the housework. Percy was shown to his quarters, which he could at least call a private retreat - an attic room with a cot, a rough board table, and a kerosene lamp. The stovepipe, running up from the kitchen stove through his room to the roof, gave welcome heat during the cold winter months; but it made the attic cell an oven on hot summer nights.

Percy soon found that Edwards had painted his property in rosy hues that were mere fantasy. Water for the house had to be drawn by hand from a deep well and carried three quarters of a mile. This was no fabulous cattle ranch; it was only a scrubby farm on a lonely prairie. The livestock consisted of a small herd of sheep, a few milk cows, and the farm horses. In later life, when he recounted his experience on the Nebraska farm, Percy wrote this to a relative in Ireland:

"I was the greenest little youngster when I first came to this country at the gallant age of sixteen that thee ever laid eyes on. I remember trying to make some biscuits, as they say in this country. I got the dough made, but had to squeeze it very tight in my hands to make it hang together. I did not know how to milk a cow, shear a sheep, or anything else. A friend of mine says I was so green that when I went out into the pasture, the cows were liable to eat me. Little by little I learned a few practical bits of knowledge, and I am sure that this experience will always make me more merciful to those who are coming along life's way."

The boy started his day at three-thirty in the morning, doing chores, milking the cows, cleaning the barn, harnessing the horses, and spreading fertilizer. "It was a part of my humble task in those hard days to lie out at night on the prairies with the sheep during lambing season with gun and dogs to keep the wolves away, and I have had the hair of my head frozen to the ground more than once so that the blooming wolf had an excellent chance to get away without some buckshot in his hide. I have had both feet frozen in my riding boots on the plains on three different occasions when trying to save Rotchford Edwards's cattle during winter blizzards while he was off filling himself with bad whiskey in the prairie village of Red Cloud."

A New Vision of Life

After a year on the Edwards ranch, the youth decided it was time for him to leave. The rancher was indulging more and more in liquor; and when he became drunk, he was abusive to his family and to young Magan. Sometimes, too, the family would go off to town for several days, leaving all of the heavy work on Percy's young shoulders. Finally the seventeen-year-old boy received a letter from his father, giving him permission to cancel the contract and seek his own fortune elsewhere in the growing country.

Percy found work in Red Cloud at the home of Levi Moore, an elderly banker. The energetic youth did the chores, built the fires, worked in the garden, and ran errands for Mrs. Moore. The sympathetic couple were kind to the immigrant lad in his plight. When Edwards attempted to slur young Magan's character for canceling the contract, the bankers wife wrote a letter to the youth's mother, praising his character, industry, manners, and thoughtfulness. Taking advantage of Mr. Moore's invitation to enjoy the books in the well-stocked library, Percy delved into volumes of history in his spare time.

As the months passed, the lad made friends with a young couple, John Gross and his wife, who lived a few blocks from the Moore home. One Sunday, dressed in flannel shirt, work trousers, and boots, Percy dropped in for a visit, only to find the young wife dressed in her black silk skirt and white blouse, ready to go out. Percy inquired, "Where are you going?"

"To a tent meeting," said the wife. "There is a wonderful preacher holding services. Won't you come if my husband will agree to go?"

"There are no good preachers until they're dead and six feet underground," answered Percy skeptically, prejudiced by his background of formal religion. "I'd rather stay here."

"But," persisted the woman, "this preacher tells how the Bible prophecies are fulfilled in the history of nations."

These words caught the interest of the young student of history. Without showing too much eagerness, Percy said, "Well, if you will take me dressed as I am and walk up to the front of the tent with me, I'll go."

The husband and wife, joined by Percy, made their way to the tent, which was pitched on a vacant lot near the business center of Red Cloud. Two Seventh-day Adventist ministers, Elders L. A. Hoopes and G. E. Langdon, had begun a series of evangelistic meet ings in the

town on June 9, 1886. At this particular service the evangelist spoke on the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. The music was simple, and a young girl, Eliza Burleigh, played the small organ.

As the trio were returning home after the meeting, the young woman asked, "Well, Percy, how did you like the sermon?"

"I did not understand it, but I would do anything to become as good a preacher as that Reverend Hoopes. If I could be as good a man as that man, I would be willing to give up everything and go to saving souls as he does."

The next evening Percy was anxious to attend the tent meeting and hear the message of the evangelist. He finished his chores, got out his best suit and shirt, and rolled them in a neat bundle. Afraid that some of the young fellows in the town would see him and ridicule his church attendance, he went a roundabout way and dressed in the bushes not far from the tent. For two weeks he attended every service, and on July 4 he told Mr. Moore that he had decided to keep the Sabbath.

As Percy was hoeing potatoes in the Moore garden, he pondered over his relation to his family and particularly his father's attitude toward him. The boy seemed to hear a voice say, "Would you rather have your rightful inheritance from your father, or have an eternal home in heaven and an angel to guide you there?" During the months of absence from Ireland, Percy had written regularly to his mother. Now he informed her of his interest in religion and how he was learning to understand the doctrines of the Bible. When his father heard of the son's experience, he wrote him: "Since you have decided to make a fool of yourself, Percy, I have disinherited you. I never want to see your face again."

In the middle of the summer the meetings ended, with four persons baptized in the Republican River and accepted into church fellowship. Writing of the results of evangelism, Elder L. A. Hoopes stated in the Review and Herald, October 5, 1886: "A young man also accepted the message, who immediately commenced to carry the truth to others. He has decided to give his time wholly to the cause of the Master."

No doubt this young man was Percy Magan, for within two weeks after he was baptized he joined the evangelistic group, acted as tent master, went to work as a colporteur among his old friends, and, as his knowledge increased, gave Bible studies to interested listeners.

One evening he visited a family that lived in a crowded dugout. While Percy was studying with eight members of the family, a severe

storm came up, and he was obliged to stay all night. The dugout had only a single room, but everyone was thankful for shelter. One by one the members of the family wrapped themselves in blankets and lay down on the floor, the men on one side of the room and the women on the other - feet to feet, leaving a narrow passageway between. The wind blew with hurricane force and torrents of rain came down amid crashing thunder and flashes of lightning. Early in the morning Percy arose and slipped out of the house. On his way back to town he stopped in a small clump of trees and removed his clothing. Here he spent an hour at an arduous but necessary task - picking off fleas!

The evangelists traveled from town to town through the southern part of the state, and reached Lincoln in time for the Nebraska camp meeting, September 15-21, where Percy heard stirring sermons by Elders S. N. Haskell and D. M. Canright. A Lincoln mission, begun the previous year by Elder G. B. Starr, gave the Irish youth an opportunity to continue his education. He worked and studied diligently until the spring of 1887. During that summer he went to Cambridge, Nebraska, with Elders Hoopes and J. E. James as caretaker of the evangelistic tent. One of his first tasks was to visit every house in the small town, soliciting subscriptions for the magazine, Good Health, an ordeal he sincerely disliked! The meetings ended abruptly one night when a tornado struck the town and tore the tent to shreds. The ministers left Cambridge for other duties, leaving the bewildered youth to clean up the mess and ship the salvaged equipment to Lincoln.

In the autumn Percy became a preacher in his own right, conducting meetings in a country schoolhouse near Grand Island, Nebraska. The attendance was fair, and several persons were baptized. But Percy realized that he needed more education, and his eyes turned east to the church college at Battle Creek.