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# Monmouth College and Martha McMillan (1894)

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## Monmouth College and Martha McMillan (1894)

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“I will not write on this page how sad and lonely I feel this night....The brightest day has its close—change and passing away is part of our belongings. Let even this inspire us to something nobler, better. How long I watched and waited for their coming home—but they have come and gone—and all has passed away just like a dream. And thus it is and ever will be.”

Martha McMillan wrote this entry on Wednesday June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1894 at the end of an event-filled day. This entry is a rare expression of the tension she feels between her desire for her children to live an upstanding, profitable life and the loneliness she experiences when they leave home. During 1894, her sons, Fred and Homer, were attending Monmouth College in Illinois, approximately four hundred and fifty miles from Cedarville. This distance made travel to and from home an infrequent occurrence, though travel was possible by train. As mentioned in earlier journals, McMillan intentionally set an example for how to live the Christian life and instructed her children in the Bible, both in the home and at Sunday School. By 1894, most of her children are venturing into the world to gain knowledge outside of the home and “either bless or curse the earth,” as she writes on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1894. Martha McMillan’s influence extends beyond the home and Cedarville, Ohio; her ideas and instruction are shared with others through her children’s education at Monmouth College.

Monmouth College was originally founded in 1853 as an academy before it became a university in 1856. The location was chosen based on several factors: agriculture, proximity to water, and transportation. The rich, dark soil of Northern Illinois is ideal for farming, and the town of Monmouth is not far from the Mississippi River. Most significantly, the new railroad

would run directly through Monmouth, making the college easily accessible to those who lived far from the small town. In the 1894 *Ravelings*, the editors write, “Monmouth College...is characterized by a spirit of Loyalty to its own and Liberality to others. Its sphere is the Church, the Community, and the World” (Wishart 9). The college was founded by Presbyterians, including influential pastors from Ohio. The college’s first president, Reverend David Alexander Wallace, was raised in Guernsey County, Ohio, and he graduated from Miami University before helping found Monmouth in 1856. The diverse nature of the college’s founders upholds its purpose for reaching “the Church, the Community, and the World.” The founders used their Presbyterian background to establish an educational institution that bolstered a small community to educate young men and women from within and beyond the community, and these young scholars would take their knowledge home and into the broader world.

Fred and Homer McMillan both attended Monmouth College in 1894. Fred was a freshman, and Homer was enrolled in the preparatory program (*Thirty-Eight* 60-61). During his freshman year, Fred joined the editorial board for *Ravelings* as the business manager, and he also played baseball (Wishart 3 and 93-94). Additionally, he and Homer participated in the Casino Club (42). Homer was the class president, and he wrote an article for *Ravelings* (27). Furthermore, this volume of *Ravelings* implies that Fred was mildly well-known on campus, and his knowledge of the Bible becomes a joke in this publication. On page 128, Fred is considered a “standard authority” on “Bible references.” This volume of *Ravelings* shows that Fred and Homer have gained identities outside of the McMillan farm while still holding onto their background. Martha raised them with the habit of going to church and reading the Bible while learning about Christ at home, and Fred was known for this education. This document also shows that Fred and Homer found a home outside of the life they knew on the McMillan farm in

Ohio. They were given the opportunity to interact with those who grew up in different areas of the country with different ideas. One of these individuals was Charles F. Wishart, who would go on to be the president of Wooster College in Ohio. Fred worked with Wishart on the editorial board of *Ravelings*; surely the mingling of ideas occurred during the editorial process. As a result, Martha mentions her disillusionment with Fred's work at Monmouth on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1894: "This afternoon Fred told us all good bye and Mr. Mc took him to Springfield—he expects to go on the...train to Monmouth—to get ready for his 'work.'" She has prepared him for his role at Monmouth, but she does not understand his work, nor does she seem enthusiastic about his departure. His identity at Monmouth clashed with her expectations for him as her son.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1894, Martha McMillan recalls these words from Reverend Morton's sermon: "The home life after all is the true life. A man's life at home always reveals his true character. We should walk wisely at home because of our influence and our responsibility, and because there are streams that flow from the home that will either bless or curse the earth. The seeds that are producing such a glorious harvest were cultivated in the home." This passage reflects one of her goals, as established in her earlier journals. In addition to her duties as a wife and her individual preferences, she strove to be a good mother and raise her children with a knowledge of the Bible and a love for Christ through their attendance at church and their education at home. She recognizes her own influence in their lives, and Reverend Morton's sermon echoes her own sentiments: the home is the origin of children who will either bless or curse the earth, depending on how they were raised and the habits they develop. This tension between loneliness and a feeling of success manifests itself through Fred's education at Monmouth, where he finds a sense of personal identity through *Ravelings* and his interactions

with other students. As a result, Martha's journal entries take on an air of sadness and a sense of loss. She no longer knows her children as she did when they remained at home.

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