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CHAPTER II-1 - WILLIAM E. GRIFFIS GROWS UP

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## Abstract

In which William E. Griffis is born in Philadelphia, grows to young manhood, becomes a twice-born Christian, serves briefly in the Civil War, attends Rutgers College, plays football, travels to Europe, begins theological seminary, gets engaged and, when the engagement is broken, jumps at the opportunity of becoming (for a handsome salary) a chemistry teacher (and crypto-missionary) in feudal Japan.

## CHAPTER II-1 - WILLIAM E. GRIFFIS GROWS UP

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"Providence so ordered that I should see, when almost a baby, the launching . . . of Commodore Perry's (sometime) flagship, the frigate *Susquehanna*; that I should have as a classmate the son of our American minister, Pruyn, who had been in Japan; that I should during my four years at Rutgers College . . . teach the first Japanese students in America; that I should spend another four years in educational work in the interior and capital of Dai Nippon; that my sister Margaret Clark Griffis, should be principal of the first government school for girls; and that I should remain on constant terms of intimacy with Nippon's sons and daughters ever since meeting them at my home, at the Asiatic Society, and in a hundred ways."

At the age of eighty the mind demands completion, wholeness, continuity. Life is a novel. Fact, fiction, exaggeration blend together into a comforting story. That Japan was the major adventure of a lifetime cannot be doubted. That it should be properly anticipated seems only natural. For William Elliot Griffis truth was not the issue. Neither was memory. Only understanding could suffice. Only the Lord's will could account for all the blessings received. A special warmth tinted the colors of his days. He entitled his only complete memoir, Sunny Memories of Three Pastorates.

Griffis had been born twice. His secular birthdate was September 17, 1843. From an economic point of view it was not the best of years to emerge into this world. The Depression following the Panic of 1837 still lingered. In 1842 the Bank of the United States, the nation's largest, had collapsed and the State of Pennsylvania had gone into bankruptcy. Such events would influence his life, but Griffis always preferred to recall happier omens. September 17 was the anniversary of the adoption of the Federal Constitution. In the streets of Philadelphia, his home town, an atmosphere of celebration. The militia in bright uniforms, the roll of drums and blare of cornets, oratory loud in the mouths of mayors, governors, senators. He liked to note such things, as if personal and national destiny were somehow intertwined. An indication of a patriotism so taken for granted that it did not need to be expressed.

The second birthdate came fourteen years later. On December 20, 1857, Griffis entered "into the Kingdom of Heaven." His acceptance of Christ was so complete that in the following seventy-one years his basic faith never wavered. The good things and the bad, the joys and disappointments, the failures and accomplishments -- all could be seen as part of some larger plan which unfolded according to the will of the Lord. Doctrinal disputes and conflict over personalities could be accepted because Christ's church was perfect, strong enough to surmount all problems of this world. On earth, human being could be sources of

trial and disappointment. By contrast, definition and experience, Father above would never fail Griffis.

Between the two birthdates the life of Griffis remains a vast blank, save for the launching of the Susquehanna. It was just the kind of portent he cherished. Nobody on April 7, 1850, could have known that this vessel would three years later carry the bluff Commodore into Edo Bay, playing a role in America's chief diplomatic triumph of the century. Yet the crowds were there, six year old Griffis among them. At nine a.m. he was standing on a temporary wooden structure erected in the yard of his father's coal company, just next to Philadelphia's U. S. Naval Yard. Members of the family, relatives, and friends surrounded him. On drydocks and the roofs of warehouses lining the Delaware River, people were gathered to watch the event, and as the vessel slipped down the chute to float on water for the first time, hats were waved and tossed aloft in a chorus of cheers and shouts.

It was a simpler age. Patriotism, even expansion and warfare, came at little cost. Manifest Destiny was in the air. The recent military victory over Mexico had doubled the territory of the United States and brought the West Coast of the continent into the Union. From California, the Pacific beckoned. Any new merchant ship spoke of exotic port towns, distant islands and economic growth; any new warship, of conflict and triumph in far-off waters, of the Stars and Stripes circling the globe. Heading towards Asia, both kinds of vessels were propelled not only by sail and coal, but by a weightless notion whose power was being tested: the idea of Mission. The Eagle

was spreading its wings. America was ready to carry civilization, that subtle blend of Christianity, steam engines and powerful cannon, to less fortunate nations. Griffis would be a willing agent of this enterprise.

The domestic turmoil of the period would touch him less. Expansionist America was a society in social, economic and intellectual ferment. Griffis' early years were the tag-end of an era now labelled Jacksonian, a period of contradictory aspirations. On the one hand, entrepreneurial thrusts, individualism and wild-cat capitalism rampant. On the other, communal consciousness, the self-defeating attempt to preserve pristine republicanism through social reform and control. Debate swirled around the issues of schools, asylums, prisons and factory life; experiments in communalism dotted the landscape; stormy emotions exploded into the literary and philosophical revolts of Romanticism and Transcendentalism. None of these penetrated the milieu in which Griffis was raised. His reading lists remain innocent of names like Thoreau, Emerson, Alcott or Margaret Fuller, not to mention Fourier or Robert Owen. In his world, temperance and abolition were the only social issues of much concern.

That his viewpoint was conventional is not surprising. Griffis was raised in a household in which neither parent was well educated. His mother, Anna Maria Hess, had been a Sunday School teacher before marriage, but this only meant that for her the teaching of the Good Book was the full sum of wisdom. The "Dame school" he attended from the age of five to seven, the public elementary school, even the well-

regarded Central High School of Philadelphia -- none of these were equipped to produce a critical intelligence. He learned to read, spell and figure, became acquainted with the geography and history of Europe and America, but never was taught to question economic, political or intellectual institutions. He acquired a taste for poetry to the extent of copying long selections into a notebook, but neglected to make qualitative distinctions between Longfellow, Milton or occasional verse which appeared in local newspapers. He came to love reading, but never focussed on anything very serious. Years later he would lament over all the time wasted as a young man upon "acres of trash . . . in the New York Ledger."

Reading must have been a comfort, a necessary escape. In a society where success was the measure of a man, Griffis was raised in an atmosphere of failure and defeat. He was the fourth of seven children, and the second son. His father, John Limeburner Griffis, had followed a family tradition by joining the merchant marine. After twenty years at sea, he settled down to marriage in 1837. Somehow, he never acquired land legs. Easy it was for him to tell stories of fog-bound ports in the Old World, of hot sandy beaches in Africa and the dense humidity of Manila Bay, of the odd men in pigtails who traded for opium along the China Coast. Much more difficult was supporting a family. The coal yard willed to him by his father-in-law vanished in a business reversal. After that, he never could hold a steady job. The consequences were readily apparent. Children in the Griffis household had to begin working at an early age and the family was perpetually on

the move to less expensive quarters. Poverty there was, but of a middle class variety, the poverty of expectations. No Griffis ever went hungry, but complaints over dingy linen, creaky furniture and threadbare rugs were perpetually being voiced.

Mother was another refuge. The disappointment felt by young Willie towards father would eventually edge towards contempt, but Anna always remained on a pedestal. One measure of the relationship may be found in an 1865 diary entry that mentions celebrating "Mother's twenty-eighth anniversary today." Since John was healthy enough, and living under the same roof, the omission would be revealing even to a pre-Freudian world. Anna was deeply religious, the kind of parent who dragged children to church every week and later sent them letters which concealed all pain of separation with the blessings of the Lord. Family story had it that, around the time of Willie's birth, she had vowed that if one of her sons was called to the ministry, Rutgers would be his college. No evidence remains to confirm the claim, yet the fact that Griffis chose to repeat the tale says enough about the relationship of mother to son.

Not until his journal begins at the age of sixteen does the world of Griffis begin to come into focus. For more than twenty years he recorded daily activities, then as an older man, he returned to the bound volumes to make corrections, emendations, fuller explanations, as if his relationships to people and events should be preserved accurately for posterity. To read his words after the passage of a

century is, for the curious mind, the mind of the historian, to be disappointed. One is stuffed full of details and left hungry for substance. The journals are at once informative and flat. They are a repository of events that exist in a world almost devoid of ideas, emotions, doubts or aspirations. Here you may learn that he rose early and ate donuts for breakfast, that it rained in spring and snowed in winter, that he attended church and Bible Study class, that he visited friends and walked with them up Chestnut Street and down Walnut, that he stayed in his room reading all day and went out to a party that lasted until one a.m., that he made one trip to Niagra Falls, another to Washington, D. C., and a third to Valley Forge, that he liked to indulge a sweet tooth with trips to an ice cream parlor, that at the age of twenty-one he weighed one-hundred-nineteen pounds. Sometimes, in the description of a sunset or a landscape, you may sense behind the words a soul being stirred by beauty. But pain, love, hate, desire are absent from the pages. Save for a love of the Lord so regularly professed that it too carries little emotional charge.

So resolutely pedestrian are the journals, so apparently intent on proving that life is no more than one damn thing after another, that the motives for keeping them remain obscure. No doubt tradition played a part. They may represent an attenuation of the legacy of Puritan forbears, those men and women whose diaries are harrowing records of inner struggle, anguished chronicles of despair over the closeness of hellfire eternal and the tenuous possibilities of Election to the Kingdom of Heaven. How far from such storms is Griffis, how secular by

comparison, how much less savory to modern taste. His is a world of surfaces, one in which the inner man was not acknowledged. In a sense, there was no inner man except on those few occasions when, under the stress of emotion, unexpected feelings erupted into consciousness. At those moments he would attempt to deny feelings by refusing to put them into words. During some of the most crucial moments of his life, the journals remain noncommittal, even blank. Griffis is not only unknown in the way the modern mentality would like to know him, he was also largely -- in our terms -- a stranger to himself. Beneath the surface of the man was only another surface.

One of the earliest of journal entries chronicles the end of childhood. In June, 1859, Willie Griffis graduated High School. Two months later he began a five-year term as an apprentice in a jewelry company. The transition from schoolboy to full-time worker must have been painful. A five-and-a-half day, sixty-hour week found Griffis at a bench in a small factory building, learning to use tiny tools and soldering irons to create rings, studs, collar buttons, pendants, pins and badges out of silver, gold, coral, pearl and precious stones. Feelings about the experience -- ennui or tedium -- were hidden. The first day comment, "time passed heavy, but six o'clock came at last," was not underscored until five years later: "Rose up at 6:15 and went forth to my last day of bondage." In between, silence, save for the frequent notation: "Went to the F." The solitary recorded moment of satisfaction at work came the very last week of the contract. Willie

bragged about "performing the prodigy of making a diamond ring in 1 hr. 15 min."

The most important part of life took place away from the factory. After work and on weekends, Willie was a gregarious and fun-loving young man, always ready to attend a lecture or a band concert, to stroll downtown, picnic in the country or jaunt over the Almshouse Meadows at twilight to snare frogs for a tasty dinner treat. Natural enough it was for him to be among the jostling street crowds on June 9, 1860, when seventy-one samurai invaded Philadelphia for two days of sightseeing. These members of the first Japanese Embassy to the United States, clad in formal silk robes and bearing swords, were a startling sight as they went from the Mint to the Gas Works to Independence Hall. Yet the color and novelty of the occasion did not warrant an entry in Griffis' diary. Fifty years later, history could be updated. In faint pencil in the upper margin of the journal, an addition: "As the strangers rode in carriages up Walnut Street . . . I was impressed with their tasteful costumes, the exquisite workmanship of their swords, but above all by their polished manners . . . From the first I took the Japanese seriously." Perhaps. But not that seriously. Not seriously enough to be moved to read a single book about Japan in the decade before going there.

Church was the center of Willie's life. Raised a Presbyterian, called to Christ under the aegis of Reverend John Chambers, paster of the First Independent Church of Philadelphia, Griffis at the age of twenty was drawn to the Second Dutch Reform Church of Reverend Thomas

D. Talmadge. Soon he was an active participant in both congregations. His appetite for religious activities was garantuan. Five, six, seven times a week he would be off to church. On Sundays alone there were usually four events: in the morning, a Sabbath Class he taught to youngsters, followed by the regular service; after dinner, a second service and in the evening, a prayer meeting. Weeknights included a variety of gatherings: young people's prayer meetings, Bible Study classes, reports on missionary endeavors. Lists of sermon titles and names of visiting ministers crowd his journal. He liked to evaluate oratorical styles and judge preaching ability -- usually "excellent" -- without ever mentioning what was said. All this was less duty than entertainment. Church was a meeting ground of the spiritual and the social, a place not only to encounter representatives of the Lord, men whose knowledge and wisdom was impressive, but also to meet and make friends with young people of both sexes.

Only once in Willie's life did national politics seriously intrude upon his consciousness. Across work, church and recreation fell the shadow of sectional conflict. At the Shakespeare Lyceum in mid-March, 1861, Griffis took the negative and winning side in a debate on whether the new Lincoln administration should reinforce Fort Sumter. Three weeks later, on April 13, this note: "Civil War commenced today . . . I spent the evening at the YMCA Room. Retired at 11:30." Excitement followed apparent indifference. The next days saw crowds milling about in downtown Philadelphia, angry groups of men demanding that "people show their colors," ministers reaching new heights of rhetorical

splendor in sermons demanding that the Lord bless the Union. This mood touched Willie only for a short period. For most of the four years of the conflict -- except for those moments when Confederate Armies drew close to Philadelphia -- a certain tone of distance characterized his reactions. Twice he did join the military for ninety-day terms -- in April, 1861, with the Pennsylvania Cadets; in July, 1863, with a company of the regular Union Army that reached the battlefield of Gettysburgh just after the carnage there ceased. Here was devotion to home and Union, but little indication of more general political attitudes, especially towards the large issues raised by the war. Long before the Emancipation Proclamation, Griffis could be deeply impressed by the fiery, Abolitionist orator, Charles Sumner, denouncing slavery as the cause "of this present rebellion." But he also could not refrain from noting that in the packed Concert Hall, one quarter of the audience was composed of "quakers and niggers." Even the assassination of Lincoln elicited no deep outpouring of grief, though Willie was moved enough to address his Sabbath School class "in reference to the sad event."

None of this indicates indifference to the fate of his country. Griffis was simply limited, self-centered, a young man constricted in both vision and vocabulary who could relate more easily to the local and personal than the national and abstract. The moral passions of the Civil War were not only distant, they blossomed at a time when Willie's own life began to take on a new direction and purpose. A hidden ambition that had been long growing came into focus on May 24, 1863.

Griffis would always recall that date as the major turning point of his life. The occasion was a Sunday sermon; the place, the Dutch Reform Church; the speaker, William H. Campbell, President of Rutgers; the text, "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me." The message was hardly new, but this time the words were weighted with a profound, insistent significance. They triggered something in the young man, led Willie to make two important decisions: to enter the ministry and to study at Rutgers.

Two years later he was admitted with the Class of 1869. Preparing for entrance examinations in four fields -- Latin, Greek, Algebra and Geography -- had been an immense task, a matter of will, dedication and hard work, of rising early, staying up late and foresaking pleasures to remain at a desk in study and to meet with tutors for recitation. It was worth the effort. Located in the small town of New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers might not be large, but it was old and distinguished, a good blend of the sacred and secular. Nurtured since 1770 by the Dutch Reform Church as an institution dedicated to the liberal arts and divinity, the college was in the mid-sixties in a period of rapid growth. To the traditional classical curriculum had been added a Scientific School. This action brought financial support from the State Legislature under the Morrill Land Grant Act. The student body, eighty-one in 1865, almost doubled by the end of the decade, the faculty of twelve grew by several members, and alongside the old halls were erected new buildings housing well-equipped laboratories.

The ferment of change had a positive effect upon Griffis. Something in the atmosphere of Rutgers unleashed the curiosity of the serious student. He tore into classes with an eagerness that was almost ferocious. He became a reader in many fields. To a natural and professional interest in religion and the classics was added a passion for a field he had previously ignored: science. This posed no conflict. Darwin's Origin of Species had been in print for half a dozen years, but his name and the disturbing implications of his theories were yet unknown outside narrow professional circles. The leading force in Rutgers Scientific School, Professor George H. Cook, was both an elder of the Reform Church and a teacher of Bible Classes. For him, as for his students like Griffis, science was no threat to the True Faith, but "the handmaid of religion and an instrument of blessing."

Available records fail to indicate whether Griffis elected the Classical or Scientific curriculum. What they do show is an appetite for learning across a broad spectrum of fields. Courses in the Bible, Christianity and Moral Philosophy were central to a future minister. Willie also studied mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics, botany, geology, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French, logic, political economy and history. His carefully kept list of books read while in college is divided between poetry, history, science, religion and literature. The majority of these were not required for courses. For personal improvement or pleasure he delved into writings by leading contemporary scientists like Louis Agassiz, Thomas Henry Huxley and Baron von

Humboldt. In history his taste ran to romantic works that celebrated the masculine achievements of discovery, struggle and conquest, those epics of empire by Prescott, Motley and Macauley that served not only to justify European institutions, but expansion as well.

College was not all books and classes. It was social life and student organizations, debate contests and athletics, weekend jaunts to Manhattan, parties and fun and good humor. Willie became part of it all. He joined Delta Upsilon fraternity and became active in two literary societies devoted to declamation and debate. With fellow student Robert Pruyn, he conceived, planned and edited The Targum, a monthly literary magazine that featured -- naturally enough -- the first of his writings to appear in print. He developed a passion for sports, often slipped down to the Raritan River to boat or swim, jogged for miles along country lanes, played on the football team that, the year after his graduation, engaged Princeton in the first intercollegiate match. High spirited, but never frivolous, he could appreciate that quality in others. When four students were condemned by the faculty for the prank of pulling down a fence, Griffis joined in a protest against a punishment that seemed overly severe. He also showed a good sense of humor. Famed New York editor Horace Greeley came to campus in February, 1867, to deliver a lecture on "Self-Made Men" and spent the night sleeping in Griffis' chambers. A snoopy minister was moved to ask whether Greeley had been religious enough to make devotions at night. Willie replied: "I heard considerable snoring, but no praying."

Finances could never be far from mind, even during the headiest of student days. Tuition ran close to eighty dollars a year, room and fuel another fifteen. Part of the cost of Willie's education was borne by a subscription taken among church members at home. When it became necessary to supplement that fund, Griffis, in his junior year, took a teaching position at the Rutgers Grammar School, and spent fourteen hours a week drilling potential college students in the rudiments of Latin and Greek. He also had the occasional opportunity to lecture to other classes on a wide variety of topics: Greek mythology, science and technology, natural philosophy, political economy and the American Constitution. At the Grammar School were several Japanese students who became the source of a few brief journal notations. "Bright" and "gentlemanly" they might be, but Griffis did not linger over them. They were hardly important in his busy life.

Four years seemed to run away. In that time, Rutgers provided an education without changing Griffis very much. He was a good student, fifth in his class with an average of 93.6 percent. He won half a dozen prizes for composition and oratory, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, exposed to a broad panorama of history and literature, grounded in the sciences, provided with many opportunities to polish skills in speaking and writing, and given a variety of social and athletic outlets for his energies. But at graduation in June, 1869, Willie's fundamental premises had not been altered in the least. He was still a deeply moral and religious young man, one devoted to duty, hard work

and discipline, one who perceived the world largely in terms of right and wrong, Good and Evil, Christian and non-believer.

Rutgers also failed to make him self-reflective. Never was he moved to sum up the college experience, though once as a junior he did step back for a moment to draw a perspective on the meaning of higher education. His analysis is revealing. College students seemed to him members of a group at once privileged and burdened. Basically their life was "exhilarating and joyous." Unlike most people, they were not stuck in "dull routine," but had the excitement of encountering "new worlds of knowledge." At the same time, college was deadly serious, "an armory to find the armor and forge the weapons for the life-long fray of duty and profession." Sad it was that some students, professors even, lost their "enthusiasm, tone of mind, vim, esprit." The culprit was not difficult to find: "social pleasures are seductive." Necessary they might be, but one must be careful to keep control, to "use them sparingly." The aim of education -- of life itself -- was self-improvement. This was a sacred duty. To fail was a sign of "ingratitude to God, to friends, ourselves." Certainly a harsh judgment, the judgment of a young man. But one that Willie was ready to apply to himself.

Fourteen months after graduating from Rutgers in June, 1869, came the call to Japan. A most hectic, trying, troubled and confused period, with moodswings common, joy and despair the twin faces of a coin tossed daily. College may have been a demanding world of trial

and preparation, but it was one whose boundaries were known. If sustained effort was necessary to fulfill requirements, they were at least given. Courses flowed smoothly into one another, and always towards the goal of a degree. Graduation presented a more complicated challenge. To choose the ministry was only the first step into an adult realm of unknown, unseen parameters. This was America, the land of opportunity. In religion, as in any field, all kinds of positions were available at all kinds of salaries and levels of comfort. One could serve the Lord in many ways. There were rural congregations and urban flocks, ministries to the wealthy and those to the poor, churches for the middle class and those for working people. And no one could deny that the affluent needed the Lord's word just as much as -- some might argue more than -- the indigent.

Three years of Divinity School might lie between him and a career, but already Griffis was caught up in such considerations. No doubt he was ambitious, much as he would not openly admit to that worldly motivation. His self-image was defensive. It was that of a man with a heavy weight on his back, a burden comprised of personal and family debt, and compounded by the continuing failure of father to provide a steady income. The truth contained in this view should not obscure a personal hunger for success. At college Griffis had tasted of the world of high culture and found it savory. Genteel manners, art, good books, travel, and the leisure to enjoy these things became part of his image of the minister. The role of religious and cultural leader were

intertwined. The good minister must set an example not only in the realms of Faith and Morality, but in those of learning and art as well.

To follow the dilemmas of Griffis in the months after graduation, to see him wrestling with the problem of his future, to understand how his choice of a position in Japan grew out of -- became an escape from -- difficulties at once financial and personal, one must turn to his letters written to his older sister, Maggie. She was confidante and supporter, a source of consolation and a mother substitute. To her he could confess doubts and secrets about personal life hidden from the rest of the world. Often the letters are oblique and circumspect, full of hints of juicier revelations to be delivered face-to-face, but they brim with emotions never recorded in the journals. Their subtext, the relationship to Maggie, reveals Griffis as divided. Generally the tone is at once open and cautious, that of a man who wishes to share secrets, but fears to fully reveal his heart. He is careful to note positive accomplishments -- sermons preached, lectures given, praise received, money earned -- then tends to downplay all success with complaints about expenses, debts, potential future costs. Money was the sticking point. Obligated to share earnings with the family, Willie enjoyed admiration for his role as provider. But he did not wish anyone fully to depend upon him. Adult he might be in the eyes of the world, but in the letters to his sister, Griffis still clung to the world of the child.

The period began brightly enough, with Willie and Maggie joining together for a three month journey to Europe. To make the trip,

Griffis had to borrow three hundred dollars. He made good use of the money. They sailed late in June, landed in England, hastened through the Low Countries to France, Germany, and Switzerland, then went east to Austria and south to Italy before doubling back to Great Britain to catch the ship for home. It was a glorious experience. Visions of cathedrals, opera houses, palaces and museums, sights, sounds and smells of people and landscapes, foods and fashions, open-air markets and street vendors, were both an education and an inspiration to Willie's first important writings on non-religious topics. Memories of Europe would remain as a warm, happy inner glow in the difficult months ahead.

Brother and sister descended the gangplank into New York City on the morning of Monday, October 11. That very afternoon Griffis was in New Brunswick to attend classes at the Rutgers Theological Seminary and resume the teaching post at the Grammar School. The pace set that day would not slacken for almost a year. Divinity School was more inspiring and more difficult than undergraduate studies; now he was reading the Bible in Greek and delving into theology in German. But Willie could never devote full attention to his studies. The European travel debt weighed heavy and requests from members of the family for money began to arrive in the mail. Grammar School paid a salary little more than adequate for daily needs, so to fulfill obligations, Griffis was forced to hustle.

Words were his one saleable commodity. Willie's chief skill was in delivering the message of the Lord; to this he now added his own

message in the form of lectures about Europe. In that pre-electronic era, guest lecturers and preachers were always in demand, especially if they would work in out-of-the-way places for whatever donations the public cared to make. Not for the likes of Griffis the world of wealthy congregations, large auditoriums, travel by train. His was a humble circuit of farming communities, long hikes through muddy roads, lectures delivered in drafty halls. The take varied widely. On a "good week pecuniarily" he might leave Rutgers for half a dozen appearances and earn less than forty dollars. Here is one of his best: Friday night at Raritan, \$15; a "stormy" Saturday at a country church, \$5; Sunday, morning and evening lectures in Whitehouse, donations unrecorded; Monday a long walk through "horrible" weather to Griggstown, \$7.75; Tuesday at Newmarket, \$8.25. Total for the week after deducting expenses: \$31.25.

The grinding routine -- "study, teach, lecture and preach" -- took a heavy toll. Usually exhausted, often sick, Griffis was subject to dark moods. The "debt cloud" did not easily dissipate, the lament "I wish I could raise cash" became a litany. Envy blossomed when he learned that a preacher he knew earned five thousand dollars a year. Dismay flowered when he was informed that the post of minister at a New York congregation at a salary of three thousand might have been his had he already been ordained. To hurry that possibility, he spoke in February to the head of the Seminary about a "short course" and was rebuked. Explanation to Maggie followed: It had been a "penny-wise plan . . . My aim is high. I shall not spoil it by haste . . . He that

believith shall not make haste." Two months later, other fantasies bloomed. Willie was planning to quite school for a year, move to New York and devote himself entirely to lecturing, preaching and writing. Prudence prevailed. By May the three hundred dollar debt was paid off. Now he was looking forward to two more years of seminary with a "mind . . . better prepared for . . . studies."

Financial worries were fueled by other issues. For the first -- apparently the only -- time in life, Griffis wrestled with problems theological. Delicious it was to describe in dramatic terms the way he was "grappling with doctrines that shake my old faith to the very foundations and demand of me all my powers of mind." The issue was the Unitarian challenge to the notion of Trinity. Serious it might be, but not all that soul-shaking, or Willie could not have followed with: "Whatever the result of my deliberations . . . on my theoretical belief, certainly my preaching will not be dogmatic, but practical, earnest, positive and cultured." Exposure to Theological School did occasionally push him in new directions. At one point Calvinism seemed attractive, its gloomy doctrines suited to his frame of mind. This could only be temporary for a mentality that normally believed in sunshine and good works. No Calvinist could, as did Griffis, term "glorious" a sermon based on the theme that the relation of Christian to God was based on "love, not fear."

Love was another part of the turmoil. Always sociable, drawn to female companionship, Willie could not visit Manhattan without noting that Broadway was "thronged with pretty girls." In college days years

his "passion" for one in particular had been "the purest and strongest power in my nature, save my religion." Her name was Ellen Johnson. She flits through his journal and letters, a shadowy figure referred to as "E" until a January 29 note to Maggie is headed with huge, printed words: "Veni! Vidi! Vici!," followed by an exultant burst: "Love's labor won. I have heart won fair lady! I have won her. Ellen Johnson is my Ellen. I am loved in return." Admittedly, she was not what the world took for "pretty." Willie saw her as something better, a "lovely" creature with "a quick and brilliant mind, a deeply affectionate nature, a cheerful religion, a full flow of spirits . . . " Best of all, a woman who thought "no home brighter and happier than a ministers."

A small cloud of potential reservations hovering over the relationship was ignored. For some reason Ellen did not yet want news of the engagement made public. Willie acquiesced, pleased enough that she lent him a ring so that he could go home to Philadelphia and personally create a gold band for her. When in April she began to prepare for a six-month trip to Europe, Griffis offered a reluctant blessing. Separation was not to his taste. He could accept it only because she "promised freely all that I could desire -- not to forget me, to love me more, and to be my wife." That would be a blessed state. Life without the love of a woman "would be hard, stern and dark; now it shall be sunny, glowing and joyful." No firm date was set, but in a year or two at the most, "marriage and its train of joys" would belong to them.

The prospect of marriage fueled financial anxieties, yet made Willie feel more mature and worldly. Everything was coming together now -- study, work and love. Life appeared "deeper and riper," he felt better prepared to handle "the subtle workings of the human heart." A new broadness and tolerance touched him. At a huge New York celebration in May, 1870, over the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution -- which extended to former slaves the right to vote -- he dropped the old word "nigger" in favor of "darkies . . . black people . . . negroes." Happy he was to report that their joyous behavior was not drunken and rude, but "decorous, temperate and courteous" as if "to silence all slander and choke all prejudice." No doubt including his own.

That summer of 1870 was a rare moment of equilibrium. Griffis took a job at Knox Memorial Chapel, a "tasteful and beautiful" Methodist Church located in a working-class district of Manhattan. The salary was one-hundred dollars a month, the work pleasant and not too demanding. Ellen's absence left a hole in life, but his health was good, his debts paid off, his days full, his future bright. He slept long and well, studied and wrote sermons in the mornings, attended to church business in the afternoon, saw old college pals at night and often spent part of the weekend visiting friends and acquaintances in the country. Two days a week were devoted to pastoral visits. The tenements of New York confronted him with a kind of "inexorable and hopeless" poverty of previously unimagined sort, a struggle for existence that made his own monetary complaints seem, by comparison, a

"sin." Such experience did not down all self-inflation. Proudly Willie reported that his own "experiences of poverty and the struggle for bread" well fitted him to be a messenger of comfort to the poor.

September was a cruel, disturbing month, a time of emotional storm, a period when life suddenly and sharply veered in a new direction. The first hints came on the sixth when a letter from the President of Rutgers brought Griffis a "dazzling" job offer. The position, teacher of Natural Science; the place, Fukui, Japan; the term, three years; the salary, two thousand four hundred dollars a year, plus a house, a horse, and travel expenses. Only one thing made it impossible: "were it not for the fact that E.G.J. exists I should not hesitate five minutes . . ." One may sense behind this remark a touch of resentment that such a rare opportunity had -- for whatever good reason -- to be foregone. Or perhaps this is only to read the future into the past. One week later Ellen returned from Europe and Willie met with her on the fourteenth. No record of their conversation exists, no hint other than the mute letter "E" graces his journal on this most serious occasion. Two weeks later, this to Maggie: "There is no present likelihood that E. and I will ever be husband and wife. Do not ask me for details or explanation." His heart was "almost broken . . . yet all is right, and E remains in my mind purser, nobler and more worth living for than ever." The rest is silence.

Willie was free now, more than free. He was a man ready to jump, and Japan was waiting. Yet to take the plunge was not easy. For two weeks he hesitated, consulted with people, worried the decision. In

Albany, Robert Pruyn, father of his friend and former Minister to Japan, urged him to accept the "splendid offer" with arguments that stressed "money and travel advantages, society, health, knowledge, usefulness and good to be accomplished." The elder Pruyn did more; he offered to advance eight hundred dollars to cover costs of the journey. Japanese students from the Grammar School also urged their teacher onward and the Reverend John Ferris, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Dutch Reform Church, made it seem "a duty to God, the church, my country and Japan to go." One of Willie's favorite professors at Rutgers saw the offer as "a temptation of the devil." Other faculty members were more positive about this "glorious opportunity" for Griffis and for God.

To the decision made at the beginning of October, family reaction was predictable. His sisters dissolved into tears, his mother sadly wrote, "that you believe yourself called of Him is sufficient to me," his father remained silent, his two brothers began to wonder whether Willie might be able to find equally lucrative positions for them. Maggie reacted with a ferocity that revealed closeness and a deep sense of loss. She lay the blame squarely on Ellen. Only her change of mind was sending Griffis off "to a land without God, without the Bible, without a Holy Sabbath." The horror of this prospect did not fully submerge a streak of opportunism. Maggie might grieve, but her eye never strayed completely from the practical. Instead of borrowing only eight hundred dollars for the trip, she suggested, "It would be just as

well to get \$1,000" and use the balance to buy new carpets for the house.

Sister and brother were much alike. Griffis was a man equally committed to himself and to duty, to the practical and the religious, the worldly and the spiritual. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the decision for Japan. September's "chain of events" came from God, and though the decision might lead to calamity, disease or death, he was not afraid. That he looked forward to carrying the gospel to a heathen land cannot be doubted; that he would not have done so had not the price been right was equally true. He was a good American, which at the very least means he wanted it all: "I can study and be ordained there, and God willing, return to my native land only one year later than if I staid (sic). Beside the grand opportunities and culture, travel and good climate . . . I can not only study on my theology, but collect materials to write a book. I can support my family at home, at least, pay the rent, and carpet the floors, and send handsome sums home, too."

The word "rationalization" in its modern, psychological sense was unknown in the mid-nineteenth century. If a later generation wishes to apply it to Griffis' words, it must be with the realization that to gain understanding is to lose immediacy. Insofar as the concept illuminates his behavior, it obscures his experience. Sincere he certainly was in summing up the reasons for Japan and placing responsibility for this new direction on a power higher than the self: "Unable to do anything else, now, by the help of God, I go forth to new

duties, with a conscience clear and a path as plain as when I first started in the work of the ministry."