

MACARTNEY ON MACHEN

NED B. STONEHOUSE

If the readers of this article share my particular fondness for autobiography and biography, they will almost certainly enjoy the recently published autobiography of the late Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, which has as its main title, *The Making of a Minister* (Channel Press, Great Neck, N. Y., 1961). History is the teacher of life, as an ancient writer said. And the lives of great men, especially if their memoirs present not only new knowledge concerning significant historical movements but also fresh insights as to the way in which history has been affected by the personality, character and motives of leading participants, are capable of profoundly affecting the course of our own lives.

This book reminds us of the hospitable and generous householder who is prepared out of his treasury to bring forth things new and old. Written in the attractive literary style that was one of Macartney's distinguished accomplishments, a style that is simple and lucid without being plain or monotonous, it offers the reader a great variety of fascinating disclosures concerning his life and reflections upon it.

Struggle for the Faith

Tastes are bound to differ with regard to biographical writing, and this is probably especially true with respect to what a writer chooses to include and what he decides to leave unsaid. This autobiography is especially rich and interesting in its sketch of the subject's background and early life; it seems to me to be rather thin in the latter portions, though one is grateful for many features relating to his work as minister and pastor in Paterson, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Many homely details are included which impress one with the down-to-earth humanity of Macartney; a few such details seem not to add greatly to the impact of the work; and one could wish for a much more expansive treatment of the great theological and ecclesiastical issues of the period of his mature life. Never-

theless, one is bound to be grateful that a brief chapter, entitled "For the Faith," comments frankly on the issues raised in the twenties and thirties especially in the Presbyterian Church.

Macartney's own part in the struggle "for the faith," particularly in its beginnings, is always recalled with profound appreciation, and his own reminiscences of this struggle constitute one of the most fascinating parts of the book. In this connection what he has to say regarding J. Gresham Machen is likely to prove of the most intense interest to readers of this journal, and since it on the whole speaks forth such a ringing testimony in support and vindication of Machen, one cannot but hope that the book may still serve to correct the grave distortions of his character and spirit which have persisted through the years.

Macartney recalls the Machen of their student days in Princeton Seminary as one of whom none thought, "as his modernist foes afterwards caricatured him, as sour, bitter and unfriendly" (p. 187). He acknowledges that the opposition to Machen's confirmation as Professor of Apologetics at Princeton in 1926 was blocked by his enemies "and the enemies of the truth which he represented and defended . . . because of his uncompromising stand on the great issue before the church" (p. 187). Although Macartney did not favor the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions for practical reasons, he defends its constitutionality, and declares that Machen's expulsion because he refused to obey the mandate of the General Assembly was "one of the darkest blots on the history of the Presbyterian Church" (pp. 188f.).

Dr. Stonehouse, Professor of New Testament in Westminster Seminary, is the author of J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir (Eerdmans, 1955).

An Erroneous Impression

Nevertheless, this evaluation is followed at once by a statement of a rather critical nature. For Macartney writes:

When Dr. Machen's trial came up before the Judicial Commission, I wrote to him, offering him my services as counsel. He replied with a kind letter, but declined my offer, saying that if I defended him, he might be acquitted, and that was not what he wanted. He had already made up his mind to secede, and promptly did so, establishing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (p. 189).

When I read these lines, I felt at once that they did not ring true. Fortunately I was able to check the correspondence, and have been eager to correct the erroneous impression that is given, however inadvertently, by Macartney's statement.

Macartney's offer was evidently made in a conference or telephonic conversation on May 8, 1936. The next day Machen sent the long letter which is published as an appendix to this review article and which makes perfectly clear that Macartney's memory failed him at this point. As the letter itself discloses, the basic reason for declining the offer (however overwhelmed with gratitude Machen was for Macartney's generosity in making it) was that he felt that his counsel, who would represent him before the Judicial Commission and as well afterward, in connection with the public appraisal of the trial regardless of its outcome, had to be a person who would represent his view "in the most thoroughgoing way." To Machen's deep distress, in spite of the large areas of agreement between Macartney and himself, and their mutual respect and admiration, this was not true so far as their total evaluation of the ecclesiastical situation was concerned.

Machen Not a Schismatic

At this time indeed, as the letter also makes perfectly clear, Machen had come to believe that the denomina-

tion was apostate and he longed for a separation. But it must not be forgotten that this letter, dated May 9, 1936, virtually on the eve of his condemnation by the highest court of the Church, was written after many agonizing years of struggle for reform from within wherein year after year, in the great Princeton issue and that concerned with Foreign Missions, to mention only two, those who had stood for the authority and integrity of the constitutional standards of the Church had been defeated. Nevertheless, Machen was not a schismatic. He did not want separation simply for the sake of separation or for the sake of peace. No one approached him with respect to the zeal and devotion with which he had sought to bring the Presbyterian Church back to its constitutional commitments. And even at this late hour, when the handwriting on the wall was quite clear, as the next to the final paragraph of the letter underscores, Machen's sense of obligation to fulfill his ministerial vows was such that he could not condone the evil involved in his anticipated condemnation by the Commission even though it might become the occasion of good. In the words of his own letter, "But I cannot acquiesce in that evil for a moment, and therefore I am adopting every legitimate means of presenting my case even before the Modernist Permanent Judicial Commission."

Unanswered Questions

In the context of the statement concerning Machen which has just been under scrutiny Macartney speaks of the establishment of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as "abortive" and of Westminster after 1936 in generally disparaging terms. I shall not here undertake an evaluation of these criticisms beyond a few words. Mistakes have been made and there have been deep disappointments, and even when the hand of God has been present to bless in surprising ways there has been and is now no place for complacency and self-congratulation. Nevertheless, Macartney's evaluation raises certain questions which the autobiography unfortunately makes no attempt to answer. Would not the course of history have been different if Macartney and men like him had continued to labor shoulder to shoulder with Machen? And what shall one say concerning the virtual silence, so far as a struggle "for the faith" is concerned, in the

"I do not desire to do evil that good may come."

years following 1936? One cannot but hope and pray that even now there may be many who, faithful to the basic approach of Macartney's earlier days, as they are also admirably set forth by the editor of this volume, Dr. J. Clyde Henry, in the splendid Introduction, will be aroused to carry on regardless of cost the great battle for the truth within and without the church.

Letter to Macartney

May 9, 1936

Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, D.D.,
First Presbyterian Church,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Dear Macartney:

Having deliberated very carefully indeed with regard to the matter which you brought to my attention yesterday afternoon, I am, as you suggested, writing to tell you just exactly how I feel.

First, I want to say again what I tried very imperfectly to say — that your willingness to defend me before the Permanent Judicial Commission delights and gratifies me very greatly indeed. I feel, as you can well imagine, very highly honored by it. Your review of my recent book, especially just at this time, touched my heart. I rejoice very greatly, also, in the knowledge that, unlike Dr. Craig, you are firmly convinced that we of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions have a full right under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. to form that Board and to be members of it. I regret, therefore, the more, to feel compelled to say that I do not think it would be right for me to ask you to act as my counsel. My only comfort in doing so is that from your exceedingly sympathetic and broad-minded attitude yesterday I got the impression that you will not be offended but will understand why I take the position that I do.

Certainly my taking this position is not due to any low estimate of your effectiveness as an advocate. On the contrary it is, in a way, a testimony to my sense of your effectiveness. If you were some obscure and ordinary person, I could, without risk, let you appear as my counsel and be known as such before the world, even though your position was not exactly the same as mine. But, as it is, anything that you might say would be attributed to me, and despite all manner of disavowals on your part and on my part, it would be taken by the public generally to be a statement of my position.

Just envisage, for example, what might happen after this decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission is tendered.

Suppose the issue were evaded. Suppose I got off with a light sentence. That, to my mind, would be the greatest possible calamity which could befall the evangelical cause at the present time. I do not think it is likely to happen. But suppose it did happen. Then, after the trial was over, you would be interviewed. What you would say would be said not only by the Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, D.D., ex-moderator of the General Assembly, but by counsel for J. Gresham Machen. Just because you are the most distinguished conservative preacher in America, anything that you would say would be said, so far as the press is concerned, through a tremendous loud speaker.

Under these circumstances, since your position is not just the same as mine, there would be really a very serious risk that my position on the Church would be seriously misrepresented. I should risk being in the position of letting my colleagues in the Independent Board down, and obscuring what we stand for.

Of course, I might find it difficult to define in a few words just what the difference between your position and mine is. I rather think that it is something like this — that you desire our continuation for the present in the present organization of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., hoping that there will be reform of that Church or hoping that evangelicalism may prosper by such continuation; whereas I, on the other hand, am longing for a division, and hoping and praying with all my soul that the division may come soon. I am perfectly convinced that the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is an apostate Church at its very heart. I do not think there is any blessing of God for us so long as we continue in such an apostate organization.

That difference of attitude, I think, would be bound to appear in anything that you would say. You might claim with all your might the fact that you were speaking for yourself alone and not for me. But the newspapers would never get that fine point if you had been actually asked by me to be my counsel.

As it is, I have a man as my counsel who is a member of the Independent Board and is just as guilty as I am — supposing that I am guilty at all. I can with great confidence say that Mr. Griffiths speaks for me not only before the Permanent Judicial Commission but also to the newspapers. You will understand just as readily as I understand it that I cannot say exactly that with respect to you. I rejoice with all my soul in the measure of our agreement, and particularly does it delight me to know, from our conversation yesterday, that that agreement is even more extensive and more cordial than I thought that it was.

But one guiding star has been before me in all this matter. It has been this

principle — that anyone who represents me in this occasion, which I think is an historic occasion, should represent my view in the most thoroughgoing way. That is the reason why I have not done what some of my colleagues have done. I have not asked various persons to speak for me. But I have asked Griffiths alone to speak for me. I feel that the relationship, in an ecclesiastical case like this, as distinguished from a civil case, between accused and counsel is a very intimate relationship indeed. It is not a narrowly ecclesiastical matter, but it is a matter where the deepest convictions of one soul are being represented.

Now, as I say, there are many men to whom, if I said a thing like this, I should be giving offence. I do not think that that is so in your case. In fact, I feel very confident that it is not. I have admired tremendously the broadmindedness and sympathy with which you understand just how I feel. You showed yesterday that you understand just how I feel. You know perfectly well what my admiration for you is, and you are, I am sure, not going to interpret this decision as being any denial at all of that admiration.

I hope that we may some day be not partly but altogether one in our attitude toward ecclesiastical matters. Meanwhile, I want to tell you that from the bottom of my heart I am grateful for your indignation against the injustice to which we have been subjected and for the high honor which you have certainly done me by being willing to defend so exceedingly unpopular a man as I am before the Permanent Judicial Commission.

There is one more thing that I ought to say, although, in view of our conversation of yesterday, I doubt whether it is necessary that I should say it. It is simply that I of course do not desire to do evil that good may come. I think that the evil which this Permanent Judicial Commission is doing will result in the great good of a separation of evangelical forces in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. from an apostate ecclesiastical machine. But I cannot acquiesce in that evil for one moment, and therefore I am adopting every legitimate means of presenting my case even before that Modernist Permanent Judicial Commission of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

If that Permanent Judicial Commission should acquit me, I should adopt every means of forcing the issue immediately in some other way. But that is a most unlikely contingency, and I think it would be extremely unlikely even if you had appeared before the courts of the Church in my defense.

Cordially yours,

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Change of Address

The Rev. Robert M. Nuermberger, 508 Grove St., East Lansing, Mich.

The Rev. Jack J. Peterson, 21 Bryn Mawr Ave., Stratford, N. J.

The Rev. Arthur B. Spooner, 151 W. County Line Rd., Hatboro, Pa.

The Tithe

G. I. WILLIAMSON

Sometimes those who attend our services express surprise at one thing in particular — there is no begging for money! It may take a while before they realize that this is a reflection of adherence to the Word of God. The Bible emphatically does not teach that the minister or the church must always be asking for money. The church of Christ is to remember the words of her Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

The primary business of the church is to give men the bread of life, not to see what it can get out of them. Yet the strange thing is that the per capita giving in such a church as the Orthodox Presbyterian is much higher than where money is so often the subject of undue attention. In fact, in the latest survey our denomination again ranked near the highest in the nation in per capita giving.

We would not want to give anyone the remotest idea that we are doing well enough, or that there is any reason whatever for self-congratulation. There isn't. We are simply stating a fact, and we mention it in order to draw attention to another fact: the true source of our giving is God!

Yes, that's right, for it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Where God himself does not work in us a sincere desire to give what he requires, no amount of 'sales-talk' or 'ecclesiastical-commercial' will do. But where God does work his true grace in the heart there will be a desire to give what pleases him. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3). How can they be grievous if God has worked in us in such a way that we want to do what he wants us to do?

What is God's commandment concerning our giving? The answer is that we are to give God at least the tithe — that is, one-tenth of all that he gives us (Lev. 27:30). It is holy unto the Lord. So clear is this that the prophet Malachi said that we *rob* God if we do not bring our tithes into the storehouse of the Lord (Mal.

3:8-10).

We are well aware, of course, that some try to dismiss this (as indeed many other things) by saying that it was simply 'an Old Testament requirement' no longer binding upon believers today. The attempt is made to dismiss it as part of Israel's ceremonial law which has been done away. Consider, however, the following facts.

Tithing was the practice of Abraham long before the ceremonial law of Moses was given (Gen. 14:20). Moreover, Jacob vowed that he would give "the tenth" unto God if the Lord would be merciful to him (Gen. 28:22). Christ himself indicated that it was something that ought to be done (Mt. 23:23). Nor is there anywhere in the Bible the slightest suggestion that God would have this changed. Rather, Paul writes: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (I Cor. 16:2). He wanted them to practice regular, systematic, proportionate giving — and he did not wish to have to make personal appeals for money!

Another fact not to be overlooked is that God's promise of long ago is abundantly honored by him today. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). When did you ever find a person who tithes who would dispute this promise of God? Many will testify that God has always blessed those who have taken him at his word.

It is not for nothing that the Scripture says of giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7).

True Christians willingly offer to God a portion of what they have received from God — in a response of grateful and obedient worship. When men have the gift of God's grace in Christ, they will give God the tithe — and more.