

# The Changing Scene and the Unchanging Word

By the REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D., Litt.D.

## "The Press Shall Be Asked to Co-operate"



Dr. Machen

**A** VERY outrageous insult to the public press of this country, and particularly to the newspapers of Philadelphia, has appeared in the report of the Committee appointed at the last meeting of the Presbytery of Philadelphia to propose measures for the reorganization of the presbytery's business in accordance with the principles laid down by the General Assembly's Commission.

According to the principle of secrecy favored by that Commission, the Committee proposes that news as to what happens at presbytery meetings shall be given to the press only through the Stated Clerk:

"All information relating to the proceedings of Presbytery shall be given to the Press only through the Stated Clerk, and the Press shall be asked to co-operate with this rule."

What does that mean? Well, in plain English, it means that only the ecclesiastical machine shall have the right to make public its version of what happens at the meetings. The minority is to have no such right. Here are certain people who are being done to death, ecclesiastically, in meetings of presbytery. Their opponents, through the Stated Clerk, are to be allowed to say anything they like about them, or to suppress the facts at will; but they are not to be allowed to say anything about what has happened. A worse piece of ecclesiastical tyranny, a greater encouragement to misrepresentation and suppression of facts, it would be difficult to imagine.

With such suppression of facts, with such partisan dishing out of the news, the press is to be "asked to co-operate."

If the press did comply with this request, if it *were* willing to co-operate with any such policy of suppression of facts, if it did enter into any conspiracy of silence regarding what happens in the meetings of

## The Communication of Dr. Ward

*The attention of the readers of this page is called to a communication of the Rev. Warren R. Ward, D.D., which is appearing on another page in the present issue.*

Philadelphia Presbytery or in any other meetings, if such a policy did represent the policy of the newspapers of this country, then we might look very soon for the destruction of the American commonwealth.

But I do not for one moment believe that the press will "co-operate" with any such business.

That does not mean that I hold the press to be perfect. I for my part have sometimes suffered considerably from what I have been compelled to regard as real incorrectness in the way in which I have been represented in the newspapers. That perhaps is only to be expected by anyone who is a representative of a very unpopular and widely misunderstood cause.

But I do not for one moment believe that such newspaper misrepresentation, where it has occurred, is intentional. I believe rather firmly that the press of this country is essentially "straight." That is the reason why I do not believe that it will "co-operate" with this proposal of the ecclesiastical machine in Philadelphia Presbytery. I do not believe it will consent to suppress all news regarding those presbytery meetings except what comes from the party that at any moment is in power.

When I say that, I can in one respect rejoice. But in another respect I feel very sad. I feel very sad to think that the ethics of the public press of this country and the ethics of the general public are higher than the ethics of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It is certainly a very sad thing that the ecclesiastical business of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is conducted on a lower ethical

plane than that which prevails in the world outside among people who make no profession of religion at all.

## The Unpopularity of Sticking to the Point

In the controversies of recent years, I have often observed how unpopular a thing it is to stick to the point. People want to introduce personalities into the debate, and if one is not willing to introduce personalities it seems to drive them nearly to fury. They insist on turning aside from objections raised against specific actions of ecclesiastical leaders in order to engage in general evaluation of those leaders' character or motives.

So, for example, if I state that a moderator has appointed an Auburn Affirmationist to an important committee, what is the reply? Is there any discussion of the propriety of that appointment? Is there any discussion of the specific point at issue? Not at all. The reply is: "That moderator is a Christian." So personalities take the place of real debate.

The discussion which I have carried on within the last few years with supporters of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is another instance of the same thing. I think that discussion—by way of caricature, it is true, but still with a certain measure of that kind of truth that caricature sometimes possesses—might be summarized as follows:

MACHEN: "The Board of Foreign Missions has retained a signer of the Auburn Affirmation as Candidate Secretary."

SUPPORTERS OF THE BOARD: "Dr. Robert E. Speer is a splendid Christian gentleman."

MACHEN: "You are wandering from the question. What I said was that the Board of Foreign Missions has retained a signer of the Auburn Affirmation as Candidate Secretary."

SUPPORTERS OF THE BOARD: "Dr. Machen, you are very bitter." Yes, it is a very unpopular thing to insist on sticking to the point.