

Professor J. R. MACKAY, D.D.

(1865-1939.)

When Dr John R. Mackay passed away on the 6th of May it might well be said that a prince and a great man fell in Israel. Though for the last few years he passed through sore affliction and was withdrawn from his wonted work his many friends would hardly give up the hope that he might be restored to something like his old activity and public usefulness. His Master, however, saw fit that it should be otherwise ordered. So we must acquiesce in His will.

John Robertson Mackay was born in Strathy on the 25th day of June, 1865. He was of the seed of the righteous, the son of godly parents, and it was in a highly Evangelical atmosphere that he was brought up. From his early days he was a truthful, obedient, and exemplary boy. But it was only during the years of his University course that the crisis of his career came and he passed from death to life. The teaching of the pastor of his youth, Christopher Munro, was blessed to him and through life he was devotedly attached to Mr Munro's memory. This minister of Christ in his far north country charge was one of the most pious and deeply taught ministers of the post-Disruption generation in the Free Church and it was both an intellectual and a spiritual feast to sit at his feet and learn to appreciate his preaching. With the experience of a new life the young convert felt that he was called to serve in the ministry of the Gospel. He felt like one of old who could say that, he being in the way, the Lord met him and brought him to the house of his Master's brethren. From the first days of his new life Dr Mackay's exercises in regard to both the doctrines of the Faith and his own interest in the hope of the Gospel were of a particularly deep and searching character. He was being fitted for useful service in the years to come when he should be called to strengthen his brethren.

Professor Mackay took his High School course in Old Aberdeen at the Grammar School and his first university year was taken in King's College there. The rest of his university course was completed at St Andrews, where he graduated in the year 1888. He then proceeded to the New College, Edinburgh. There he had the privilege of making the acquaintance of the

excellent Dr Smeaton who died in 1889. Though he had not the advantage of being one of Dr Smeaton's class, his intercourse with the saintly and venerable professor exercised a profound influence on his life and thought. In those years the teaching of Dr John Duncan and Dr Hugh Martin, along with his personal friendship with Archibald Crawford, put a special stamp upon his thinking.

Dr Mackay's College course was taken in the years when the party who were bent on change were putting forth their efforts to sap and undermine the constitution of the Free Church of Scotland. In opposition to their policy there came a rift in the ranks of the Conservative Party that stood in defence of the old order. Mr Mackay, along with a company of like-minded students, took the line that the Declaratory legislation of 1892 altered the constitution of their Church. So they identified themselves with the Free Presbyterian Church when it was set on foot in 1893. On the question on which this break took place the body of the Old School Defenders held that the innovating offending legislation did not secure the revolutionary end at which it aimed. And, in due course, in the great Free Church case, their contentings in this connection were justified inasmuch as the Constitution which they defended was successfully vindicated in the Supreme Court of the Realm.

In 1893 Mr Mackay was settled at Gairloch as Free Presbyterian minister. In this charge he remained till in 1900 he was translated to



Inverness where he remained as Free Presbyterian minister till 1918 when he and some of his ministerial brethren were welcomed into the Free Church. During his years at Gairloch from 1896 and at Inverness he was Theological Tutor to his Synod; and shortly after his accession to the Free Church he was appointed Professor of New Testament Exegesis in the Free Church College. He continued in this office and to adorn it until he was laid aside by long-continued ill-health which unfitted him for his work. He resigned his Chair about three years ago and lived in retirement with his son, Rev. Hugh Mackay, B.D., of Kinglassie.

Dr Mackay was a man of massive figure and of massive mind. In mental outfit he was of the type of John Owen. The Principal of the New College could say of him about 1890 that they had not the like of him for 25 years. He was an able, all-round divine and at home especially in Old Testament studies. He was honoured by the old directors of Princeton when he was approached by them with the view of accepting a vacant chair in their Seminary. He chose to remain in Scotland. He had a rich measure of lowliness of mind and candour. In his disposition he was singularly transparent. In his public religious exercises he had a striking gift of utterance in prayer. His preaching was powerful and comforting and, as a servant in the Gospel he was much beloved. Now, after the storm of his closing years, has come the rest that will never end. He has left a name that will be a cherished treasure in the memory of the many friends that mourn his passing.

J. M.

A Student's Memories.

The passing of a professor removes a landmark from the mental life of those who passed through his classes. And yet most students can testify that against the background of the years, the professor recedes and the man stands out in ever growing distinctness; they think less of what he said and more of what he was. The professor himself does not, perhaps, always realise that anything he taught that has abiding value for his students, has that value because it reached them through his own personality. Judged by that standard, Professor John R. Mackay was true to the highest traditions of his office; he lives in the lives of his students for what he was rather than for what he taught. He entered their lives at the most impressionable period of their existence, and he shall no more go out. To many of them his memory remains as the steel girders that strengthen their spiritual life in the conflict with the hosts of unbelief. When they think of him as the scholar, the theologian, and the saint—and to them he was all three—all blend harmoniously in one in the tender-hearted Christian who was at once a father and a brother to them, who touched their lives at so many points and left there the indelible impress of his own gracious and consecrated personality.

It was as the scholar that Professor Mackay was first introduced to us, and the scholar he

remained to us to the end. For his scholarship was far removed from the pretentious kind that grows less impressive with a growing acquaintance and that shrivels up under the hard scrutiny of a student's questioning eyes. His was the attitude of mind that indicated the true scholar, rather than the possession of accumulated knowledge. His first address at the opening of the College Session of 1919-20 on "Theology, the Queen of the Sciences," revealed the mental calibre of the man. It was not a laboured apologia for theology, nor a mere definition of the boundaries of natural science and the province of theology; it was much more. It was a work of art, a masterly assembling of all the sciences, with theology enthroned in the midst, taking tribute of all, and offering its guiding light to all in the search for ultimate truth. In the intimacy of the classroom, we were able to verify these first impressions of the scholar. The opening lecture of the class each session consisted of a review of the outstanding theological literature of the year; it was a masterly survey, revealing the true book-lover and the student with open mind, mastering new principles and conceptions, weighing each with strict impartiality, indicating the elements of permanent value in each, and finally bringing all to the touchstone of *the Book*. Professor Mackay respected and admired scholarship in any field of research, and his mental get-up led him to pay deference to sheer ability in any department of life. His students were ever impressed by his complete fairness, his open-mindedness, and his wide sympathies in the field of scholarship. We cannot forget how his countenance saddened, as if it came under a deep shadow, when he expressed his regret that such a distinguished scholar as Dr Sanday had abandoned the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel. On the other hand he dwelt with unconcealed satisfaction on the support given to conservative theology by men of such scholarship as Dick Wilson, Machen, Robertson and "my friend B. B. Warfield." If ever, in later years, his students had a mind to offer any criticism it was that he was too ardent an admirer of intellectual attainments; yet there was so much else in his character that provided the suitable antidote to any over-deference to the intellectuals! He maintained, as might be expected, a high standard of scholarship in his requirements of his students. This was indicated in his evaluation of work done in class examinations. There were few things about him that students appreciated more keenly than his method of marking examination papers with strict regard to the quality of the work done. He never indulged in cheap praise and the most that he would say of a paper that had gained relatively high marks was "This is substantially correct." On the other hand he was quick to acknowledge good work faithfully done, and most generous in his estimate of his students' mental powers. In this respect

he took the very best out of us. Those who may say—and there will be a few—that he was not a first class teacher, forget that teaching in the highest sense is not so much the imparting of knowledge as the creating of a thirst for knowledge. He was, perhaps, not methodical enough to convey to his students a relatively large number of facts, cut and dried, on any one subject, but he laid the foundations of specialised knowledge surely and stably, and he indicated what the scholar's attitude to his subject should be. Above all, there was in his teaching that illusive and indefinable thing, *inspiration*, and for that reason he shall live as teacher in the respect and gratitude of many of his students.

To his students, Dr Mackay will remain an outstanding type of the Scottish theologian. To him theology was not a mere system of truth, theoretically dry and spiritually arid, it was a living structure for living men, an unfolding of the glory of the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Romans were his favourite fields of study. He poured out his soul in adoration of the Son of God as His glory was unveiled in the pages of the Fourth Gospel. His great objects in the study of this Gospel were to prove its Johannine authorship, to read the Gospel in Greek and so "to breathe its atmosphere," and to concentrate on the teaching of the Gospel concerning the Person of Christ. This latter was his favourite theme, and he delighted to go for it to John's Gospel, because it included not merely the Incarnation, but the presuppositions and the results of the Incarnation. Hence, he always treated the doctrine of the Person of Christ as taught in the Fourth Gospel under the four divisions: "His essential nature, His Incarnation, the Conditions of His earthly Life, and His Work as Messiah." How he delighted to expound the thesis of John that "the supermundane Word is one with the Word Incarnate, and the Word Incarnate is one with Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Of the Epistles, "Romans" was doubtlessly the one he felt most at home in. He never wearied of following out Paul's thesis of "Salvation by a God-provided righteousness." His advice on the selection of Commentaries on the New Testament was valuable as the ripe fruit of his own wide reading. His attachment to the Princeton School of Theology was marked and his references to the Hodges, Alexanders, and Warfield were numerous. It was obvious that Warfield was his hero. But he was quite at home in discussing the German School or rather schools of theology of fifty years ago, and he was accurately conversant with the various schools of thought in this country. We were ever impressed by his scrupulous fairness in discussing those with whom, theologically, he was in most profound disagreement.

Notwithstanding his eminence as scholar and

theologian, Professor Mackay will live in the hearts of his students rather as the saint and the consecrated servant of Jesus Christ. The tenderness of his Christian feeling was, perhaps, the most impressive thing about him. His opening prayers were an unveiling of his own soul, and for us by far the most valuable "exercise" of his class. In this respect he closely resembled his own favourite spiritual guide, Dr John Duncan. His passionate earnestness and deep feeling as he came to identify "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our own God" left with his students a memory that must remain one of the precious things of their spiritual experience. Certain it is that all the studies of his class were undertaken under the awe of that opening prayer. The beautiful simplicity of his faith was a veritable tonic to his students, and the boyishness of his smile is something not to be forgotten. All combined to form a personality of singular winsomeness and power, whose influence for good will live in the hearts of his students as long as life lasts.

Colin MacPhail, Elder, Lochfyneside.

On 21st April, at Milnathort, Kinross, Colin MacPhail passed away at the age of 81 years. The end came rather suddenly, and the fact that both he and Mrs MacPhail hoped to re-visit the old home about that very time, added to the sorrow of his friends there. Mr MacPhail was a remarkably fresh man for his years, and his friends hoped he would enjoy some years of peace and happiness in his new home. For many years he was connected with the congregations of Greenock and Milton, and on occasions acted as lay preacher. His zeal for the Master's Cause being keen, he was deeply interested in the Foreign Missionary activities of the Church. As a man of prayer, Mr MacPhail was remarkable, his prayers in public conveyed the impression that he was one who dwelled "in the secret place of the Most High." A. G.

Mr George Sutherland, Elder, Clyne.

Mr George Sutherland entered his eternal rest on April 21st last. He had attained to maturity of years, being over 80 years old when he passed away. He was an elder in the Brora congregation for over 16 years; to the duties of his office he attended with diligence and steadfastness to the end. Before his passing he was blind for two years which kept him confined to his house. Mr Sutherland was blessed with a sweet and melodious voice, which he used in presenting the Gaelic psalms in the Sanctuary on the Lord's Day. He also trained not a few of the young men of the district to be Precentors in the Gaelic language. Three sons are left to mourn his loss to which we give our sincerest sympathy.

Murdo Macleod, Elder, Coigach.

The worthy Mr Murdo Macleod, Polbain, passed to his eternal rest on 22nd April last, at the advanced age of 90. The congregation of Coigach is much the poorer by his passing.