

Obituary

The Late Rev. Malcolm Macsween, M.A.

On January 18th 1904, a son was born to William Macsween and his wife Agnes. The place of birth was Marches Cottage, Strond, Harris and the parents named their son, Malcolm, presumably after his grandfather, Malcolm Macsween, an elder in the Free Presbyterian Church, South Harris. The young Malcolm was not left long in this native island as his parents decided to move to Portree, Skye, when their son was only two years old. It was that same year, 1906, that his sister Joan died and one can well understand the sadness of the bereaved parents as they began their new life in Skye.

The Macsweens lived in Portree until 1914, when the family flitted to Raasay, where the father pursued his trade as a stone mason. Eventually, he was appointed the Church's missionary there and in this capacity continued until his retirement in 1937, when the family once more moved: this time to Stein, Waternish, Skye, Mrs Macsween's native village.

In 1916 the Macsweens experienced another bereavement when their little daughter, Annie, died at the age of four years. Time passed and in 1932, Hannah, their last daughter died at the early age of twenty-one. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness: and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." Proverbs 14:10.

Malcolm, when referring to this sad occasion, did not hide the depth of his own grief. It was a loss, which made a lasting impression on his mind and the experience proved helpful to him in future years, when as a minister of the gospel it was his lot to comfort others in trouble. All who knew Mr Macsween would agree that he was a compassionate man.

In 1919 Malcolm Macsween began his secondary education at Portree School and after successfully completing his course of studies there he proceeded to the West of Scotland Agricultural College, Glasgow, where in 1929 he gained a Diploma in Agriculture. That same year he was sent as an Estate Manager to British Central Africa, where his duties were not solely confined to supervising work on the farms but also included the maintenance of law and order in the community. In addition to all this, there always lurked the threat to life, from the wild animals, wandering in the bush and in this potentially dangerous situation Mr Macsween ascribed his preservation to God alone.

In 1932, the year his sister Hannah died, he returned home to Raasay and this sad event was partly used by the Holy Spirit in his conversion. The death of his sister deeply impressed on his mind the uncertainty of life here as well as the absolute necessity of preparation for death. This and the burden of his sins filled his soul with fear and sorrow, leaving him with no illusion about the awfulness of being lost. His sorrow, however, was turned into gladness, when he discerned the joy of God's salvation in his own soul. As he sought relief and rest he was led by the Holy Spirit to the Cross, where he saw Christ crucified for him. Like Christian, in "The Pilgrims Progress", he was relieved of his burden and, like Christian also, he felt a desire to commend Christ to others.

The first step, in implementation of this desire, was taken in 1934, when he became a member in full communion with the Raasay Congregation of the Church. This was the beginning. In 1935 he was received as a student by the Western Presbytery and, in October of that year, he began his Arts Course at Glasgow University, where in July 1938 he graduated M.A. Later that year he began his divinity studies at Oban, under the tutorship of the late Rev. Donald Beaton a scholarly man of considerable repute. After completing the first year of his theological course, he moved to Dingwall to study under the tutorship of the late Rev. D. A. Macfarlane, M.A., a man of no ordinary intellectual prowess. For two years Mr Macsween studied under Mr Macfarlane with gratifying results. It was at that time, the writer, as his fellow student, had the privilege of knowing Mr Macsween most intimately. We lodged and studied together. It was a period of which we had only pleasant memories.

In 1941 Malcolm Macsween was licenced to preach the gospel. This important event in his life was two years after his mother's death but his father was spared to share with his son this token of the Lord's favour. The following year he was ordained and inducted to the pastoral charge of the Portnalong-Bracadale congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church. History was made that day. The congregation was the minister's first charge and the minister was the congregation's first pastor.

A very important event took place in our friend's life in October of that same year for it was then he was married to Miss Christina Macsween, Connel Ferry. This marked the beginning of a most happy era in their lives. With manifest dedication they addressed themselves to the Lord's work. Mr and Mrs Macsween had one son, who proved a source of joy and comfort to them both. They themselves gave of their best to their congregation, winning the loyalty and affection of the people. Mr Macsween's ministerial labours, we believe, were blessed to not a few,

both in his own congregation and beyond. An able preacher, his services were much in demand, both during communion seasons and on other occasions. In expounding the word of God to the converted and unconverted, he delivered his message with striking clarity. His hearers' blood will not be required at his hands.

Mr Macsween was Deputy to Canada for fourteen months during part of 1946, and part of 1947. Throughout that period, he conducted services in various parts of Canada and the U.S.A. but most of his time was spent in Winnipeg, where he was remembered by his grateful hearers long after he left.

It was in 1949, his father passed away at the age of 77 years and needless to say his death was sorely felt by his son and daughter-in-law who tenderly nursed him during his last illness.

Mr Macsween's pastorate of Bracadale ended in 1956, when he became minister of the Oban congregation. As the Macsweens had many friends in both Portnalong and Bracadale, the translation to Oban was indeed a wrench but the Lord's time had come for this move to a new sphere of labour. It was with gratitude and joy the Oban people welcomed their new minister and his family. Mr Macsween, like his predecessor the Rev. John Tallach, was highly respected by the whole community and truly esteemed by his own flock.

In the general administration of the church he played an active part. As Tutor he rendered invaluable service and was loved and respected by his students. When Moderator of Synod in 1949, he projected an image of dignity, worthy of the supreme Court. During his Convenership of the Sabbath Observance Committee, he wielded his pen with crushing condemnation of every form of Sabbath desecration. His annual Reports were not only informative but reflected the dedication, with which he applied himself to his work. As Clerk of the Southern Presbytery he was most proficient.

Mr Macsween loved his church and its inherited testimony. He was well qualified to assess the importance of the Protest, lodged in 1893, at the Free Church General Assembly against the Declaratory Act, by the Rev. Donald Macfarlane and the Rev. Donald Macdonald. He cherished the memory of those godly men, who in the face of apparently overwhelming odds, saved our evangelical heritage from forces set on its destruction. Scotland owes much to the faithfulness and courage of those ministers. Having followed in their footsteps and in those of others, who now through faith and patience inherit the promises, he himself was called home on 29th March, 1978. The end came rather suddenly. Some

hours earlier Mrs Macsween and he had paid visits, quite unaware of the imminence of their being parted by death. The close of an happy era had come and to the surviving partner the realisation of it was, in her own words, overwhelming but for the departed it was the beginning of everlasting joy.

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Matthew 25:21.

The large attendance of people, from far and near, including many from other denominations, at his funeral on 1st April, 1978, was a public and fitting tribute to the memory of this servant of Jesus Christ. His mortal remains were laid to rest in the Pennifuir Cemetery, Oban, where the dust of many of the Lord’s redeemed must await the resurrection of the dead.

In recording our heartfelt sympathy with the bereaved, Mrs Macsween, the son Dr William Macsween, his wife and children, we would refer them to 1st Thessalonians, 4:13 —

“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others, which have no hope.”

May these words be a source of comfort to all the bereaved as they mourn the loss of one who was a devoted husband and father; a faithful minister and true friend.

D.C.