

WILLIAM J. MCCLURE - - - ANOTHER PIONEER

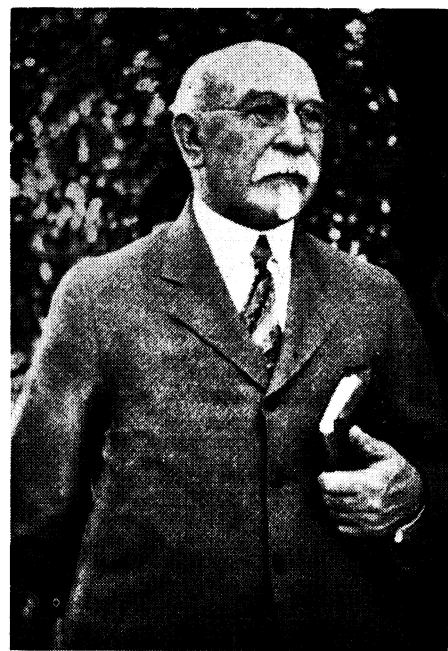
William J. McClure was one who faithfully served his own generation. Over sixty years ago he grasped with a firm grip the lighted torch extended to him by those who preceded him in the Christian relay race, and now, having finished his part of the course, he has handed intact that light which he received to the generation following.

Born on Christmas Day, 1857, in the town of Banbridge, County Down, Ireland, of staunch Episcopalian parents, though unsaved at that time, William grew to be a strong and robust boy and above many in stature. He early learned to work in the forge with his father, who was a blacksmith of some note in that part of the country, but his ambitions were for higher occupations than a lifetime in a smithy and he often had thoughts of going afar to make his fortune. However, as he approached the age of sixteen, his dreams were interrupted by thoughts of death, hell and judgment and caused him deep spiritual anxiety. Moody and Sankey had come over from America and throughout the British Isles the mighty power of God was seen in the awakening and conversion of young men who afterwards devoted their lives to the gospel in the home and foreign fields. Cottage meetings were held in various places and Mr. McClure's sister who was at that time living in Belfast, was persuaded to attend one of these. She immediately became concerned about her soul, for, while she was an active church member, had never known a time in her experience when as a lost guilty sinner she had accepted Christ as her Saviour. She was genuinely converted as a result of this meeting and her letters home were used to awaken her brother, William. He went

through great soul-agony and was unable to get relief from any of the preaching he heard at the town Church. Deliverance came at last and to quote his own words, "Through reading I Peter 2:24, 'Who His own self bare our sin in his own body on the tree,' and Isaiah 53:5, 6, I got just what I needed. But such was my state of anxiety as I prayed for forgiveness in my bedroom, that I was looking for some sign to assure me I was saved. Had I looked to the sky, and had I seen, or thought that I had seen, the words, 'W. J. McClure, you are saved,' I would have been very happy. It would have been a sign such as I was looking for, and would have given me assurance. Thousands of times I thanked God that nothing like that occurred, as that assurance would not have lasted long, for very soon after my conversion I met another W. J. McClure. Instantly the question would have arisen in my mind: 'Did those words in the sky refer to you or to him?' And away would have gone my peace and assurance. But I saw in John 3:16 a word which would take us both in and everyone else as well. It was that grand word 'WHOSOEVER.' This verse was not so well known sixty years ago as it is today, and it was not until after my conversion that I enjoyed its blessedness."

The young convert was not favoured like many who have had the great blessing of being raised in a Christian home or even under the influence of a godly Sunday School teacher, and who at the very start of their Christian life have been nourished by those who cared for their souls. But just as in the case of Saul of Tarsus (whom God had called to be a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before the Gentiles), the

Lord had a "disciple named Ananias" at Damascus ready to be the first to call him "brother Saul" and to give him his earliest lesson in the school of God, so the Lord had also his servants ready to be used by Him in leading young W. J. McClure into the right ways of the Lord. Little beginnings, some indeed that might seem of no importance, have often been the seed plot from which fruit has been gathered in later days. Such might be said of the early experiences of brother McClure.



He and a Christian companion, James Ruddock, who had heard much about the wonderful opportunities for work in Belfast, conceived a great desire to go to the city with the laudable object of being able to make money to help their respective families. They started out and after some difficulty obtained work in the Barbour and Coombes Foundry, where they remained

for a number of years. About that time, hand-loom weaving had become quite an industry in Northern Ireland as the soil was very suitable for growing flax and thus began the manufacture of the far-famed homespun "Irish linen." With the invention of the power loom, linen factories sprang up in the towns throughout Ulster, Belfast taking the lead, and this industry, with the opening of two large shipyards, drew many working people from all over the country. The town of Belfast flourished and increased rapidly in population, spreading out into what was once farming districts. Foundries and other industries added to its prosperity and eventually the town of Belfast became a city.

But more important than its fine linen and ship-building industries, Belfast became a very fertile field for gospel preaching, especially during the memorable year of 1859, when a mighty revival swept over Ulster. This work of grace began in a very simple manner. A saintly old woman spent her time visiting among the people of the Braid Valley, County Antrim, speaking of God's great salvation as opportunity afforded. The Lord blessed the testimony of his handmaiden and among others three young Irish farmers were saved. Their new life in Christ became very evident, for these young men soon began to feel the spiritual dearth that existed all over, and, as a result, during the winter months of 1858, they came together for prayer in a little school room in the village of Kells. Sincere and earnest were the prayers that ascended to the Throne of Grace from that little school room, the burden of their petitions being that God would send an awakening into the hearts of the people. Early in 1859, these young men began to preach the gospel with much simplicity and yet with a power that gripped the heart and con-

science, making it like a new message to the people. Very soon there were tokens of the gospel's wonder-working power. Souls were saved and a sound of "abundance of rain" was heard all over the land. Ministers who were born again and not prejudiced by "tradition" welcomed this visitation which was spreading like a breath of spring all over Ulster, and further afield. During all that summer, thousands of men and women, in every walk of life, flocked to hear the Word of God proclaimed, mostly in fields with platforms raised for the speakers, as buildings were far too small to hold the multitudes that gathered together. One rather strange feature attending this remarkable work was that during the service, men and women, old and young, many of whom had just attended the meetings through curiosity, would fall down "stricken" as it was called, and in bitter anguish of heart would cry out in despair, as they seemed to get a look into Eternity and saw the coming wrath of God upon the guilty and their cries for mercy were heard all over the audience. In many cases, the light of the Gospel broke in upon darkened hearts, and it became quite usual to see men who had never before spoken a word in public gathering, rise up and with wonderful eloquence and power, tell out what the Lord had just done for them through the work of the Cross. Thousands were truly born again, while others, in the excitement then existing, made professions which soon faded like the morning cloud. Many who witnessed these scenes were heard to say, "We have seen strange things today."

Belfast shared largely in this great Revival, multitudes coming together to listen to the gospel and all over the city the singing of the songs of Zion could be heard early and late. For many years following these events, God raised up earnest preachers,

who kept the fire burning. In 1873 two evangelists came to Belfast, James W. Smith and James Campbell, who, although born and saved in Scotland, had been preaching in the United States, and had been greatly used to the conversion of souls. It was in 1875 that young William J. McClure arrived in Belfast and for the first time met these two evangelists whose godly influence had a wonderful effect on his long life afterwards. These brethren, Smith and Campbell, like many others who were students of the Word, had learned the truth of the priesthood of all believers, and also of the gifts to the Church from the risen Lord for ministry to the members of the Body; that the Lord Himself calls His servants, fits them and sends them forth as ambassadors for Christ, to be guided in their service by the Holy Spirit; that they needed no "Board" to direct them nor the promise of a salary for their temporal power. From the great commission of Matt. 28, they ascertained the command to preach the gospel, to baptize believers, and to teach them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord had commanded. The result was that the plain searching preaching and fearless manner of these two brethren, as they sought to set forth the verities of Eternity, marked them as men who sought not the favor of men, but whose sole object was to please God.

A large canvas tent was pitched near the center of Belfast and crowds of people from all over the city and surrounding country flocked to hear the burning messages from these servants of Christ which effected the awakening of many who were dead in trespasses and sins and the discovery by others who were mere professors that although they were looked upon as Christians, they had never been born again. It was a time

of great rejoicing, for souls were passing from death unto life.

Soon after his arrival in Belfast, William McClure was attracted to the tent. The preaching was a revelation to him, for although he had been saved about one year, little progress had been made in the divine life and he was at times subject to doubts and fears. To use his own words, "My standing in Christ and His work to meet my failures and backslidings were quite unknown to me." How often young Christians, after professing to be saved, perhaps baptized and brought into the Assembly, the truth having cost them little, seem so soon to settle down, giving little evidence of that divine nature and exercise as to vital godliness and separation from the world, but are content to go on without any definite object in view. Yet, there has come a crisis in many a young life when brought in contact with experiences as brother McClure enjoyed in that early day, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Word ministered, they have seen things in the light of Eternity and the judgment seat of Christ, resulting in a complete change. The life is laid on the altar and used afterwards in happy and fruitful service for Christ.

In later years Mr. McClure often referred to that memorable year when he first met those two messengers of God. Although he had many difficulties to overcome and it took a good while for him to bow to all the truth they set forth from the New Testament, yet the time came when he owned the Lordship of Christ and he thanked God for the ministry he had heard in those days. A short time afterward he linked himself with an assembly of Christians gathering alone in the Name of the Lord in Old Lodge Road Gospel Hall, and took a special interest in the study of the Scriptures,

which now opened up to him with new light. Notes on the Pentateuch by Mackintosh provided much food for his soul and in after years he excelled in the line of ministry which exalted Christ and His high ministry as revealed through the types in the books of Moses. The truth he then learned of gathering in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ was a stay and strength to him all through life; He never faltered but lived in the power of it himself and taught it to others.

There was in those days a band of energetic young men connected with assemblies in and around Belfast, some of whom had been saved through Smith and Campbell, but all of whom had come under their godly influence, and in turn were all used of God as preachers of the gospel: Dr. William J. Matthews, Thomas Lough, James Meharg, David Oliver, William Matthews and John Knox McEwen. All these were earnest workers in and around Belfast and William McClure shared with them in their happy service.

In 1881, when twenty-four years old, W. J. McClure became exercised about going to the United States, purposing to continue working with his hands and as much as possible make known what the Lord had taught him in the gospel and in believers' truths which had become so precious to him. He arrived in Chicago a complete stranger but was heartily received by the saints gathered in the May and Fulton St. hall. Donald Ross was at that time living in Chicago and his ministry was stimulating to the Lord's people and his energy in the gospel was a great help and encouragement to the young men, exercising and stirring up the gift that God had given them. Among these young men were Robert Telfer, very earnest and full of zeal in carrying the gospel message, and Kenneth J.

Muir, brother of T. D. W. Muir. Brother Telfer and he became much drawn to each other and were closely associated in gospel work. Happy days were spent as they sought to carry on an aggressive testimony in that large city. In later years while speaking of the preparation for the work of the Lord in broader fields, Mr. McClure referred thus to the education he received for his life work: "We cannot read the Word of God without seeing that He believes in preparation, and so it pleased Him to give me such an education in Chicago where after standing all day before a wood lathe I devoted my evenings to Bible study and gospel work. Another very important factor in my education was the May and Fulton Streets assembly. Some of the men whom God used as my tutors were Donald Ross, Richard Sparks, Donald Munro, John Smith and T. D. W. Muir. Donald Ross was an out-and-out evangelist and his faithful exhortations kept us from settling down and fostered the desire in our souls to preach the simple gospel of Christ. Richard Sparks was a man very well taught in prophetic truths and was used of the Lord to preserve me from the many deadly heresies that abounded then in Chicago, as they do to this day." The fields of the West were large and assemblies few and these young brethren, Telfer and McClure, were feeling the call of God to lay their all at Jesus' feet and to go forth in His name to make Christ known in the regions beyond. Deep was their exercise of heart with the result that Mr. McClure went out for His Name's sake, followed later by Mr. Telfer.

Mr. McClure began His labors in Ontario, Canada, helped by J. Norman Case and later by W. P. Douglas, who became his fast friend and yoke-fellow in the bonds of the gospel. They endured many hardships as the field was new, but as a result,

"much people was added to the Lord." Mr. W. H. Hunter joined him in the work in Ontario and saw much blessing, and in 1893 when Mr. McClure went to the Pacific Coast Mr. Hunter went out there also to help in the tent work. For about nine years brother McClure labored up and down the Pacific Coast, in California, Oregon and British Columbia, associated with John Moneypenny, Mr. McFayden and others already mentioned. He then paid his first visit to Texas and gave ministry at Houston, Waxahachie and other towns in that great state.

However, Mr. McClure's heart extended beyond the boundaries of this vast continent and he became exercised about work in South Africa. The Lord's work in that part of the world had suffered greatly during the years of the Boer War, many of the saints being driven from their homes and scattered to other parts. Following the war there was great activity in reconstruction with a more hopeful outlook and when early in 1905 Mr. McClure arrived in Capetown, his visit was very opportune. He had just entered his forty-ninth year, strong in body and with a wealth of experience attained in the Lord's service that fitted him for the work that lay before him. As an evangelist and a good soldier of Jesus Christ he had learned to endure hardness and his ability to rightly divide the word of truth was very marked. All this, with a resolute mind, ready to undertake great things for God, made him a polished shaft fitted by the Master of assemblies to do a special work in the world and in the Church. He held meetings on prophetic subjects, illustrated by large charts and found great interest in Capetown, Johannesburg and Southern Rhodesia. Not only were souls saved but many were gathered out to the Name of the Lord Jesus. Thus after the

years of war and discouragement, this visitation of God in many parts of that land was like the early and latter rain. Not only were the assemblies much cheered and increased in numbers but the spiritual tone was raised, giving them fresh courage and a better hold on the truth that God had taught them.

Mr. McClure loved ocean voyages and after spending about a year in Africa, he turned his thoughts to New Zealand and Australia and spent about two years there giving helpful ministry from charts on prophetic subjects. He dearly loved to preach on the Seven Churches of Revelation and to dwell particularly on the truth of gathering to the Name of the Lord as shown in the Church at Philadelphia. He strongly opposed division in assemblies that were thus gathered, contending for the principle that unless an assembly had imbibed false doctrine connected with the foundations of the faith, or moral evil and a refusal to judge it, there was no authority from the Word of God for any assembly or company of assemblies to take upon themselves the awful responsibility of dividing or cutting off another assembly that has been gathered to His Name.

Mr. McClure returned to the States and paid visits to California, and other scenes of his former labors, taking in Nova Scotia. Again he thought of Africa and paid a return visit to that continent twenty-five years after his first visit there. His health was not good and the doctor advised an ocean voyage, to which he was not averse. He again found open doors for his ministry and returned by way of Japan, where he was able to visit the missionaries and give help in ministry. The following year after he had undergone an operation for cataract on his eyes, he was much exercised about paying a third visit to South Africa

and taking in the long cherished hope of seeing the land of Palestine. Many friends tried to persuade him otherwise, as he was advanced in years and his health none too good, but he seemed to show the spirit and energy of Caleb of long ago, and still felt able for the battle. He set out accompanied by a young Irish evangelist, and stopped at Egypt, where he had special meetings, then proceeding on to Jerusalem. He had meetings there nightly and was an encouragement to the saints in that land. To break bread at Jerusalem almost in sight of the Hill of Calvary was a blessed experience and he often spoke of it. The two months spent in Palestine passed very quickly and he set out for Africa again. There, in spite of his age and infirmities he was again in active service having meetings almost nightly. He wished to encourage some of the missionaries in China and Japan so stopped at both of these places on his way back to California. On his return in 1936, it could easily be seen that he had reached the evening time of life. He was now aged and worn; his sight and hearing were impaired and other infirmities were becoming manifest, but his ministry was still fresh and helpful. He visited Detroit, Kansas City, Texas, Cleveland and other cities giving help at Conferences and special meetings as he was able. Finally he returned to California to the home of Mr. McIntyre where he had made his home for many years, and on November 21, 1941, he gave his last Conference address from Psalm 127. On December 4 he quietly fell asleep. There was a deep sense of loss among the Lord's people when he passed into the presence of the Lord, for they felt that "a Prince and a great man" had passed away. He was buried in California on December 11.

During the long years Mr. McClure had spent in the Lord's service there were cer-

tain principles that governed his life. His standards were high and he sought to hold these in keeping with what is written in the Scriptures. He went forth to preach wholly trusting in the Lord for guidance as to his path in service, and in full dependence on the Lord for his support. In his earlier years he was a true pioneer, and he was often tried as to financial need, but when more than enough came in to meet his own requirements, what was over went back to the Lord through His servants and their service, and as years went on his giving to the Lord increased. Servants of the Lord in the Gospel plowing their lonely furrow in new territory were made strong to labor by a letter and check from Mr. McClure. Preachers with families of small children were especially remembered by him in this way. Many a widow in her loneliness and sorrow was made to sing for joy as she opened a letter from our brother with words of comfort and a substantial check to help her along. Indeed giving was a grace he cultivated and he loved to pass on the Lord's portion sent him. The children

loved to see Mr. McClure come along. Liberality and consideration were true of him at all times when he was travelling and requiring assistance from porters or working men.

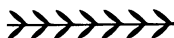
Mr. McClure never married. He often said it was not because he made any vows against it or that he did not at times long to have a home of his own, but, "I just never seemed to have time," and he always kept busy with the Lord's work. Our brother never owned property nor did he make any provision for his old age, but was a real pilgrim, a stranger on the earth, and followed his Master more than most.

Editor's Note:

The foregoing is a reprint from the new book compiled by J. T. Dickson entitled "William J. McClure."

Copies of the complete book which gives many more interesting details may be had from the author, J. T. Dickson, 1449 Van Buren St., Hollywood, Florida.

We heartily recommend this new book to our readers.



Equipment and Duty

Power in service, or in witnessing, comes from the Holy Spirit. The form in which the power shall manifest itself is not for us to decide. "The Spirit divideth to each one severally as he will." But of this we may be sure, that if we have allowed God to choose our work, the power bestowed will exactly match the task that is before us. If God has picked us out to bear burdens, hew stone, or to act as overseers, he will endow us with the power needed for our work. As there are diversities of tasks, so there are diversities of gifts, but the one Spirit.

Without the gift and presence of the Holy Spirit our witness is bound to be a failure and disappointment. Let none of us be content with a lower spiritual experience than God is willing to give us.

Selected