



MARGARET MILLER MANSON

1913

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1966

"Her Sparkle Will Add to Heaven's Light"

by

Matthew Manson

The warp and woof of Margaret Manson's life were woven in many lands. Since her death in India at the end of August, through hundreds of letters which have come in from every corner of the globe to our daughter, Marion, and myself, something of her life's pattern has begun to emerge. And the colours are vivid and bright, rich and warm. Sometimes they sparkle.

Many have recollected incidents, sometimes homely, sometimes national in importance, but always reflecting her deep concern that the good road of Moral Re-armament would become the path along which mankind will one day walk. The recollections which follow have been selected in the belief that they are worth sharing with those who knew and loved her, and perhaps even with those who never met her.

Canada

Whole-heartedness was her hall-mark. It was so in the early 1930's at McGill University where in the Dramatic Society and in many other student bodies she gave vigorous leadership. And it was so when Dr. Frank Buchman came to Montreal and challenged Canada to live to remake the world under God. Her response was a whole-hearted "yes" with no "if's" and "and's" and "but's." Subsequently she decided to accept the post of director of personnel in Eaton's Department Store in Montreal with its 4,000 employees. She did this because she wanted to create a practical demonstration of how such a diverse nation could be united above race, creed and class.

A friend who knew her intimately in these days describes with what imagination she tackled this assignment. She writes: "Her non-stop activities varied according to the time of year. In winter you would find her organising moonlight sleigh parties to the top of Mount Royal, followed by a candle-lit evening of French Canadian folk music, or producing and directing dramatics and concerts. For three months each sum-

mer she ran a camp for the many hundreds of employees and planned all their sports.

Many of the sales girls came and talked their problems over with her. This was remarkable because they were all French Canadians and Margie's background was British. She had bridged the gulf between the two races and had won the confidence and trust of the French Canadians through her fluent French and her warmth of heart and interest. She knew that all division can be cured if someone is prepared to change instead of blaming the other side. Out of a vast commercial enterprise, which could have been divided by race, language and religion, Margaret created a family with which she enjoyed being together, working together and playing together."

How highly Eaton's valued her work became evident when she was invited to travel with a mobile MRA force into the Nova Scotia coalfields. They permitted her to go on full salary hoping she would return to them. But one day news reached her that her loved brother Reggie, a pilot in the Canadian Air Force, had been killed in an air battle over Tunisia. Her mind was then made up to give her whole life to the revolution of Moral Rearmament for the world. And it would be without salary.

Homes - The Nation's Heart

Margaret had the firmest conviction that homes were the heart of the nation and that the kitchen was the heart of the home. Her first touch with India was in a Montreal kitchen. The Canadian family in whose kitchen she cooked for many months was host on one occasion to Devadas Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi. He was an editor and it was just after the Second World War when he had come to Canada in search of newsprint. She put an all-out effort with her colleagues in that kitchen to prepare an Indian curry that would make their foreign guest feel at home. Many years later when she was in Delhi, she was in the home of Mrs. Laxmi Gandhi, the widow of Devadas, and the subject of her husband's visit to Montreal came up in conversation. Mrs. Gandhi recalled how her husband on his return from Canada had talked enthusiastically about that curry. The "Poona Herald" on the day after Margaret's death wrote, "She was an extremely good hostess

and became an expert in the preparation of Indian dishes which she liked and relished." So did the editor who wrote that article, who on several occasions had sampled her dishes!

The Stage Her Weapon

She was a talented actress, and a number of people admit how her portrayal of Annie Jaeger in "Annie the Valiant" had brought to them the birth of a living faith. A French school-teacher writes, "She made me realize through "Annie the Valiant" what ordinary people can do—with two feet, no penny and common sense." Others refer to her role in the hilarious family scene of the "Good Road", and one of those who played in that scene with her writes from California:

"I remember one day when we were playing in 'The Good Road'. The scenery started falling down. Some of us were stumped, but Margie quite naturally went over and calmly started putting it up. We then went on with the show. She was a great person for holding things together, whether it was the scenery of a play or people or situations."

But more than acting, her deep passion was to impart to others her secrets of stage-craft, especially if they wanted to use the stage to change their nations.

In Caux, Switzerland, in 1960 she produced a play written by Greek and Turkish Cypriots to dramatise a uniting answer for that strife-torn island of Cyprus. In France, she worked with extraordinary vigour to forge the French version of "The Forgotten Factor." For long hours on end, in the barn of a French farm in the heart of the country-side at La Ferté Milon, that industrial drama was created under her direction. It then went to the coal-fields of Northern France in the immediate post-war years with decisive effect. In India she produced "You Can't Buy Us", a topical social drama written by two Indian school-girls, Jyoti Subrahmanyam and Padmini Kirtane. It played to thousands in the city of Poona, and then the demand for it in the Marathi language was so pressing that a new cast was found and, although Margaret spoke no Marathi, she launched into the production with furious energy, and the play reached thousands more. Many of those she trained are currently presenting "Sing Out Poona", a bracing original musical which continues to enlist many of Poona

University's students in a constructive alternative to violence and destruction.

She had an outstanding capacity to make her own whatever country she was in, and then retain constantly that sense of oneness with her friends there, wherever she happened to be.

France

Her love for France was deep and lasting. One day in India as some of us were listening to the first rendering of the now widely known song, "The Ballad of Joan of Arc," floods of tears came into her eyes. She would often say to me, "You know, I'd just love to work in France again." She gave much to that country. On one occasion she had received the generous gift of a new car for the work she was doing from her family in Canada. About three weeks after the car was purchased it was discovered that the roof of the house in Paris, where she was staying, was in need of urgent and total renewal. It was the MRA residence, and it was vital that this work be done speedily. But at that point there were no funds available. She asked the cost and found it came to the price of the car. So the car was sold and the money given for the roof.

Africa

A friend from Africa recalls the occasion when we were in Ghana. Our plans were laid and our air tickets bought to fly direct from Accra to Lagos in Nigeria. But at Accra airport, Margaret was suddenly impelled by the strongest conviction to change the plan and go via Dahomey instead. "We might just see Ignacio Pinto," she said. Pinto was Dahomey's Ambassador to the United Nations and was very rarely in his own country, so it was a big risk to take. But on our arrival at Cotonou airport, standing there on the tarmac, having flown in from Angola a few minutes earlier, was the Ambassador, overjoyed to see us. This was his first visit to Dahomey in many months. He invited us to stay over in his home and arranged a meeting with the Prime Minister and a number of the Cabinet. A lively conference on Moral Re-Armament took place in the Prime Minister's office. Margaret Manson's flexibility led her constantly into the most fascinating situations. She had no doubt whatever that when man listens, God speaks

and when man obeys, God acts and when men change, nations change.

Cyprus

An Irish doctor brings to mind her part in the 1959 events which led to the end of the blood bath in Cyprus. She was in Switzerland and was in a train bound from Montreux to Geneva to catch a plane to Paris. Before she reached Lausanne an arresting thought struck her, that she should get off that train and catch an express to get to Geneva faster. Now there was no normal reason for this, as the train she was on would have arrived in good time for the plane. But she had learned to obey these "arresting ticks," which Dr. Frank Buchman talked about. So she got down and boarded the express which brought her to the airport one hour earlier than was necessary. As she entered the airport lobby, she met Mr. and Mrs. Zenon Rossides who had just flown in from America. There was a warm exchange of greetings and she immediately put them in touch by phone with me in Caux. She discovered they were going to stay for some days in Geneva and got their address. Mr. Zenon Rossides was Archbishop Makarios's representative at the United Nations. Then she flew to Paris. That evening she told her friends there of her airport encounter. One of them was a British diplomat and he seemed electrified at this news. "Where are they now?" he asked, "We've been searching for them all over Europe. We knew they had left New York, but no one knew where they were going or when they had left. We've got to reach them immediately. Zenon has an invitation to a private top level meeting." They were contacted, and the invitation given to Zenon who went to London and had the conference with historic results. Among the first messages to arrive after her death was a moving tribute from the Rossides in New York, where Zenon is now Cyprus's Ambassador to the United States.

Hospitality

In many a campaign, she was called upon to go ahead of the main party to arrange the hospitality. All across America as the play "Space Is So Startling" moved with speed from east to west and also all across India, her responsibility

with others was to undertake this important task. In city after city where she had never been before, people responded to her request to receive these visitors from many lands into their homes. When the plane or train arrived with the main party, all were suitably and happily accommodated. When a good friend, Barry McCrae, died in an accident shortly after her own passing, a letter from Switzerland referring to this said, "It is marvellous to know that God has arranged the hospitality on the other side—a thing Margaret excelled in here."

India

In her last years it was to the young generation of men and women of India that she gave herself without reservation. It has been revealing to read the letters from the principals of colleges and schools of Poona, and elsewhere who put an extremely high value on her work. The principal of an influential College of Arts and Sciences writes, "Mrs. Manson took such a keen interest in my college that many times I felt overwhelmed. She had become one with our country and her work in this cultural centre of Poona is beyond praise. Her sudden death is a great tragedy not only to her immediate family personally, but also to the whole of Poona where her devoted work will always be remembered."

Poona abounds in high schools run by the Jesuit Fathers, and by the Sisters of the Convent of Jesus and Mary. It was in these institutions that Margaret Manson did much of her work. Mother Sacred Heart, now the Mother Superior of Bombay's biggest Convent High School, wrote, "The death of such a dedicated woman is indeed a great loss to India. Her life was an inspiration to me and I'm sure to all those who had the happiness of working with her and for her. I shall always treasure her selfless dedication to the service of our youth. One incident keeps coming to mind, as I pray much for her beautiful soul. She had spent a strenuous day in Bombay, returned by night train to Poona, called very early at the Convent and was ready for another day of meetings. When I asked her to have breakfast, she told me not to go to the trouble of preparing it as she had a flask of tea with her. She had no thought of herself. 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.' I have commended her soul to God every day in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass."

By Sea to Bombay

The manner in which she prepared, enjoyed and used her last voyage to India in April in the S.S. Ettrick and the S.S. Riouw with Marion, was typical of her whole life. She chose to come by cargo boat from Rotterdam because it was economical and because she wanted to bring adequate equipment and food supplies for MRA in India. She received an immediate and generous response from her Canadian friends and from many British and Dutch friends whom she had fully included in her battle plan. Canada's Ambassador to Holland was notably among them. She and Marion sailed from Leith in the S.S. Ettrick and arrived in Rotterdam two days later. At the Dutch port they were met by a friend who wrote after her death, "We always remember her as a fighter, who in most difficult situations did not say No, but did what God wanted. In Rotterdam I had to get her from one boat to another. She travelled with so much luggage that I had to rent a truck!" On the ship the Captain, officers, crew and passengers were included in her work. She had a film show arranged on board for all to see "Mr. Brown Comes Down the Hill" by Peter Howard. It produced the liveliest discussions and brought forth the healthiest response from the least likely members of the ship's company. When the ship arrived at Bombay she took great delight in introducing me to all her new friends. "Sing Out Australia" was running in Bombay at that time and the Captain, officers and many of the crew accepted her invitation to come and see it. Many were so captured that they came back a second night. As she moved through customs sheds, shipping agents' offices, clearing agents' houses in the course of clearing her "cargo" she invited all to see the show. And they came with their families. MRA for her was not private property, but God's property to be shared by all.

She Lives

I could truly say of her

"Steel true, blade straight
The Great Artificer
Made my mate."

"She never tolerated the intolerable," said R. D. Mathur at her funeral service, and he was right. The second-rate had no place in her life or in her home or anywhere else. And it made her on occasion uncomfortable to live with, especially when the standards needed raising. But never did she take herself or her family too seriously. Her calling as a world re-maker she took very seriously indeed. This made her tackle very often what others regarded as impossible. "If you do what you can do," she frequently said, "you don't need God. Faith starts when you tackle what you can't do humanly."

The hilarity of her last days with Marion was born of the deep enjoyment of a shared commitment. Marion says of her in these days that everything seemed to give her joy. The deep green of the Maharashtra hills, the sun going down against the giant monsoon clouds, the splendour of the Indian trees, the new house being built across the way—all were relished to the full. And something else satisfied her. Her husband was with Rajmohan Gandhi and "India Arise" on the Madras battle-front. Practically the last entry she made in her guidance book was "Have no fear. Matt is in the right place where he is meant to be."

When the Bible declares, "They that lead many to righteousness shall shine like stars in the firmament," it is describing souls like Margaret Miller Manson. A firm friend writing in a much treasured letter puts it in this way:

"To me Margie was the best of life. She was gay and lively—and at the same time had great depths of understanding. Above all she had courage of a rare kind: to branch out into the unknown and carry others with her, to live for another country than her own. She will have a hero's welcome. And her sparkle will add to heaven's light."

MARGIE

*God must've needed her gallant heart
For some important work,
And He knew in Margie He had a child
Who wouldn't grumble or shirk,
Who wouldn't jib at what was hard
Nor say what the problems were,
So He summoned Margie to be with Him,
And all the trumpets are sounding for her.*

*Margie grew up in Canada
But she lived in many lands.
Giving to thousands unstintingly
Talent, and service of heart and hands,
Showing the way a woman should live
Not bound by "what can be done",
With heart and home where the world walked in,
Showing that living by faith is fun.*

*The Manson three will still fight on,
Margie, Marion, Matt,
On the battlefield which stretches through
Our earthbound world and that
Other world, where Christ is King,
Which is not very far,
And no "go slow" curbs Margie there
Where His many mansions are.*

Janet Mace

France's Tribute

From the Courrier d'Information, September 6, 1966.

Margaret Manson

France owes her much.

Many in France were moved to learn of the death in India on August 31 of Margaret Manson. This great Canadian had learned the secret of changing people when she, as a young woman, was director of personnel of a large department store in Montreal. During the war when morale and patriotic service needed multiplying in Canada as in the United States and elsewhere, she successfully made her debut in the first plays of Moral Re-armament. Afterwards she was invited to give the fruits of her experience, her fighting faith to France during the post-war years of reconstruction and bitter social conflict.

She came to spend more than ten years in our country, living in one home after another, in the Nord, the Pas de Calais, the Loire, and the Paris region. It was during these years that she married Matthew Manson, who was also working with Moral Re-armament in France, and it was in Paris in 1952 that their daughter was born. Gay and always in high spirits, linking the qualities of two nations traditionally allied to France, Matthew and Margaret Manson acquired in our country the friendship and gratitude of employers, workers, cabinet ministers, housewives and so many more to whom they brought new hope.

For the last two years, the Mansons have worked closely with Rajmohan Gandhi in India. On Friday, September 2, India paid her last homage to this fighter whom she also had adopted. Mr. R. D. Mathur, speaking in the name of his country said that the greatest desire of Margaret Manson was to build the centre of MRA at Panchgani, so that the leaders from India and from the world could meet there and find the answer to which she had given her life. He added that a fund would be created to honour her memory in this way. "It is a privilege", he said, "and a matter of pride for us in India that Margaret Manson will be with us for ever."

SOME MESSAGES

The Lord knows best. After the wonderful life of dedication which she has had, she will undoubtedly, from the Heavens above, have an influence that, maybe, she could not have on this planet of ours. My husband joins me in a message of deep sympathy and also of great admiration and affection for Margaret.

*Madame Georges Vanier,
Wife of Canada's Governor General,
Government House, Ottawa.*

We are saddened to think that Mrs. Manson has been taken away so prematurely and has been cut short in the work with MRA to which she was giving so much dedication. We offer our prayers so that you will be comforted by the memory of her fine life.

*Roland Michener,
High Commissioner for Canada,
New Delhi.*

She was a dear friend to me. One I could tell everything to. She was true blue. Our prayers shall be for you.

*Agnes Ritchie,
Executive Member,
Scottish Labour Party, Dundee.*

She rides ahead. We soldier on. With gratitude Margie's joy, giving, many lands.

*Marquis of Graham
Isobel, Marchioness of Graham,
Auchmar, Scotland.*

She worked hard for attainment of better world through divine guidance and strength. Dedicated to God's plan and purpose. It was a wonderful and beautiful life.

*Mr. and Mrs. Zenon Rossides,
Embassy of Cyprus
New York, U.S.A.*

Margaret was a rare woman of God. The best of Canada. The way she won the hearts of first Quebecois to this almighty task will be one of her most treasured victories.

Robert Lowery, Canada.

Margie remains alive, and in our hearts is a permanent challenge to live straight, committed and wholly given to others moment by moment.

*M. and Mme. Pierre Chavanne,
Morocco.*

We are so grateful for all she gave to America, through the plays particularly. Her marvellous fighting spirit and humour given to all meant so much.

*Mr. and Mrs. Caroll Wax,
Hollywood, California,
U.S.A.*

She was one of God's truest fighters. Hundreds here at Caux and Switzerland remember her pioneering words in many homes and many stages.

*M. and Mme. Mottu, M. and Mme. Spoerri, M. and Mme. Schaeffer,
Switzerland*

She gave the best of herself without counting the cost, to her apostolate. We retain remembrance of her as a friend magnificent and generous beyond bounds.

*Madame Lily Wallaert,
Lille, France.*

Margaret has joined Frank and all those who gave absolutely everything to bring in God's kingdom on earth. Our prayers are with you and Marion.

*M. and Mme. Frederick Philips,
Eindhoven, Holland.*

A real hostess and mother for so many young Australians and New Zealanders. She leaves tremendous heritage for all.

*Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Mayor,
Geelong, Victoria, Australia.*