

## THE LATE RIGHT REVEREND R. B. DOUGLAS, D.D.

By Dr. E. MACMILLAN

I am grateful to the Editor for having asked me to write an appreciation of my friend and his, Dr. Douglas, familiarly known to us in South Africa as R. B. D., who passed to his rest on Friday of last week. It is now over twenty-one years since my old professor, Sir George Adam Smith, said to me on the eve of leaving for Pretoria, "You will meet out there Bulloch Douglas, one of the ablest men I know and a great loss to the Home Church." The words proved true, and what Scotland lost South Africa gained. He was by far our biggest man. Intellectually he had no equal among us. This may not have been good either for him or for us. But we were proud to have at least one first-class scholar, not simply one who had behind him an unusually distinguished college career, but one who had the mind, the outlook and the habit of a scholar. He was certainly our greatest ornament.

Yet it was not for this reason only that he took first place among us; it was because of his evangelical zeal and power and spiritual leadership. He could become rapt when he preached and ecstatic when he prayed. It might be said with truth that all his mental gifts were consecrated to the service of the Church, to which he gave himself without reserve. Many of his friends, especially his old fellow-students, "the Celestials," had hoped that he would give to the world some original work either in philosophy or theology, but with rare generosity he subserved all interests and activities to those of the Church. When his friend and colleague, Thornton, died, Temple Gairdner said of him, "The work was not the feature of his life: it was his life." The same might be said of R. B. Douglas. For him the Church was the living centre of Christ's creative and redemptive work in the world, and to it all his energies and capacities were devoted. He had no axe to grind, no personal distinction to win. He had no other ambition than that of serving the Church.

As Editor of the official magazine, the *Presbyterian Churchman*, he was for over twenty-five years the voice of the Church on all public questions. None was as privileged as he was. If he ever erred in judgment his sincerity was beyond question. He wrote just as he preached, out of a burning heart on all matters that affected the moral and spiritual life of the people, such things as the drink evil, gambling, native legislation and Church Union. The natives had no better or more understanding friend. He lost no opportunity of championing their rights; and great was his sorrow over the present tendency towards repressive and unjust legislation. There was something volcanic in his passion against injustice, and he spoke or wrote at white heat.

### Twice Moderator

Twice did the Church elect him to the Moderatorship, an almost unique distinction. He was reigning Moderator and actually in the midst of his itinerary when he was stricken with mortal sickness. We still hoped he would be spared, for his brave spirit had often carried his body through desperate crises, but his physical resources were depleted and this onset proved too much for him. "So he passed over, and the trumpets sounded for him on the other side." He was our Valiant-for-Truth. We tried to honour him in the only way open to us, and we were glad and proud that his old University of Glasgow remembered him and recognised his worth in conferring on him the Doctorate in Divinity. But it is in the love and gratitude of the leal hearts of those he served that he will be best honoured. It is true we are poor without him, poorer than we yet realise, but in Wesley's words when dying we can say, "The best of all is, God is with us."

Our hearts go out in respectful and affectionate sympathy to her who so deeply shared his life and who so unselfishly spared him, and to the children who are bereft of one so rightly dear and beloved.