

## Robert Milligan

President John W. McGarvey  
*The College of the Bible*

It is my purpose to devote the last two addresses of this session to an account of the two men represented by the first two portraits above our rostrum.

Those portraits were not hung there merely to ornament the room, although they are somewhat more ornamental than the bare walls would be, but for the purpose of imparting important lessons to the students of our college.

Our college, brief as its career has been, has outworn two presidents and pretty nearly finished the third. The lives of these two men are sources of great inspiration for good, such as is needed to stimulate the minds of young men preparing to preach the Word. Robert Milligan was a native of the North of Ireland, the Protestant portion of Ireland, that portion in which my own father was born and brought up. His ancestors were Scotch, as his name indicates, and from them he received the Scotch Presbyterian faith in which he was educated. His father moved to this country when he was a child and settled in North East Ohio, which was then almost a wilderness. The farmers had great difficulty and toil in clearing their lands of the heavy growth of timber. Robert, when he was a boy, was brought up to that kind of work. He was characteristically industrious and enthusiastic, and into everything that he did he threw all of [his] strength. To such a disposition this hard work of clearing lands proved too much, and enfeebled his constitution for life. He was educated in a private school taught by a distinguished graduate of Edinborough University. Then, having reached his majority, and having become a communicant in his father's church, he looked out for work to do. He had chosen teaching as his profession, and he found employment in it here in Bourbon County, in the little village of Flat Rock.

In teaching, he had young men in his classes from our brotherhood, who have now as they had then the prevailing numbers in Bourbon County. These young men, knowing him to be a Presbyterian, and being better instructed in the word of God than Presbyterians in general, threw before him a great many puzzling questions about the Scriptures, and especially about Baptism. His strict conscientiousness and his desire to know the truth and to espouse it, led him, under these questions of the boys, to undertake the reexamination of all the grounds of his faith and his baptism; and as is true of hundreds of other such men, he was convinced by his careful research of his own Good Book

that he ought to be immersed and unite with the Disciples, which he did.

After teaching thus for two years at Flat Rock, he started to go to Yale, to extend his own education. But in passing through Washington, Pa. where he had some friends, he was importuned by them to stay there and graduate in Washington College. The main inducement for him to stay there, was the fact that there was a little congregation of Disciples about a mile from town who were very much in need of a leader and teacher. So they besought him to stay with them and they prevailed. This opportunity for usefulness was a far stronger inducement to him than the greater education at the more famous institution.

Such was his success as a student, that the very next year after his graduation he was given a professorship which he held for twelve years. Then was exhibited another mark of his conscientiousness. He learned that it was the will of those who had charge of the college to put it under the Presbyterian Synod. That was done in order to make it strictly a Presbyterian college. He was not willing to remain in a college the owners of which wanted it to be strictly Presbyterian while he was not of that faith himself. He offered his resignation. He was urged to remain and assured that his change of view made no difference. But it made a difference with him, and he did not stay. He differed from many preachers and teachers, who, when they get into a good place stay there at the cost of any kind of strife or division.

He was now offered a professorship in the Indiana University located at Bloomington. He accepted it. There he lived for two years. But Indiana at that time, in its early settlement, was full of malaria. Chills and fever prevailed very greatly, and in some places fatally. The ill health of his family constrained him to resign.

He then accepted a chair that he been offered him repeatedly in Bethany College. Alexander Campbell had heard of him and formed his acquaintance. He esteemed him very highly from the first; and when he knew him well, he longed for his assistance in the management of the students of Bethany College. Finally he prevailed. When he came to Bethany there was what we might call a revolution. He instituted a system of work for the religious good of the students, such as had never been known before in that institution. All the students admired Alexander Campbell and wondered at his greatness; but in a little while everyone learned to love Professor Milligan. He was their friend. He was their companion as much as his duties would permit.

He had labored there for five years, when Kentucky University, having arisen into prominence and looking about for a

president selected him. They selected him for the name he had won by his work in Bethany College. It was very hard for them to get him to accept the presidency, but he finally did and moved to Harrodsburg. The same kind of work as done here as a president as [he] had been done there as a professor. Then when the University was moved to this city, he came with it. When the College of the Bible was organized, in its very beginning he was chosen as president. Nobody thought of anyone else.

In the year 1875 he breathed his last. Every virtue and every grace which he had exhibited in his previous life was here exhibited more fully. No student ever spent a year in the College of the Bible or in the College of Arts, that did not have a passionate love for President Milligan.

As a scholar he was not eminent, but his scholarship was such that with the earnest care and diligence with which he entered into every question he was required to handle, he was accurate and sure. As a preacher he was not brilliant nor oratorical, but always deeply impressive. As a teacher he was one of the most successful. He was clear in his utterances and required the members of his classes to be clear in theirs. He never fell into the fault of many teachers of doing the talking in the classroom himself when it was time for the students to do it. When a young man stood up to recite to him he had to depend upon himself to get through; or else, when he could not get through without help, with a very kind word and a nod, "That will do, my brother" he had to sit down. And very few students ever passed through his classes without having a reasonably thorough knowledge of the subject.

His chief distinction was as a man, a Christian man, a man with every virtue and every grace that adorns a Christian character. It was this characteristic, or these, that made him almost the idol of those whom he instructed. Who can estimate the value of the work of such a man as that, though he died, as we may say, prematurely at 61 years of age. How many souls he started in the right path! How many crude minds he filled with vital truth and with correct knowledge, and sent out into the great field of work to sow seeds of righteousness and eternal life. No man can count the number of these. When I think of him personally, I remember him as one of the warmest friends I ever had on earth. I think of him now as one of the best friends I now have in heaven. If it were in his power to do me any good during the remainder of my sojourn here, I know he would do it. But 'twere vain for me to call on him for it, seeing there is one greater than he who has it in his power to do what he will for his servants, and he promises to do the very best for me that is possible.

Brethren, keep the characters and careers of such men before you. One of the characteristics of a Christian, as Paul defines it, is to be “a lover of good men.” Be lovers of good men. That makes you seek to imitate them.