

Thomas D. Muir...Another Pioneer

When Thomas D. W. Muir passed into the presence of the Lord in Detroit on February 7, 1931, the Church of God lost a gifted teacher, the Detroit assembly a pastor and the world a faithful herald of the gospel. During the fifty-five years of very active ministry, fifty of which were spent in Detroit, he was one who "always abounded in the work of the Lord." His numerous magazine articles and gospel tracts will continue to bear fruit. As editor of *Our Record* for a number of years, he carried the burden of that magazine at a period when our late brother Charles W. Ross was in poor health. He was also a hymn-writer and a musician of no mean order, and several of his gospel hymns are in regular use.

Mr. Muir was born in the village of Ormiston, province of Quebec, in 1855, of Scottish descent. His parents were rigid Presbyterians, although at times the family attended a little Baptist Mission nearer their home. In 1869 he received his first spiritual awakening in this Mission, through the preaching of a young man named Richmond. In 1870 the family moved to Hamilton, Ontario, and four years later the pioneers, Donald Munro and John Smith appeared in that city, preaching in the open air and a hired hall for four months. For the first six weeks these two men preached every night for an hour in the open air and then for forty-five minutes longer to the few who had followed them into the hall. They were completely discouraged and were packing up ready to leave, feeling there was no stir at all. Then one evening, three souls were saved, William L. Faulkner, who afterward went to Central Africa, Thomas D. W. Muir, and his brother Kenneth. The strong words used in tracts and

posters, "Friend, thou art travelling to Eternity; to an Everlasting Heaven or to an Endless Hell—Which?" coupled with John 3:16, were used of God in leading Mr. Muir to Christ in July, 1874, when nineteen years of age. Need-



Thomas D. W. Muir

less to say, the meetings continued for many weeks longer and others were saved. After his conversion young Thomas endeavored to help in the meetings as much as possible. He swept the floor of the hall, dusted and arranged the chairs, kindled the fire and placed the hymn books in readiness for the various meetings. Thus he was serving an apprenticeship that stood him in good stead for the years to come. One night he and another young Christian decided to help advertise the meetings, by holding a street-meeting themselves, the bargain being that Mr. Muir, who had a

fine singing voice, would sing a hymn and attract the crowd and the other young man would speak. When the hymn had been sung and an audience gathered, Mr. Muir looked around for his friend who was to speak, but he was nowhere to be seen. He had had an attack of "cold feet" at the critical moment and had quietly withdrawn, leaving young Thomas alone to face the situation, so for the first time he spoke forth the gospel to the people and was helped of God. After he had finished, a woman's strong Scotch voice was heard to call out, "Weel, laddie, God has opened your mouth. See that the Devil never shuts it." Mr. Muir said later, "And this was my ordination to the ministry."

From the time of his conversion Mr. Muir began to be exercised about giving all his time to preaching the gospel, and was encouraged in this desire by a godly old brother in the Hamilton meeting. There were many obstacles in the way, some of them financial, but God met the need in a remarkable way and, step by step, Mr. Muir followed the leading of the Lord. The Scripture, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you," was used on one occasion to encourage him in this path.

In the year 1877, at New Year, at the conference in Hamilton, Mr. Muir first met Mr. Donald Ross, who was greatly interested in the young man, having heard something of his progress as a Christian and his seeming desire to spread the gospel. Mr. Ross suggested to him that he go with him to Galt, Ont., and, as he put it, "be John Mark to me." He was only too glad to fall in with Mr. Ross's desire, feeling, as he said, that it would be an honor to accompany such an one in the work, and realizing that there would be an opportunity to get help in the things of God, which he knew he needed. He asked Mr. Ross to criticise his preaching and tell him of

anything in manner or matter which might hinder the reception of the message. This Mr. Ross promised to do and every evening the two men would spend at least an hour before retiring talking over the Word. Faulty expositions of certain texts, or faulty expressions of what was in itself the truth, all passed in review, with the result that help was given at that time that was never forgotten. Mr. Muir himself wrote of those days as follows: "Mr. Ross himself an active man, he could not bear to see others idle who were professedly devoting their time to the Lord's service. Both by example and in the course of his ministry he condemned it. Yet he never thought it misspent time that was used over the Word of God. Indeed, he encouraged close study of the Bible. 'Take time to study God's Word,' he would say to me in those days; 'Use all legitimate means to enable you to grasp the scope of it. Examine the context; secure if possible, the primary application; then, as you meditate upon it, you may find there are principles in it of wider application, which will come to the front as you may need to use them.' To emphasize such instruction, he could give me portion to study and 'work out' as he called it. In leisure time these 'studies' would be gone over and criticised, to my profit. I shall never forget those days, nor cease to thank God for the help given during the eight weeks we were together. And in the years that have followed since those early days, how much I have been indebted to him for wise counsel, encouraging words, and, by means of his public ministry, searching messages, stirring up my lagging energies to desire, in some measure, more real devotedness to Him we own as Lord and Master."

When Mr. Muir first went to Detroit it was a city of about one hundred thousand inhabitants. Things were very primitive during his first years in that city, a few street cars drawn by horses

and these only on the principal avenues and at wide intervals. Detroit then saw the first open-air gospel meetings, when Mr. and Mrs. Muir stood by the Detroit River at the foot of Woodward Ave. Later a few professed faith in Christ and a little assembly was formed, the open-air meetings were held at the Soldier's Monument on Cadillac square where there were good audiences and few interruptions.

For several years a gospel-tent work was carried on in the summer months and his tent was the first ever pitched in Detroit. There was a good deal of persecution from the Roman Catholics in those early days and many a time the tent was found flat on the ground, the ropes having been cut. The little assembly first met in a store building, and was very weak and its members few and poor, so there was a constant struggle to meet expenses. Mr. Muir received not one penny of fellowship from the Christians in Detroit for the first seven years there. When any special effort in the gospel was made he had to foot the bills himself, pay the printer out of his own pocket, and furnish the extra light and heat for the occasion. From other places the Lord graciously supplied his own family needs as they arose, and Mr. Muir testified many times to the Lord's faithfulness during all these times of trials and testing. He made his requests to God and to Him alone and never gave to anyone else the slightest hint of his own need.

One little incident in connection with his times of testing may be interesting to our readers. Mr. Muir told this himself years after it occurred. His wife was recovering from a long illness and craved something to tempt her appetite. "If I could just have some chicken broth," she said. He had no money to buy such food and you can imagine his feelings when he knew her desire and his inability to gratify it. But that very day a man who professed to be a Chris-

tian called upon him. Several times in the past this man had had fellowship with Mr. Muir in the work of the Lord. In the course of the conversation on that day our brother discovered that the man held a serious unscriptural doctrine that precluded him from having any fellowship with him. As the caller rose to leave, he took out a roll of bills and said, "I want you to take this." Mr. Muir withdrew his hand, saying, "I cannot take any money from you as I cannot have fellowship with one who holds the doctrine of annihilation as you do." The man insisted, but Mr. Muir stood firm in his refusal, though, as he said, the Devil was taunting him with his wife's need of nourishing food and his own seeming cruelty in refusing money with which he could satisfy her craving. When the visitor left, our brother wept like a child and then poured out his heart before God. Did God leave him to Satan's buffetings? No! That very night a Christian came to the same door bearing a basket containing a pitcher filled with chicken broth, a cooked chicken, vegetables and a loaf of home-made bread. Mr. Muir added, "And again I withdrew and kneeled down to my heavenly Father who knew I had need of such things and who had so graciously turned my heartfelt prayers into heartfelt praise." By these things men live and characters are formed. All such experiences gave Mr. Muir boldness and faithfulness to stand for God and God's ways.

The assembly in Detroit grew through the years until at the present time there are several hundred breaking bread in one location, with smaller companies scattered through the city—all dating back to the time when Mr. and Mrs. Muir stood on the street corner alone singing and preaching the gospel.

Mr. Muir did some pioneering in towns in Ontario, also, Straffordville, Forest, Arkona and other places in the Lake Huron region. John Carnie was

with him during those years and the work done then is still standing.

A poem, one of the many written by our brother Muir, seems a fitting ending to this memoir of one of the outstanding pioneers in this country.

'Awake Thou That Sleepest'

Saints of God, redeemed and precious
Children of a heavenly birth;

Why do we like veriest worldlings

Grovel low upon the earth?

What though we gain earthly treasures,

Tho possessed of wealth untold;

What will all the struggle profit,

If we lose our crown for gold?

Child of God, His grace has saved you;

Saved to serve a Master true,

For He has in His vast vineyard

Some appointed spot for you.

Has he not redeemed and saved you

That your tongue His praise might
swell,

That you might, in working with Him,

Save poor souls from death and hell?

Dare you trifle; while around you

Thousands perish day by day?

Perish in their sins, not knowing

Christ the true and living way.

What though all the world despise you,

Christ was hated long ago,
You have heard His voice command
you,

"Preach the Gospel," therefore go!

Not perchance to distant places—

Will He first direct your way—

Home and friends and old companions

Need the warning Word today.

Go to them, proclaim the message,

Warn—entreat to flee from hell.

"Preach the Word," be not discouraged,

God will fight the battle well.

Stay not there, tell other sinners—

Tell the freeman or the slave,

God will prove to all who trust Him,

That He's mighty still to save,

Mighty, for the wondrous power

Wrought in Christ, brought from the
dead

Quickens still, and saves from judgment,

All the flock for which He bled.

Hasten, then; for Christ is coming—

Coming soon, His own to claim;

And each soul won for the glory

Swells the honor of that Name!

Hasten, ere the shadows lengthen,

Love's demands no longer shirk—

Time is flying—men are dying—

Night draws near, when none can
work.

Ed. Note: The foregoing article should be read by every one of our readers. It will touch the heart with a deep sense of God's goodness to those who will trust Him.

