

Professor G N M Collins

Sadness and gratitude were strangely mingled at the news of the homecall of the Revd Dr George N M Collins, Edinburgh, on the 20th October 1989. There was sadness because his going seems to spell the end of an era. There was gratitude because his lifetime of work in the service of Christ has been rounded out in such full measure of years and grace.

Born in London in 1901, George Norman MacLeod Collins was brought up from the age of eight by his maternal grandmother in the Highland village of Elphin in Sutherlandshire. This placed him in the ambit of a godly home and a uniquely discerning circle of spiritually exercised believers who always related the importance of sound doctrine to practical Christianity and godly living.

He was ordained to his first pastorate in the Free Gaelic Congregation, Greenock, in 1928 and his sixty-one years of ministry were to prove as exceptional in their influence as their length. It was in the pulpit of Free St Columba's, Edinburgh — made famous by the redoubtable Thomas Guthrie — that from 1938 his reputation was secured as a gifted, lucid, preacher and from it he exercised an expository biblical ministry for twenty-five years. His influence as a minister was enhanced beyond the frontiers of his own denomination through his work as Editor of the Church's magazines, the INSTRUCTOR from 1937 to 1958, and the MONTHLY RECORD, from 1958 to 1973.

From 1963 until 1983 Dr Collins served with distinction as Professor of Church History at the Free Church College. His appreciation of his subject prompted him to write for the youth of today and his best known book, THE HERITAGE OF OUR FATHERS (1976) is particularly valuable in its discerning account of the events which produced the present Free Church of Scotland. His knowledge of 17th century Scotland was probably unrivalled in the present day and so historians of note in Britain and from overseas frequently sought his counsel and advice.

He gave valuable service to many worthy causes outside his own denomination. Not least of these was his part in the beginnings of the British Evangelical Council. He and one of his fellow Free Church ministers, the Revd Murdoch MacRae, met with three representatives of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and instituted the Council in 1952. Dr Collins was to serve the Executive of the BEC for many years, retaining an interest in its work until the end. His long-standing friendship with Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones — whom he frequently brought to Scotland — meant that the pulpit of Westminster Chapel was one from which he preached at regular intervals.

Having become a father figure on the British church scene he will be missed by many. It is our prayer that God would now touch many of Britain's sons with the same constraining love that motivated our brother and that all of us who came under his influence might emulate the simplicity and humility which adorned his profession and commended his faith.

Professor J D MacMillan
