BOOK REVIEWS

John McMillan, the Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, 1752-1833.  
By Dwight Raymond Guthrie, Professor of Bible, Grove City College.  (University of Pittsburgh Press, c1952. x, 296 p. Illustrations, maps.)

In this work Professor Guthrie admirably combines the skills of biographer and historian in producing the portrait of a man against the background of his career. Pigments for the author's palette are found in what McMillan divulges about himself in his journal, in letters and in certain ledgers—these latter in his own handwriting. Drawn upon also is that which McMillan imparted about his parents, their forebears, his brothers, sisters, children, and himself, as found in such works as the late Daniel M. Bennett's life of McMillan (1935) and in Joseph Smith's volumes on Old Redstone (1854) and Jefferson College (1857). Of primary value as autobiographical source material is McMillan's letter to President James Carnahan of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), here quoted in full in Appendix C. With notable success the historical background for the narrative has been blocked in so as to support and not obscure McMillan's likeness. In the last chapter, entitled "Personality," the subject's traits of character are brought out concretely, and as the reader turns back to the frontispiece portrait of McMillan, he muses: "Yes, that is the man."

The author portrays his subject in eight chapters, which occupy about two-thirds of the book. In a manner dear to the student, he has authenticated his statements in carefully listed notes at the end of each chapter. By way of introduction a customary page of acknowledgments is prefixed to the work in a foreword. This is followed by a glossary addressed to the reader, which is a great help to those unfamiliar with Presbyterian usage. Herein are clarified the words and phrases Apostle, Presbyterianism, the West of 1752-1833, Session, Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly, and a Call. Attention is next directed to the volume's three well-defined maps. Pictorial illustration consists of frontispiece, woodcuts, and line drawings. The first-mentioned is a portrait of Dr. McMillan, backed by a facsimile of a ledger-page, character-revealing both in content and script. The praiseworthy woodcut is by Boyd Hanna and appears both on the title-page and the final sheet. The excellent line drawings by Clarence McWilliams are appropriately
placed and are entitled "Conestoga Wagon," "Westward," "Spinning Wheel," and "Fireplace." The dressing up has not been overdone. The inclusion of more photographs and cuts would not have enhanced the artistry of the volume, which with its handy size, excellent paper, printing, and binding, cannot be dubbed "just another book." Incidentally, the paper wrapper is a clever stroke of salesmanship: thereon the past is brought up to date by a map with modern place names so that the reader says: "This is my home town and this is my book."

The supplementary appendixes are: (A) McMillan's journals, 1774-1791, 1820-1833; (B) His expense accounts, 1820-1833; (C) Excerpt from the Pittsburgh Christian Herald and Western Missionary Reporter, December 14, 1833, which contains the aforementioned letter from McMillan to President Carnahan of the College of New Jersey—reminding one of Lincoln's well-known autobiographical sketch. Here, in clear, unaffected English in his eightieth year, Dr. McMillan wrote cogently of matters in his long life, especially about his own religious experiences and those of others to whom he preached in the course of his long ministry.

There is also a comprehensive bibliography in which authorities are classified as primary and secondary sources. It is not only a veritable "Poole's Index" on John McMillan and his time, but also a sizable listing of works on American church history, including Presbyterianism in general. This department is indeed a researcher's treasure-trove.

The index, like the rest of the work, is excellent, notwithstanding the lumping of three Allisons: (1) Judge James Allison, Jr., (1742-1820), mentioned on pages 53, 58, 88-89, 95, 139, 147; (2) a James Allison mentioned on page 141 (James, Jr., had a son James who was a judge in Beaver County, formerly a part of Washington County, and who may or may not be the man intended here); (3) the James Allison quoted on page 57. The latter was born in 1823. He was a trustee of Washington and Jefferson College and editor of the Presbyterian Banner. (See History of the Presbyterian Church of Sewickley, Pennsylvania, 51—New York, 1914.)

The first chapter of the narrative, entitled "Beginnings," shows the subject with his roots in the soil of Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism. It is hard to disassociate the terms "Scotch-Irish" and "Presbyterianism." The pioneering western Pennsylvania forefathers might possibly, with apologies, stretch the term "Scotch-Irish" to include the Baptists, and
in post-McMillan days, begrudgingly, the “Campbellites” also, but the “Methodies” (Arminians), never! Transplanted as they were to America, by root and cultural soil as well, these buckram-fibered Presbyterian nonconformists suffered no loss of character. They had been disciplined in soul and mind and body by a century of endurance under and resistance to political and religious tyranny in Ireland. Independence of spirit, religious zeal, love and respect for learning, business enterprise, and a genius for political self-government were in their blood. These values were nurtured by the tenets of their church in the new land as in the old country. The farmstead, the home, the children dedicated to God, the plain church building, the schools (grammar and Latin), the Calvinistic Westminster standards, strict Sabbatarianism (and we do mean strict) were all of the fabric of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian way of life. In this initial chapter we see the genesis in Pennsylvania of the home life of the kind of people we meet in Agnes Sligh Turnbull’s The Rolling Years and continued by their present-day descendants. Important to the understanding of McMillan is the record in this chapter of his pre-natal dedication to God and the Gospel ministry by his devout parents, William and Margaret Rea McMillan. Their son was born on November 11, 1752, in Fagg’s Manor, Pennsylvania, and the story of his early years tells much that conspired to make the “predestined” boy’s “calling and election sure.”

Chapter two, entitled “Mission,” shows the tough-minded and strongly mystical youth, as he undergoes spiritual regeneration and moves steadily forward in earnest preparation for the life of a Gospel minister which, he had no apparent doubt, God had willed for him. After grammar and Latin schools he went to the College of New Jersey where he graduated in 1772, at the age of twenty years. Before going to college he was under the pastoral influence and scholarly tuition of the Blair brothers. While at Princeton, he was taught by the eminent President John Witherspoon. Upon returning to Pequea Academy to finish his theological education his teacher was the erudite Robert Smith. He was an apt student but not a genius. His professional training, by the standards of the day, was excellent. According to Presbyterian procedure, McMillan, having been “taken under care of presbytery,” was “licensed to preach” on October 26, 1774. After functioning as a licentiate in the eastern part of the state, he then visited western Pennsylvania. At that time he was invited to settle there after his ordination. Returning to the
east he was ordained at Chambersburg by the Presbytery of Donegal on June 19, 1776, and was given the calls to the Chartiers and Pigeon Creek churches in western Pennsylvania, then under the jurisdiction of that presbytery. These churches had already agreed to accept him as their minister. On August 6, 1776, he was married at Fagg’s Manor to Catherine Brown.

In the third chapter, entitled “Home,” we are made acquainted with the manse McMillan built and with the home life maintained at Chartiers. Early in November, 1778, he and his wife and their baby daughter settled in the parish of which he had been pastor for two years, and which, in the meantime, he had served sketchily but with satisfaction to his parishioners. Some of the McMillan relatives had already found their way to southwestern Pennsylvania, and more of his kinsfolk were to follow, so that he was not without family ties in the new country. Life on the frontier as the newcomers shared it in all its ruggedness, along with neighbors and co-religionists, is described by our author. McMillan was not only smart mentally but was also physically fit, being large of frame and able to pioneer with masterful skill in his threefold job of pastor, farmer, and educator. He capably assumed the leadership to the degree expected of him by his congregations at Chartiers and Pigeon Creek, whose members were well-bred, with backgrounds similar to his own. This influence emanated for over fifty-eight years from his orthodox Presbyterian home, dedicated to Jesus Christ. There, grace at table, family prayers, Scripture-reading and memorizing, and catechetical instruction were practiced regularly without fanaticism. After the manner of the manses of his boyhood community, McMillan’s home became, in 1780, the seat of a Latin boarding school conducted by him in a small log cabin near his dwelling. Here candidates for the ministry were given instruction in theology, Latin, and Greek. Other ambitious young men were given pre-professional training, board and tuition free. And in the keeping of the home and the care of her family and the students, Mrs. McMillan bore her part with faithfulness and efficiency.

In chapter four, entitled “Church,” our author adequately supports his thesis that “without question John McMillan is the father of the Presbyterian churches in the West.” He outreached his preaching and pastoring in his settled charges for over fifty-six years in a work of assembling, organizing, and fostering Presbyterian congregations.
Through his revivalism and teaching, Dr. McMillan, more than any other minister before or during his time, successfully promoted the general interests of his denomination in the Upper Ohio Valley region. On the other hand, our author in no way obscures the ministries of several able contemporaries in Presbyterian pastorates—Dod, Smith, Stockton, and others. These he treats with deserved respect. Churches were founded by McMillan in present-day Allegheny, Washington, Greene, Fayette, and Westmoreland counties in Pennsylvania, and he preached as far north as New Wilmington in Lawrence County. He either preached at or founded the church at Richland (St. Clairsville, Ohio), according to Dr. Edward B. Welsh, although his preaching places in Ohio are not mentioned by our author. Of imposing presence and of powerful voice, McMillan was primarily a revivalist, howbeit not a sensationalist. He carefully prepared and memorized his sermons, which were "clear expositions of Gospel truth and solemn warnings." In the field of his teaching ministry for thirty years after 1802, McMillan was professor of divinity at Jefferson College. His extant lectures in theology, transcribed by his son-in-law, Moses Allen, show that he taught the current Calvinistic system of doctrine in keeping with the tenets of historic Presbyterianism. When in 1825 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church approved the plan to establish a theological seminary in the West, McMillan, because of his lead in advocating the project for over forty-three years, was looked upon as the father of that institution, now the Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh.

In fact, McMillan's popular fame largely attaches to his role of pioneer educator, and chapter five enlarges upon the subject under the heading "Education." From the tiny acorn of his log-cabin "college" or Latin school (established 1780), grew Jefferson Academy (founded in 1791, chartered 1794), Jefferson College (chartered 1802), and of the same charter although "independent in the power to grant its own medical degrees" (page 98), Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia (1824). Related to McMillan also, as one of its founding promoters, is Western Theological Seminary (1825) as aforementioned. Of his culturing although not of his specific planting was Washington Academy (chartered 1787). As a trustee of Pittsburgh Academy (chartered 1787), our author could also have connected McMillan with the founding of the University of Pittsburgh, through its forerunning institutions, West-
ern University of Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh Academy. It was through the influence of McMillan and his associates, Judge James Allison and Judge John McDowell (brothers-in-law and ruling elders in Chartiers Church), that the charter and a land grant of five thousand acres in what is now Beaver County was received from the legislature in 1787 for the establishment of Washington Academy. McMillan along with other ministers and several elders were of the first board of trustees of this academy, which had a hectic life until it bloomed out as Washington College by recharter in 1806. The chart of the planting and growth of each of these institutions is set down by our author. Arboreal growing tension in the form of a prolonged "college war" until after many vegetal bleedings from transplantation and grafting, Washington and Jefferson College was produced in 1865. Dr. McMillan came to posthumous honor as the acknowledged virtual founder.

Chapter six, entitled "Presbytery," recounts McMillan's life as a "presbytery man," beginning with his licentiate in the Presbytery of New Castle (October 26, 1774), and continuing through his membership in the Donegal Presbytery as an ordained presbyter (May 25, 1776-May 16, 1781), in the Redstone Presbytery for the next twelve and a half years, and in the Ohio Presbytery for the next forty years and one month, or until November 16, 1833. Through these years his presbytery connections found him under the jurisdictions of three synods—New York, Philadelphia, Virginia and Pittsburgh. Here we learn of McMillan's part in organizing the Redstone and Ohio Presbyteries and the Synod of Pittsburgh (now merged with the Synod of Pennsylvania). In this chapter, we are also made acquainted with the subject's ministerial contemporaries in the Ohio Presbytery, John Clark, John Brice, James Hughes, and Joseph Patterson—all of them men of piety and learning with whom McMillan compatibly shared "the parity of the Clergy." Under the subtitle, "Presbytery Matters," the subject is shown as he carried on in the routine duties of a presbyter including "the judiciary." The need of a strong backlog of sanctified common sense and stabilizing Christian character through these early years of organized Presbyterianism in the strongly Scotch-Irish population of Pittsburgh was supplied by "Apostle John" and his like-minded associates among the ministers and elders. In the Barr case as reported in this chapter, we glimpse the Pittsburgh of 1775, a frontier trading post, "a place of contrasts and contradictions," with a population of fifteen hundred.
Our sympathies in this "church fight" are with the pastoral incumbent of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh. The Birch case, the Kerr case, and the Gwinn case all bear evidence of the fact that Scotch-Irish Presbyterians at all times and in all places are given to holding to and fighting for their rights to the very last notch of their privileges for offense and defense within the bounds of the law, church or civil. "The Duty of Zion's Watchman" is the title of a sermon preached as, what proved to be, a "swan song" by Dr. McMillan in the spring of 1833. He preached it before the presbytery meeting in his Chartiers Church. Inadvertently it bears testimony to the noble way in which the preacher himself fulfilled the high ideals of the office of presbyter.

In the seventh chapter on "Politics," the author reveals "the Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West" as a molder of public opinion and a champion of things political which made for law and order, the moral welfare, and the sound economic development of southwestern Pennsylvania. Our author makes 1794 the focal point for treating of this phase of his subject's interests. This year marked the settlement of the "Whiskey Insurrection," historically important as the first demonstration of the power of the new federal government to enforce its laws uniformly. McMillan is shown to have been on the side of "law and order," although many of his parishioners likely never did see eye to eye with their dominie on this point. Among them possibly were two of his closest friends and elders, James Allison and John McDowell, both of them brothers-in-law to David Bradford, with whom they are believed to have been on friendly enough terms, at least personally. The congressional election of that same year, 1794, the Jay Treaty of 1794-96, and the gubernatorial campaign of 1808 are considered to show the activities of the "patriarch" which made him a figure to be reckoned with in the field of regional, state and, in a measure, federal politics. His championship of the candidacy for office of his friend and former teacher in his employ, Senator James Ross, shows the worthy "Apostle" being subjected to misrepresentation and abuse by a yellow journalist of that day.

1 In the reviewer's opinion, the last word has not yet been written on David Bradford's behalf in connection with the insurrection episode for which he has suffered much undeserved obloquy. However, Earle R. Forrest's illuminating researches into the life of Bradford have borne good fruit in the Washington (Pa.) Reporter of April 9, 1953.
In the last chapter, on “Personality,” there emerges for our respectful observation, in the maturity of his apostleship, the venerable personage whom the author makes stand before us Samuel-like, grown old in the service of the Kingdom of the Lord and now ready to lay down his responsibilities. As was the prophet Samuel, so John McMillan was a very human individual, blunt, outspoken, but large-hearted and generous. From a young man coming “out of seminary” to Chartiers, we have seen him as he “grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” The while we found him always a leader in the manifold service of his high calling. “The Last Leaf on the Tree” with “his old three-cornered hat, his breeches and all that” does not describe the Reverend John McMillan, D.D. The tree itself, bringing forth fruit in old age the better depicts him. He was a shoe-buckled, blue-stockinged, conservative in dress and views. His vertebrate theology made him very sure of both the wrath and the infinite love of God. Intensely practical, yet humorous, he was kindly most of the time and always honest.2

On the next to the last page of his narrative, Dr. Guthrie quotes indirectly, and inaccurately, in minor details, a contemporary description of seventy-six-year-old Dr. McMillan in attendance at the Synod of Pittsburgh of 1829, found in the Rev. Dr. Samuel C. Jennings’ Recollections of Useful Persons, 14 (Vancefort, Pa., 1884), which reads in part as follows: “There sits near the Moderator, Dr. John McMillan, robust, with rather a swarthy face, heavy eye-brows, his hair not entirely white. He holds his hickory staff, takes but little part in the common business. . . . His aid is sought in religious services, and he is treated as a father.”

“At the Synod of 1833,” continues our author, “some members asked him where he thought the next one should meet. He answered ‘he would be home before that time and was not interested in the place of meeting.’” His return to Chartiers was via steamboat to Wheeling where he preached for fourteen days (likely in the First Church, built in

2 In this chapter (p. 186) Dr. Guthrie makes passing mention of McMillan’s having enrolled in the local militia in 1782, as related more fully in Bennett’s life of McMillan (p. 264), where the original source cited is Pennsylvania Archives, sixth series, vol. 2, p. 105. If the John McMillan there listed as a member of the “6th Class, Capt’n Jam[e]’s Scotts Comp’y, 3d Batt’n, W. County Militia,” was indeed the preacher and teacher of the same name, the latter appears thereby to have suffered no interruptions, in his preaching ministry at least, during the three or four years in which, according to Bennett, Capt. Scott’s company was in service on the frontier.
1820). "Altogether in the four weeks of this last journey," says Guthrie, "he traveled by stage and steamboat more than two hundred miles and preached at least twenty sermons."

Then the author brings him by stage, on November 3, to Canonsburg, where he became violently ill. There, on November 16, 1833, at the home of his physician, Dr. Jonathan Leatherman, now the borough building on East Pike Street, Dr. McMillan died in his eighty-second year. His grave, beside that of his wife in "Hill Church" (Chartiers) Cemetery, is covered with a raised stone slab. According to a brief notice in the *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette* of November 21, 1833, "the deceased was the apostle of the Presbyterian Church in the West," and Dr. Guthrie's researches embodied in his book amply justify this claim. To paraphrase Secretary Stanton: "Now he belongs to Pennsylvania," where his name is inscribed among the immortals on the frieze of the State Education Building at Harrisburg, and where the institutions that he fathered are among his monuments.

To the legion of descendants of many of the very people named in its pages, this book should be "must" reading. It promises to be a welcome volume to many who are blood of the blood, flesh of the flesh, faith of the faith of those mentioned therein. Our grateful thanks to the author, a fellow "Scotch-Irish" Presbyterian.

Neffs, Ohio

MILTON M. ALLISON


In some respects Mr. Higginbotham's task is more difficult than

3 Mr. Allison, now minister of the Coalbrook Presbyterian Church in Neffs, Ohio, was born in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania (in the heart of the "McMillan country"), and is related to or acquainted with many of the descendants of people mentioned in Dr. Guthrie's book, including those of John McMillan himself. Moreover, a number of the reviewer's ancestors were trustees of Jefferson Academy or Jefferson College.—Ed.