

George Hay Morgan, K.C.

SCHILLER said that "Death cannot be an evil because it is universal." The passing of those whom we love, and who have entered deeply into our lives, leaves gaps which can never be bridged, however profound may be our faith. Our sorrow is not for those who are gone, but for ourselves. As some of us know so well, with increasing years there comes a sense of loneliness as one after another of our friends go into the unknown. That the sudden call of George Hay Morgan came as a shock to many all over the country has been abundantly evidenced. In every sphere of life wherein he had entered there are those who have hardly as yet realised that they will see and hear him no more on earth. This is supremely the case with Mrs. Morgan, who, after forty years of the greatest of all human associations, is now left desolate. One can only tender to her the deepest and most loving sympathy, as also to their adopted children, praying that the rich memories remaining to them may be their comfort at all times and under all circumstances.

To me has been committed, the oldest living friend of Mr. Morgan, the writing of some notes as to his varied career. These are not intended to be in any sense a memoir, but a tribute to his personality and activities. What is said cannot express all I feel. It, however, may in some measure, record a friendship which has extended over nearly forty-one years. Had there been any anticipation of this being my lot, it might have been more worthy of him. The fact is that I had hoped, when my task on earth is o'er, he would have been the one to conduct the last offices for me.

Our first meeting was in 1890, when I was Secretary of the Woodberry Down Church. The first minister of that church was the late Rev. W. R. Skerry, who baptised me during his ministry at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Our friendship continued through his time at Counterslip, Bristol. Meanwhile I had removed to London, and when Mr. Skerry took up the work at Woodberry Down I joined that church, was elected a Deacon, and ultimately Secretary, holding that position for several years. When Mr. Skerry left in 1899 for Camberwell, the church gave a unanimous invitation to the late Dr. J. E. Roberts, then a student at Regent's Park, which he accepted to take effect when his college course was completed six months later. Shortly after-

wards he was approached to become assistant to Dr. Maclaren, at Manchester. Upon the appeal of the late Principal Gould, the Church, recognising the importance of this call, absolved Mr. Roberts from his promise and made way for his greater service in Lancashire. That was our first disappointment. Afterwards there was another to which it is not necessary to refer.

In April 1890, the late Dr. Booth, Secretary of the Baptist Union, gave me the name of Mr. Morgan, formerly of Pontypool College, then a student at Cardiff University, and spoke very highly of him. Shortly before he had been invited to consider an invitation to Collins Street Church, Melbourne, Australia, which he had declined solely on the ground that he did not feel justified in leaving the country so long as his mother was alive. So many were Mr. Morgan's engagements that he could not come to us until the following June. He then stayed with me, captivating all the members of my household by his charm and loveable nature, which affection has remained throughout his life. His conduct of the devotional part of the church services, his sermons, his earnestness and humility made a deep impression, remarkably so upon the younger portion of the congregation, and whom we regarded as of supreme importance. A second visit confirmed the first impressions, and a unanimous call was given to him, which he accepted to take effect after he had sat for the B.Sc. examination at the London University, for which he had been preparing.

Often have we recalled what took place subsequently when he came to London for the examination named. Like others of small means, and especially from an earnest desire to help as soon as possible his widowed mother, he had worked at great pressure to abbreviate by a year the University course. The result was that, when he entered the examination room, he could not even see to write his name on the sheets, and he was advised to postpone any attempt at that time. It was a crushed man who came to tell me of what seemed to be disaster. He feared that it would mean cancelling the invitation to Woodberry Down. It was my privilege to help him at a time of deep depression and disappointment, and to assure him that his breakdown at this stage would make no difference. That was confirmed by the Church which, three years afterwards, afforded opportunities for renewing his preparations for the degree named, and he was at that time successful in the examination for which he sat. His explanation of taking a Science instead of the usual Arts degree was that he felt the former would help him to be of greater service in reaching the hearts and minds of his hearers, and especially the younger generation. There were those who did not agree with him and were very critical of his decision. One

of his firmest supporters in this and other respects was Dr. John Clifford, who remained his friend to the last, and often invited him to Westbourne Park. Even when he decided to change from the Ministry to the Bar, Dr. Clifford said that a man should be permitted to decide for himself in all such questions, and that God's ways could not be circumscribed by man's judgments. As an indication of the greatness of Dr. Clifford, who gave the charge to the church at Mr. Morgan's recognition, on the occasion of a difficulty which appeared to be very serious, a visit of Mr. Morgan to the Doctor, and the advice given, armed him with fresh vision and courage, in which latter characteristic Mr. Morgan was seldom wanting. He came back from that interview a different man.

Ten years were spent at Woodberry Down. It was a great ministry. The first twelve months were devoted to the Church. For that the writer was responsible. The Church needed its new pastor, and he needed time to delve into many of the deeper questions which could not be dealt with during a collegiate or University course of studies. A young minister is often hindered rather than helped by the dissemination of his powers in preaching and speaking here, there and everywhere. He is run after as an attraction by other churches, not for any higher motive. Popularity of this nature may be attractive. It is none the less a positive danger. In answer to the innumerable invitations received, a circular letter was sent stating that he could not respond during the first year, as he desired to devote himself to his own church. More than once my friend told me that this was the best piece of advice he had ever received, and for which he was deeply grateful. It enabled him to continue his studies and in the wider fields. A further point may be mentioned, namely, that the Church agreed to his exchanging with some other minister once every month. That was an arrangement good for him, the church, and others also.

There is no need for me to emphasise the fascination of his personality. That has been recognised by all who met him, most of all by those who have entertained him in their homes. He had the capacity of entering into the interests and feelings of everyone. Children and young people worshipped him; older folk admired him. He was always interesting, as much by his ability to listen as well as to speak. By some mystic influence nearly all who knew him were proud of the fact. Even when many disagreed with what he said and did, these were disarmed by his recognition of their point of view. Never was I prouder of him than when, on the occasion of his first parliamentary contest in the Khaki election of 1900, at a time of bitterness seldom equalled, in the hour of his defeat, when seconding a vote of thanks to the

returning officer, he said that he had the satisfaction of being defeated by a good man, referring to his victorious opponent, the late James Howard, who was astounded yet deeply gratified by this tribute to his high character. Only a big-souled man could have done that.

Mr. Morgan was born at Hay, in the Wye Valley, in 1866. The beautiful country there influenced his whole life. His early conditions were humble in the extreme, especially after the early death of his father, a small farmer. As is so often the case, everything he was and did was primarily due to his mother, who evidently realised his latent powers and sacrificed herself to his welfare. His devotion to her as long as she lived was beautiful to behold. A great tribute to mother and son was paid when he was first elected to Parliament in 1906 for the Truro division of Cornwall. Some of those who had known both, on receipt of the news of his victory, decorated her grave at Hay with beautiful flowers. That, as a boy, he was recognised for his potential abilities is evident from the fact that the clergyman at Hay offered to provide the cost of his education if he would prepare for the Church. It must have been a great temptation to the aspiring youth. The offer was declined on principle. He had been baptised and joined the little Baptist Church at Hay in his thirteenth year, and remained faithful to his principles and denomination throughout his life, in which respect not a few budding politicians have failed, tempted by social and other influences.

The way of advance in life was presented through the teaching profession. He was educated in the British School at Hay, where he became a pupil teacher. Afterwards he served as Assistant Master at Stafford and Merthyr Tydfil. At the latter place his future career was determined. I believe, though no date is available, that he first began to preach in his sixteenth year, from which time onwards wherever he was, and through his college and University courses, there were few Sundays when he was not so engaged. It was not long before he was strongly pressed to enter college in preparation for the ministry. Even then, as in later years, he did not feel that the regular ministry was his field of greatest service. This was indicated to me soon after he came to us at Woodberry Down. It was, and is, difficult to understand why. The fact, however, remains. At Merthyr Tydfil he was led to change his mind. At a week-evening service in the local chapel where he had given an address, one of the older deacons who had shown him great kindnesses, and for whom he had a warm affection, in his prayer asked that God would show his young friend His will, and break down the pride of spirit which was keeping him from devoting himself to

the work to which all believed him to be called. That presented a new aspect. He was compelled to ask himself whether he was refusing to follow the Divine leading. The result was that shortly afterwards he entered Pontypool College, to the great joy of his mother and all who knew him. There he spent a year under the late Principal Edwards, of whom he always spoke with deep affection and respect. Then he entered Cardiff University for the reason already given. The four years at Cardiff were only made possible by the 10s. and 15s. paid him for his Sunday services. It was a hard time, as he had to live on less than 10s. per week in very humble lodgings. In this connection one fact may be emphasised and has always won my admiration, namely, that my friend was never ashamed of his humble origin, and of his early struggles.

It only remains to refer to the other phases of his varied and interesting career. In 1891 he married Margaret Jane Lewis, of Sunnybank, Pontnewynydd, South Wales, a member of a well-known Baptist family. It would be impossible to say too much as to how Mrs. Morgan helped her husband in every part and at every stage of his life's work. His last words were to her. They are too sacred to record. These told of devotion to him, and of his gratitude for all she had been. She grew with him and won the love of all who have known her. We pray that God's comfort may ever sustain her.

By 1897 we felt that a change was coming. Although some of us regretted it, yet we supported him in what he thought to be right. That year he became a member of the Tottenham School Board, and was for three years Chairman of the School Management Committee. During this period he was studying for the Bar, to which he was admitted in 1899, and took silk fourteen years later. In 1900 he fought his first Parliamentary contest, in the Khaki election of that year, but was unsuccessful. In 1906 he won for the Liberal party the Truro division of Cornwall, and confirmed his position in the two succeeding elections. Then the Truro division was absorbed under the redistribution of constituencies, and he stood on several occasions for other constituencies, but was never successful again, due to the cross-currents which have characterised the war and post-war years. Whilst Member of Parliament he was secretary for the Nonconformist group of the House of Commons, in which he rendered great service, though many of us have always thought that the group named was lacking in an independence which ought to have been displayed. It was, however, a period of great difficulty and complexity owing to the divisions which supervened soon after the great Liberal victory of 1906, and have continued to the present day. His attention was turned also

into other channels. He was for several years a Director of the Tottenham Gas Company. Later he occupied a like position in the Abbey Road Building Society, to which he devoted considerable time and energy. His colleagues in both spheres have paid high tributes to his services. In each he won the confidence of all who were associated with him by his diligence, courtesy, and wise judgment. In these his legal training has been a great asset.

Mr. Morgan was essentially a preacher, in which respect he rendered a greater service than would have been possible in a regular pastorate. Scarcely a Sunday through all the intervening years when he was not preaching. Nor was his service restricted to his own denomination. Those who had him once desired him again and yet again. He was not a theologian. His message had an appeal, especially to the younger men and women, an application to life in its varied aspects, one which it is difficult to characterise, and was peculiarly his own. It never lost freshness from first to last, nor was it ever stilted. When Dr. Townley Lord, at Bloomsbury Chapel in the evening service on January 25th, made the announcement of his death, there was a wave of emotion evinced by the congregation which was striking in the extreme—a tribute to Mr. Morgan's influence and personality. It revealed a sense of individual loss and sorrow that no longer would his presence be seen and his voice be heard from the historic pulpit which he had occupied so often. And the same was felt all over the country. To me the memory of our long friendship is very precious, and will continue throughout the days remaining, whether these be many or few.

EDWARD BROWN.

Some Notes on the history of the Dorford Baptist Church in Dorchester, 1645-1930. By Douglas Jackman, M.B.E., eight pages, four pictures.

Mr. Jackman, who bears a name honoured in early annals, has been very successful in recovering the story of the first eighty years. There was a dim century, when all continuity was lost, with all property. Then from Weymouth a re-foundation. It is interesting to read of Thomas Hardy attending a prayer-meeting rather than go to the circus! He paid a queer tribute in one poem that seems suggested by old Dorford:—

“I wonder Dissenters sing Ken:
It shows them more liberal in spirit
At this little chapel down here
Than at certain new others I know.”