

Oxford standards and traditions, he won a welcome for the College that might otherwise have been very hard to achieve.

Robinson's death coincided with the emergence of a new world which presents a startling contrast to the one in which he had lived and worked. The insatiable demands today by new and rapidly growing populations for more and better opportunities of education; the almost pathological resistance of the young to every form of authority, not least that of the teaching and practice of the Christian Church, and the submergence of familiar denominational boundaries in a widening concern for the religious life of man as a whole — these were not the kind of problems with which Robinson had had to cope. And it is interesting to speculate how he would have viewed the place and functions of the Christian ministry in the modern world and the direction of advance. About this of course we can only guess. There is, however, one aspect of our situation today to which we may believe his attention would have been specially directed. For as a life long exponent of the Bible he would surely have taken with great seriousness the establishment of the State of Israel, and would have been the last to suppose that the return of the "chosen people" to Palestine could be dismissed as a purely political event. He would have been much more likely to consider this phenomenon in the light of God's unfolding purpose for the world, and to see in it an opportunity for Jews and Christians to examine together other implications of this step in the light of the great Hebrew Christian tradition of which the Bible is the source, and they themselves the divinely appointed trustees for all mankind. For the rest, no one who knew Principal Robinson can doubt that he would have met these and all other changes with serenity and courage in the secure conviction that man's way forward into fullness of light and life is still through faith in the living God, and obedience to Him who makes known His Will to those who seek it through His life-giving Holy Spirit.

R. L. CHILD.

His Authority and Spiritual Impact

THERE ARE some men who stand head and shoulders above their contemporaries and who convey an unmistakable impression of authority. Henry Wheeler Robinson was one of these. In any company he was outstanding: he could never be overlooked. This note of authority has been well caught by James Gunn in the portrait which now hangs in the Hall of Regent's Park College, Oxford. Robinson's

was indeed a commanding presence. With his pointed black beard and his remarkable eyes, he looked, as was often said, like one of the Hebrew prophets about whom he lectured. The eyes were truly remarkable. They seemed to search a man and read the secrets of his heart. It is not surprising that he showed considerable hypnotic powers as a young man. Nor is it surprising that, with his respect for human personality, his experiments in hypnotism were early discontinued. But the hypnotic quality was still there. Gunn, in the portrait, has stressed the austerity of his personality. As he grew older, his friends remarked that he became more genial and approachable; although always there had been those very human characteristics — the pipe, the love of a good story well told, and the fondness for detective fiction.

“A man’s heart moulds his expression,” says Ben Sirach. The commanding presence revealed the integrity of his character. It is impossible to think of Robinson being guilty of a mean act. Honest in his thinking, he was honourable in everything else. Touch his life at any point and it rang true. The fearless honesty of his thinking was, undoubtedly, a considerable factor in his authority as a scholar and teacher. It was, of course, the authority of the expert who has made himself master of his subject. Other scholars might not always accept his conclusions; but they were treated with respect for they were the result of patient research, wide reading, and prolonged and conscientious thought.

His moral ascendancy was evident even in student days; and it was for this quality that the Mansfield College students elected him President of the Junior Common Room. This moral influence was present all through his life as minister, tutor, and principal. It was the fruit of a noble Christian character and derived from an heroic self-discipline. He knew the value of a carefully drawn-up “rule of life”, suitable to the tasks which had to be performed and the responsibilities which had to be carried. To such a programme he rigidly adhered. Nothing seemed to be able to deflect him from doing the appointed task at the appointed time. The strength of his will-power was at times almost frightening. It could be said of Robinson as it was said of Gladstone, “His industry was more than half his genius”. He allowed no shoddy work to slip through his hands. He had exacting standards and he drove his students hard. But he drove himself harder. No wonder he became a conscience to his men. As R. L. Child has said, “His life was marked by a truly Kantian devotion to duty.”

In James Gunn’s portrait yet another factor in the making of the man is emphasised. The face is that of a man who, has suffered much and has thought long and deeply upon the problem of suffering. His was not a happy childhood. In manhood, although he never knew financial stringency and was esteemed and respected, he knew misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and the loneliness of leadership.

Driving his body mercilessly, Robinson experienced physical breakdown and mental distress. But he accepted these things in the spirit of a sentence of Bourget which he was never tired of quoting: "Rien n'est perdu quand on l'offre. Je sais qu'il y a une grande consolation cachée au plus intime d'une souffrance qu'on accepte." As a result he was able to share with many his insights into human suffering and to give them strength by the example of his own courageous endurance.

There were those who only saw the moral disciplinarian. They failed to see that part of Wheeler Robinson's spiritual impact was the fruit of love. He was a shy man and he had little small talk. Some never pierced the reserve; but those who did found not only the critical mind but the warm heart. He had a deep love for his fellows. He was interested in their work, their problems, and the kind of lives they lived. He longed to share with them the riches of the Christian faith and, to this end, spared no pains in his pulpit preparation, endeavouring to present the truth clearly and attractively.

Robinson's own faith was deep and genuine. When he spoke about it in private or in public, he spoke "with authority"; there was the authentic note of personal experience. His faith had not come easily; he had wrestled for it. He was intensely loyal to the central doctrines of the faith because he was a "convinced" man, one whom the truth had conquered.

It is not surprising, then, that the abiding impression left upon us who knew him intimately is of the intensity and depth of his spiritual life. If one may adapt a modern phrase, his was "an open-ended life". On the one side it was open to God: on the other, open to his fellow men. On the Godward side it was nourished by a disciplined life of prayer and by prolonged meditation upon the Bible (especially the Hebrew Bible) and the great devotional classics. On the manward side it was nourished by the great art he delighted to see, the great music he loved to hear, and the great books which were his constant companions. He was especially influenced by great poetry. He read and re-read the tragedies of Shakespeare, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Browning's *Ring and the Book* to name but a few. His was a mind constantly occupied with the greatest themes.

This emphasis upon the spiritual life was central to all his work. It is seen in the greatly valued series of Quiet Days for ministers which he conducted while he was tutor at Rawdon College. In his religious journalism and especially in the long series of monthly articles which he wrote for *The Baptist Times*, he constantly returns to the theme of the devotional life. Supremely, this concern was felt in the weekly Communion Services which were so notable a feature of his principalship. In his Communion addresses Dr. Robinson often shared with his students the insights which he himself had found in the great devotional classics, notably *The Imitation of à Kempis*, *The Interior Castle* of St. Theresa, the *Preces Privatae* of Lancelot

Andrews, and *Grace Abounding* by John Bunyan. He often expressed the view that Baptists needed an "Oxford Movement" of their own. He was himself in the true sense of the phrase a High Churchman and his own austere devotional life was reminiscent of the greatest of the Tractarians. His own life was nourished by the sacraments; and his teaching upon Baptism and the Lord's Supper led many to a more adequate and more truly Scriptural view of the two dominical sacraments.

How, then, may we assess Wheeler Robinson's spiritual impact? It was undoubtedly very great. His books will, no doubt, continue to spread his teaching and continue his influence for some time to come. His little book *Baptist Principles* has exercised an influence upon Baptist thought and practice far out of proportion to its size. *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit* is enjoying a new life as a paper-back. His pastoral work at Pitlochry, Coventry, and Leeds was of the highest quality. Innumerable lives were lifted nearer to God; and all through his life there were those of many different ecclesiastical traditions who turned to him for spiritual direction. The one devotional book which he published, *The Veil of God*, preserves for us the quintessence of his teaching on the devout life. His religious journalism, so varied and so perennially fresh, moulded a generation of thoughtful readers. His preaching was never "popular": but the discerning found in his sermons not only intellectual stimulus but rich spiritual sustenance.

Robinson's greatest impact was, however, upon those closest to him, his colleagues and his students. There were a few who did not yield to the spell but the majority hold the memory of Wheeler Robinson in great reverence as a great Christian gentleman and as one of the master influences in their lives. Through them his spiritual influence continues throughout the world.

Speaking of Dr. Alexander Whyte, Wheeler Robinson once wrote, "This man owed his brilliant success, under God, to three things—an intense evangelical experience of sin and grace, a life of hard and methodical and concentrated work, and a spirit of broadest sympathy with men who served God in ways other than his own." This might have been written of Wheeler Robinson himself. His authority and his spiritual impact are both evidenced and explained in the text inscribed upon the tablet which commemorates him at the entrance to the College Chapel: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

EDGAR W. WRIGHT.