

Sir George Macdonald, K.C.B., LL.D., Hon. F.R.S.E.

SIR GEORGE MACDONALD was born in Elgin in 1862. He received his schooling at Ayr Academy, where his father, from whom he inherited his lifelong interest in archæology, was Rector. Then he went on to the University of Edinburgh, and the completion of his undergraduate studies there was marked by a First Class in Classics and the Ferguson Classical Scholarship, open to graduates of the four Scottish Universities. Oxford was obviously the next stage, Balliol was no less obviously his college, and Firsts in Classical Moderations and in *Literae Humaniores* followed in due course. He also studied abroad, especially in Germany, where he laid the foundations of an excellent knowledge of German, which he wrote with remarkable facility and accuracy.

In 1887 he became a master at Kelvinside Academy. Five years there, and twelve years as Greek Lecturer in the University of Glasgow till 1904, when Sir Henry Craik and Sir John Struthers were glad to secure his assistance in the Secretariat of the Scottish Education Department. First as Assistant Secretary, then as Second Secretary, and finally as Secretary of the Department, he played a most important part in the great changes in Scottish education that took place in the first thirty years of the century. Though his deepest interests lay in Classics, Classical Archæology and Numismatics, he was entirely free from pedantry in his attitude to the school curriculum and fully realised the fact that a large proportion of our secondary pupils find more profit in subjects that are not linguistic or severely academic.

While he was connected with the Department he was a most active and valuable member of two important Government Committees—on Modern Languages, and the Superannuation of School Teachers. Sir George could touch nothing without going into it with heart and soul, with unerring judgment, and with an industry and painstaking research that amazed his friends and were the despair of those who differed from him. The distinction with which he discharged his duties in the Department was recognised by his election as an Honorary Member of the Edinburgh Merchant Company, and as an Honorary Fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and by the presentation to him of his portrait, painted by Greiffenhagen.

Sir George enjoyed twelve years of retirement, and died in Edinburgh

on August 9, 1940. Though he had his full share of illness he possessed remarkable powers of recuperation and was busily occupied with his scholarly pursuits to the very end. For scholarship was his ruling passion, and one is tempted to wish that he had spent his life in an Oxford College or a Scottish University. But that view would be mistaken. It was a real gain to Scotland that his signal gifts were devoted for so many years to Scottish education; for our Scottish schools and central institutions owe a very great deal to him, both educationally and materially.

Sir George, however, was far from thinking that his day was done when his table was clear at the office. He followed the Periclean doctrine that the best relaxation is a change of activity, and to archæology, history, and numismatics he made a contribution that was a life's work in itself. When he was at Glasgow he produced his first great work, the *Catalogue of the Hunterian Collection of Greek Coins in the University*, which was crowned by the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. It revealed his mature classical scholarship, his relentless industry, his remarkable power of handling and marshalling evidence, and his unerring judgment. A list of his publications, compiled by his German friends for a *Festschrift* in honour of his seventieth birthday, contained many scores of papers and articles contributed to learned journals in Britain and abroad, and he continued his scholarly activities to the end of his life. He was one of the greatest European authorities on Roman Antiquities, and his *Roman Wall in Scotland* is, and is likely to remain, a classic.

Honours were showered on him. The King created him C.B. in 1916 and K.C.B. in 1927. He was Hon. LL.D. of Glasgow and Edinburgh, Hon. D.Litt. of Oxford, Hon. Litt.D. of Cambridge, Hon. Fellow of Balliol, and a Fellow of the British Academy. In addition, he was Hon. R.S.A., Hon. Curator of the Hunterian Coin Cabinet, Medallist of the Royal Numismatic and the American Numismatic Societies, and member of the German Archæological Institute.

His combination of learning and administrative ability was of great service to various societies of classical scholars and numismatists, and at one time or another he was President of the Classical Associations of England and Wales, and of Scotland, the Royal Numismatic Society, the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, and the Anthropology Section of the British Association.

He was also a member of the Royal Commission on Museums and Galleries and, subsequently, of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries. These Commissions dealt with England and Wales as well as with Scotland, and Sir George was one of their most zealous members, as he was of every committee, commission, or society with which he was

associated. In his native country he was a pillar of strength to the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, the Ancient Monuments Board, the Society of Antiquities, and, on the academic side, the Carnegie Universities Trust. For many years, too, he was a most active member of the Treasury Grants Committee. In these multifarious activities it will be difficult, or rather impossible, to fill his place.

A word about the man. To those who did not know him he may have seemed aloof or even formidable, to his friends he was the soul of kindliness and loyalty. He possessed encyclopædic knowledge, he knew his English literature well, including the Bible, and he was a keen student of Dante and Browning. He wrote admirably clear and forceful prose, he had a keen sense of humour, sometimes sardonic, and he was no mean versifier. George Macdonald was without doubt one of the most distinguished intellects of his generation, and he would have attained eminence in any profession he had entered. It was the good fortune of scholarship that it was his main interest throughout.

He was elected an Honorary Fellow in 1933.

W. W. M'K.