



BISHOP J. RALPH MAGEE

Born at Maquoketa, Iowa, June 3, 1880; Elected Bishop of the Methodist church 1932; Portrait unveiled and presented to the Iowa Department of History and Archives June 8, 1944.

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PORTRAIT OF AN IOWA METHODIST BISHOP

The first native son of Iowa upon whom was placed the high responsibility of a Bishop of the Methodist church to serve in Iowa, was J. Ralph Magee in charge of the Des Moines Area 1939-1944. This fact and all that it means in Iowa history has been underscored by placing in the portrait gallery of the Iowa Historical Department a life-size portrait in oil of the Bishop, the gift of the Methodists of the state.

The presentation and all the related circumstances bear witness not alone to the high esteem in which Bishop Magee is held, but to the large part of his church and his associates in the cultural and spiritual life of Iowa, and of the earnest desire to maintain the high standard of Iowa in the building of character into the citizenry. The gift, the man, the ceremonies, so aptly illustrate the contemporary life of Iowa that an extended account of what was done and said is appropriate.

The presentation of the portrait of Bishop Magee was a part of the program of the Iowa-Des Moines Conference, in session in Des Moines on June 8, 1944, at ceremonies in the State Historical building. The setting for the event was fine. Iowa's Governor and Lieutenant governor and men prominent in the church occupied a platform in the open corridor, about five hundred members of the Conference and others were seated in the rotunda, and the flags of the nations gave color to the scene. There was good music and good speaking. The portrait is certainly one of the finest ever placed in the state's gallery, a faithful delineation of the man, and a real work of art.

The inner meaning of the ceremonies was suggested by Bourke B. Hickenlooper, Governor of Iowa, who presided.

"Without in any way attempting to detract from the individual who will be honored here today," he said, "I might say that it is my opinion that it is more than the recognition of an individual. This program goes much further than doing honor to a particular personality. It so happens that that individual and that personality by his own efforts has fully merited this occasion. But it is far beyond that, and is the recognition of the adherence to ideals, the advancement of morals, of spiritual matters, that inheres in the observance today."

The invocation was given by Dr. Earl A. Roadman, president of Morningside college, and the program was set off by Dr. George A. Lawton, Superintendent of the Des Moines district, who introduced several who had a part in the preliminaries. Among these were members of the portrait committee, the portrait painter, Mr. Harry Solon, and the curator of the State Historical Department, Mr. Ora Williams; also Rev. and Mrs. J. Homer Magee of Sidney, Montana, their daughter Jean Louise and their son J. Ralph II, and Miss Dorothy Magee, the daughter and secretary of the Bishop. The Governor, as presiding officer, was introduced as one who "had his start in a very fine Methodist home."

GREETINGS FROM COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

Dr. Charles C. Selecman, bishop of the South Central area, of Oklahoma City, had been sent by the Council of Bishops to speak for the entire body of Methodism. His life has been devoted to religious work. Under his leadership as president of the Southern Methodist University, that university rose to great national standing. He is one of the outstanding men of the church. He said:

It is my high privilege and honor to bear the official greetings of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist church on this occasion when you have met to pay tribute to one of the most highly respected and eminently useful members of our council.

It has been said that if one would be remembered when he is gone he must either write things worth reading or do things worth writing. However, when we contemplate the great probability that this portrait will publish to generations the name and fame of the

honored guest of today, we are disposed to add a third way to be remembered, namely, by having one's portrait hung in the State Capital of Iowa, the state where tall men grow.

There is something quite unusual and refreshing in the fact that a Churchman who has devoted his life to the promotion of religion should have his name enrolled in the list of those who have been foremost in the affairs of state; but why not? After all, is there not an ancient and abiding relation between religion and patriotism? One may make bold to affirm that religion without the elements of loyal and intelligent citizenship is not an adequate expression of Christianity. Piety without patriotism falls short of the mark. The converse is also true. Patriotism without religion is lacking in one of the primary elements of good citizenship. When the ancient Hebrew bard sang, "The pillars of the state are falling, what shall the righteous man do?" he took cognizance of the fact that the righteous man is the major factor in upholding the pillars of the state.

What constitutes a state?
 Not high raised battlements and labored mound,
 Not cities proud with spires and turrets crowned,
 Not bays and broad armed ports,
 Where laughing at the storm rich navies ride.
 Not starred and spangled courts,
 Where lowbrowed baseness wafts perfume to pride—
 But men, high-minded men.

This occasion did not happen in a day. Back of it lie a Christian home, noble parentage, a sweet loyal wife, and a personal life of character and industry. You can't set fire to a vacuum. When you recall that the venerable Doctor John Calvin Magee, father of Bishop Magee, was for forty years a minister in Iowa, always ready to blow a trumpet blast for truth, wave a banner for a righteous cause or unshield his sword for the Kingdom of God, you have at least a starting point. The Magee boys, Ralph and John and Carl, were well brought up. In fact they helped their parents at the job of bringing each other up. Once Carl poured ice water in Ralph's ear to bring him out from under the table where he had gone in a pout, and Carl declares that one application of the water cure was effective.

One cannot reckon with the fact that Who's Who in America carries a larger proportion of the names of sons and daughters of the parsonage than of those of any other profession or trade without facing the strong presumption that to be brought up in the presence of books, in an atmosphere of idealism and faith adds something to one's chances of running the race successfully. Great questions are not settled by iron and blood, as Bismarck declared; they are settled by good people who love God and who love their neighbors as themselves.

My colleagues would have me tell you that Bishop Ralph Magee did his part in the noble sequence of events that have led up to this crowning moment.

You may lead a horse to water,
But you can't make him drink.
You can send a boy to College,
But you can't make him think.

Three things—work, will and success—said Pasteur, constitute the meaning of human life. The willingness to work has carried this diligent and tireless servant of the church across Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. No night has been too dark and cold for him; no day too hot and dry; no task too large; no detail too small to demand his most painstaking effort and cooperation. It was the immortal Michael Angelo who said, "Trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle." In the spirit of fidelity to things large and small Bishop Ralph Magee has earned not only the signal honor which you confer upon him today, but he has merited such implicit confidence of the bishops and leaders of the Methodist church that he has been called to leadership in the Crusade for Christ, the major objective of our great communion for the next four years. He, therefore, occupies the chief place in a movement which we regard as crucial and historic.

Therefore, Bishop Magee, we who are about to honor you, salute you!

FIRST NATIVE BORN IOWA BISHOP

In order to give something of the work being done for religion in the Des Moines area, Dr. Levi P. Goodwin of Jefferson, spoke of this work and of the achievements of Bishop Magee. Very fittingly, he said, the Methodist constituency of all Iowa responded to the suggestion that this portrait of Bishop Magee be placed in the art collection of the state in recognition of his service to Iowa Methodism. "I think," he said, "the response is indicative of the joy in the hearts of Iowa Methodists that at last the long-cherished dream has been realized in the establishment of an episcopal residence here at Des Moines, as well as in the bringing to Iowa for the first resident bishop of a native-born son of this state." This month, he continued, organized Methodism in Iowa is celebrating the centenary of its official organization. From small beginnings it has grown to a membership of 220,000. He recalled that years ago, for a brief period, Bishop Andrews was a resident of

Des Moines, and later Bishop Hurst was also a resident of this city. In 1920 an unsuccessful effort was made to secure establishment of an episcopal residence in the city; but not until at the Uniting Conference at Kansas City in 1939 were steps taken that brought results. By unanimous request of the delegates, Bishop Magee was assigned to be the first episcopal leader here.

Dr. Goodwin highly praised the work of Bishop Magee, who has made "his dynamic leadership felt in all phases of the religious life in this state and in the wider circles of interdenominational church activity within the bounds of Iowa." Continuing, he said, "These are days when our human world is seeing more tragically than ever the perils and fears which selfish and irresponsible leadership have brought to our world; and it is against this background that there is coming to Iowa Methodists a sense of the value of spiritual devotion and service of this leader, as represented in the presentation of this portrait to the State of Iowa today. We rejoice that it comes while he is here to share in its significance, and we rejoice that his son Rev. J. Homer Magee and family are here, and the daughter, Miss Dorothy Jean Magee, who has served so efficiently as his office secretary and made the Area office the center of Methodist activity in Iowa. We miss with great regret today the gracious presence of Mrs. Harriet Keller Magee, his beloved companion, whose living presence would have made this occasion complete, but whose spirit cannot fail to thrill at the meaning of this hour as Iowa Methodism places in this Iowa Gallery of Art the portrait of our first native-born Methodist Bishop to serve the Des Moines Area as its resident leader. Iowa Methodism wishes to this son in the Methodist Episcopacy many further years of creative spiritual leadership."

The portrait was then unveiled by J. Ralph Magee II, a grandson of the Bishop, after which the chairman introduced Rev. C. N. McMillan of Primghar, who headed the portrait commission and had from the first been active in the whole matter. He complimented the friends and fellow workers for their fine cooperation. As to how the

portrait project came about he stated that when he had visited this "one of the finest state portrait galleries anywhere" he had looked upon the portrait of Rev. Bennett Mitchell (which he had helped to place twenty-four years ago) and the thought came to him how proper it would be to have a portrait here of "an Iowa boy, born in a Methodist home, in a Methodist parsonage, educated in Iowa schools, trained for the ministry." He presented the idea to the Iowa-Des Moines conference, the Upper Iowa conference, and the Northwest Iowa conference, "and it took." When the committee was formed it was remembered that the Mitchell portrait had been painted by Mr. Harry Solon of New York, and he was unanimously chosen for this task.

IOWA'S CONTRIBUTION IN MEN

Continuing, Mr. McMillan gave a little more of history of Iowa Methodism, saying:

A man named Landon Taylor, of whom the bishop spoke this morning in his devotional talk, put his hand on a young clerk in a drygoods store in Burlington and he said, "Charlie, you have had a rare case of conversion, and we have been considering you and think you ought to give your heart and life to the ministry of the Methodist church." The young fellow shook his head. He could not see that. But he thought about it and thought about it, and finally one day he went to his father and said, "Dad, I am going to leave. I am going to a Methodist seminary. I have decided to become a Methodist preacher." And Charles C. McCabe became one of the great leaders of the church because a Methodist preacher had faith enough in him to put his hand on his shoulder and say, "Charlie, you ought to give your life to the ministry."

Well, the old Iowa Conference went farther than that, and so there came Edwin Holt Hughes. We have had something to do with more of them. John W. Robinson, who has given years of faithful service in the mission field, and Matthew Simpson Hughes of blessed memory—all from the old Iowa Conference.

I could not figure out just where the old Des Moines Conference came into it, and I felt kind of humiliated until I got to studying, and then I talked with George Lawton. And George said, "Well, wait a minute, Mac, the old Des Moines Conference has some claim too." And he called attention to the fact that Brenton C. Bradley got his training at Simpson College. Is that not enough for any Conference?

And then I began to study the Upper Iowa Conference to see what they had been doing about this business. I found Thomas Nicholson of blessed memory, who has given years of service to the Kingdom of God, was touched mightily here. And Titus Lowe was here long enough to find out what Iowa was like and have the Lord impress him somewhat in his life and character. And then we have got Homer C. Stuntz, also of blessed memory, and Edwin F. Lee, Missionary Bishop to a country that he doesn't have a chance to get into any more, but please God, he will have a chance to get into presently again—the Malay Peninsula and the Philippine Islands, and so on. Well, that is honor enough for the Upper Iowa Conference, isn't it?

And then the Northwest Conference swings into line with Wilson Seeley Lewis, that mighty man of God whose portrait also hangs up here. I don't know just how that came about. I am careless about that. It is here. And Eben S. Johnson, who went into Africa and went all around Africa doing God's work. Charles Wesley Flint, educator and later a preacher and Bishop of the Church. And our own J. Ralph Magee, whom in honoring today we are honored. Bishop Magee is the only one who was born in Iowa who has been sent back to preside over an Iowa Area.

PRESENTATION AND ACCEPTANCE

The formal presentation of the portrait to the State of Iowa was made by Rev. C. N. McMillan, and the acceptance of same on behalf of the state was made by Robert D. Blue, lieutenant governor, introduced as "an outstanding public servant of many years of service and experience, a man whose moral and spiritual approach to his public duties is beyond question and beyond reproach." Governor Blue said that "today as the war roars on to a tremendous climax, it is significant beyond words that the people of Iowa find it possible to meet here on an occasion such as this to honor not only a great leader of a great church, to honor a great citizen of a great state, but also to pay tribute to those fundamental ideals which are at the foundation of every sound society and government." Continuing, he said:

It seems to me that as we pause here for this brief time, it is of the greatest importance that we should come to have this realization, that of all of the works that man can ever engage in none is greater than that of building character in mankind, and that the measure of the success of any society or any nation is the measure of the success of the spiritual leaders of the community.

And so today, we find ourselves plunged into a great war because the leaders of some of the great nations of the earth have failed to learn or understand or practice those fundamental concepts of the brotherhood of man that this man whom we honor today has brought to the people of this community.

And as we come to the period of time when we look forward to the writing of a new peace, it seems to me that it is altogether fitting and proper that we should gather here on an occasion such as we have today and pay tribute to this honored citizen of Iowa and to the great and immortal truths that he has been teaching the citizens of Iowa. And of all the distinguished sons that we have in Iowa, whether they bear political title or military title or rank high in places of industry and trade, none should stand higher than the names of those who have built so well the foundation of morality and Christianity, upon which the society and the government of Iowa have been founded. And when we say here in Iowa that "of all that is good, Iowa affords the best," we are indeed speaking not alone of our manufacturing and of our industry and our other resources of that type, but we are speaking of the leadership of the men and the women who have built so well those foundations without which no society can long endure.

BISHOP MAGEE INTRODUCED

As a finale to the ceremonies, Bishop Magee was introduced by the chairman. Mention was made of the fact that he was born at Maquoketa, an Iowa product, and he has an outstanding record. We here in Iowa, continued Governor Hickenlooper, are unusually proud of the stability and firmness of the core of the moral honesty that runs through the hearts of our civilization between these great rivers that wash our east and west boundaries. We have had some great leaders and certainly the Methodist church has furnished an outstanding number. "But none superior to the man you honor today, who has shown by his vigor, and by his great human understanding, and by his realistic approach to the divergent and the numerous and ramified problems that affect anyone and any people on moral issues, that he is not a crusader of the mysterious and mystic type who fails to account for the realism of human reaction, but he is a man who approaches his morality and his leadership from a realistic, practical and successful standpoint." The event of today is a great tribute to him. Continuing, the Governor said:

He and countless those like him are going to be needed tomorrow more than we need them today, and more, perhaps, than we have needed them at any time in the past. We are in the most tense and serious period now with the immediate question desire for victory in this war. And yet if we fail to realize that victory in this war will amount to nothing unless the readjustment in the days that come will be made, not out of the minds of men physically approaching a physical problem alone, but out of the moral fiber of men there using their intelligence and their training and their civilization as they have learned it, guided and controlled by the spiritual and moral rules that we know are good.

Among those who will give us leadership is Bishop Magee. He will be one of that all too small army to whom you and I must look to keep the moral and the spiritual principles ever controlling and directing the human elements that, if not so directed, are often subject to all of the frailties and the mistakes of unguided human emotions.

The response of Bishop Magee was as follows:

I recognize the true worth of all the things that have been said regarding the ideals of the ministry and the place of the ministry in the leadership of a commonwealth. I only wish that all the things that have been said about me personally were true.

My father was a very handsome man. You could hardly believe it, but he was. Fine enough in his personal appearance, so that some of the photograph companies wanted to use his picture as a sample in some of their work. And a woman who was a member of his church said to him, when some comments had been made one day in regard to his fine looks, "Dr. Magee, I should think you would get the big-head when people say these things." And father said, "Never mind, sister, I hear enough of the other side to keep me humble." Governor, I assure you that I have in my files some letters that say some very different things. And you two gentlemen who are in political favor in this state know what I am talking about.

I would be less than human if it were not within me to say a word of very, very great appreciation for your presence on this occasion, to those who have made possible through their gifts and these who, through their energy, have made possible this great event in my life, and I trust it may be of some help to others.

And, I would be less than human not to say a very great word of appreciation, if I could say it, to my dear friend Claude N. McMillan—"Mac" to me—who was the instigator of this, has been the pursuer of it, and has made this day possible.

It hardly seems possible to me, Governor, but there is but one man now in the effective ministry of the Northwest Iowa Conference who was in the effective ministry when I joined. I feel all too young for that to be true. But Mac comes in pretty close, for he

joined the next year. And all through the years we have known each other, very much to my delight, and I appreciate what he has done. . . . And there are so many who have had a part in this event that I could not begin to mention them personally. . . .

My dear father came to Iowa in 1852 when a mere boy of nine years of age and settled in a little community near Anamosa called Scotch Grove. That community is still there. When I say that he settled in a community called Scotch Grove you can understand why his name was John Calvin. My father was raised a Covenanter Presbyterian. Having been raised of Scotch ancestry he had through all the years been a Presbyterian. When a boy fifteen years of age, just a little older than my grandson now is, father arose in Covenanter meeting one night to bear testimony to his faith in Jesus Christ, and a dour old Scotch Covenanter, one of the elders, came to him and said "Young men should be seen and not heard." There was a Methodist church not so very far away, and so not to be turned aside, being Scotch, he went over to the Methodist church, and he stood up there and bore his testimony for Jesus Christ. And one of the good men of the church—we happen to have those every here and there—came to him and said: "Young man, good for you. Keep it up." And because of that father became a Methodist, and gave forty-three years of his life to the active ministry here in the state of Iowa.

My mother came out west about the same time, I don't know the exact year, but not far from the same time, as a mere girl, and her folks settled at McGregor. I was up there a while ago and I found in the records of 1860 that my grandfather was elected as one of the stewards in the church in McGregor. And while I don't remember that mother ever told me, knowing her age at the time and knowing her life and what it was, I am sure that she must have joined the church at the time she was in McGregor.

I don't want to take your time and go further into our family affairs any more than to say that these good parents, about whom I could talk for a long while from a deep sense of appreciation, brought up a family all of whom have been able to face the world without being afraid to declare themselves as Christians and to take an active part in the Methodist church.

Three of the brothers were mentioned by Bishop Selecman. There was a fourth brother who grew up, and he was perhaps more brilliant than any of the rest of us. I am the least so. He had an outlook of a promising career, but while still in his active life was smitten with sleeping sickness and his career was cut short.

I have two sisters. One of them has lived in Cedar Falls for more than fifty years. Mr. Martin, who sits here, has known her practically all of that time—nearly so, and has done most of the legal business which she and her husband may have had to do during the

years. Another sister has spent most of her life in the east. Now enough for the family.

I want to say a word in regard to this good man who sits in front of me who painted this portrait. He does not know that I know it, but I found it in Who's Who. But he is well past seventy years of age, and yet you can see the fineness with which he carried on his work. If you can tell me—he cannot—how a man can take the same brush and the same paint and make one piece to look like silk and another one like velvet, and another look like the face, it is beyond me. And yet I saw him do it. I can vouch for the fact.

Mr. Solon has become a friend of mine. I shall always cherish him as such. He said when he started on this, "If you will give me time enough I want to make this my masterpiece of my life's work." I have expected that, and when the work was completed he said: "I think I have done the best job I have ever done."

He was gracious enough during the time that he was painting to describe to me what was happening. I was interested in his mixing of paints. I was interested in his method of sketching. I was interested in his desire to catch personality, for he says that a portrait is not a picture of the individual, that the artist attempts to catch the character and personality whether it looks like the person or not. I think you will agree that he made this look like me anyway, whether he caught the other or not. Mr. Solon, I just want to add, how faithfully and loyally and wonderfully you did this and how much I appreciate it personally.

Now I must not longer detain you. You people here, as Mac has said, are the ones that made this possible, for you produced the wherewithal.

I do not feel that this is a day honoring me. I feel that it is a day honoring Methodism and what Methodism has done in the state of Iowa; for if you were to take out of the history of Iowa the contribution which Methodism has made to it you would take the very heart out of Iowa—these questions of solid character to which the Governor referred, these questions of great ideals and spiritual things to which he referred, have come from this great background of Iowa Methodism.

Now, inasmuch as this is the year of our centennial, I want to add, as a matter of Methodism now, a little history. My father joined the Upper Iowa Conference when the Conference was but fourteen years old. He joined in 1870, and he joined that Conference when Iowa Methodism had been organized independently—that is, the anniversary which we are now celebrating, the one hundredth anniversary—when it had been only twenty-six years in existence. So that you see that my family reach pretty well back through the history of Iowa Methodism. I have no right to boast of it, for I had nothing to do with it, but I do have a right to say that they have contributed their share in attempting to make Meth-

odism solid and sound in the state of Iowa, for which I am grateful; and it is because of that that Mac could discover that I was the first Iowa born man to be elected a Bishop and serve in Iowa.

The first man to be elected a Bishop in Iowa was John W. Robinson—that is, a native, I am referring to now. But he was elected a Missionary Bishop and went to India. Strangely enough, when the General Conference was held in Des Moines in 1920 they elected the Missionary Bishops as General Superintendents, and John W. Robinson in his own native state was taken from a Missionary Episcopacy and placed in the General Episcopacy. I have tried to get him back to this Conference—I wanted him here—but he is getting quite old and quite feeble, living in California, and didn't feel that he could quite stand the journey.

I am the only man, native of Iowa, who was elected directly into the General Superintendency because, as I have just said, Bishop Robinson was first a Missionary Bishop and then a General Superintendent. Now, in order to make the record clear as to that, I should say this: Men who are elected to the Missionary Episcopacy are nominated for that task; and John W. Robinson, like all others who have been elected to the Missionary Episcopacy, had his name presented in nomination along with others and then was elected; while those who have been elected through the history of our church to the General Episcopacy are not subject to nomination. The delegates to the General Conference just begin to ballot for whom they desire, and keep balloting until they elect, and it takes a two-thirds vote of a General Conference, or did when we still elected by General Conference, a two-thirds vote of the delegates present to elect a man for the General Episcopacy. So, I am the first native of Iowa who was elected directly as a General Superintendent of the Methodist Church—but more distinguished men than myself have been elected from Iowa, as has been reviewed by my friend Mac.

Again I want to express my very great appreciation to you all, to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor for taking their time to come here and grace this occasion, to those who have traveled far to get here, to Bishop Selecman, who has gone to catch a plane in order to get back to his work, but who so gladly came to represent the Bishops of the Church, and to all others who have had a part in this wonderful day for me and for my family. Thank you very kindly.

The chairman closed the session with an urgent invitation to those present to go through the State Historical building and study the fine historical collections.

The benediction was given by Dr. Russell D. Cole of Cornell college. The music was furnished by Paul Reisman, professor of violin at Simpson college, by Mrs. Sven

Lekberg, assistant professor of voice at Simpson college, and by Robert Wallace of West Des Moines, vocalist.

The portrait, secured by small contributions from Methodists of the state, was painted in Des Moines by Mr. Harry Solon, referred to by speakers, an eminent portrait artist of New York, a native of San Francisco, and educated in art in Paris.

ASSIGNED TO CHICAGO AREA

Since the ceremonies of June 8, Bishop Magee has been reassigned by the Council of Bishops of the Methodist church to the larger and more important Chicago area. He was born in Maquoketa, Iowa, June 3, 1880; attended Iowa State teachers college, and received degrees from Morningside college, Boston University School of Theology, Upper Iowa university and the College of Puget Sound; has held pastorates in Sioux City and Paullina, Iowa, Falmouth, Taunton, Boston, and Brookline, Massachusetts, and in Seattle, Washington. He has held many other responsible positions, and has always been quite active in work both inside and outside the Methodist church.

PIONEERING HANDICAP

“At Fort Des Moines, Iowa, there is a dreadful scarcity of women. In one house we found nineteen bachelors and only one married couple. The editor entreats the ladies to come out there.” We find the above in an eastern paper and don’t question its truth. It isn’t much better in Davenport than at Fort Des Moines, and we are sure it would be an act of humanity if scores of the young maidens who are pining away in the eastern villages for somebody to love would set their faces at once toward Iowa. We know of one house in Davenport where there are at least twenty bachelors who wouldn’t remain so six months if there only was a fair chance to improve their condition.—Davenport *Courier*, 1855.

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