



NORMAN McLEAN

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1865-1947

**I**N 1939 the British Academy awarded two Burkitt Medals for Biblical Studies, one to Dr. A. E. Brooke, the other to Dr. N. McLean, joint editors of the larger Cambridge Septuagint.<sup>1</sup> It was a fitting recognition of an academic partnership which had lasted since the early 1890s, and was only broken by the sudden death of Dr. A. E. Brooke on 29 October 1939. An account of Dr. Brooke appeared in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxvi (1940), 439-53, by Professor J. F. Bethune-Baker. After Brooke's death, Dr. McLean was unable to continue the work owing to failing health. He died on 20 August 1947 in Cambridge. He had been elected F.B.A. in 1934. By some oversight no obituary of Dr. McLean ever appeared in the *Proceedings*, though his death was duly recorded. This brief memoir is an attempt to remedy the omission. It is produced under difficulties. Few who remember Dr. McLean well are still alive. But those who knew him at the height of his powers, and who at the same time understood his academic work, are now dead.

Academically Norman McLean belongs in his own undoubted right to an almost legendary race of giants in biblical scholarship. His greatest monument is certainly his part, with A. E. Brooke, and, for a considerable period, with H. St. J. Thackeray, in the larger Cambridge Septuagint. This began to be published with *Genesis* (1906), and he lived to see the first two volumes, (1) the *Octateuch*, and volume (2) *1-4 Kingdoms, 1-2 Chronicles, and 1-2 Esdras*, completed. The first fascicule of volume (3) containing *Esther, Judith, and Tobit* also appeared in 1940. After the war the Cambridge Press eventually decided to discontinue publication, in a new context of rising costs.

The first proposals for the work were made to the Syndics of the Cambridge Press in 1875 by Dr. F. H. Scrivener who was unable to go forward with the work himself. But on 13 March 1883 an announcement was made in the *Cambridge University Reporter* 'that the Syndics of the University Press had undertaken an edition of the Septuagint and Apocrypha, with an ample apparatus criticus, intended to provide materials for the critical determination of the text'. The first fruits of this scheme were

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, xxv (1939), 4.

the three volumes of a 'portable' text, entitled *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, edited by Dr. H. B. Swete. This was completed between 1887 and 1894. In the meantime Dr. F. J. A. Hort drew up a memorandum, in November 1891, concerned with the larger project, echoing the judgement of Swete that this 'must necessarily be the labour of many years and a variety of hands'. This large task was assigned to the Revd. A. E. Brooke and Mr. N. McLean. From those days onwards it became their life work.

A note on the Septuagint work was supplied to Professor Bethune-Baker for his memoir of Dr. Brooke<sup>1</sup> by the present writer, and from that note<sup>2</sup> it will be seen that the object of the huge undertaking was not to determine a critical text of the pre-Hexaplaric text of the Septuagint, but to accumulate and display the evidence upon which such a critical text might one day be attempted. Brooke and McLean were providing a tool for which all subsequent workers in this wide field have every reason to be grateful. The authoritative note, supplied by Sir Frederic Kenyon to Bethune-Baker for the same memoir, should also be consulted.<sup>3</sup> The Cambridge work was eventually to be joined by not a 'rival', but a very different series in the '*Göttingen Septuagint*' which is still being produced. It may suffice here to quote the judgement of Dr. S. Jellicoe in 1968—twenty years after McLean's death, and nearly thirty years after the effective discontinuance of the work—'On the whole, however, it can be said that if and when both [Cambridge and Göttingen] editions are completed their relationship, owing to difference of plan, would be complementary rather than alternative.'<sup>4</sup> We need both.

Independently of his part in this work, and, indeed, one of his notable qualifications for it, Dr. McLean was a Semitic scholar of the first rank. Syriac studies are still in his debt, both for his publication in 1898 of Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, in Syriac (completing work begun by William Wright), and for his masterly survey of *Syriac Literature* in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

At this distance of time it has seemed natural to recall first McLean's enduring published work. But it must be remembered that McLean was also a man of large and versatile human sympathies.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, xxvi (1940), 439-53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 444-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446 f.

<sup>4</sup> S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (1968), p. 23.

Norman McLean was born at Lanark on 2 October 1865, the eldest son of the late Revd. Daniel McLean of Lanark. He graduated at Edinburgh University in 1885 with Firsts in classics and philosophy. In 1887 he came to Christ's College, Cambridge, as an affiliated student and scholar and was placed in the first class in the Classical Tripos Part I in 1888 and in the Semitic Languages Tripos in 1890. He was awarded the Jeremie Septuagint Prize in 1890, and the first Tyrwhitt Hebrew Scholarship and Mason Hebrew Prize in 1891. He was elected Fellow of Christ's College in 1893, and so was a contemporary there of another famous Scot and polymath—William Robertson Smith (1846–94). McLean married Mary Grace Luce, daughter of Colonel C. R. Luce, J.P., of Malmesbury, in 1896. Sadly his wife died in 1905.

From 1903 to 1931 McLean was University Lecturer in Aramaic, and there is abundant and affectionate testimony to his excellence as a teacher. But perhaps warmest of all is the regard he inspired as tutor of his college from 1911, and Senior Tutor from 1914, and lastly as Master from 1927 to 1936. He is remembered for kindness—especially to students and children. If his own marriage was ended by the early death of his wife and he had no children of his own, the children of his colleagues gratefully found themselves the targets of his generosity.

In Cambridge he is also remembered as chairman of the University Library Syndicate from 1928 to 1932. In committee meetings he was silent, unless he had something to say—a wonderful epitaph.

H. St. J. HART

*Note.* Apart from oral tradition, slight personal knowledge and the published work, I am indebted to a memoir by Mr. S. C. Grose in the *Christ's College Magazine*, Lent Term 1948; a memoir by the late Dr. W. A. L. Elmslie in the *Cambridge Review*, 11 October 1947; and a slightly larger account by the same in the *Dictionary of National Biography* 1941–50.