

The monograph immediately following was especially written for *The Book of McKee* by a McKee descendant, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Jesse Hays Baird, President Emeritus of San Francisco Theological Seminary of San Anselmo, California, and formerly Moderator of the Presbyterian Church for the United States.

McKEES HAVE BEEN PRESBYTERIANS

BY THE RT. REV. DR. JESSE HAYS BAIRD, A.B., B.D., D.D., LL.D.

MCKEES ARE Scotch-Irish. That means that their inherited religion is Presbyterian. That should be of interest to every McKee, whether or not he still adheres to the Presbyterian Church. The inherited religion of any people is a silent, subconscious mold through which the thinking and believing of the succeeding generations pass, giving them a certain bent and certain characteristics.

Presbyterians are spiritual children of John Calvin and the Reformation. When the "Protestants" arose in Europe in 1517, under the impetus of the bold new thinking of Martin Luther of Germany, John Calvin of France was one of the first converts. He was a brilliant young student of the University of Paris. He had studied law and then turned to Theology and was in training for the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. All Christians of Europe were then "Catholics". When Calvin became aware of the new ideas which Luther was proclaiming he was impressed and convinced that they were true. Luther, after long study of his Bible, had come to believe that people are saved by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, and that a human priesthood like that of the Roman Catholic Church cannot dispense the benefits of God's grace. He became convinced that every individual person is his own priest. He must say his own prayers, make his own confession direct to God, and depend only upon the goodness of God to forgive and accept him. No bank of merit from saints and martyrs has anything to do with it, and the sale of indulgences such as was going on, he believed, was a complete departure from the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. Facing up to the totalitarian authority which the priesthood and the royal houses of Europe were exercising over the lives of the people, both Luther and Calvin proclaimed the sovereignty of God. God alone has such authority over the thinking and living of people and He has not delegated it to anybody. Priests and princes stand before God on the same level as all other men, subject to His judgement and in need of the salvation which is available only because of God's great love and the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ.

The authorities of church and state did not know that Calvin was thinking these dangerous new thoughts until it leaked out in a strange way. The University of Paris had elected a very scholarly new President, a young man who happened to be a friend of John Calvin. When the day of his inauguration came he delivered a profound address but in it he incorporated the new ideas of the Protestant Reformers. The men of authority were surprised and shocked. Their wrath descended upon their new President. Then they learned that John Calvin had written the "heretical" parts of the address. Immediately his arrest was ordered. Prison and death would be his reward. But Calvin, with the help of some friends, went over the wall of Paris at night, one jump ahead of the police, and escaped to Geneva, Switzerland.

There, in Geneva, he found refuge. Geneva had recently become free from the hectic tangle of European power politics. With its surrounding territory it lay in a pocket at the heart of the rugged Swiss Alps, at a point where the territories of France, Germany and Italy

met. All three of those great powers wanted Geneva but could not take it under their sovereignty without clashing with each other, so in the impasse which resulted little Switzerland became its own master and declared its independence.

When young John Calvin arrived precipitately in their midst, the Genevans were just beginning to try to figure out what to do with their new freedom. Lo, here was a youth of obviously brilliant mind, thoroughly trained in both Law and Theology. So they invited him to help them in the organization of their church and their government. He was really on his way to Germany to join forces with Martin Luther but they persuaded him to remain in Geneva at least for a time. Reformation ideas had already come to this little mountain community, largely by way of other refugees like Calvin who had come seeking a haven of refuge.

Here was a task made to order for the zealous young Frenchman. Here was an opportunity to try out the ideas which had turned the whole course of his life—for good or ill. With these new found associates he set to work to figure out what kind of church and what kind of government *God* wants. He wrote a book which the world still reads: his "*Institutes*". Then through long study and constant debate they hammered out a Theology, a form of church government and a form of civil government along the same lines. The Bible was their supreme source book and they pledged each other not to agree to anything unless through sincere prayer they had become thoroughly convinced that it was the will of God, as revealed in the Bible.

The results of their studies were amazing—alarming in the light of things as they then were in Europe. If God is King, then all earthly authority is answerable to Him and kings and priests stand before Him on a level with all mankind. Earthly sovereignty is vested in every individual and to whomsoever the individual delegates it. Government must be by the consent of the governed. This leads to representative democracy in which those who conduct the affairs of government are elected by those whom they govern. By the ballot the sovereignties of many individuals are transferred to a few individuals who seem to be most capable of ruling, but the representatives hold that sovereignty by the will of the constituent people and it may be withdrawn by those same people if they choose to do so. Both "representative" rulers and the sovereign "citizens" must recognize God as their real Sovereign and do His will if government is to be good and effective. If then the individual is to be his own priest, and his own prince, the individual, every individual, must be a superior person. He must be good, if he is to escape dictatorship from other men. If he is not to be controlled by force from without he must control himself from within and do right because he wants to do right. He must also be intelligent for he must read the Bible and other books to inform himself of God's truth and acquire all needful earthly wisdom. He must likewise be free to follow his conscience wherever it leads him without interference from human sources. When he finds the will of God he must be free to follow that will. When by his prayers and studies he sees the path which his conscience tells him leads to his highest good and his greatest service to God and man, he must follow that conscience, unless his freedom begins to interfere with the freedom of others, when external authority must step in and restrain him.

Representative democracy, universal education, the open Bible which all should read, profound preaching of the Word of God, strict moral living, the faithful observance of the Sabbath for worship and instruction: these became the enterprises of the Reformed Faith. In Geneva there arose a great University, a Swiss Republic and the Reformed Presbyterian Church. They all stand today after four hundred and fifty years, with ever widening influence.

It is in the interest of truth to note that all of the convictions outlined above did not attain to their full maturity in the days of Calvin and his contemporaries. Our heritage today is the result of long years of testing as those ideas have been tried out, corrected, expanded, and screened. But the fact remains that the basic discovery and development of those formative truths were carried out by those Protestant Reformers of the early fifteen hundreds.

The Reformation spread rapidly. Luther, Calvin and their fellows did not want to split the "Catholic" church. They wanted to *reform* it. But the hierarchy in control reacted violently against them and their ideas and did all in their power to rid the church and the nations of them. Nevertheless, the movement spread like wildfire, through Switzerland, Germany, Britain, Scandinavia, and through France until the Huguenots (fellow Presbyterians) were driven from the nation or crushed by the purge of St. Bartholomew's Day. After a thousand years under totalitarian authority, the Peoples of Europe were hungry for freedom and for the simple Gospel of the early Christian Church.

Young, zealous converts of the Reformation fled from persecution in their homelands to Calvin's refuge in Geneva. There they attended his university and sat under his incessant lectures. In due time when they dared, they went back to their homelands and spread his ideas. One of the most promising of these students of Calvin was John Knox of Scotland. When he thought he dared, he went back to Scotland, praying, "God, give me Scotland or I die". God gave him Scotland, after many trials and testings, and Knox remolded it into the pattern of Reformation ideals. The open Bible in every cottage; the Scottish family religion, so beautifully pictured in Robert Burns' "Cotter's Saturday Night", powerful "Preaching of the Word"; strict morality; universal education, with public schools and great Universities; the Presbyterian Church with its representative sessions, presbyteries and synods: Scotland got to be like that under the powerful leadership of John Knox and his Presbyterian associates.

When the Roman Catholic Irish arose in rebellion about sixteen hundred, it was from these Presbyterian Scots that the Crown chose its soldiers to bring Ireland into subjection. It was largely from the lowland, border clans that the recruits came. They went to Ireland and won the war for their king. Then they were invited by their grateful sovereign to remain and populate North Ireland, which had become a waste. They were given hundred year leases on farms which were parceled out to them. They stayed their hundred years and became a distinct people—the Scotch Irish, or Irish Scots. They did well by themselves and by their king. They developed prosperous farms and a considerable industrial enterprise, especially in the manufacture of linens. But their Presbyterianism and their prosperity undid them. They thought they knew how to worship God, à la Calvin and Knox, hence they could not bend and conform every time a new sovereign put out a new prayer book. That got them disliked by kings and queens. The southern Irish, bitter against them, and we cannot be surprised that they were, never allowed them very much real peace. The success of their industrial enterprises aroused the jealousy of competing industrialists of England, and Parliament was pressured into the imposition of ruinous restrictions and taxes upon them. When the hundred year titles to their farms began to run out, about seventeen hundred, they were in terrible trouble. Many of them were in dire poverty. They were losing their lands and their jobs. Because they stubbornly followed their consciences in their religious worship they were persecuted and penalized in countless heartbreaking ways. They felt they had been betrayed by the very kings and parliaments whom they had served so faithfully, as loyal Britons. The Scotch Irish had become "displaced peoples" in the earth.

Relief offered itself from over the seas. Great-hearted William Penn had turned his newly inherited "Woods" into a haven of refuge for the homeless and persecuted of earth. Land and freedom he offered to whomsoever chose to come. God bless the Society of Friends! How often in history they have played the role of Good Samaritan! The Irish Scots began to cross the ocean. Ship loads of them, in increasing numbers! They went and went until alarm spread at home, lest there should be none left. They did not all go abroad, however. The Scotch Irish of Ulster are still a significant unit among the peoples of earth, but between the years seventeen hundred and seventeen seventy-six, some hundreds of thousands of them made the crossing. They did not find it easy. They didn't ask for ease. With an axe in one hand and a long rifle in the other, they plunged into Penn's Woods and slowly turned it into smiling farms and growing cities. Scalpings and blood chilling alarms were their lot for many years. They fought the battles for the peaceloving Quakers. But they found what they were seeking—land and freedom. Up the valleys which radiate westward and northward from Philadelphia they hewed their way. The valleys of the Delaware, the Juniata, the Susquehanna and the Cumberland became their new homeland. And wherever they settled they built a Presbyterian Church at the heart of the colony. Built like a fort, usually beside some strongly flowing limestone spring, the church was their centre; for worship, education, litigation of quarrels, administration of justice, police control of the unruly by session action, and for defense when the Indians attacked. In his log house by the side of the church the *Dominie* dealt out his wares of the mind and the soul. He was the "Parson" (person) of the community.

It was these Scotch Irish of the frontier who supplied about half of the soldiers for George Washington's armies, according to his own testimony. It really was not hard for them to fight a British king and parliament after what had happened to them in Ireland. When the war was over and the United States became a nation, with George Washington at its head, the pioneering blood of these folk ran warm again. They had been on civilization's frontier for almost two hundred years. They understood it and loved it. Lands to westward were being ceded to the new nation by the Indians. Surveying parties were being sent over the great barrier of the Appalachian Mountains to mark out four hundred acre tracts in the forests of Western Pennsylvania, Western Virginia, and later in Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio. Two young surveyors set out from the Cumberland Valley for service on the hills of the distant Allegheny River. They were Thomas McKee and Thomas Beard (Baird!). The author of this paper went with them for they were in the stream of his ancestry.

Dubbing themselves "Men of the Western Waters", the Scotch Irish sold their beautiful farms to the Germans, crossed the barrier which had halted their westward march for a generation, cut loose from the streams which ran eastward to the homelands of their past, and plunged into the howling wilderness which was filled with wild beasts ("varmints" they called them) and wilder men who resented their coming.

In 1796 the surveying party of Thomas McKee and Thomas Beard surveyed the lands west of the Allegheny which drain into that river by two creeks called "Big Scrubgrass" and "Little Scrubgrass". The young men each claimed a four hundred acre tract. Either that year or the next, Thomas Beard married Martha McKee, sister of Thomas McKee, who had also made the wilderness trek and joined them there. Thomas and Martha Beard built their log cabin in the wilderness by a spring that sends forth a sizeable "run" which drains into the Big Scrubgrass "Crick" and there they settled down to become my great grandparents.

On Thomas McKee's farm there developed in time a beautiful little village, named Clintonville for Clint McKee, his son. There in the early eighteen hundreds a McKee and

THE BOOK OF McKEE

a Baird took the lead in organizing a Presbyterian Church, of which they became Elders. When I joined the tribe in 1889, it was the white steeple of that church, rising above the ridge a mile away where Clintonville spreads out in a long white line, that brought one of the deepest and most lasting impressions to my child mind. As I played in the old barnyard it said to me, "Laddie be good". And it was while I wiggled on the old hard pews of that church that saintly and beloved Ida McKee taught me my first lessons in the faith of my fathers. Thank God for Ida McKee! Thank God for the long processional of faithful generations who brought this living faith down to us! And thank God for the fathers and mothers of us all, whose graves mark the historic trail which we have been travelling in review!

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