

Duncan Black Macdonald

1863–1943

The death of Dr. D. B. Macdonald on the 6th September last removes a figure who will long occupy a special place in the esteem of Arabists. For close on fifty years he was the foremost Islamic scholar and teacher on the American continent (though born and educated at Glasgow), and to his vision and personality was due much of the success achieved by the Kennedy School of Missions.

But his influence radiated far beyond Hartford Seminary and professional missionary circles. The first of his published works, issued in 1903, on the *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence, and Constitutional Theory*, already showed his remarkable power to clothe the dry bones of his subject with living tissue. All his later work was instinct with the same vitality—the vitality of one who has thought and felt deeply and whose vision has penetrated through the outer husks to the essential core. Possessed of a deep and sincere religious faith, he combined an inflexible loyalty to his own ideals with a breadth and charity of outlook that enabled him to enter into the minds of faithful men of other creeds and times and to share their strivings towards the light. And having lived long and familiarly with their books, what he had to say about them was drawn from profound experience and was said with a sincerity and a conviction that disregarded the hesitations and the circum-spections of more conventional minds.

This characteristic directness of feeling was fully displayed in his Chicago Haskell lectures, published in 1909 under the title of *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam*. By contrast with the elaborate and laborious products of the German schools they seem ingenuous and simple, but it is precisely in that simplicity that Macdonald's greatness lay. The student who seeks to know the real nature of the religious experience in Islam will have to search very far indeed before he finds a better answer than he will get from Macdonald, both in these lectures and in the subsequent studies, chapters, and articles which he contributed to various volumes and journals, and notably to *The Moslem World*.

During his later years at Hartford his Arabic studies were extended in two other directions. One, the result of an association begun in 1920 with Dr. George Sarton and his journal *Isis*, was in Arabic

science ; the other was in the history and contents of the *Arabian Nights*. Although he published several articles on this subject (most of them in this *Journal*), the bulk of his research materials was eventually transferred to other hands and his fine collection of *Arabian Nights* literature to the Case Memorial Library in Hartford Seminary.

After his retirement from active teaching in 1932 Macdonald devoted himself to the trilogy which he had long planned on Old Testament literature. Two volumes, on *The Hebrew Literary Genius* and *The Hebrew Philosophical Genius*, appeared in 1933 and 1936 ; the third, on *The Hebrew Poetic Genius*, had to be given up through failing health. Although these works attracted little notice, on this side of the Atlantic at least, in the torrent of Biblical publications, they display the same robust individuality, disregard of conventional views, and the same curiously exciting quality as his earlier studies.

To his gifts as a teacher D. B. Macdonald added the qualities of a correspondent. He gave generous measure to his old students, whose affection was expressed on his retirement by the publication of a Presentation Volume of studies. But many a young scholar whom he had never seen must also, like the present writer, cherish the long letters of kindly criticism, appreciation, and encouragement received from him.

H. A. R. GIBB.