



Thomas Campbell

*Seceder and Christian
Union Advocate*

... BY ...

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DEDICATION

*To her, beloved fellow worker
in the gospel of Christ for three and a
half decades in both Occident
and Orient—my wife*

FOREWORD

IT is a distinct pleasure to write a word concerning the significance and value of the pages which follow. In the judgment of the writer, no more valuable contribution to the early history of the Disciples of Christ has been made since the publication of Robert Richardson's *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*. The source material contained in this book is of the highest value and serves as a corrective in certain particulars of even such authoritative biographers as Richardson and Alexander Campbell. The fact is that the latter depended upon his memory too exclusively and made frequent errors on this account. The main facts, of course, remain unchanged, but some very important details are set forth in a new light, so that the total picture is made more brilliant and luminous. Thomas Campbell becomes a much more lifelike figure than he had been before, and the action of the Associate Synod of North America likewise becomes much more explicable when its official minutes are read and studied. Mr. Campbell was obviously a little petulant and the Synod was likewise doing its best to reach a decision satisfactory to all parties. The whole situation, as Mr. Hanna discloses it to us, is decidedly human, dramatic and convincing. We recognize the personal motives back of the unwarranted persecution of the Chartiers Presbytery, and it is perfectly clear that the officials of the Synod

of North America saw through the situation also. At the same time they were quite justly suspicious of Thomas Campbell's orthodoxy, and their analysis of his theological position was, in the main, clear and sound. Campbell himself at this time appears to have been feeling his way, and, no doubt, failed to appreciate the full implications of his teaching. It required the bitter experience of censure and suspension on the part of the two ecclesiastical bodies to ripen his thinking into the full fruition of the "Declaration and Address." "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." If the Seceders had been a little more tolerant, the "Declaration and Address" would probably never have been written.

Up until the appearance of this volume no satisfactory biography of Thomas Campbell has been available. The memoirs written by his son, as the author of the present book indicates, never met with public approval, and today only a few scattered copies are in existence. The reasons assigned for the inadequacy of the work by its author are no doubt partially correct, but they do not seem to cover the entire ground. The truth appears to be that Alexander Campbell, when he undertook the job, was aging rapidly, his memory was failing, and there was something about the whole situation which made the task entirely hopeless for him. In the prime of his life he would have produced a great interpretation of his father's career, but when he set his hand to the undertaking he was no longer capable of measuring up to the responsibility which

was laid upon him. Nevertheless, just because he was Alexander Campbell, and because he had written at least a purported biography of his father, later writers felt estopped from touching the subject. For this reason, perhaps more than any other, Thomas Campbell has remained without an adequate biography until Mr. Hanna, inspired by the discovery of his new source material, essayed the task. He has thus placed all of us under a debt of gratitude for filling in a gap which threatened to become permanent.

One word more may be added concerning the immense value of preserving what may sometimes appear to be unimportant and uninteresting records. Perhaps to most people the minutes of the Chartiers Presbytery, written over a hundred years ago, would seem to be singularly inconsequential. The Campbell case was only one out of a number of similar instances of routine procedure which even to contemporaries were probably tiresome enough. We read them today with intense interest because of what history has done for some of the characters who are involved. The moral would appear to be that no transactions of any organization should be regarded as unworthy of preservation. It is highly desirable that future generations should understand the facts of past history in order the more surely to expand their own outlook. Accurate and detailed official records help to promote such an understanding more than anything else. We must be sincerely grateful today to the men who wrote and preserved the records upon which the present volume is so

largely based, and to the author of this book for making them available for the general public.

It scarcely seems necessary to call attention to the fact that Mr. Hanna has once and for all laid the ghost of the imaginative schism between Thomas and Alexander Campbell which has been advocated at times by uninformed radicals. On only one or two rather unimportant matters was there any real difference of opinion between father and son throughout the long period of their harmonious and co-operative fellowship. The fact is that Alexander carried out the plan and program of his father to the very best of his extraordinary ability. Thomas Campbell, on the other hand, was delighted at the forensic leadership of his son and was content to remain in the background so long as the principles which he advocated were being promulgated in such admirable fashion. History records few instances of more thoroughgoing and consistent harmony between two great leaders in the work of the church. The famous relationship which existed between Luther and Melancthon was far less ideal. Not the least service of the present volume is the fact that it helps to immortalize the sacred and beautiful unity of spirit which existed between Father Campbell and his illustrious son and successor.

FREDERICK D. KERSHNER.

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INTRODUCTION

THOMAS CAMPBELL died on Jan. 4, 1854. His friends and relatives felt that there ought to be a biography of him whose life had been long, worthy and inseparably connected with the religious movement that was making so great a challenge to American and even European life. It was believed that there could be no better person to make Thomas Campbell live through a biography than his son, Alexander. This son had more than the usual pride of a son in his father, and sensed the duty to memorialize him in a book. Notwithstanding what seemed to be an urgent call for an immediate performance of this act, it was not until the year of 1861 that Alexander Campbell published under copyright a book entitled *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell*. From the preface we take this closing paragraph: "This memoir has long been called for. My apology is and has been, the multiplicity and the variety of public calls upon my time at home and abroad, in connection with the Bible Union, Bethany College, and my long tours in response to many calls and importunities. I have long been waiting for a more convenient season, but it still seemed to be in the future. And even now, at last, I have to regret that it had to be dispatched in too much haste to satisfy my own intention and desire. But, under all the circumstances that surround me and all the du-

ties incumbent upon me, I have done the best I could."

The reader of the resultant *Memoirs* is sure to be just as much dissatisfied with it as its writer declares he was. So intimate had been the association of the father, Thomas Campbell, and the son, Alexander, for fifty-odd years, that the latter was the only one qualified to preserve the life of his father and make him an intimate friend of succeeding generations of men. Even though the elder Campbell had tens of thousands of admirers in all parts of the world, the *Memoirs* made but little appeal to them. It lacked so much of being a "life"; never had a wide circulation; and there is no record that a second edition was ever called for. The biographer delegated to his brother the task of writing of "a certain period of Father Campbell's life and labors" on the ground that he was more conversant with the same, with the result that Dr. Archibald Campbell is as much the writer of the above-mentioned *Memoirs* as Alexander. Yet we are able to enjoy the little that was presented by both, together with a few letters, a glimpse into Thomas Campbell's diary for 1800, magazine articles, and letters of appreciation that came upon the death of him whom they had come to esteem for his works' sake in the restoration of primitive Christianity.

To the *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, by Dr. Robert Richardson, the world owes far more of its knowledge of Thomas Campbell than to any other work. This two-volume work is so exhaustive

and charming that it has become monumental. Its length has made it a mark for abbreviators. Other lives of Alexander Campbell have been written since, but they all lean hard on Richardson and have little original material. No person has thought it worth while to attempt another life of Thomas Campbell, though Dr. Richardson adds very much to the data found in *Memoirs of Thomas Campbell*. The lamented Archibald McLean prepared two addresses on the Campbells, father and son, and had them published in a booklet under the name *Thomas and Alexander Campbell*. The edition was small, and can not be looked upon as other than a tribute and interpretation. It is possible that the paucity of material has warned writers away from Thomas Campbell as a subject. However, some genius may arise one day to give to the world a more extended and satisfactory account of the life and labors of the truly great Christian and religious leader that he was.

The present work is not to be esteemed as the offering of a master. The writer counts himself but a student of his subject. In connection with finishing work leading to a degree in Western Theological Seminary, some themes were called for. Among subjects chosen were "Thomas Campbell: Seceder" and "Thomas Campbell: Advocate of Christian Union." These were approved by the professor of church history, and work was begun upon them. It occurred to the aspirant that neither Doctor Richardson nor any other writer, so far as known, had made use of documentary material from

Presbyterian sources. It may be that it was not available, or that they had not thought of its existence. At any rate, the two documents that relate to the American life of Thomas Campbell as a Seceder minister and are necessary source material are "Minutes of Chartiers Presbytery" and "Minutes of Associate Synod of North America," both of which embrace the years from 1807 to 1810. These books, in the original handwriting of the secretaries of the respective bodies are now in the archives of the Library of the Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, located at Pittsburgh, Pa. They are books, blank books once, and bear evidence of having been used and examined in the course of years. Possibly it was by those who were interested in Secederism and United Presbyterianism. Or it may be that persons interested in the Campbellian movement had used the works, but little direct use of the same has been indicated in any publications that have come to the attention of the writer.

It is possible that an apology ought to be made for making such liberal use of the actual words and form of the two sets of minutes. The writer's thought has been to multiply copies of the material that concerns Thomas Campbell, for those original documents will likely never be published. The secretaries of Chartiers Presbytery and of the Associate Synod were not composing literature, but they were writing happenings, reporting acts and speeches of deliberative bodies, and theirs was a hard task. None were shorthand reporters; they

had no typewriters, no fountain pens, no steel pens, no blotting paper. It is not to be wondered at that a secretary of an organization in the early part of 1800 would write as little as he could and abbreviate where he thought it wise, and endeavor to condense as much as possible. On two occasions, at least, Thomas Campbell was led to question the accuracy of the minutes as well as their completeness. Several times we discover Mr. Campbell moved to "crave extracts" from the minutes. As one reads the minutes of those happenings in ecclesiastical circles of more than a century and a quarter ago, he discovers how earnestly the things of religion were dealt with.

Aside from places where Thomas Campbell's matters appear, we find things that are of interest to us. The Chartiers Presbytery had its problems with ministers who walked disorderly, presbyters who opposed ministers, who slandered, kept back wages and so on. In that early period both Presbytery and Synod were making resolutions concerning slavery. Such records help to give us the background of the period, and Thomas Campbell was in the midst of it all. An effort has been made, however, to copy in exact detail what concerned him most intimately during the period when he professed allegiance to Chartiers Presbytery and the Associate Synod.

It has been with some temerity that corrections have been offered on the report of the heresy trial of Mr. Campbell as it has been written up by Dr. Richardson. By no means would the latter be

charged with inaccuracy. He seems to have been dependent on the recollections of both Thomas Campbell and Alexander. Both of them had either forgotten some of the details or possibly had not thought they were of sufficient importance to mention. The records bear witness to the fact that the heresy trial was based on something more than the charge of a single minister that the accused was irregular in ecclesiastical procedure and errant in some teaching. The libel is almost ponderous in its seven items and the sevenfold recurrence of the refrain, "but you, the Rev'd Thomas Campbell." But Mr. Campbell does not suffer from the very intimate view we get of him before presbyters and fellow ministers as he sought to justify himself. On several occasions we are told that Mr. Campbell withdrew from both Presbytery and Synod, refusing to sit longer in the session. It was not petulance at being opposed that so moved him, but a sense that right and justice were being outraged. But the reader must be left to assess the conduct and stand of "Thomas Campbell: Seceder," as he feels the record demands.

A new era in the life of Mr. Campbell set in when he, having separated from Secederism, took his position for Christian union. As we enter into that era we discover that we are very largely indebted to *Memoirs* by Dr. Richardson for a record of the elder Campbell's activities. Too often, it seems to the writer, sufficient place is not given to Alexander Campbell's father. We dare not blame the great biographer, for he was writing

chiefly about the son. Would that he had essayed another "Memoirs" and given Thomas Campbell the prominence he deserved in the "Current Reformation." It is the desire of the author (utilizing materials in *Memoirs of Thomas Campbell*, the *Christian Baptist* and the *Millennial Harbinger* and one or two other works) to lift "father" Campbell into greater prominence, out of some of the shade into which the greatness of his son has thrust him. Nothing is to be taken from the halo of genuine greatness that has been placed upon the brow of Alexander Campbell. It may be that church historians have failed to construct the full halo which Thomas Campbell deserves. There is far more owing him than the great honor of having produced the "Declaration and Address." A humble effort has been made to set forth in somewhat clear, but not exhaustive, fashion the life period from 1810 until 1854, during which Thomas Campbell deserves to be known as "Advocate of Christian Union." If this work shall spur some one to write an adequate biography, the writer will rejoice. If readers will be moved to thank God anew for such a character as Thomas Campbell and will be tracing yet his service and influence in the great task of bringing together all those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will give the writer his reward. It has been a joy to go with Thomas Campbell through his ninety-one years.

THE AUTHOR.