Gaylord Starin White

1864 - 1931

By Professor William Adams Brown

Thirty-four years ago Hall Caine published a novel, to which he gave the title "The Christian." If I were to choose a phrase to sum up most concisely the impression which Gaylord Starin White produced upon those who knew him, it would be the phrase which Hall Caine chose for the title of his book. Once in a while we meet a man in whom religion and life are so intimately married that we cannot tell where one stops and the other begins; one in whom simple goodness is incarnate and to whom faith seems the most natural thing in the world; one who makes the things we have heard about Christ, but which often seem too good to be true, seem real and who encourages us to believe that some day they may become true for us. Such a man was Gaylord White. Of him one could say with no sense of incongruity or reservation, "He was a Christian."

Yet it was the last thing he would have said of himself. If there was one of the virtues which go to make up the historic ideal of sainthood which he exemplified more than another it was humility. He was the most modest of men and, in all that concerned the secrets of his spiritual life, the most reserved. Of formal religion, after his resignation of the pastorate, he spoke seldom and in public only at rare intervals and after great pressure. But when he spoke his words came with authority and carried conviction. He made the impression of one drawing upon deep reserves, and this impression was confirmed by daily contact. He lived his religion and, living it, made it lovely. His life was a candle shining in a dark place. Of him it could be said with truth, as of the Master he loved and followed: He could not be hid.

What can be said of him that he has not said more eloquently by his life! All that I can do is to recall some familiar facts which may help to focus our thoughts on memories which we cherish as a priceless possession.

My friendship with Gaylord White dates back for more than forty years. I first met him in 1887 at the old Seminary on Lenox Hill, which we had both entered as juniors. He came from Princeton, I from Yale; but we had many points of contact. His grandfather, like my father, had been a Director of the Seminary for many years (1857-1882), and was Vice-President of the Board from 1870 to 1882. His father, Charles Trumbull White, was a merchant who had lived all his life in New York and I still remember his mother, from whom he derived his middle name, as one of the most gracious of women. He was somewhat older than I, having been born on March 3, 1864; but our later experiences were chronologically, as well as spiritually, parallel. After leaving Williston Seminary, where he went to school, he entered New York University, soon afterward transferring to Princeton, whence he graduated in 1886, the year of my own graduation from Yale. Graduating from Seminary in 1890, he received in the same year the degree of M.A. from his Alma Mater. In 1892 he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry and in the same year, on the second of June, he was married to Sophie Douglas Young,

with whom he spent twenty-four years of unbroken trust and happiness and by whom he had four children, two sons and two daughters, all of whom survive him.

His reticence as to his own intellectual attainments has led many to forget his distinguished scholarly career. In a Seminary class which contained a number of men who have attained distinction in their chosen fields, he was alternate Fellow, and by a happy arrangement it was made possible for him to spend two years of study abroad. During much of that time our contacts were intimate, as my own work took me, as his had taken him, to Berlin. Together we attended Harnack's classroom and came under the spell of that extraordinary teacher. Together we sat at the modest but wholesome table set by our landlady, Fraulein Jungk, at 73 Königgräetzerstrasse, in Berlin, partook of roast goose and gequetzte Kartoffel on Sundays, and listened to Fraulein's interminable tales of old Berlin. He was fortunate in having his mother and sister with him during part of the time, which introduced the home atmosphere into what would otherwise have been a strictly masculine environment; and Herr Miller, a medical student who made the fourth of our little circle, and I profited thereby.

But before his years of study drew to a close our paths parted. Already he was feeling the pull to the practical application of the Gospel which was to determine his later career. For the work of the scholar in its technical sense he felt no calling and even the pastorate to which he then looked forward attracted him less as a platform for preaching than as an opportunity to exercise a personal ministry on human lives.

So he left Berlin for London, plunged into Whitechapel, studied the work of the Salvation Army, became a resident of Toynbee Hall, and in those first-hand contacts with human poverty and misery received the impulse which was later to blossom in the stately buildings of the Union Settlement and the even more significant structure of the United Neighborhood Houses.

Returning to New York in 1892, he spent a year as Assistant Pastor in the Rutgers Presbyterian Church and was then called to the pastorate of the City Park Branch of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, where he spent eight fruitful years.

The City Park Branch was at that time a good example of the type of mission church common forty years ago. It had a good plant, adequate financial support, and enlisted the services of a small group of loyal workers from the home church. But in the consciousness of most of the people of that church it was not so much an integral part of the church as a field for its missionary activity. To White, fresh from his contact with the settlement movement in London, there was something incongruous in the attitude of unconscious patronage which he found in some of his good friends in the home church and in spite of his friendly relations with the pastor, Dr. Clarke, he was never quite at home in the relationship. In his association with the Union Settlement, of which he was one of the founders and in which from the first he was an active worker, he found a congenial field; and when, in 1901, the opportunity came to him to cast in his lot with the Settlement as its Headworker, he eagerly embraced it.

His election as Headworker of the Settlement was the beginning of a relation which continued uninterrupted until his death. He remained Headworker until 1923, a period of twenty-two years, during which he was continuously in residence; and even when, in 1923, his increasing duties at the Seminary led him to transfer his home from the East to the West Side, his spirit continued to inspire the workers. Until his death he re-

mained the responsible mind in the conduct of the Settlement's affairs.

To tell what he did and, still more, what he was to the Settlement, would require many more words than are at my disposal; and even if the barrier of space were removed, there is much in the story that would elude me. When he came to the Settlement it was housed in two small houses in East 103rd Street and its support, both in personnel and in finance, while loyal, was limited and precarious. With his coming a new era began. It was an era of progressive friendships. Where he found the people whom he interested in the Settlement and how he enlisted them; more wonderful still how he kept their interest, is a story only he could tell, and perhaps he least of all. One thing we know: the friends he won for the Settlement it never lost. If there is another institution that can show a more uniform record of unbroken friendship, I do not know it. The imposing buildings in which it is now housed, the many-sided work it is doing, the number of people who are directly or indirectly associated with it, the confidence in which it is everywhere held: all these we can see. But these things are significant not so much for themselves as being symbols of the spirit that, centering in him, permeated and beautified all that he touched.

His coming to the Settlement brought him into direct association with the Seminary, the gift which made his coming possible being made by a friend who wished it to serve as a bond of closer union between Seminary and Settlement. It was a connection which he highly valued, not only because it enabled him to enlist a number of students in the direct work of the Settlement, but because it enabled him to interpret to the student body as a whole the type of Christianity in which he was coming increasingly to believe. The new position which he assumed as at once Headworker, Lecturer, and afterwards Professor of Applied Christianity, carried with it, in his conception, responsibility for formal and academic teaching and he was conscientious in fulfilling this part of his duties. But his heart was never in the academic side of his work and as time went on he became increasingly restive under it and was happy when, in 1929, the election of Dr. Niebuhr to the Chair relieved him of all responsibility for formal teaching. But in more informal and personal ways few members of the faculty were more effective in their teaching. When the Seminary took up extension work in the summer of 1920 with the first annual Conference for Ministers and Other Religious Workers, it was Mr. White to whom we turned for the careful preparation that was necessary to make it a success; and the smaller Conference of City Church Workers, which we have now maintained for ten years, was in a peculiar sense his creation. When the Seminary felt the need of interpreting its work to its own Alumni and to the the wider public of its friends, it was Mr. White again to whom we turned; and in the ALUMNI BULLETIN, his creation almost unaided, we have convincing evidence of the wisdom of our choice. These are but examples of countless ways in which his spirit permeated the life of the Seminary and his hand was ever present in helpful activity. As Chairman of the House Committee, as Executive Secretary of the Alumni Council, as Chairman of the Faculty Committee on the Alumni and the Churches, as Chairman of the Conference Committee of Faculty and Students, and finally as Dean of Students, he seemed the indispensable man. When death robbed us of his services it was necessary to divide the work he was doing among no less than four different members of the faculty.

Of both phases of this dual work at Settle-

ment and Seminary I had intimate knowledge. As one of the founders and from the first an active worker in the Settlement, I still remember the heavy load we carried during those formative years and recall as if it were yesterday the sense of relief that we all felt when we knew that Gaylord White had accepted the headworkership. And when, many years after, at Dr. McGiffert's breakdown, I was unexpectedly called to be Acting President of the Seminary, it was to Gaylord White that I instinctively turned to be my assistant in discharging the many duties, some of which I have already enumerated, which he never afterward laid down.

As I look back over the rich record so briefly passed in review, three achievements stand out from the rest as typical of the kind of service with which we associated Gaylord White.

The first is the Lincoln's Birthday Conference of Social Workers. I remember as if it were yesterday how it came into being. It was the outcome of a series of discussions by some of the leading social workers of the city who felt that unless the new movement could find some organ of spiritual refreshment and stimulus it was in danger of losing its soul. Was there no way in which those who felt this need could meet under conditions of perfect naturalness and freedom to exchange experiences, voice common aspirations, and refresh their spirits through communion with unseen reality? It was our friend who found the way and the Lincoln's Birthday Conference was the result. Here men of all political and religious faiths, and of none, Christians and Jews, Socialists, Single Taxers, men who believed in the existing social order and those who were convinced that it was radically and incurably wrong, met on the common platform of love for humanity to voice their faith in the deeper meanings of life. At these conferences our friend seldom spoke, but it was he who brought all the others together and it was his presence that made it seem appropriate for all to be there.

The second achievement is the United Neighborhood Houses, an association which brings together the settlement workers of the city. Here again the initiative was shared with others, but it was his leadership that translated the desire for some united organ of expression from aspiration into reality and he who, when organization was finally achieved, was the inevitable choice for first President. Social workers, for all their strong social passion, perhaps because of it, are a group with highly marked individuality and to lead a group of such differing responsibilities and convictions was a task which called for just the combination of tact and persistence which Gaylord White possessed.

The third service I have in mind is less well known but quite as characteristic. I mean the service he rendered as Associate Secretary of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches. When at the outbreak of the war the Protestant Churches of America felt the need of some agency through which their desire to serve could find common expression, Dr. Robert E. Speer and I were asked to serve as President and Secretary of the newly organized Commission. Our first task was to find associates on whom we could rely for the unselfish and tactful service that was needed. Instantly my thought turned to Gaylord White as the man who best combined the qualities that were indispensable. He responded with his usual generosity and for eighteen months we were constantly associated in the many complicated and perplexing questions which each day brought with it. Our work with the chaplains especially brought us into intimate associa-

tion with the Government and when at a critical period we needed some one to represent us at Washington, it was to White that we instinctively turned. When the war was over our paths took us both to Europe and on an August day in 1919 we stood together on the hillcrest of Douaumont looking out over the battlefield of Verdun and tried to visualize some of the heavy tasks which must be performed before the hideous devastation could be repaired. That is how I like to think of him always, where need was greatest and sorrow most acute, ever at hand to heal, to comfort and to sustain.

One more memory, the most intimate of all, carries me back fifteen years to a cloudless afternoon in 1916, when all the White family were gathered at their summer home on Cape Cod. Mr. and Mrs. White had just returned from a week's motoring with friends, a sort of belated honeymoon, to which he always looked back as a time of peculiar happiness. In the afternoon the children had gathered for bathing at the beach and Mr. and Mrs. White were watching them. After a while she rose, saying she was tired and would go to her room to rest. When an hour later he rejoined her he found her sleeping the sleep from which there is no waking here.

What she had been to him in all their years of married life, no words of mine can tell. What the Settlement would have been without the home she helped to found, no one who knew it can imagine. Of all my memories of them, that center of peace in East 104th Street is the most sacred and abiding.

And now he too, after fifteen more busy and useful years, has come to the time when rest was earned. How could one imagine a fitter homegoing. Like hers, it was a falling asleep after a useful and happy day. For him, as for her, we may be sure that useful and happy days are waiting.

Patience, brave soul!
A truce to all thy hasting.
'Tis time for rest.
Pleasant the bowl
Invites thee to its tasting;
But sleep is best.

If thou but cease,
The morn of high endeavor
Full soon shall break.
Sleep now in peace!
For joy shall greet thee ever,—
When thou awake.

The Minute of the Faculty in Memory of Dean White

The death, on November 25, 1931, of our beloved colleague and friend, Gaylord Starin White, brought to a conclusion an official connection with the Seminary which had lasted for thirty years, but his personal connection with the Seminary was of much longer standing. His grandfather, Norman White, had been for many years a Director and was from 1870 to 1882 Vice-President of the Board. His uncle, Erskine White, and more recently his cousin, Stanley White, had been graduates. Born on March 3, 1864, the son of Charles Trumbull White, a merchant of New York City, and of Georgiana Starin White, he entered the Seminary as a junior in 1887, after preliminary studies at Williston Academy, New York University, and Princeton. He graduated as Alternate Fellow in 1890, dividing his years as Fellow between Berlin and London, where he lived in Whitechapel as one of the early residents of Toynbee Hall, and made an intensive study of the social conditions in that congested center. Returning to New York

in 1892, he was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry and after a year as Assistant Pastor of the Rutgers Presbyterian Church became pastor of the City Park Branch of the First Presbyterian Church, where he served for eight years. He received the degree of M.A. from Princeton in 1892.

His call to the Settlement in 1901 inaugurated a dual relationship to the Seminary and the Settlement which continued uninterrupted until his death, and in which it would be difficult to say which member of the combination profited more. He himself greatly valued the association and regarded his work at the Settlement not only as valuable for itself but as giving him an outpost of the Seminary where the spirit and ideals which he believed should inspire the Christian ministry could be translated into appropriate action. As the progress of the years brought increasing Seminary responsibility and finally made necessary the transfer of his residence from the Settlement to the Seminary, his interest in the Settlement was not diminished and he remained until his death its animating spirit and controlling mind.

Of the details of his service to Seminary and Settlement it is not necessary to speak here. An appropriate record will be found in the ALUMNI BULLETIN, of which he was the Editor until his death. But his colleagues cannot allow his death to pass without putting on record what he has meant to us in his life. Others have made large place for themselves in our Seminary life and have left fragrant memories. It would be difficult to think of any one who, in quiet and unostentatious ways, so lived himself into the life of the whole. Trusted friend, wise counsellor, unselfish helper, generous giver of self and all that self contained, silent witness to things lovely and of good report, liver day by day and hour by hour of the life that is hid with Christ in God, he was a constant interpreter to faculty and students of the reality of the things of which we others spoke; and, leaving us, has added one more convincing evidence to the deathlessness of the life of the Spirit.

SPECIAL MUSICAL SERVICES

It was in 1914 that Dr. Dickinson inaugurated the February historical lecture organ recitals in the chapel. In the more than fifteen years since, the Tuesday afternoons of February have come to be regularly reserved on the calendars of many friends of the Seminary. These lecture-recitals have brought an incalculable boon of inspiration and instruction as well as enjoyment and refreshment to the increasing crowds which annually over-taxed the capacity of the chapel. Probably no feature of the work of the Seminary was more widely appreciated. It will be a matter of genuine regret to numbers that, because of the current financial stringency, the February recitals will not be held this year.

But that does not mean that we shall not be indebted, as usual, to the School of Sacred Music for a number of special musical services. Already three such programs have been offered. On Tuesday evening, November 17, Mendelssohn's "Elijah" was sung in the chapel with Sue Harvard, Helen Bard Nixon, Robert Elwyn and Fred Patten as soloists. The "Messiah" of Handel was given on December 8, by the motet choir with the assistance of Ruth Shaffner, Nevada van der Veer, Harold Haugh and Alexander Kisselburgh as soloists. Both of these oratorios were conducted and played by students who are candidates for the degree of Master of Sacred Music. And on the Wednesday afternoon before Christmas vacation, a candle light service of Christmas carols was again held with the participation of the full Sunday chapel and daily chapel choirs, together with a children's choir which was under the direction of Mrs. William Neidlinger.

At morning chapel some special musical services have been sung from the historical liturgies and Dr. and Mrs. Dickinson are planning to give such services at intervals during the year.