



Walter Lowrie
1868 - 1959

Walter Lowrie: 1868-1959

On August the twelfth occurred the death of the Reverend Canon Walter Lowrie, D. D., *R. af D.*, and *Æresmedlem* of the Søren Kierkegaard Society. The indefatigable interpreter and translator of Kierkegaard died full of years and full of faith. He was in his ninety-second year and had been at work at his desk until within six days of his death. Two new books, the product of the last two years, will be published posthumously.

Having taught himself Danish at the age of sixty-five, the man who as early as 1930 styled himself a »superannuated clergyman« proceeded to bring out twenty-seven books in the next twenty-seven years. Fourteen of these were translations from the works of Kierkegaard, and two of these were biographical studies: the massive biography in 1938, which the late Professor Eduard Geismar hailed as »the best single volume on Kierkegaard in any language,« and a *Short Life of Kierkegaard* in 1942 which has now found its way into Dutch, German, and Japanese.

In the '30s and early '40s Dr. Lowrie carried on this prodigious labor with scant support from his environment. Indeed, when no publisher could be persuaded to undertake the risk of launching an author who at that time was virtually unknown in England and America, Lowrie himself paid to have the books published. »Having confidence in this enterprise,« he remarked a few years ago, »I was undismayed when at one time I was out of pocket to the amount of \$ 18,000.« Subsequent history has shown that his confidence was not misplaced. Professor J. V. Langmead Casserley has given it as his opinion that the translation and publication of Kierkegaard's writings is »perhaps the most important episode in twentieth-century English publishing.« And W. H. Auden has said: »To the Oxford, Princeton, and other presses who have been making Kierkegaard available in English, we and our children owe a debt which we could not repay even if we remembered it.«

Kierkegaard, however, was not the only thinker to engage the interest of the man who for twenty-three years was Rector of the American Church in Rome. He has written on Rudolph Sohm, Albert Schweitzer, Karl Barth, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Hamann, and Soloviev. But that is less than the half of it. Lowrie's *Forfatterskab* also includes impressive and critically acclaimed tomes on Christian art and archeology, ecclesiastical polity and problems of Church unity, liturgics, and New Testament interpretation.

The story of his many and varied achievements can be read in a *Festskrift* called *Dr. Lowrie of Princeton & Rome* which nine of his American friends presented to him on his eighty-ninth birthday. The editor of that book required Dr. Lowrie to make a complete bibliography of all his writings. At the end of this list he offers a comment fully characteristic of him: »I have enumerated nearly 100 items: 38 books and 59 substantial articles in reviews. It would be tedious to write, or even to read, a bare list of the more trivial items I have contributed in the course of a long life to daily or weekly papers. Most of them I have kept, but I haven't the heart to count them. Suppose they amount to one thousand and one - that would be a sorry record for eighty-eight years, as compared with many a columnist who turns out a column a day! My output comes to barely 12 items a year, or one a month, in the course of a long and misspent life.«

The scholarship which won for him an international reputation is something which Lowrie himself always regarded as »incidental to my vocation as a parochial pastor.« It is, in fact, as a wise spiritual counsellor and a trenchant preacher that scores of people who have never read his books and who perhaps could not understand them - including many people who do - that he is remembered with gratitude.

Walter Lowrie, priest and teacher, Knight of Dannebrog and Knight of the Faith, is gone from us now. It is, of course, only for ourselves that we are weeping, not for him.

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