

PROFESSOR MEANY AS I KNEW HIM

It has seemed fitting to those in charge of this Memorial Service that there should appear on this program a representative of the Department of History, and as the one who has served the longest with Professor Meany in that department, it has fallen to my lot to speak of him as I knew him. My service with him has covered a period of twenty-seven years, and during the greater part of that time we have been more intimate than most brothers.

The outstanding characteristic, as I see it, of Professor Meany was his loyalty—loyalty to his friends. And loyalty is one of the very finest traits of character.

It should be remembered that although Professor Meany was born in the United States, he came of Irish stock and he possessed many of the characteristics of that interesting and versatile people. As a boy he was "red-headed," and he possessed the temperamental qualities of a red-headed Irish boy. The hand of time gradually changed the color of his hair to gray, and finally to snow white, but time made surprisingly little change in his poetic soul. He might have been accurately described by the refrain of a once popular song:

His hair was red, his eyes were blue,
And he was Irish through and through.

Professor Meany would have been more than human if in the span of seventy-three years he had not taken into the folds of his expansive friendship some who were unworthy of that friendship—or some who in the course of time became unworthy of it. Quite often when this unworthiness became evident to those less forgiving and less charitable, he loyally and staunchly defended them, until he too, reluctantly and sorrowfully, gave them up. This transition period made him appear to champion the unworthy—to defend the indefensible—the explanation is to be found in the steadfastness of his loyalty.

I do not mean to imply that he abandoned friends because they made mistakes—far from it. No one that I have ever known was more charitable, more forgiving, and more willing to forget mistakes than he. Nor do I mean to imply that a friend was abandoned because of his economic, political or social convictions, which leads

me to what I consider his second outstanding characteristic—tolerance.

Perhaps no two people studying the complicated problems of history differed more widely in conclusion than Professor Meany and myself; yet never in the long years in which we have been associated did he ever manifest the spirit of intolerance—and what was true in my case was equally true with all his friends. He, himself, was essentially individualistic and conservative in his tendencies. Many of his friends entertained what to him were chimerical and outlandish views. Times without number have I known of attempts by his friends to convert him to new and strange views. He willingly and frankly discussed them, but quite often he remained unconverted. His acceptance or non-acceptance never made the slightest difference in his friendship. Once convinced that these views—totally unacceptable to him—were held honestly and faithfully by a friend, his loyalty to that friend was militant and unshaken. Those members of the faculty who knew of the wide divergence between the views of the late J. Allen Smith and Professor Meany, will recognize a concrete illustration. Still, the two men were linked together in a beautiful and indestructible friendship.

The third outstanding characteristic of Professor Meany, as I see it, was loyalty to high ideals of conduct. As I have already said, Professor Meany was essentially an individualist, and his ideals of conduct were individualistic.

In the twenty-seven years during which I have known him, I have never known him to tell an untruth—a lie was simply not in him. Moreover I have never known him to consciously do a mean or a underhanded or a discreditable act. Often he had been asked to do something which his conscience did not approve. Usually he listened to the request in silence, and remained silent. Those who knew him well understood that meant “No.” If a petitioner urged him to action, he positively and flatly refused. Many another person in the same circumstances would suggest delay, or diplomatically sidestep. Professor Meany never did; he refused flatly and positively and gave the reasons for his action. The high standards of personal conduct he laid down for himself, and lived up to, were likewise exacted of his friends. As I have stated, mistakes were forgiven and passed into oblivion. Erroneous or distasteful views, honestly held, were tolerated, but deceitful, shady or slippery conduct put one outside the pale of his friendship.

You name for me a list of Professor Meany's intimate friends, and you have named a long list of men and women whose personal honesty and integrity are, humanly speaking, unimpeachable. No one else could be an intimate friend of Edmond S. Meany. Among the thousands of students who registered for his courses were many who were only remotely interested in the content of those courses. Much that we teach is soon forgotten anyhow. I have often said that it made little difference what was the content of his courses; in his case the content was of minor importance. The important thing was the teacher himself. He imparted to his students something of his enthusiasm, something of his kindness and charity, something of his lofty personal ideals, something of his love of nature and its beauty, and after all those are among the great things a great teacher should teach.

Hundreds of students have said to me: "My father, or my mother was in Professor Meany's classes, and I must have at least one course with him." The influence of his character and personality has thus been extended over two and in some cases three generations, and will continue its influence through other generations. No one could know him intimately without loving him for his sterling qualities as a man. And blessed are those who have known him as a friend.

EDWARD McMAHON