

THE RIGHT REVEREND WALTER BURD, D. C. M., D. D.
Sixth Bishop of Saskatchewan - 1933-1939

A MEMOIR

Canada was his adopted land, and Saskatchewan his spiritual home. Walter Burd was born in Ireland and spent his early boyhood there, but when he was thirteen his father died, and he had to leave school and start work in Sheffield, England, as an office boy. Twelve years later, by dint of hard work and a constant succession of night classes, he had qualified as an industrial chemist and was rapidly climbing the promotion ladder in a large Sheffield chemical firm. Then the course of his life changed suddenly and unexpectedly. In 1912-13, that vigorous and charismatic figure in the history of Canada and the Canadian Church, the Reverend George Exton Lloyd, later the fourth Bishop of Saskatchewan but at that time the Principal of Emmanuel College, Saskatoon, came to England to seek for young men who would come to Canada for theological training in order to minister to the thousands of British immigrants who were flooding the Canadian West and who had no clergy to look after them. Walter Burd immediately threw over his successful career and came to Emmanuel College for the fall term of 1913.

A year later, with the outbreak of the First World War, when he and most of his fellow students joined the armed forces, Walter Burd enlisted as a private in the 28th (Northwest) Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and proceeded overseas with the Canadian Second Division. By this time a Lance-Sergeant in charge of a special bombing party, he led his group on the Division's first trench raid on the enemy lines on the night of January 30/31, 1916.

From the London Gazette, March 15th, 1916:

SERGEANT WALTER BURD. Awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for conspicuous gallantry in the field. He led the leading bombing party over the parapet and attacked a machine-gun emplacement. He continued bombing out a party of the enemy until he was seriously wounded, and then insisted on coming back alone.

Because of the severity of his wounds he was evacuated to Canada to undergo treatment in Toronto, and was discharged as medically unfit. In Toronto he took up his theological studies again at Wycliffe College. In the fall of 1917, severely upset by the death in the battle of Passchendaele of his younger brother (who earlier had followed him as a student of Emmanuel College and who had been commissioned in a British regiment), he managed to re-enlist in the Canadian Army, and then transferred to the British Army to undergo officer training. He was commissioned in the summer of 1918, and joined the Worcestershire Regiment in France, Belgium, and Germany. After the Armistice, Walter Burd resumed his studies at Wycliffe College, graduating in 1920.

On graduation he was appointed General Secretary of the Brotherhood of Saint Andrew, at that time a strong nation-wide Anglican laymen's association, and spent the next two years travelling back and forth across the country and gaining useful contacts and an overview of the work of the Church. In order to work more effectively with the laymen's groups he delayed being ordained. Then in 1922, George Exton Lloyd was consecrated Bishop of Saskatchewan, and attracted the thirty-four-year-old Walter Burd to his Diocese as Rector of Tisdale. He was ordained Deacon in June 1922, and priest later in the year. At the Diocesan Synod in June 1922, Bishop Lloyd is quoted in Archdeacon Payton's history as follows:

... by virtue of his years and experience [the Reverend Walter Burd] could be considered senior to many men who had been ordained for a number of years. Bishop Lloyd referred to him as a fine soldier of the King, a real Christian and an all-round good fellow.

From then on Walter Burd's rise was unusually swift. After four years as Rector of Tisdale where, it is said, 'he endeared himself to his congregations', he was appointed Canon Residentiary of St Alban's Cathedral in Prince Albert. Only three years later, when the division of the Diocese into two Archdeaconries was made, he was appointed Archdeacon of Prince Albert, in charge of the Northern half of the Diocese.

It should be remembered that up until 1933, the Diocese of Saskatchewan was enormous in extent, comprising the present Dioceses of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan, and it was hoped that somehow it could be reduced to a more practicable size. In the middle of the Great Depression this seemed a vain hope. However, God works in mysterious ways: one of the other young men that George Exton Lloyd had fired with enthusiasm on his prewar visit to England was a Cambridge student. But before he could come to Canada, the war intervened, he joined up, and was killed in action. He was the only son of a wealthy widow, who thereafter did what she could to help the work of the Church in the Saskatchewan to which her son had committed himself. Among her many benefactions was one that was truly magnificent. The Anonymous Donor, as she was always known, provided a sum of \$80,000 (close to one million dollars in present day money) for the Bishop Lloyd Memorial Bishopric Fund, an amount that was sufficient to endow the Bishop's Chair for a newly set-up part of the old Diocese.

Thus it became possible for the Diocese of Saskatoon to be formed as the continuing Diocese, with the Right Reverend W. T. T. Hallam as its first Bishop, and an episcopal election to be held for the new northern Diocese of Saskatchewan. At the special Synod in December 1932, Archdeacon Burd was elected on the first ballot. Archdeacon Payton comments in his history:

As indicated by his election as Bishop on the first ballot, Bishop Burd assumed the position of Bishop of the Diocese with the full support of all its members together with their affection . . . His sincerity and devotion, coupled with his experience and administrative capacity, made him an ideal Bishop when the division was completed.

The esteem in which Walter Burd was held by people in all walks of life is perhaps suggested by the Illuminated Address presented to him by the City of Prince Albert on the occasion of his consecration:

To the Right Reverend Walter Burd, holder of
Distinguished Conduct Medal, Doctor of Divinity—
-- Lord Bishop of Saskatchewan --

Right Reverend Sir: -

The Mayor, Aldermen, Officials of the City Hall and Citizens generally extend to you and Mrs Burd our cordial good wishes as you assume the important duties of the high office to which you were elevated yesterday.

The Diocese of Saskatchewan of which you are the newly appointed Bishop, is a Diocese in which the City of Prince Albert has always retained a definite interest seeing that it has been for the most part of the five previous Episcopates the See City. Under the new arrangement, we find ourselves still in the happy position of being the See City and headquarters of your very important Church work.

We congratulate you Sir, on the high honour which your fellow Churchmen so wholeheartedly accorded you when you were elected to assume the leadership of this Northern Diocese. Your duties in this position will be many, arduous, and very important and we pray that strength of mind and body equal to the task may be given you.

Your career in the active ministry of the Church of which you are an honored member, commenced in this City when you were ordained Deacon, in St. Alban's Cathedral, on June 18th, 1922. Since then your work has always been in this Northern Diocese, and for the greater portion of the time, in this City, for we remember that you came here again in the fall of 1926, to assume the post of Canon Residentiary and later, Archdeacon of the same Cathedral. You are therefore no stranger amongst us, and we are proud to number you one of our leading citizens.

We know that from the records of your past service with His Majesty's forces in the Great War, when you earned the much prized decoration of the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and, from what you have accomplished for your Church in Canada, that you will not limit your sphere of activities to any narrow bounds but, that all our people will benefit from the broader outlook of life which your experience brings to this high office.

The Citizens of the See City greet Mrs. Burd and yourself in the name of the Master whom you both serve.
Signed on behalf of the City of Prince Albert, this thirteenth day of March, Nineteen Hundred and Thirty Three.

H. Sibbald Mayor
L. W. Andrews City Clerk

The Bishop started on his new task with characteristic energy and foresight. At the top of his priorities was the whole question of work with the Indians in the Diocese, and one of his very first episcopal acts was to appoint that remarkable Christian, the Reverend Edward Ahenakew, to be a Canon of the Cathedral and General Missionary to the Diocese. He began planning for a two to three month canoe trip that summer to all the Indian northern missions, and set up a wide ranging conference on Indian affairs, to be held immediately after the first Diocesan Synod in June.

He was concerned to give women as full a part as possible in the life of the Church and in its organizations, capitalizing on an earlier initiative by Bishop Lloyd, so that there was no distinction between the sexes in the choice of delegates or members of committees. Another major move on his part was to seek the closest cooperation with other denominations, so that their limited resources were not overstretched by attempting to compete with each other. In cooperation with the United Church he developed a scheme where, instead of centres being served mainly by theological students from both denominations in the summer with their people being left largely to their own devices the rest of the year, full-time clergy were placed in those centres where their denomination was in the majority, but they also looked after their combined flocks with members of the other denomination being accorded full privileges in the running of the local church. At intervals, priests or clergy from the minority denomination would visit their own people to maintain their denominational ties. Very often an Anglican confirmation service would be combined with the reception of United Church members into their own denomination by their own minister.

Another important priority was work with the young people of the Diocese. The Bishop stressed the importance of Confirmation as an important step for older teenagers to take when they were at a stage when they could make a mature commitment to Christ and his Church, he very much encouraged the work of the AYPAs, and last, but not least, continued the work of Camp Okema, which he had helped found, with Diocesan Summer Conferences for young people. He also strongly encouraged the formation of evangelical laymen's groups in parishes and the training of lay readers.

The task ahead of the Bishop and his people was a formidable one. The Diocese of Saskatchewan, in the depths of the Great Depression, was one of the most poverty-stricken dioceses in the country, for the Province of Saskatchewan had the general devastating effects of the Depression severely increased by years of crippling drought, a drought that eventually led tens of thousands of farmers from the south of the Province to migrate north to homestead in the Northern bushland. The Diocese was hard-pressed to minister to all these additional souls, yet throughout, faith in God sustained the clergy and the laity in their efforts. It is salutary to be reminded of the burning faith of the Christians of the time, and the inspiration which they gave to others.

One example illustrates this with compelling clarity. Each Wednesday morning at the Synod Office in Prince Albert, the Bishop, his Archdeacons, the Secretary-Treasurer, all the office staff, and any others who were present, joined in a prayer meeting to thank God for his blessings, and to lay before him the heartbreaking needs which had come to their attention. The Bishop often said, looking back on these meetings, that they provided the clearest evidence of God's loving care for those who trust in Him. The Bishop had a discretionary fund, the Bishop's Box, into which was put any unassigned donations which came into the Diocese. Time and again, with the agreement of the group, the Bishop would send a cheque to meet some desperate need, a cheque which more than drained the account, but in the faith that God would not leave them unprovided. And indeed the money would come in in time to cover the overdraft. Now this in itself may not seem particularly remarkable, for some donations would come into the Diocese throughout the year, but what was astonishing was that not only did the money come in without fail, so that the Bishop's Box never ran dry, but over and over again, far beyond the likelihood of mere coincidence, a donation would arrive, perhaps in the very next mail, which was exactly the amount of the need which had been prayed for.

The Bishop's plans went forward, but, tragically, severe illness prevented him from doing all that he wished. Shortly after he was consecrated in 1933, the Bishop suffered from a massive recurrence of a staphylococcus infection that had originated with his severe wounds in the First World War. While the disease ran a fluctuating course, from then on he was never without pain, he developed various bone infections which required major operations, and a good part of his episcopate was spent either in hospital or convalescing. In November 1937, at a time when he seemed to have made a welcome recovery, his beloved wife was killed in a car accident, the same car accident which broke his reconstructed hip and caused another flare-

up of the infection, which necessitated the amputation of his right leg in the spring of 1938. Yet throughout all this his Christian faith was unwavering, and he looked forward to the future with cheerful courage. His example was often cited as an inspiration for his devoted team of administrators and clergy, and the people of his Diocese.

In the first issue of the camp newspaper of the third annual Diocesan Conference at Camp Okema in 1938, the Editor, the Reverend Thomas Mitchell, wrote: 'It is with no small measure of regret that we mention the unfortunate absence of our Bishop. Many of us had looked forward to his being with us this year, but as he must have more medical attention we must not expect too much. Nevertheless, the fact remains—our Bishop makes all the difference.' Bishop Burd sent one of his characteristic messages to the young people of the camp, and here it is in its entirety:

Prince Albert, June 30, 1938

My dear Young People:

Although I am not able to be with you for your summer conference, yet I wish to give you a word of welcome as your Bishop. I would very much like to be with you and to take part in all your activities, but must be content to follow the doctor's orders so that I can be with you next year. Some are here for the first time, and I give a special welcome to them and tell them, what the rest of you know, that they will get out of the Summer Conference just what they put into it. I hope that you 'old hands' will help the newcomers feel at home, and that all of you will act as if the success of the Conference depended on you.

As I write this in the Prince Albert Hospital, I can hear the cries of two new babies who arrived last night. They are born into the world that you will make for them, and just as the generation ahead of you is largely to blame for the conditions of today, so you have the opportunity to make things better for those who come after you.

So, while I hope you will have lots of fun and fellowship together, I hope also that each one of you will leave the Summer Conference with a greater determination to serve your Master and your fellow men and women. You will find as you get older, that it doesn't matter so much what happens to you in life as how you meet it, and your gathering together, your Bible study, your lectures and devotional periods, will help you face life fearlessly, knowing that there is nothing in this world that can overcome a Christian.

May you have a good time and may God bless you all.

Your friend and Bishop,

Walter Saskatchewan

Thereafter, Walter Burd's health continued to run a fluctuating course, but the intractable infection in the long run made it impossible to look for a satisfactory recovery. In March of 1939 he resigned his office, and retired to Victoria, in British Columbia. The infection got worse, and he died on August 2nd, 1939.

He was buried in Prince Albert, in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, the original church of the diocese, beside his beloved wife, and not far from the grave of Bishop McLean, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Saskatchewan. The simple black granite tombstone reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
WALTER BURD, D.C.M., D.D.
BISHOP OF SASKATCHEWAN
1933-1939

DIED AUGUST 2, 1939

"AFTER HE HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED
HE OBTAINED THE PROMISE"