

----- Through The Years -----

One of the most influential Methodist leaders of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was Charles Cardwell McCabe. He was a preacher, bishop, chaplain, college chancellor and was one who popularized one of the most stirring hymns in the Methodist Hymnal.

McCabe was born in 1836 in Athens, Ohio. His father, Robert, was a tailor. His grandfather, also Robert, was an early class leader in the Methodist movement in the mid-eighteenth century. An inspiring speaker, Charles was made a class leader at age 15. He later went on to Ohio Wesleyan University where he graduated in 1860. He became a high school principal and joined the Ohio Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church all in 1860. That same year he was ordained a deacon and was made an elder in 1862.

After the Civil War broke out, McCabe helped raise a regiment of infantry for the Union Army. He was named chaplain of the 122nd Ohio Infantry in 1862. He was captured by the Confederate Army and sent to Libby Prison in Virginia, a notorious facility known for its inhumane conditions. While in prison, a newspaper was slipped through the bars of his cell. It contained the relatively new song Battle Hymn of the Republic. McCabe liked the song and taught it to his fellow prisoners. He became ill while at the prison and was released to go back to the North. Later, at a meeting of the United States Christian Commission in the U. S. Capitol, he met Abraham Lincoln and sang Battle Hymn of the Republic to him, in his rich baritone voice. Lincoln was so moved by the song that he asked Rev. McCabe to sing it again.

After the war, Rev. McCabe lectured all over the country. His most famous motivational talk was called "The Right Side of Life in Libby Prison" which captivated many. He served as Church Extension Secretary of the U. S. Christian Commission and raised money for the construction of new Methodist churches. The famed agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, declared that churches were "dying out all over the land." Rev. McCabe countered, "Dear Robert, we are building more than one new Methodist church a day and propose to make it two a day." The numbers of causes that Rev. McCabe lent his efforts to are too numerous to mention.

Rev. McCabe was named a Bishop in 1896 at the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Cleveland. Then, in 1902, he was named chancellor of American University in Washington D. C. Bishop McCabe died in 1906 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Chicago. At his funeral the baritone singer, George Iott, sang the Battle Hymn of the Republic. His friend Bishop Earl Cranston said, "Few men have done more to make the world better."

Do you have any MUMC history you would like to share with the congregation? Please send it to:

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