

of a long talk with Burbank in his house at Santa Rosa. His strength was failing—he died a few weeks later—and a young lady valiantly held the door against visitors, but when Burbank heard me give my name he bade her bring me in and we had a long and stimulating talk. In his later years Burbank had moved from ideas of creating new flowers and fruits to the idea of creating a new race by cultivating children. He had found how injuriously the dreams of the churches hindered the work and had said so. He followed my work, he assured me, with complete sympathy.

Back in London I accepted the loan of an apartment in the center of the city from a friend and got ahead with the Blue Books. When I found a quiet little house in a quiet little suburban street I continued to write the books and mail one every week in singular circumstances. For a month I worked as a house-decorator, ending on my knees scrubbing the floors—buying furniture had nearly emptied my treasury—and all the time this irritating and disquieting fuss over an imaginary debt quivered like sheet lightning on the horizon. For a month I was my own cook. In such odd circumstances were written half the Blue Books, and then I secured my admirable housekeeper. For a time, however, I had a new distraction. I had two houses to maintain, no source of income in Britain, no plans in America beyond the Blue Books. But Mr. Haldeman-Julius soon evolved the idea of the "The Key to Culture," and long before I completed the 40 volumes I had a contract for a lecturing tour from coast to coast in Canada.

The One Big Union of Winnipeg, under the lead of one of the finest men I met in Canada, Bob Russell, had invited me some years earlier to lecture one Sunday in Winnipeg, and the lecture had attracted so large a crowd that an educational tour, mainly of lantern lectures on evolution, was arranged. The boat for Halifax was days late, and I sped overland from Newfoundland. I had a week's lecturing in each capital and odd lectures in a few smaller towns in each state two officials of the Union accompanying me; and as my route continued from Vancouver to Seattle and San Francisco, and my work was taken over by an American Labor organization which arranged lectures in Chicago, Buffalo and other centers to New York, I saw another large slice of the globe.

The tour was not a brilliant success. Halls that were too large and unsuitable for speaking were too frequently hired, and towns with little hope of yielding an audience were occasionally selected. We struck one such small town on election night. At the appointed hour there were—in a room for 700 people—two men in the front row and two ladies in the dim distance, the farthest corner of the gallery. We returned their money to the ladies, and my two companions engaged the two men (from an agricultural college) for more than an hour in a story-telling competition which made the air blue. But the tour stands out in my memory for many features. Between Chicago, New Zealand, and other places Rationalists had—shall I say failed to pay me?—sums that total about \$1500. I found the boys of Canada's One Big Union the promptest and most cheerful cashiers I ever encountered, and it was a pleasure to work with them. We had many a merry night after a lecture.

I think that it was on this tour that Dr. Riley, the Fundamentalist leader, challenged me to a few debates. Though his speeches were, as I expected, extremely crude, I was glad to get the opportunity to speak in small Fundamentalist towns, as well as in Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York. In one small town, where the voice of the evolutionist had never been heard before, two men drew me into a quiet corner and told me that they were delegated by the others to thank me and say that they had all been deeply impressed. At another small town about 200 of the audience refused to vote at the close. Riley demanded at the close of each debate that the audience should vote, not on evolution, but

"whether Dr. Riley or Dr. McCabe had won," and I heard that he repeatedly boasted that at every encounter he had "beaten the most famous champion of the evolutionists." On the contrary, while he naturally won by a large majority in the three small towns—I had gone in the hope of addressing a hostile audience—in Chicago he was snowed under, in New York (as I will tell) the vote was overwhelmingly against him, and in his own city, indeed his own parish, of Minneapolis, the vote of the immense audience was so even and so clumsily taken by the Fundamentalist chairman that I disputed it.

But Dr. Riley was entirely conscientious in regard to our business arrangement and, in spite of my hard hitting, courteous and helpful throughout our little tour. Indeed, the profit on the tours arranged by Socialists and Fundamentalists was sufficient to outweigh the defaults and deceptions I had suffered on Rationalist tours. For the first and only time in this pious globe-trotting I was returning home with more than \$1,000; but in view of statements made by my colleagues in London I should add that it was not *much* more, and was less, for a half year's hard labor, than they would earn working five days a week in comfortable offices. Yet even this record was spoiled by Rationalists.

The debate with Riley in New York was not organized by him or the local Fundamentalists. They knew New York. But a Rationalist of, I understood, responsible position, offered us \$100 each and organized the debate on an ambitious scale. Had it been successful he would have made a profit of more than \$1,000. Riley demanded and got his \$100 bill before he set foot on the platform. It was a ghastly failure, and I not only failed to get my fee but lost nearly the same amount in expenses. I had drafted my money to London and I had to borrow \$15 from a comparative stranger, who saw me to the boat, in order to get through, parsimoniously, to London. However, it is the vote that is of interest here. The Fundamentalists had virtually taken over the organization, without any financial responsibility, and had provided three juries: the audience, which voted overwhelmingly for me, a "special jury of New York citizens" (they sat behind the chairman like a crescent of Negro minstrels and were mainly Fundamentalists) who voted for Riley, and a large body of 16-year-old high school pupils who, to Riley's comical disgust, voted by an immense majority for me.

My last apostolic journey was in 1930. It was not with a view to profit and yielded none, but was an educational experiment, a month's lecturing in Dr. L. M. Birkhead's Unitarian Chapel in Kansas City, Mo., arranged by Mr. Haldeman-Julius, and as such was successful. Of the uniform kindness and generosity I encountered it is hardly necessary to speak, but one point may amuse the reader. On my last day in Kansas City I learned, on absolutely reliable evidence, that the city is so liberal in its provision of amenities that you could hire a man, at a certain business office, for \$15 to "bump off" anybody you disliked. I was sad. I had infuriated the local Catholics and they had not thought my life worth \$15. I returned much lowered in my self-esteem, by way of Baltimore, where I had discovered a cousin, and Washington; but I was uplifted a little in spirit to find that for a day, in southern trains, I became a "cunnel."

American readers, for whom this account of me is written, will know enough about the vast work I did for E. Haldeman-Julius in the next 17 years. From my general "Key to Culture" we selected fields for extensive detailed treatment: a study of sex—it is my friend Haldeman-Julius who gave it the title "Key to Love and Sex"—a history of morals from the age of the Pyramids to ours, history of Atheism, a history of the Roman Church, and a biographical history of "The Hundred Men Who Moved the World." Then there were odd volumes, and a new series of booklets on current topics; and for a time I wrote a monthly *Militant Atheist* and contributed to *The American Freeman*. I had almost aban-

done the platform, but I annually visited the Leicester Secular Society which (as earlier described) was my first love and has been close to me in generous friendship through all the vicissitudes of my career. Annually also I made the journey to Glasgow, where the warm-hearted Scottish Rationalists and Secularists always gave me a grand welcome. Other Secular societies, which seemed to resent warmly the conduct of the Right Hon. J. M. Robertson, got visits from me. In London the South Place Ethical Society resumed "diplomatic relations," and I was glad to find myself once more in that fine institution. In 1946 they made me a generous present in recognition of 50 years lecturing for them.

But I had little time for lecturing. I was writing more than half a million words a year for E. Haldeman-Julius and at least a book a year for Bishop Brown until he died in 1937. I was still immersed in this flood of work when, in 1934, a director of the Rationalist Association, Surgeon-Admiral Beadnell who had been my friend for many years, asked if I would entertain the idea of writing again for them. It is another sheer untruth that I returned in sackcloth and ashes to this Association when my American work failed. Few literary men in the world could have been writing as much as I did in 1934 when Beadnell wrote me. But for my own credit I would prove that there was on my side no incurable rancor, and I found time for the work and hoped that new blood in the executive of the Association portended a new spirit.

Americans, who seem to be strangely misinformed (if they seek any information at all) on this point, will care to know the subsequent course of this re-association. I found, and tolerated as well as I could, that although the Association had still no men of either literary or scholarly competence on the staff, the old practice, which is almost unknown in the literary world generally, of embroidering the margins of my proofs with amateur corrections was resumed. Sentences which I wrote in literary English were turned into journalese, and men who knew nothing about the subject of the book corrected my statements. The first important book I wrote for them, "The Splendor of Moorish Spain," based upon the soundest Spanish authorities and my own study of the Arab remains, was described in a scanty and shabby notice by a totally ignorant reviewer (an engineer, I learned) in the organ of the Association as hardly worth crossing a room to read; whereas it was meant to convey to Rationalists the real secret of the restoration of civilization in the Middle Ages. It was a handsome, profusely illustrated book, and it filled a conspicuous gap in British historical literature.

As the older men died off our relations improved a little, but they soon recovered their slightly acid flavor. At the beginning of the war I was invited to write a "Rationalist Encyclopedia" of 450,000 words—still receiving, though the cost of living had doubled, only \$5 per 1,000 words, which at that time would not have been offered for hack work on a suburban paper. But the "correcting" was the last straw. The whole bunch of amateur critics was let loose upon my manuscript—one, it is true, was a self-conscious professor but there were not three pages in 1,000 that touched his subject—and I wearily spent weeks tracking down their inaccurate, often insolent, statements. In short, when I received a copy of their final and peremptory corrections I was able to report that while they had discovered a dozen or so trivial errors—I had not seen proofs or might have detected most of them—they had made many times more mistakes in 50 pages than I had made in 700. I fear this exhibition of bad temper on my part did not sweeten our relations, and the extraordinary clause was now inserted in my contracts that they retained the right to refuse to publish any book I wrote at their request. This clause was soon enforced. My work was "not up to my usual standard." I scented a painfully familiar atmosphere.

I should add that apart from questions of personality the Association had changed its aims in the 20 years. The word Rationalism was always vague—even the Jesuits held that *they* were the true Ration-

alists—and the definition of it as "a claim of the supremacy of reason" did not clarify it. But it had always meant criticism of religion and, for reasons into which I need not enter, this was gradually pushed further and further into the background until it almost disappeared. In the spring of 1946 I was invited to take the chair at a public propagandist meeting organized by the society and addressed by two recruits of the new type, a professor of metaphysics and a professor of mathematics. They both snubbed me most offensively, before the audience, for criticizing the Catholic Church in America—incidentally they told the audience to treat as a joke my statement that there was in America a dangerous agitation for war upon Russia!—and neither mentioned Rationalism in his learned and entirely pointless address.

These matters must be of faint interest to Americans, and I will see myself through this eighth decade of my life. Mr. Haldeman-Julius struggled valiantly against the deepening gloom of the depression, and at this period I spent a long holiday every summer in a friend's chalet in Switzerland. It was during the last of these holidays that I heard that the state of the book-trade in America made it useless to continue to write books and, as Bishop Brown was dead, owing but not leaving me money, I had for four or five years only the small income from my books in England. Almost at once another calamity broke upon me. In prosperous days I had—so it was represented to me—invested nearly \$10,000 in the business of a family which I had known for more than 20 years and regarded as of the highest character. I received only about \$1,500, and so lost nearly half the money I had laboriously saved for my declining years. I lost a further \$6,000 in the general crash of investments and I approached the age of 70, with a gap between my income and expenses of at least \$1,000 a year, and, in spite of the most drastic economy, more capital had to go. But for the loyalty and skill of my housekeeper during those five grim years I doubt if even my stubborn spirit would not have been broken.

In the middle of this period I reached my 70th birthday (1937) and generous American friends, apprised by *The American Freeman*, gave me welcome help, though they had no idea of my circumstances. In England there was a tradition of recognizing the 70th birthday of leading workers of the Rationalist movement, but mine passed without mention. It is ironic that the one greeting that reached me came from a strict Catholic, my sister; and I may add that the only legacy I ever had was a small sum from her modest estate. Shortly after my birthday, however, an old Rationalist friend wrote an indignant letter to the organ of the Rationalist Association, and a small note, immensely overshadowed by an appeal for the journal itself, appeared in that organ intimating that subscriptions for a birthday gift to me would be accepted. I broke a long silence by writing to Mr. C. Watts and cordially thanking him for the proposal. With shame I confessed to him that I was reduced to penury. There were then 4,287 members of the Association. Apart from a generous gift by the directors out of the funds and the contributions of 10 old friends, I received less than \$500. More than 4,000 of the 4,287 members took no notice of the appeal. I was dead.

The reader is by this time probably as weary of hearing of my calamities as I am of writing of them, and I can hardly plead in extenuation that such experiences in these later years help to explain my attitude to life. For by this time I was, to borrow a phrase from Talleyrand, an old umbrella and another shower or two did not make much difference. But this sketch of my career is destined mainly for the eyes of friends and old readers, and they will expect the realism and candor that I have ever preached. I trust, too, that it will prevent any from repeating a question that has so often been put to me: How is it that neither of my sons (both now electrical engineers in good positions) has emulated my zeal to help folk to right thinking? No reader of this narrative is likely to ask me that question.



Came the war and the new pulsing of wealth in the veins of America; and E. Haldeman-Julius began again to sparkle with ideas of books and send them along to me. In the last five years, between the ages of 75 and 80, I must have written between two and three million words for his press. And it has been a sheer pleasure. An American literary monthly said a few years ago that there were only two writers, Clarence Darrow and McCabe, who ever stood firm with Mr. Haldeman-Julius and compelled him to accept their terms. I know nothing about his business relations with Darrow but the statement was moonshine in so far as it concerned me. On that happy night in Girard 22 years ago he offered me a rate of payment which I thought adequate and at once accepted, and from that day to this we have never discussed terms. So I wrote to the monthly to which I have referred and the editor honestly inserted my correction. I have never asked a high fee of anybody for any of my services.

I am content with life. Many a time during the London blitz, when my work flowed on as usual, I sat by my fire reading, as I always do from 9 o'clock to 12 or 12:30, a detective or a Western story while the ominous throb of a German plane drew nearer and the whine and the thud, thud, thud of explosive bombs punctuated its approach. I continued to read and even smiled a little. Sometimes I let the book sink for a moment and said to myself: It was a long life, a good life. and if this is the end I have no complaint. One night a plane, scurrying home and dropping its load of incendiary bombs rapidly as it fled, crossed directly over my house. A bomb, fortunately of the lighter type, fell on the roof of my house and bounced into the street, and I went out in my slippers, pipe in mouth, put my sandbag on the blaze, and returned to my novel. One Sunday, near the end, I was writing as usual when a rocket-bomb fell a few hundred yards away. I did not know until the afternoon. I had learned to protect my work with the same film of indifference to thuds and blasts and crashes as to the cries of babies and the chatter of their mothers in the street. One night, returning from a lecture in the provinces, I had to walk five miles home through streets that were lit only by the blaze of the guns and by burning houses, between midnight and 2 in the morning; and almost every pub I passed had defiantly extended its hours—the law closes them at 11 on Sundays—and had a boozy chorus of 50 to 100 men chanting the latest indelicate songs to the hellish orchestration of the guns and the giant drum-beats of the bombs. I joined them in one. Many pubs were struck, and the choir was transferred to the angelic halls.

I had foretold the war. American readers will not at once put me in the class of Churchill and others who "warned the nation." Churchill never foretold the war, and the way in which he has bluffed both Britain and America into believing that he warned Britain and then led it to victory is part of that systematic deception of our age that explains most of its tragedy. Churchill was as pitifully duped by Mussolini as the British statesmen and aristocracy were by Ribbentrop's assurances that the Nazis meant only to extinguish Socialism. He, in the one medium available to him in those days, the *London Standard*, assured Britain to the end that with such staunch allies as Italy and France it need fear nothing. Mussolini and Petain led him by the nose; and it was from no coincidence that he was "painting the Italian lakes" when his letters to Mussolini were being hawked in that district. My own peremptory warning of the coming war, even of its European extent, was published in 1937, in my "History of the World Since 1918" (p. 122); and I equally foretold the tragic failure of the peace. As early as October 31, 1943, I spoke in London (South Place Ethical Society) on "The Shadow of the Coming Peace." My audience was one of the most intellectual in London, and probably not one person in it agreed with me; and I have already told how when in the spring of 1946, speaking to a Rationalist audience

in the same hall, I warned them of the more horrible atomic-bomb war that was threatening, and professors and daudience mocked me.

I might be pardoned if I had sulked in my tent or bitterly told the world to go to hell its own way. Under the strain, not so much the tragedies that befell as the spectacle of the supineness of most folk and the wilfulness of their guides, my friend, H. G. Wells, with whom I had become intimate, broke down and declared the malady of the race incurable. It is safe to prophesy about events that you will not live to see, and it is rather in order to give the reader some understanding of the mood in which I pass my remaining years that I make this act of faith, or this one more forecast that is a reasoned deduction from realities; that within 10 years the mass of the people of the leading nations of the earth will realize how they have been deceived by their political orators, their press, and their radio-sophists and will force life into a path, lit by science, in which there will be such progress as the world never witnessed before. It is horribly possible that within the next year or two America will be persuaded by the vile conspiracy of its industrialists, bankers, and religious leaders to embark upon that terrible enterprise which they call a preventive war, and that the retaliation of Russia will be so ruthless that the two greatest civilizations will be reduced to an impotent existence in fields of ruins. But it is sheer nonsense to say that even that would mean the end of civilization.

So I continue, as placidly and confidently as I did 40 years ago, to use whatever opportunity I get to open the eyes of men to reality—to all reality. For 20 or 30 years I have called myself an Atheist. A growing impatience of hypocrisy moved me one day to inquire what this elegant word "Agnostic" and the despised word "Atheist" really meant, and to my surprise I found that, according to the Oxford Dictionary and all the leading authorities, I and all those colleagues of mine who called ourselves Agnostics were in fact Atheists. For America, Funk and Wagnalls' Dictionary is surely authoritative, and it approvingly quotes these words of Dr. Flint, a standard religious writer:

"What is called positive or dogmatic Atheism is so far from being the only kind that it is the rarest of all kinds. Every man is an Atheist who does not believe in God."

Few have had more experience in these matters than I, yet I never met an Atheist who thought it necessary to "deny the existence of God." It is the Agnostic, who is so apt to think it superficial, blatant, or in bad taste to call himself an Atheist, that checks himself with the wrong label. Huxley's real aim in coining the name Agnostic was respectability, but at least he had the support of the Humean philosophy. In 99 cases out of 100 the modern who calls himself an Agnostic has not.

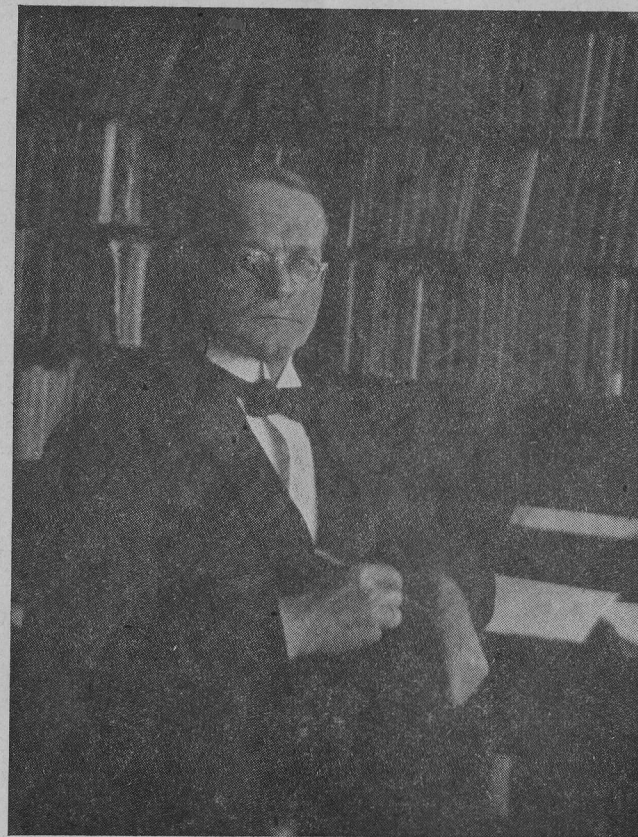
But Atheism is not "merely a negation" or a negative frame of mind. It is just the negative aspect to a theologian of a large and positive creed; and to say that I devoted my life to Atheism would be as stupid as to say that a Socialist devoted his life to a mere negation—the denial of the virtue of individualism. All the learning that I have packed into 65 years of study is part of my creed. It is atheistic and materialistic but both these are just negative aspects of it. Some call it Naturalism and some Humanism, but too much vagueness and timidity shelter under those banners. There is no need of a label. I have said how having followed the course of evolution from the condensation of nebulae into globes, the advance of life from mud flats in the primitive sea to the appearance of that degree of intelligence which we call civilization, I endeavored to apply the same realistic and entirely candid method to our social, political, and economic problems. I have given my name to all sorts of reforming organizations, though most of them quietly cut it out when they became prosperous and respectable and I became less and less respectable in my labels. From the first year when I looked with a scientific eye at the problems of today I became convinced that

a collectivist or Socialist organization alone would enable us, now that science has so wonderfully fertilized production, to avoid over-production, depression, and unemployment and to utilize to the full the resources of modern science.

Why I have never belonged to any political or economic society I have explained. *Enfant terrible* to the end, let me give away one more little secret. On the eve of one of my Australian trips a few men who, they told me, represented a Labor organization asked me if I were willing to be nominated candidate for the parliamentary representation of a South London borough. I had to sail next day and asked time to consider; but when I returned, ready to accept, I heard no more about it—except a whispered explanation that MacDonald and Snowden and the other Areopagites had shuddered at the proposal to adopt an ex-priest and Atheist. And when I see today how lamentably their successors are betraying the hopes of Socialism by their blunders and compromises I thank whatever gods there be that my steps were diverted from the broad road that leads to—honors.

I go on, cheerfully, with the work which, as a new citizen of the planet, I took up 50 years ago: to refute and pour irony upon all lies and hypocrisies, to denounce all cruelties and injustices, to give to such part of the world as I can reach all truths and facts that may help them in charting their lives. I have had a grand time in spite of all the malice, meanness, and ingratitude; and the last hour of the day is not marred by any of the weariness that usually punishes the octogenarian, for lingering so long on this planet. I am never tired, and I have forgotten what a headache is. A few months ago a policeman held me up, in the public street, and, to my amused inquiries he gave the still more amusing explanation that I corresponded to the description of a burglar who was operating in the district, "an athletic looking man of about 65." I have no desire for a long life if it means the usual penalty of a tired brain, nor do I ever concern myself nervously about health. To work cheerfully every day, to eat temperately, and to spare an hour or an hour and a half each day for a brisk walk—I live on the fringe of the great city—are the only secrets of my medicine chest. I rarely visit or receive visitors, not from churlishness but quiet taste, and this summer I have taken my first vacation in seven or eight years.

But I work with one ear lazily open for the tinkle of the camel-bell that heralds the approach of the caravan of death. I neither seek relief in sleep, as I have seen so many of my generation do, nor do I fret or repine at the thought that the pen must soon drop from my nerveless fingers and the dear sunlight must fade. How I have always loved sunlight! Perhaps I shall survive this new phase of stringency and privation, which I now share with all the honest folk of my land; though for me it is bountifully tempered by the generosity of friends across the ocean. Perhaps a time will come again when I can sip wine or beer instead water when I sit with my pipe and novel over the fire for the last and best three hours of the day. Perhaps not . . . Kismet. Life has been too good for me to complain that it cannot run forever. I neither, with Whitman, talk of "Sweet Sister Death," nor shall I murmur, with Beethoven, that "the comedy is over." To me, the devout harvester of facts, death will be just the last fact.



JOSEPH MCCABE, AT WORK IN HIS HOME LIBRARY





JOSEPH McCABE, AT 35 YEARS  
OF AGE



JOSEPH McCABE, AT BRISBANE,  
AUSTRALIA, IN 1920



JOSEPH McCABE, AT 40 YEARS OF AGE

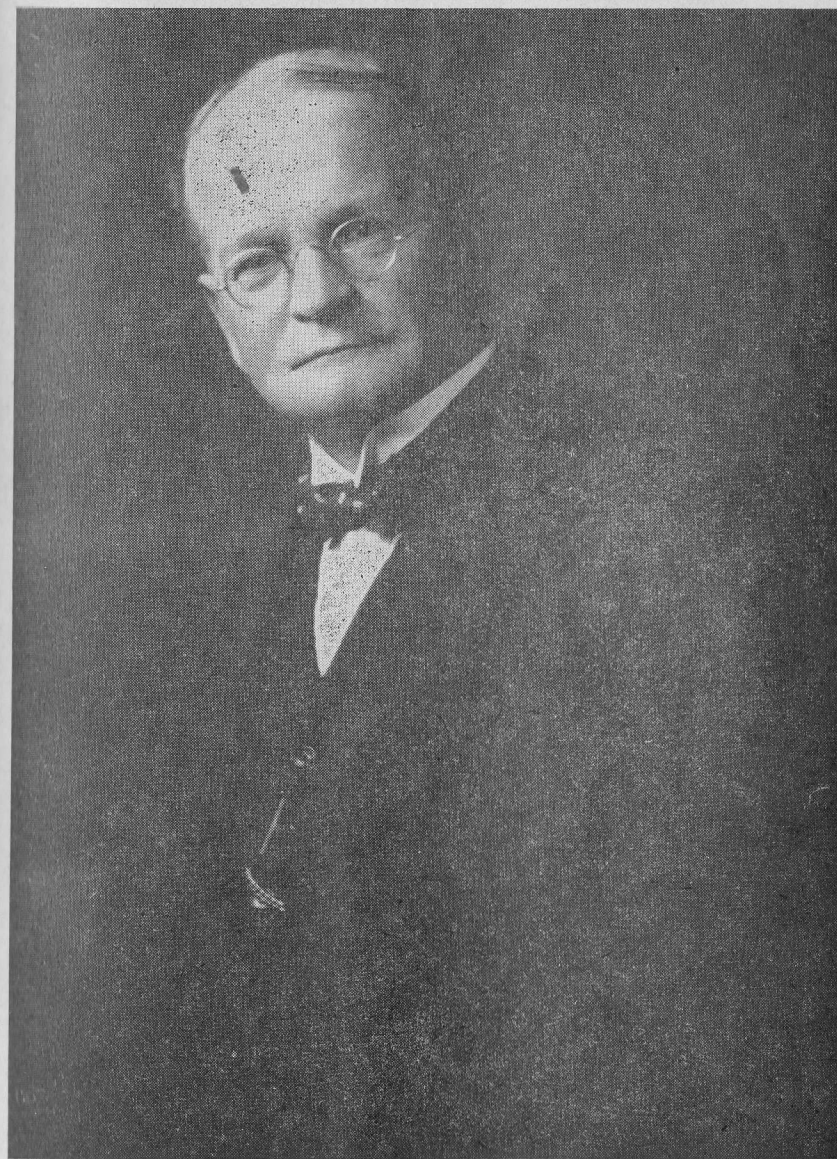


JOSEPH McCABE AGE 75



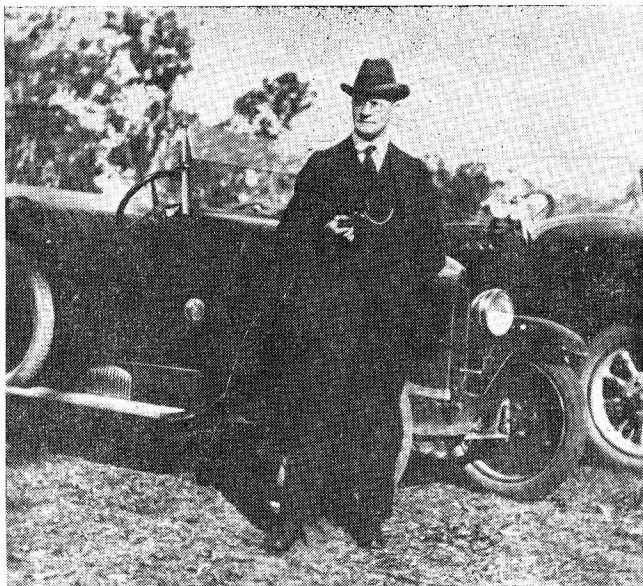


JOSEPH McCABE (1910 AUSTRALIA)



JOSEPH McCABE, AT 60 YEARS OF AGE





JOSEPH McCABE, AT THE TOP OF A QUEENSLAND MOUNTAIN



IN THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH, IN 1920  
(JOSEPH McCABE IS THE FIRST ON THE RIGHT)