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This distinguished theologian was called from this life in May of the present year. Known as he was to the readers of this Journal by his contributions to its pages, as well as by his other published works, and also by his long career as a teacher, it is proper that we attempt some estimate of his life and work. This is the more desirable because the most of the published notices have been inadequate. The event which brought Dr. Briggs into the public eye was a trial for heresy, and the newspapers in announcing his death naturally called attention to this fact, and revived the judgments passed at the time when the trial took place. But a judgment based on a heresy trial is almost unavoidably one-sided. In such a trial *ex parte* statements clamor for the public ear. The accused is pictured on the one hand as a reckless innovator who would undermine the faith of the church; on the other side he is declared to be a courageous reformer who desires only to eradicate antiquated errors and introduce a new era of enlightenment and progress. Neither the party leaders nor the public which is solicited to take sides in the controversy discovers the real man with whom they are dealing. Him we shall try to reveal.

Whatever else he was, Dr. Briggs was a man of positive convictions, and he was always perfectly frank in stating those convictions. Thorough in the investigation of the grounds for an

opinion, when he once satisfied himself of the truth he embraced it with his whole heart. What he could not understand was the levity of those who defended their alleged faith with superficial reasons. The strength of the expressions which he used in characterizing such levity sometimes obscured the fact that he was a man of great sweetness of disposition and of great modesty in his estimate of himself. These qualities were most clearly revealed in the home, and friends who were privileged to enter that circle were charmed by the perfect harmony which reigned there. Complete affection, conjugal, parental, and filial, bound all the members together. To say more than this would be to violate the sanctities which are now more than ever precious to the memory. But the sweetness of disposition and modesty of bearing were equally manifest in a larger circle made up of colleagues and personal friends. The volume published in his honor on his seventieth birthday commemorates the impression made upon these friends, many of whom were his pupils. It speaks of "the stimulus of his untiring energy, his patient research, his fearlessness in proclaiming truth, his warm personal sympathy and his quick response to every demand made upon his stores of knowledge and the treasures—often unsuspected—of his warm and valiant heart."

More convincing testimony it would be hard to find. And it should be added that difference of opinion made no difference in the friendship. That differences of opinion must exist where there is positiveness of conviction is obvious. In case such differences came under discussion Dr. Briggs debated with warmth but with no personal feeling. In the perplexities of his trial he was always ready to listen to the advice of friends, and would waive his own preference out of deference to theirs. Where principle was involved he never wavered, but short of that he was always ready to yield. The gentleness, modesty, and patience of the man were especially remarkable when during his trial he was made the object of bitter attack and of almost ludicrous misrepresentation. His bearing at that time will always remain indelibly fixed in the memory of those who most closely observed him.

These personal qualities were rooted in an unusually deep and earnest piety. His friends knew that he lived in the presence of

God. Evidence of this is given by the fortitude with which he bore himself, not only during his trial, but after his condemnation by the highest court of his church. The amount of suffering which this condemnation involved is very slightly appreciated by the average American Christian. The fact that Union Seminary stood by the accused professor and retained him in his chair made many esteem suspension from the ministry a comparatively slight matter. To think thus is thoroughly to misunderstand Dr. Briggs. Let us say at once that in the best sense of the word our friend was a high-churchman. He believed in the church as a divine institution founded by Christ himself. This belief he held concerning all the more closely organized denominations, holding that all are parts of the true universal church, and that all possess valid ordinances and effective sacraments. This church (existing in all these separate denominations) is the divinely commissioned instrument for the salvation of men by the preaching of the Word, and by the administration of the sacraments. The importance of ordination is that it makes the minister the organ by which these means of grace are brought to sinful men. In all this Dr. Briggs was in fullest accord with the doctrine professed by the churches themselves. The standards of the Presbyterian church formulate this view with all desirable distinctness. The logical conclusion drawn by the standards of the church, and heartily embraced by Dr. Briggs, is that in the rite of ordination the church is acting for Christ. Its work is ministerial and declarative; the act of the ordaining officer (bishop or presbytery as the case may be) is the act of Christ himself.

To the average American Christian this view of the church and its rites is obscured by the current theory of our civil law which treats churches as voluntary associations, in the same class with musical clubs or secret orders. It requires an effort of the imagination to appreciate the historic view of the churches as to their divine origin and mission. But if we make the effort of imagination and realize what ordination meant to Dr. Briggs we shall appreciate the suffering involved in his suspension from the ministry. First of all he experienced a holy joy at his ordination. The act of presbytery was to him the solemn declaration of his

Master that he had called him to the highest service that any man can render to God and humanity—the nourishment of the believer's higher life by the preaching of the Word and by the orderly administration of the sacraments. But in proportion to his joy in receiving the divine commission must be the pain when a church judicatory deprived him of the privilege.

No doubt the members of the court which pronounced judgment on the charges would say (if they reflected on the matter at all) that as the act of the presbytery in ordination was the act of Christ so was the act of the assembly which inflicted the penalty of suspension. But this is just the point at which the individual conscience asserts itself. It is not claimed by the Presbyterian church that the acts of her assemblies are infallible, and in fact the church expressly declares that synods and councils may err. This leaves the way open for the right of private judgment, and Dr. Briggs was qualified to exercise this right by his profound knowledge of the doctrine and law of the church. Carefully reviewing the case, he was compelled to think that he had been unjustly condemned. It could hardly escape even the superficial observer that the court applied a test (the inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture) which is not contained in the Confession, which had never been imposed as a test of ordination, which had never been used as a standard in heresy trials, and as it turned out has been used but once since this case was tried. The mental suffering of the accused was therefore aggravated by the thought that the penalty was unjust. It was further aggravated by the thought that the whole procedure of the assembly in taking jurisdiction of the case was irregular. My only interest in reviewing these matters is to show that fortitude in suffering was nobly exemplified by our friend. The suffering came from the thought that the church to whose service he had devoted himself had proved false to itself. Yet without complaining, without denunciation, without violence of word or deed, Dr. Briggs quietly submitted to the sentence, went on with his work as a teacher, and waited for the church to come to a better mind. Only when some years of waiting showed that the better state of mind was not coming did he seek the privilege of ministering in another historic church.

The high-churchman is distressed by the unhappy divisions of Christendom. The many separate bodies which claim the name of church of Christ are a reproach to the faith and a contradiction to the ideal which he cherishes. All of us will agree that there ought to be one undivided body of Christ "holding the unity of the faith in righteousness of life." This adds an element of bitterness to such an event as a heresy trial, because by such a trial the forces which work for schism are thrown into strong relief. One of Dr. Briggs's most ardent desires was for the unity of Christendom, and for this he both worked and prayed. Now the action of the assembly seemed to put any possibility of reunion into the remote future, for it must be evident that the imposition of a narrow and petty test of orthodoxy—what we might call the fad of a temporary majority—is a divisive force. If the churches ever come together it must be on the ground of a simple creed embracing only the most fundamental beliefs. If each denomination insists on minute conformity to its theological thinking the breach between the various sections of Christianity will perpetually grow wider. This aspect of the heresy trial gave added pain to the man who daily repeated the Master's prayer that all his disciples may be one with the oneness of the Godhead.

The deep and unaffected piety of which I have spoken and the high-churchmanship went together. That is to say, Dr. Briggs's spiritual life was nourished by the ordinances of the church, and by the thought-forms in which the tradition of the church has crystallized itself. As we very well know, this is not always the case. The Quaker finds the inner light sufficient and can dispense with external sacraments. Many pious people in our own day find the official creeds of their church a hindrance to piety rather than a stimulus. In other words it is becoming increasingly clear that the Spirit of God works when and where and how he pleases. We have now to do with the man ecclesiastically minded, one who finds that the way of salvation is intrusted to the visible church outside of which (according to the Presbyterian standards) there is no ordinary means of salvation. Dr. Briggs's piety was in closest connection with historic Christianity in its organized form, either Presbyterian or Episcopal. The deep and thorough

consecration which he made of himself in his early manhood was a consecration to Christ and his church, we might say to Christ in his church. His wide erudition, the admiration of friends and foes alike, was acquired in order to serve that great historic institution, and the marvelous intellectual activity which scarcely knew a break in fifty years of study and teaching, all centered about organized Christianity.

That Dr. Briggs could ever be taken for a radical or an innovator seems little less than ludicrous. In the best sense of the word he was a conservative. His latest books show this most clearly, but they only bring into plain view what he always thought. In his early manhood he had thoroughly examined the grounds of his faith and settled that faith so firmly that he had no need to change. The disharmony between the heart and the intellect which we sometimes mark in theological thinkers never made itself felt in his experience. His heart and his intellect both were satisfied by the great historic creeds held by the orthodox churches. Probably no one of the ministers and elders who sat in judgment on him was so thoroughly in accord with the great theological teachers of past centuries as was the man whom they suspended from the ministry. An impartial observer would have the right to pronounce the trial not only a crime but a blunder. Had the conservatives but realized it, they had in the man whom they were accusing an able and earnest defender of the faith which they professed to hold dear. The accused man was much better qualified to sit in judgment than those who arrogated to themselves the title "Court of Jesus Christ." It would hardly be too much to say that, judged by the historic faith of the church, Dr. Briggs was the last of the line of orthodox theologians. That the conservative party has not discovered this and realized what a loss their church suffered is one of the strangest facts of our time.

The extent of Dr. Briggs's erudition is indicated, though imperfectly, by the titles of his published works, and by the variety of subjects on which he lectured during his professorship. He was equally at home in exegesis, in biblical theology, in church history, and in the comparative study of the creeds. At no time was his work simply critical and destructive. He desired to magnify his

office as a teacher by building up the faith of the church. Even the address on "The Authority of Holy Scripture," which was made the ground of attack on him, was a defense of the Scriptures instead of an attempt to minimize their importance. Coming into the ministry a short time before the reunion of the two branches of the Presbyterian church he desired to promote unity by instructing the reunited church in the historic sense of its own standards. To his mind the issues which had divided Old School and New School were of minor importance, but he knew that both branches had neglected important doctrines of their own system. This he set forth in the book entitled *Whither?* which pointed out these defects. At the same time he would not have such questions settled by ecclesiastical process, but by calm and scholarly discussion. The founding of the *Presbyterian Review*, in which as in the conduct of it he was specially active, was intended to promote just this sort of discussion, and so to bring the church to a better knowledge of the great Evangelical and Presbyterian tradition.

That there must be progress in theology he very well knew. Fully acquainted with the critical method as applied to the Bible he saw that the church must adjust herself to the results of that method. But to his mind this did not mean anything revolutionary, for he found that the theology of the Westminster divines was more in accordance with the facts of Scripture than was the more rigid theory of inspiration advocated by some American teachers. John Owen indeed held the more rigid theory, and his attack on Walton's *Polyglott* showed that his theory was as inimical to textual criticism as it was to literary criticism. Liberty had been secured for textual criticism because the facts were too plain to be denied even by the most conservative. This was shown most strikingly in our own time when the defenders of inerrancy were compelled to locate the alleged inerrancy in the "autographs" instead of in the present text. To a man as well informed as Dr. Briggs the facts brought out by the higher criticism were equally telling. Hence his books on the study of Holy Scripture and on the higher criticism of the Hexateuch. These books are a demonstration that a man may be thoroughly acquainted with modern biblical scholarship and heartily accept its results, and yet

retain the orthodox belief as formulated in the great creeds of Christendom. Any negative or agnostic deduction, such as some critical scholars feel compelled to make, had no place in his thinking. Even the reserve with which some of us who stood with him feel concerning the forms of antique thought which are contained in the creeds was foreign to his mind. He was in earnest in contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The incomplete bibliography of Dr. Briggs's works published in 1911 shows about two hundred titles. When we reflect that during the years when these books and essays were written the author was actively engaged in teaching, that during a considerable part of the time he was editor of an important theological review, that he was frequently called upon for lectures and addresses outside the classroom, that he was compelled to take part in various ecclesiastical bodies, we get some conception of the tireless activity of the man. In fact his power of concentration was unusual and his application was constant. This intellectual activity was more like that of the late President Harper than that of anyone with whom I am acquainted. It made him the admiration and the despair of his friends. The thoroughness of his work will be realized when we note such a fact as this: in preparing his commentary on the Psalms he elaborated a complete critical text of the book. The amount of labor he gave to the biblico-theological articles for the Oxford *Hebrew Lexicon* can be appreciated only by one who has attempted the same sort of work.

We have already noticed his attitude toward the so-called higher criticism. His interest in this department of study is indicated by the fact that about half the titles in the list of his works are concerned with the Scriptures. This indicates the thing most significant in his career. It was his good fortune to introduce modern methods of biblical study to American theologians. His first published article (except a translation from the German) was entitled "Biblical Theology." This was published in the *American Theological Review* just after he had entered his professorship (1870). The title of the article was significant of the new attitude toward the Bible, but the church paid no heed, and the review in which the essay was published soon ceased to appear. The reunited



church was for the moment resting in the belief that controversy was over and that, doctrine being settled, it could give itself wholly to practical work. Dr. Briggs at any rate was under no illusion, although ten years passed before the attention of the church was aroused. During these years he was carrying on his work as teacher, and under the lead of his elder colleague, Dr. Schaff, was translating and enriching commentaries from German sources. Then came the founding of the *Presbyterian Review* in which as has been said he was active from the start. In the first volume (1880) he published a discussion of the Robertson Smith case. To the next volume he contributed an elaborate article entitled "Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration," and the following year gave us an article on "Biblical Theology." In 1883 came "A Critical Study of the History of the Higher Criticism with Special Reference to the Pentateuch."

This is not the whole story. These articles were part of a series contributed by various scholars and designed to lay before ministers and thoughtful laymen the facts concerning the modern attitude toward the Bible. Both conservatives and progressives were represented and the significance of the series was that it claimed the right within the Presbyterian church to discuss questions of criticism unhampered by dogmatic considerations. How revolutionary the discussion appeared to many minds is shown by the attitude of the so-called religious press, and by the ecclesiastical agitation which followed, culminating in judicial process. It is scarcely necessary to remark here that the final effect was to secure the independence of criticism as a legitimate science, and to free exegesis from subservience to dogmatics. The credit of this advance belongs in large measure to Dr. Briggs.

Next in importance to this work of introducing the critical and historical study of the Scriptures to the American churches, and in line with it, was the enlightened planning of the two series known as the *International Critical Commentary*, and the *International Theological Library*. It would be too much to say that at the time when they were projected English-speaking theologians had ceased to produce original work. But there was undue dependence on German scholarship. And this was a one-sided dependence.

The prejudice against German rationalism led to the ignoring of much important work done in that country of specialists. The elaborate *Foreign Theological Library* of T. & T. Clark, for example, avowedly embodied the works of conservative scholars only. Professor Briggs and his coeditors felt that the time had come for English and American theologians to undertake more independent work or, where they were doing such work, to make it more widely known in their own world. Hence the plan of the two Libraries which have measurably fulfilled the design of the editors. The breadth and comprehensiveness of the scheme will be realized by anyone who reads the prospectus. It is safe to say that without the suggestion and encouragement of Dr. Briggs the greater part of the American contributions to the series would never have appeared. He was the one who took the initiative, and others followed his lead. The catholicity of the editors is seen when we notice the number of denominations to which the contributors belong, and the considerable difference of views which they express. The whole series is a testimony to the belief of those who planned it, that freedom of discussion is the very life-breath of scholarship, without which progress is impossible in theology as in all the sciences. Of the value of Dr. Briggs's own contributions to biblical scholarship it is unnecessary to speak at length. The Hebrew lexicon for which he prepared many important articles is an indispensable help to him who would read the Old Testament in the original; his *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* has opened the eyes of several generations of students to the nature of the Bible and the task of its expositor; his *Commentary on the Psalms* is the most exhaustive that we have in English, perhaps the most thorough that exists in any language; his *Messianic Prophecy* gives a historical view of a subject on which erroneous views have long been held by professed theologians. Nowhere else had English readers found that which the title of this work well describes as: "A Critical Study of the Messianic Passages of the Old Testament in the Order of Their Development." The eight editions through which his book has passed show that it met a felt want. I have no desire to intimate that this book or any of the others is final. Dr. Briggs himself would be the first

to repudiate the idea that this or any book could be final. It is enough to say of any book that it has nobly served the generation for which it was written.

Passing over Dr. Briggs's contributions to church history, the value of which is universally recognized, let me speak briefly of one book which roused some discussion at the time when it was published and which was made the basis for part of the indictment brought against the author. This is: *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason; the Three Great Fountains of Authority*, published in 1892. The purpose of the book is sufficiently indicated by its title. It is directed against the exaggerated claim often formulated in the words: The Bible alone is the religion of Protestants. Two considerations probably led the author to his defense of the three fountains of authority. First of all, history shows that the three factors have always been concerned in determining the creed of the church. The creed, however strictly it professes to be based on Scripture, is the expression of the faith actually held by the church. Moreover, the creeds have arisen from the application of the human reason to the data given in Scripture and in Christian experience. There is a great difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene profession of faith. How has this come about? Evidently by a process of reasoning. The three fountains have actually co-operated therefore in giving the church its standards of belief. To this must be added the second fact, namely that the insistence on Scripture alone as the fountain of authority has brought about the divisions in the church which we regard with so much misgiving. Every one of the Protestant churches asserts its belief in the Bible as the infallible rule of faith yet each has a different system of doctrine. This divisive effect of the Protestant principle is well known to the historian for he sees that the times when the verbal infallibility of the Bible was most strongly insisted upon were the times when the various churches were indulging the bitterest polemic, not only Protestant against Catholic, but one Protestant denomination against another. One who searches for a basis of unity therefore must look for something more than the Bible alone.

This I think was the decisive consideration with Dr. Briggs.

As a good historian he allowed weight to the facts just stated, but his heart was drawn toward the unity of Christendom, desiring above all else that the communities which bear the Christian name should become one great organization, one body of Christ, one army marching against the forces of evil and bringing the thoughts of men into obedience to the one Lord. If such an organization ever comes into existence it cannot take the Protestant position that the Bible alone is the source of authority, but must recognize that Christ still speaks through his living ministers, and that he speaks in the sanctified reason, the God-given organ of intelligence. It was therefore an ardent desire for the unity of Christendom which animated this book. And this same desire called forth those later publications which have brought the author's real conservatism more distinctly into view. These are: *The Incarnation of the Lord* (1902), and *The Fundamental Christian Faith*, which came from the press just before his death. The statement in the preface of this last-named work may be cited here as his message to the churches on the subject of unity. After speaking of the reactionary and the radical tendencies of our times he goes on to say:

There is also the wholesome irenic tendency which seeks to reunite the separated churches on the basis of the fundamental principles of historic Christianity, without intruding upon denominational preferences or private opinion in other matters. These principles of faith are to be found in the ancient creeds, the official expression of the faith of the ancient church, to which all churches which are legitimate descendants of historical Christianity adhere.

It is not the purpose of this paper to enter upon a discussion of a host of questions which are suggested by such a statement as this. All I have tried to do is to present a just estimate of the man whose ardent desire inspired these words, and whom I was privileged to call my friend. Having served his generation by the will of God he has now fallen asleep, leaving us not only his written words as a rich legacy, but as a richer inheritance the memory of his courage, his patience, his warm sympathy, and his loyalty to the great Head of the church, whose he was and whom he served.