

# The Canadian Evangelist.

"GO . . . SPEAK . . . TO THE PEOPLE ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE."

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## THE Canadian Evangelist

Is devoted to the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ, and pleads for the union of all believers in the Lord Jesus in harmony with His own prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, and on the basis set forth by the Apostle Paul in the following terms: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."—Eph. iv. 1-6.

### An Evening With Prof. Briggs.

During my recent visit to Ann Arbor I had the unexpected pleasure of spending a good part of two days in company with the distinguished Professor of Biblical Theology in Union Theological Seminary—Dr. Charles A. Briggs. He had an appointment to lecture at Ann Arbor on Tuesday evening, but on returning from a southern tour he arrived on Monday afternoon, and we were guests together until Wednesday morning following at the residence of Bro. C. A. Young, who for a time was a student in Union, and was personally acquainted with the professor. On Monday evening, while Bro. Young was engaged with his duties, I spent several hours alone with him, and had an opportunity of drawing him out on many of the questions of the day. Some of my impressions concerning him, and some of his sayings, will not prove uninteresting to the readers of the *Christian Evangelist*.

Prof. Briggs is a man of medium size, and has just passed his fifty-second birthday. His whiskers are quite gray, but his hair less so. He has good health, eats heartily, and is evidently capable of doing a great deal of work. He is of a nervous, sanguine temperament, and while talking frequently works off surplus energy by the tapping of his foot or his hand. He has a benevolent looking face, and a very pleasant voice, not unlike that of the late Isaac Errett, of whom he reminded me in some of his mannerisms. He has the manners of a cultivated gentleman, and the habits of the scholar. He converses with great freedom on all matters relating to his alleged heterodoxy, and, as any one knows who has read after him, is a man of very positive convictions. He has enjoyed the best advantages which this country and Europe offer in theological studies, having had, as he said, the best teachers in the world, including such men as Henry B. Smith and Boswell Hitchcock in this country, and Dörner and others of like fame in Germany. In historical studies relating to the Westminster Confession and other creeds of Christendom, he is probably without a peer. It is this fact which makes him a most formidable

antagonist in the struggle now going on in the Presbyterian Church. He has been a student and teacher of Biblical theology for twenty years, he says, though of course he has only entered that chair recently. With all these advantages, however, he makes no pretense of having mastered all Biblical questions. In answer to some of my inquiries he would say, frankly, "I have not made up my mind on that question," or, "I have not fully thought that out." Without attempting to report him with verbal exactness, or to follow the exact order of our conversation, I may give the substance of some of his statements, gathered from the evening's interview and from other conversations.

On my referring to the fact that his teaching had produced some consternation in other religious camps than his own, he replied that he was aware of that fact, regretted it, but that he saw no help for it; that every advance in Biblical knowledge had been accompanied by similar alarm among extreme conservatives and traditionalists. "Are you aware, professor," I asked, "that you are represented by some of your own brethren in the ministry, and by other good people, as teaching the errancy of the Holy Scriptures in matters of faith and practice, as well as in the minor matters of chronology, historical and scientific references, etc.?" "Why don't they read?" was his comment. "No one," he added, "holds with greater tenacity than I do the infallibility of the Scriptures in all that pertains to faith and salvation." "But," I said, "there are those who contend that while you are able to make this discrimination and maintain your faith in the authority of the Scriptures, the tendency of your teaching is to undermine the faith of others, and particularly of the young." "The best proof that such is not the case," he replied, "is the fact that of the 2,500 students I have taught in Union, not one, so far as I have heard, was ever led to distrust the Scriptures, while very many have told me that my teaching had saved to them their faith in the Scriptures."

Reference having been made to the waning power of creeds, he said, "Yes, but I do not object to creeds; I am not attacked on that score. I stand by the Westminster Confession in its original and historical meaning; the contest, so far as I am concerned, is between Princeton theology and that of the Westminster divines." When it was said in reply to this that the objectionable feature of creeds, from our point of view, was the requiring of others to subscribe to them as tests of fellowship, he answered: "Well, on that point, I am coming to the position of your people; I seriously doubt our right to require of others subscription to these formulations of doctrine."

The matter of his inaugural address coming up, I told him I was among those who understood him in that address to teach that the Bible, the Church and Reason, were three co-ordinate sources of authority, and that while I had read his denial of this interpretation I was not sure I fully understood him as to the sense in which he made Reason and the Church sources

of authority. This led him into an elaborate explanation of his meaning, which I cannot give here in full. It is only fair, however, to say that his explanation removes most of the objections which have been urged against that position. In the term Reason, he includes conscience and the religious consciousness, or experience, through which, of course, God does speak to the soul. By the Church, he means any church that is truly a church of Jesus Christ. In its ordinances, its worship and its ministry the divine power is continuously present witnessing to the truth. "Take away this thought, and we worship a dead Christ; who lived more than eighteen centuries ago. If God is present in his ordinances and worship, there is something healthful and inspiring in a Christian service, and if in the call to the ministry God is speaking to men, preachers would preach more efficiently by realizing that fact. The church seldom realizes that when it meets, as for discipline, Jesus Christ is with them, as he promised, and so loses that power and inspiration which such a faith would bring. Something like that is his idea of the church as a source of authority."

"I believe, professor, you are an advocate of Christian union," I said. "Yes," he replied, "I have any hobby it is Christian union." "The truth is," he added, "it is my advocacy of Christian union quite as much as anything else that has gotten me into trouble." I remarked that I was glad to hear him say that, for I had said as much for him in the *Christian Evangelist*, and was pleased to have him confirm it. It is not any merely sentimental, inward, invisible, and intangible unity that he favors, but a united church, organically and visibly one. He appreciated very highly, he said, what we had done for the cause of unity, "but, of course, there is the question of baptism," he added, "about which we differ." "What is your solution, professor, of the baptismal problem in relation to Christian union?" "I would make it a purely congregational matter," he answered. "Let every individual church settle for itself whom it will receive for baptism and how it will baptize them." I told him that in wrestling with the problem recently that solution had occurred to me, but that I had deemed it impracticable, not to mention any other objection, because congregations practicing immersion as the only baptism would not agree to recognize and fraternize with those churches which practiced pouring and sprinkling and infant baptism. "Well," he replied, "in that event nothing can be done until we are willing to allow that there is sufficient ground for difference of opinion on this subject not to make it a test of fellowship." "Then you do not regard it as clear, beyond reasonable doubt, that the original practice was immersion?" he was asked. "No, I do not," was his reply. "I rather think the candidates with the administrator waded into the water, and then water was poured on the heads of those to be baptized." He was reminded of the figure of a burial and resurrection in connection with baptism. "Yes," he replied, "that is one figure, but the

pouring out of the Holy Ghost is another." He avowed his willingness, however, to be immersed any time for the sake of Christian union, on the ground that the Lord would more readily forgive him for repeating his baptism than for continuing the sin of division. "You are aware, perhaps," I said to him, "that the religious movement of the Disciples was originated by Presbyterians?" "Oh, yes," he replied, "I am acquainted with the history of the Campbells."

"Professor, what do you think will be the outcome of your case in the General Assembly in May?" "Oh, I shall be defeated, I think. I have no hope to the contrary. The west and south are against me, and Pennsylvania will send an almost solid delegation against me." "What will be the result of your condemnation?" "So far as I can now see, it will result in a division of the Presbyterian Church. It is only a question of how large a part of the church will go out with me." I ventured to hope that he was mistaken in this, and that more prudent counsel would prevail when it became apparent that a disruption of the body would result from his conviction. He thought it barely possible that a few of the more reasonably conservative men, like Dr. Nicholls, of St. Louis, might, by acting in time, prevent such a result, but he feared he was too late now. "What would be the policy of the party going out with you?" "We would adopt a short and simple creed, and denominationalism would probably not figure much." "While you are shortening your creed, doctor," I said, "why not go back to the old creed of Simon Peter?" "I am ready for that," he said, "but I do not think we could get others to agree to go farther back than the Apostles' Creed." Personally, he said, he would have preferred quietly withdrawing to being the cause of the disruption of the church; but his friends thought he ought to fight it out on that line. "I do not know," he said, "what will be the result to me of all this commotion, but I am sure that good will come out of it to the cause of Christ."

We had much more talk as to his views of the middle state, the possibility of learning about Christ after death to those who never had the opportunity to know about him in this life, the doctrine of the resurrection, etc., to report which would make this article too long. One other point of some interest I will mention. He was referring to the false meaning that had been put into the doctrine of total hereditary depravity, when I asked him if it were not true that nearly all the old Reformation doctrines had undergone deterioration, and instanced that of justification by faith. He replied that this was undoubtedly true, and that the modern idea of faith extracted pretty much all meaning or value out of the word.

In closing this partial report of our interview—which must not be considered a verbatim report, though I have used the direct style frequently—I find these impressions of the man:

1. He is a man of undoubted faith in God's word and in its power to take care of itself against all enemies without

the need of any false plea in its behalf. Indeed, he told me he did not know what it was to doubt the authority of the Scriptures; that if he had had some trouble on that line he might have been better able to sympathize with the position of those who are troubled about his teaching. He may hold a wrong theory of criticism, but he is a profound believer in the inspiration of the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ as a divine Saviour. Can the church of to-day afford to convict such a man of heresy? I am sure that I differ from many of my brethren on the question of Higher Criticism. I regard it as one of God's providential agencies for breaking the power of tradition, freeing the church from its bondage to creeds, and accomplishing the very ends for which we have been praying. Others, equally loyal to Christ, regard it as an enemy to be resisted. But we shall have no heresy trials among us on the question unless we first repudiate the very basis on which we have made our fight with denominationalism, and go back into the tyranny from which our fathers escaped.

2. Prof. Briggs is a courageous man, more courageous than prudent. He will have no truce or compromise measures. He is not always careful to guard against misunderstandings. He is an able man, too, having equipped himself as few men in this country. I think we need a few such men as Prof. Briggs in the church, but it would not be well, perhaps, to have everybody like him.

3. He impresses me as a man of uneven development—a radical in some things, a conservative in others. This is the impression his book "Whither?" made on me when I read it, and my personal intercourse with him deepens this impression. There are some questions he has not studied thoroughly, or "thought out," as he says. But he is destined I believe to play an important part in the ecclesiastical changes of the near future. I shall always esteem him more highly for having had this personal acquaintance with him, and while I may in the future, as I have in the past, criticize some of his positions, I cannot doubt his sincerity, his honesty of conviction, his courage, or his faith.—J. H. G. in *Christian Evangelist*.

"Give me the first five years of a child, and I will make of it a saint or a devil."—*A Catholic Priest*.

If I had my ministry to go over again, I would give more attention to the children."—*Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green*.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."—*Proverbs xxii. 6*.

"We can raise more Christians by juvenile Christian culture than by adult conversion—a thousand times more."—*Dr. J. G. Holland*.

"The time is coming when there will be two sermons preached to children and youth where there is one to adults."—*Bishop Janet*.

"After the observations and experience of a long life I have come decisively to the conclusion that if I had my life to live over again, I would pay ten times as much attention to the young of my charge as I ever did."—*Dr. Samuel Miller*.