

# THE BULLETIN

—OF THE—

## Western Theological Seminary

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## WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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### **A Theologian for the Hour: Peter Taylor Forsyth.**

REV. EDWIN H. KELLOGG, B. D.

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That the most crying present-moment need of the Church, under God, is its need of a great, wholly modern, philosophical theologian of that Eternal Gospel the faith of which constitutes the being of the Church, is a statement that is received with intolerant impatience by the noisy, shallow leaders who have the ear of the Church in her present passing hour.

One who has already learned from Principal Peter Taylor Forsyth's previous work, of the past decade, in *Soteriology* and *Christology*, to hail him as that gift of God whose advent some of us unpopularly but eagerly thus await, can with difficulty repress a certain exuberance of the enthusiasm with which he rises from a perusal, thrice repeated since the time of its publication last spring, of the volume indicated in the foot-note below,\* the latest product of its author's immensely rich and varied theological and general culture, masterly philosophic grasp, brilliant gifts of criticism and of exposition, and sheer power of intellect and of spirit. Taken together with his several works upon the Atonement and his very valuable Christological contribution of 1909, entitled

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\*"The Principle of Authority, in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society". An Essay in the Philosophy of Experimental Religion. Lectures by P. T. Forsyth, M.A., D.D., Principal of Hackney College, Hampstead. Hodder and Stoughton: New York and London. 1913. \$2.50 net.

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human needs as the psychology of Professor Royce would indicate? Does the existence of communities of hope and communities of memory furnish sufficient ground for asserting that the World of Interpretation exists?

WILLIAM H. ORR, '09.

Wayncsboro, Pa.

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**The Fundamental Christian Faith.** By Charles Augustus Briggs, D.D., D.Litt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1913. pp. 332, \$1.50 net.

This book and the forthcoming volume on Theological Symbolics are the fruit of Dr. Briggs' occupancy of the chair of Theological Encyclopedia and Symbolics in Union Seminary, New York, during the closing years of his life. They bring to a close the very considerable list of books of which Dr. Briggs was the author and so have an interest attaching to them in addition to their intrinsic worth.

One cannot imagine that "The Fundamental Christian Faith" will ever be a popular book. It is too exact and precise and scholarly to be popular—some critics might call it too dry. It has no respect for what George Eliot once described as "the right of the individual to general haziness". Yet we have no doubt that it will fill satisfactorily a want long felt by students in its department of theological learning.

Dr. Briggs not only believed that ideally creeds may express the personal convictions and religious experiences of Christians in their relation to Jesus Christ their Savior, but in the volume before us he proceeded upon the conviction that the fundamental Christian faith is actually and adequately set forth in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed with their ecumenical developments. Our book then consists of a careful, painstaking analysis of these creeds, clause by clause, with the special object of discovering as nearly as possible the origin, history, and explanation of each of them in the light of the Scriptures on which they were based and the writings of the contemporary Church Fathers.

Because of its plan it is a very difficult book to review. Instead, therefore, of attempting to characterize its content as a whole—a proceeding which could scarcely do justice to the variety of subjects embraced in it—we propose to take one chapter and observe Dr. Briggs' treatment of a single article of the Apostles' Creed. From this example some conception of his method may be gained, and those who desire information of a similar kind on any of the articles of these creeds may be referred to the book itself, where they must go eventually, no matter what kind of a review is here printed.

Turning then to Chapter V, entitled, "Born of the Virgin Mary", we find that a part of the testimony of the early Church Fathers, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Justin, and Ignatius, is cited to prove that the substance of this article of the Apostles' Creed can be traced back to the church at Antioch at the beginning of the second century. Peter and Paul had ministered to this church and their disciples, as well as some doubtless of the first generation of Christians, were still living at this time.

Taking up the testimony of the New Testament, Dr. Briggs

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finds nothing to dismay him in the argument from silence so often used by those who deny the necessity of a Virgin Birth in connection with the absence of this doctrine from the preaching of Peter and his associates and the failure of Mark, Paul, and others to specifically mention it. Adequate reasons for reticence on this subject are easily adduced for some of these men. There is not a bit of evidence to contradict the strong probability that they were acquainted with the fact of the Virgin Birth, though they made no use of their knowledge of it in their work. In the cases of other authors of New Testament writings, not usually counted as witnesses for this doctrine, Dr. Briggs's careful examination reveals evidence which indicates, inferentially at least, that they were not ignorant of it. Paul's epistles, for instance, attribute such antithetical qualities to Christ, i. e., holiness, incorruption, a life-giving spirit of holiness, as imply more in His human origination than ordinary generation. If Paul did not know of the Virgin Birth, says our author, he was certainly very near it, and no one has been able to suggest anything in substitution for it that would not undermine and destroy his entire theology.

Taking up the text of Luke, our attention is directed to the many excellent opportunities that evangelist had had for drawing on numerous first rate authorities, both oral and written, for the materials of his Gospel. On strictly metrical and stylistic grounds Dr. Briggs is convinced that the narrative of the infancy and childhood is based upon a series of seven Hebrew canticles, already long in use in the Hebrew community, which Luke translated into Greek, edited, explained, and incorporated in his Gospel. Dr. Briggs reproduces these in English.

Matthew's account also is found to be based on a Hebrew poem, but it has to do with the annunciation to Joseph, while Luke's has to do with the annunciation to Mary. Whether the original Hebrew verses so used were separate poems or parts of one long poem makes no difference for this argument, which finds in the special use of these verses made by the evangelists, two independent witnesses to belief in the Virgin Birth by earlier and poetic authors in the Hebrew community. It is not likely that knowledge on this theme would have been general during Mary's lifetime or that poems on it would have been composed until a sufficient time after her death had elapsed to permit the diffusion of this knowledge. But it is altogether probable, according to Dr. Briggs, that these verses were composed during the lifetime of James and Simeon, and other members of Jesus' family, and acquaintances of Mary who had known her from her earliest years. The story of the Virgin Birth therefore may be traced back step by step to an entirely trustworthy origin among the family and friends of Christ.

With all attempts to connect this doctrine with a mythical or legendary source, or to base it upon a misconception of Isaiah's prophecy, or to derive it from its so-called parallels in other religions, our author has no patience. He says (p. 88), "all these suggestions of sceptics or agnostics are merely makeshifts, altogether unsubstantial, that cannot endure the least breath of criticism, made for the sole purpose of getting rid of the reality of the Virgin Birth of Jesus. They were not invented in the interest of historic truth or fact. They were not invented in the interest of Biblical Criticism. They do not, and cannot be made to, harmonize

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with the results of Biblical Criticism, which condemns them root and branch”.

After discussing the questions connected with the genealogical tables and the supposed inconsistencies between the story of the Virgin Birth and other statements in the Gospels, Dr. Briggs remarks (p. 93), “we have been compelled to go into all these details in order to hunt the opponents of the Virgin Birth out of all the holes and corners in which, like rats, they take refuge. It is with them anything and everything, however trifling in importance, which may be used to put suspicion on the story of the Virgin Birth”.

Our author next takes up the significance of the Biblical statements themselves; after briefly considering the facts as recorded by Luke, he examines Hebrews 2:14-17 and finds in this passage an implication of birth by more than ordinary generation, conception by divine presence and power.

The First Epistle of John is also drawn upon for corroborative testimony of a similar nature.

Then the Prologue of the Gospel of John is taken up and a profoundly interesting argument developed in connection with John 1:13. In the Greek codices, and so in the English versions, this verse (“who not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God were born”), as plural, is taken as descriptive of those, mentioned in the preceding verse, who received Christ. The pertinent fact employed here so effectively by Dr. Briggs is the testimony of several of the early Church Fathers, who materially antedate our earliest Greek codices, that in their day this verse, in the singular, applied to Christ Himself, not to those who received Him. So read, it of course becomes a very valuable additional witness to the fact of Christ's extraordinary and divine generation.

The cumulative effect of all this testimony makes a very strong case for Dr. Briggs' contention that the weight of the argument from silence in connection with this fact has been greatly overestimated.

He points out also that this doctrine had no less meaning in the Creed than it had in the Gospels, as is amply indicated by the controversies with the Ebionites and Gnostics where this was a point at issue.

He ably asserts the *a priori* probability that if God was to become man it would be accomplished not in the ordinary human way but in an extraordinary divine way, appropriate to the nature and character of the divine Being.

He makes it clear that inductive science and philosophy cannot reasonably deny the possibility of such a birth for such a Being.

And he concludes his discussion with an emphatic assertion of the vital importance of this article of the creed as describing an essential portion of Christ's saving work. The view of the atonement which would make the crucifixion the one great act of salvation is characterized as not only modern but unbiblical. The Incarnation is emphasized as the initial saving act of the Son of God upon which all other saving acts depend. For this in its completeness he finds the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is nothing less than a necessity.

With due allowance for our author's well known freedom from all so-called traditional bias, and in spite of his very free use of

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texts under the influence of his, sometimes peculiar, critical theories as to date and authorship, we believe that the fifty pages here devoted to this theme contain the strongest argument for the truth and value of this much disputed article to be found in a similar compass at the present time.

We have examined this important chapter by way of illustrating Dr. Briggs' method. In the chapter on the Resurrection of Christ he is no less emphatic in his defense of a real bodily resurrection, and in his condemnation of those who reject this doctrine; and these chapters are typical of his attitude throughout this book.

The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, and the work of the ecumenical councils beginning with Chalcedon are considered in the latter half of the volume. A chapter of Christological definitions concludes Dr. Briggs' work.

He was in revolt against what he believed to be the modern exaggeration in theology of the doctrine of the atonement and salvation by the cross. He believed that the saving acts of Christ were not one but six as set forth in the Apostles Creed, and that such a view required a more equitable distribution of emphasis on its various articles. In connection with the discussion of the Second Advent he attacks the idea that at the moment of death Christians are completely sanctified.

He is inclined to hold to some form also of the theory of a second probation. With these and a few additional minor exceptions we believe that this work might easily have been received as the work of a rather conservative theologian had it been anonymous. It will doubtless, therefore, exhibit its late author to many readers in an unexpectedly favorable light. And it will take its place as a most thorough and scholarly investigation of the origin and value of these basic creeds of Christendom.

Van Wert, Ohio.

JOHN W. CHRISTIE, '07.

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**The Creed in Human Life.** By Maurice Clare. New York: George H. Doran Company. 1913. \$1.50.

This work is a series of articles on the Apostles Creed. It is not doctrinal, but devotional. "It attempts", as the writer says, "to translate into their spiritual meaning, without lingering upon their verbal details and evidences, the respective clauses of the Apostles Creed". The writer has succeeded in accomplishing this purpose. No one can read its thoughtful and practical exposition without being spiritually benefited, and confirmed in the eternal verities set forth in this earliest of all confessions of faith. A valuable feature of the book is its wealth of apt quotations, gathered from every department of literature. Possibly one-third of its contents is composed of excerpts from the great theologians, philosophers, poets, and novelists. Any one preparing a series of addresses on the Creed will find in this volume a mine of suggestive material.

D. W. MacLEOD.