



PROFESSOR ROBERT WILLIAM ROGERS

With the close of the academic year 1922-23, Professor Rogers completed thirty years of fruitful service as Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in Drew Theological Seminary. A recent and distinguished Biblical scholar, of international reputation, a teacher of unusual gifts and power, a writer of important books and a Christian gentleman of wide culture, he has made large contributions to the Church in America and throughout the world by training and inspiring hundreds of ministers, and by his writings, and it was eminently fitting that Oxford University should give him, as was done June 19, 1925, the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. The picture above shows him in his Oxford gown.

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

FOR full thirty academic years have I been teaching the Old Testament in Drew Theological Seminary, and if I had my life to lead again I should wish to do this same thing! So little imagination have I, or sense of the change of time and thought! Yet am I sure in my own mind that in naught else could I have been so useful or so happy. I said "happy" and meant it, though I have not always suffered the indifferent gladly, or viewed the morning from a mountain top either of achievement or of assured result. The past is at least secure and a cheerful inheritance has enabled me to forget the trials and remember the joys. As I look back some few rambling remarks leap willing to the pen, and here they are, however small be either their interest or value.

I came to my task in a time of sore trial and anxiety, for it was in the day that the massive structure of the splendid Presbyterian Church trembled beneath the embattled forces arrayed for or against Professor Charles Augustus Briggs, and the Methodist Episcopal Church was already preparing for a similar tragedy in the sacrifice of poor Hinckley Gilbert Mitchell. I was under suspicion at once and needed stout defenders like James Monroe Buckley to keep my footing in perilous places. By a sort of instinct rather than by preternatural youthful wisdom I focused attention on the great essential messages of the Old Testament and thus prepared the minds of neophytes to deal with critical problems a little at a time. Many of those earlier classes had far more instruction in these problems than ever they dreamed, and ten years after graduation must have found themselves strangely able to meet problems that arose in preaching or teaching without knowing whence the attitude was derived. *O sancta simplicitas!*

From the beginning I was ever putting emphasis on scholarship. I had been trained as

a scholar and loved the ways that were both lordly and humble. Nor did ever a class pass out into the big world without hearing the glories of learning extolled, and its value in and for itself, apart altogether from any practical use or end. There are echoes of those passionate and ringing words still resounding in far distant lands and in dark places nearer home.

It has always been difficult to keep men at the hard things, and scholarship is a stern mistress and keeps ever the hard things before her gleaming eyes. When I am asked, as often I have been, how the students of today compare with those of yesteryear the answer is always the same, that different though they be, they are yet the same. There were giants in the early days, and there is an occasional surviving example in these days, but the mass are as before still human, and not averse to finding an easy way and a light burden. This innocent search has been much encouraged in American education by the elective system, which began in the colleges, and was later to spread its languorous vapors over the high schools in one direction, and the theological seminaries in the other. If faculties do not know, or have not made up their minds, what students ought to study, it is not easy to see any valid reason for demanding such a decision from youth. Whatever the rights may be, there can be no doubt that students do not know, and that their decisions commonly follow the lines of least resistance.

In the theological seminaries there has been an enormous invasion of electives, and often in very skillful hands. Some of them are easy, and that attracts students, if no other quality were present, but when there is added to this even the seeming assurance that something would be secured that might be immediately available in pulpit or pastoral work the appeal becomes irresistible. These electives draw students from subjects which seem to make a heavier demand on time for preparation and the results are depleted classes. Nobody has suffered so much from this as have I, for Hebrew has long had the evil reputation of being "hard," and many have been the expressions of desire somehow to escape its toils. Here natural inclinations and apparently superior attractions have united and disaster im-

pends. I have no trouble in finding students to attend courses of lectures on history, archaeology and paleography, but the classes that face the forms and syntax and the exegesis of passages in Hebrew are steadily dwindling and must, it would seem, soon reach the point of being quite negligible.

This is a personal tragedy for me, and I make no secret of my pangs of pain. This matters nothing, of course, if others hear or see and care not. I am but an individual cog in a big machine, and my personal predilections cannot be weighed or counted and ought not be. But somebody who has no such interest as mine ought soon to consider what is going on, and face squarely the issue. Let me state it, not directly, but indirectly, coming round by fields, or the deserts if you please, and not by the direct road.

THE BIBLE OUR ONLY BASIS

The Bible is still our only basis. I say it boldly, for there is no alternative offered that deserves a moment's serious consideration. The great preachers have all been preachers whose message was squarely founded on or sprang directly from Holy Writ. Where is there an exception? I have yet to hear his name. It is true that sciolists appear from time to time and gather a following for a season, but their influence is weak, their endurance brief, and to predicate greatness of them were laughable. From Chrysostom to Cadman the great preachers have thundered Sinai and pleaded Calvary. It is absurd as well as silly to seek another way, and they who do are goats and not sheep, not feeding in sweet meadows on lush grass, but picking at wild hedges or poisoned cacti. The Bible has the story, the whole satisfying story of God's revelations to men, and they who know it and preach it shall not want hearers, or their hearers comfort in their sorrows and guidance in their doubtings. But the Bible is a very big book and they who have really begun to know it have spent a long life time upon its riches. There is no short cut to the knowledge of God's ways with man as Holy Scripture makes it known. Vast libraries have been written to explain its every word and many more are yet to be composed. The gleaming in these is a

man's task, and they who do become preachers of wealth untold. The others may attempt to feed their diminished souls on the last novel, the newest speculation, but the search is vain and the result a trifle.

Grant this, and the case for Hebrew and Greek is won. They are the places for beginning, and there are no others. I say it challengingly, let him dispute it who dares. But, says someone who has not yet thought the case through, "What use are these studies, if a man forget them and use them not at all, as many say they do?" Bless your innocent heart and its untrained thinking! Nobody ever learned the beginnings of Hebrew and of Greek and so completely ceased their use as to have no profit of them. They find use in remote and almost unseen ways as a man reads commentaries or big books which have grappled with the intense questions, the pressing issues. But even though it were conceivable that men should not make even this highly practical use of them, their early acquisition would nevertheless have left a precious residuum in the mind, and added color to the thought, a figure of speech, a flower fragrant and beautiful for the diction. Precious beyond all measure are the rewards of those who have applied themselves to the toil of winning for later years an inheritance pleasant and comely of a little learning.

EMPHASIS ON THE BIBLE

What is to be done in this crisis? Let me state it with a certain daring simplicity. The Bible needs a new emphasis in the theological seminary. A seminary so large as Drew now is needs more of its staff to teach the Bible in Greek, Hebrew and English. There are not enough men now to do it as it needs doing. It is a stupid waste for me to be teaching even so much English Bible as I now do, and very few men in like positions elsewhere do so little as I. I should be doing nothing but Hebrew. Let those who will not take Hebrew go without whatever of enthusiasm, life or learning I have to impart. But to do this would mean more endowments for the Bible, the Bible alone and only, the Bible first and last. Who wants biblical preaching, let him see to it that the preachers of tomorrow are

today filled, saturated, steeped in the Bible. They will preach it as no others need be expected to do.

What will these departments of biblical learning require besides the men to man them? Very little indeed will be their demands. They will not demand great laboratories and elaborate apparatus, as do the professors of chemistry and physics in the great universities. They will indeed need a far better library than now is theirs, but as every other subject has the same need there is naught of special requirement in this demand of biblical learning. Give us this new strengthening of the biblical forces, and I care not the least what happens to all the rest. Say not this is sadly selfish, but the rather hear my reason.

I have seen and known more or less intimately the theological difficulties, controversies and readjustments of my time. In my childhood it was geology, in my youth evolution, in the earliest days of ripening maturity it was higher criticism. I have survived them all with a smile. I have made my acceptances of the newer thinking without a qualm, found ways of reconciliation, taught them eagerly, saved men's faith many a time and oft, as they have gladly witnessed, and here I am looking backward as well as forward, and the Bible is more precious and more sure than ever. I believe its priceless revelation of God to men, and this I desire the churches to hear and to believe. But how shall they hear without a preacher? And the preacher must be trained for this and to this. The theological seminary is the Church's instrument for this high purpose. There is no other worth comparison. Strengthen the Bible there and my cause is won.

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