



REV. MATTHEW BROWN RIDDLE, D. D., LL. D.

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Dr. Riddle's Boyhood

BY DAVID RIDDLE BREED

Matthew Brown Riddle was born in Pittsburgh, October 17, 1836. The house in which he first saw the light was located on Penn Street, near to the site now occupied by the Joseph Horne Company. It was one of the old style, three-story, brick dwellings, built on the street line, with a flight of stone steps, guarded by an ornamental iron railing and ascending parallel to the face of the house. This portion of Penn Street was then the best residential section of the city. His father was David H. Riddle, then pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, and his mother, Elizabeth Blaine Brown, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Matthew Brown, then President of Jefferson College at Canonsburg, Pa. I know nothing of his father's ancestry. The family of Dr. Brown, however, was quite distinguished and his posterity are to-day men and women of character and influence. Dr. Maitland Alexander's mother was a Brown, a sister of Mrs. Riddle—"Aunt Sue", as she was affectionately called by her near relatives.

The circumstances which determined Dr. David Riddle's settlement in Pittsburgh were quite unusual. The Third Presbyterian Church was formed chiefly of a colony from the First Presbyterian Church of which

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JAMES A. KELSO

Matthew Brown Riddle was born in Pittsburgh, not far from the Block House, Oct. 17, 1836. His father, David H. Riddle, was a prominent minister, for a time pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, and later president of Jefferson College. His mother, Elizabeth Blaine Brown, was a daughter of the famous Matthew Brown, for a time principal of Washington Academy (later Washington College), and subsequently president of Jefferson College. Through his mother he was a lineal descendant of John Brown, the Covenanter martyr of Priesthill, who was shot by the hand of Claverhouse himself. Dr. Riddle always spoke with great pride both of his intimate connection with this region of country, and of the signal achievements of his family in the spheres of religion and education.

He was a precocious youth. Partly at the Western University of Pennsylvania and partly under the direction of private tutors, he made rapid progress in his studies so that he was ready to enter the sophomore class in Jefferson College at the age of thirteen where he graduated three years later in 1852 at the early age of sixteen, winning the second place in the honors of his class. He entered the Western Theological Seminary in 1853, but at the close of the middle year, owing to some controversies growing out of the relations of the Old and New School bodies, he withdrew and went to the New Brunswick Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church, where he graduated in 1859. In the years intervening between his residence at the Western Theological Seminary and his entering the New Brunswick Theolog-

*By the appointment of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh, this sketch of the life and work of Dr. Riddle was written as a minute on his death, and was read at the meeting of Presbytery held on October tenth, 1916, in the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh. It has been published at the formal request of that body.

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ical Seminary he was engaged in teaching Greek at Jefferson College. In these days at Jefferson College he laid the foundation of his Greek scholarship deep and secure. These early tutorial days proved to be a providential preparation for his life work. He was licensed to preach on the twenty-sixth of May, 1859, by the Bergen Classis of the Dutch Reformed Church. A few months later he went abroad for travel and study, spending a portion of the years 1860 and 1861 in post-graduate study at Heidelberg, with occasional visits to other universities. Returning to his native land in 1861, he found her in the throes of Civil War, and, being intensely patriotic, he entered the service of the Union as Chaplain of the Second Regiment of New Jersey Volunteers. He was ordained by the Bergen Classis of the Dutch Reformed Church, April fifteenth, 1862. His period of service in the Army was brief, as he was incapacitated by an attack of malarial fever; but he was exceedingly proud of his membership in the Grand Army of the Republic and was a chaplain of one of its posts. In 1862 he married Miss Anna M. Walther, the daughter of a merchant of Heidelberg, Germany, who survives him. He is also survived by one son, Dr. Walther Riddle, of Pittsburgh, and two daughters, one of whom is Mrs. Hermann Page, the wife of Bishop Page, of Spokane, and the other, Mrs. Russell Sturgis Paine, of Worcester, Mass.

Only seven years of his long ministerial career were spent in the pastorate. After his ordination in 1862 he became pastor of the First Dutch Reformed Church at Hoboken, N. J., and from 1865 to 1869 he ministered to the Second Dutch Reformed Church at Newark, N. J. In 1869 he resigned his pastorate at Newark and crossed the ocean once more for the purpose of travel and study. He was absent from home for about two years, and on his return entered upon the great work of his life. He was called to the chair of New Testament Exegesis at Hartford Theological Seminary in 1871

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where he continued to labor until 1887. When the New Testament Chair became vacant in the Western Theological Seminary, through the resignation of Dr. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield to accept a call to Princeton Theological Seminary, the directors of the institution within the bounds of Pittsburgh turned to one in a very vital way their own son, who had won fame in the field of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in the arena of international scholarship. He accepted the call to the theological institution of his native city, and was inducted into the chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis on Nov. 15, 1887. The theme of his inaugural address was characteristic: "How the Theological Student Should and Can Become Skilled in New Testament Greek". As a teacher for twenty-four years he exercised a remarkable influence on the classes of the Western Theological Seminary. In 1907, feeling the weight of advancing years, he asked the Board of Directors to give him an assistant. His friends very loyally furnished the funds, and Rev. William R. Farmer became his assistant on January seventh, 1908, but he did not relinquish his teaching until the end of the academic year 1911. At this time the Directors of the Seminary created a special chair of New Testament Criticism and assigned him to it, giving him the privilege of lecturing at his own pleasure. For two years he continued to come to the Seminary once a week to conduct the chapel exercises, but increasing feebleness and defective eyesight prevented him from making even an occasional visit to the Seminary after the close of the term 1913-14. This scholar and man of God was translated August thirtieth, 1916. If God in His providence had not called him home until the seventeenth day of the present month he would have reached the extreme Scriptural limit of fourscore years.

About the time Dr. Riddle was called to the New Testament chair at Hartford Theological Seminary, he was invited to join the American Committee of New

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Testament Revisers; in accepting this honor he became one of the original members of this group of Biblical scholars. The minute examination of every detail of the New Testament text and careful investigation of the meaning of words involved in the work of revision gave him an encyclopedic knowledge of the New Testament Scriptures. To his students and friends he often spoke of the labors of this Company and never failed to touch upon the spirit of Christian unity which prevailed in all the meetings of the Committee. In such conversations the attention of the listener was frequently directed to the fact that none of these scholars received a single penny as remuneration for a service of fundamental importance to the Church. After the agreement with the English Committee had expired, the three surviving members of the Revision Committee, ex-President Timothy Dwight, Professor J. H. Thayer, and Dr. Riddle, brought out an American edition incorporating the readings which they preferred. It is known as the Revised Version, American Standard Edition. Dr. Riddle performed the exacting task of reading the proof for the entire New Testament of this edition and really injured his eyesight by too constant application to the task. The General Assembly also drew upon his exact and wide scholarship. He was a member of the Assembly's Committee for revising the proof-texts of the Westminster Standards in 1889, and later he was a member of the important committee entrusted with the revision of the Confession of Faith.

Dr. Riddle wielded a very prolific pen. He was a regular contributor to the *Sunday School Times* from 1875 down to very recent years. He was also assistant editor of the *Presbyterian Banner* from 1893 to 1898 and frequently contributed to its columns. In fact, one of his earliest literary efforts was a series of articles written from Europe for the *Presbyterian Banner* in 1870-71, giving a sketch of the Franco-Prussian War; but he also made occasional contributions to such journals as "The

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Christian Intelligencer", "The Independent", "The Congregationalist", "The Homiletical Review", and "Scribner's". The last periodical article from his pen appeared last year in the "Biblical Magazine", and presented the principles of textual criticism of the New Testament comprehensively, with striking lucidity and with an appreciation of the progress of recent years. He was a contributor to the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia and to the American Supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica. Most of these encyclopedia articles treat of problems of New Testament Introduction and indicate complete mastery of the questions under discussion.

But Dr. Riddle's most solid literary achievements belong to the sphere of exposition. He edited, with Dr. Philip Schaff, *Romans* in Lange's Commentary, 1869; translated and edited *Ephesians* and *Colossians* and edited *Galatians* in the same, 1870; wrote, with Dr. Schaff, *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* in the International Popular Commentary, 1879; wrote, with Dr. John E. Todd, *Notes on International Sunday School Lessons* (New Testament), Congregational Publication Society, 1877-81; *Question Book* on the same; wrote with Dr. Schaff, on *Romans* in Illustrated Commentary, and on *Ephesians* and *Colossians* (alone), 1882; small volume on *Mark*, 1881, *Luke*, 1883, *Romans*, 1884, in International Revision Commentary; edited *Mark* and *Luke*, Funk and Wagnalls' issue of Meyer's Commentary, 1884; revised and edited Robinson's *Greek Harmony of the Gospels*, 1885, revised and edited Robinson's *English Harmony of the Gospels*, 1886; portions of Vols. VII and VIII of Bishop Coxe's *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1886; edited Chrysostom's *Homilies on Matthew* in Schaff's Nicene and Post-Nicene Library, vol. X, 1st. series; also Augustine's *Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. VI, same series. Some idea of the extent of his literary activities may be gained from the fact that a complete list includes more than seven hundred separate titles. His work in this department was so extensive and so scholarly that it

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gained for him not only a national but an international reputation. His preëminence in the department of New Testament Literature and Exegesis and his contributions to literature were adequately recognized by great institutions of learning. He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Franklin and Marshall College in 1870, Doctor of Laws from the Western University of Pennsylvania in 1894, and he was one of the few distinguished scholars selected to receive the degree of Doctor of Laws at the Sesqui-centennial of Princeton University in 1896.

Great as Dr. Riddle was as a scholar and a writer, he was still greater as a teacher. His aim was to create an inspirational atmosphere in the class-room. He treated the theological students as men and not as school-boys. He administered tremendous rebukes to the lazy and indifferent, but he never tried to force them to learn. His main effort was directed towards arousing the latent and slumbering intellectual faculties; and the intellectual stimulus which he gave to his 'boys', as he affectionately termed his pupils, was like a galvanic shock, and it aroused many a man from intellectual slumber. Professor Williston Walker, of the Yale School of Religion, told the chairman of your committee, in a conversation some years ago, that of all the teachers of his youth Dr. Riddle had given him the greatest intellectual stimulus. It has been the privilege of the chairman of your committee to sit at the feet of some great teachers. There is no disparagement to the others when he says that three of them rank as geniuses in the sphere of teaching, namely, the late Professor Alonzo Linn of Washington and Jefferson College, Professor Harnack of the University of Berlin, and our own Dr. Riddle. His colleague in the Revision Committee, Dr. Timothy Dwight, preceded him to the heavenly home by only a few months. The death of Dr. Dwight afforded the editor of "The Congregationalist" an opportunity to write an editorial on the career of this distinguished

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scholar, and also gave him the occasion to compare him with Matthew Brown Riddle as a scholar and teacher. We quote from him ("The Congregationalist", June 8, 1916). Dr. H. A. Bridgman, the editor of this journal, begins by saying that he did not owe his first real interest in New Testament study to Dr. Dwight, but adds, "That I had acquired the year previously at Hartford Seminary under Matthew Brown Riddle, a scholar and teacher of high repute. He helped me to appreciate the textual side of New Testament criticism, the importance of minute, exact scholarship. He had the art of flashing light upon a single verse or passage, for he had a nimble mind, a keen wit, and a rare gift of concrete expression. Dr. Riddle, in his manner, was nervous to the very finger tips. He would stamp up and down the class room and would frequently score a point by clinching his fist under the eyes of the student".

He possessed certain striking qualities. One was absolute fidelity to truth. There was nothing too minute or unimportant in the field of New Testament scholarship. He made it emphatically evident to his students that he was willing to follow the facts wherever they might lead him. Equally prominent was his fidelity to duty. He heaped scorn on men who were busy here and there while their own vineyards were neglected. He very frequently dwelt on the parable of the pounds to inculcate the great lesson of fidelity to duty. Carrying this principle out in his own life, he made the work of the classroom paramount, declining to accept lecture engagements or to take part in unimportant ecclesiastical activities lest they might interfere with his teaching. Although he was a master in his department—second to none in our country, and the peer of any European scholar—he went over his work very carefully each year and never went to his classroom without fresh preparation. The words seem trite but they are literally true, that we shall not soon see his like in our midst.

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It would scarcely be a fair portrait if we were to overlook his eccentricities of manner. He was blunt and outspoken, often wounding the feelings of strangers. This side of his character made him unpopular in some quarters, but never with his students, who knew that behind his severe and odd exterior there was a tender sympathetic heart, and consequently their love and devotion to him were unbounded.

In all his teaching he tried to impress upon his students that love for Christ and gratitude to the Savior ought to be the supreme motives in a minister's life. As he used to put it, 'not scholarship for scholarship's sake but scholarship for Christ's sake'. It was quite evident that Jesus was supreme in his life as he sought to make Him supreme in the lives of his 'boys'. A quotation from a letter from the president of a distant theological seminary, recently addressed to the faculty of the Western Theological Seminary, will give a fair idea of the high regard in which our brother Presbyterian was held by the Church at large. "Dr. Riddle was for such a long period a notable figure in the department of New Testament Interpretation and Scholarship, that, although we could not by reason of his years expect him to abide much longer, we cannot but feel ourselves bereaved. All his contributions to his special department are marked by scholarship, insight, reverence, and common sense".