

W. Sprague
WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.
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 HIS DEATH AND SKETCH OF HIS LIFE.

The death of Dr. Sprague occurred at his residence, in Flushing, L. I., on Sunday morning last, May 7, in the 81st year of his age.

He was born in Andover, Conn., October 16, 1795; graduated at Yale College in 1815, and at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was in the class with Drs. Charles Hodge, Johns, Chester, Nevins, and Peters; and in other classes were Drs. Magie, Dickinson, Shmucker, and many of similar spirit. In 1819 he was ordained in West Springfield, Mass., where he succeeded Dr. Lathrop as pastor in 1820. From this, his first charge, he was called, in 1829, to the Second Presbyterian church in Albany, N. Y., where he was pastor until his resignation, in 1869, when he removed to Flushing. There he has resided in great peace, waiting for the translation he has now enjoyed.

This is the brief but complete outline of the life of a remarkable and illustrious man; a cultivated, elegant, voluminous, useful and popular author; a justly celebrated preacher; an indefatigable and successful pastor; an unselfish and devoted friend; loving, genial, pure, noble; an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile; one of the most childlike, unsophisticated and charitable of men.

No minister in this country was ever called upon to preach so frequently on special public occasions. These sermons were often published, and they amounted to nearly two hundred. His "Letters to a Daughter," "Lectures to Young Persons," "Lectures on Revivals," "Hints on Christian Intercourse," "Contrast Between True Christianity and other Systems;" his biographies of Dr. Griffin, Dr. Dwight, Dr. McDowell, Dr. Jediah Morse, and others, show the fertility and resources of his mind and his patient industry. But his *magnum opus*, the great work of his life, was the "ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN PULPIT," which he began to prepare when he was fifty-seven years of age, and finished in ten large octavo volumes, the most complete history of the churches and ministers in this country ever attempted. The labor bestowed upon this work may be inferred from the fact that he said to the writer, long before it was finished, that he had already paid out more than one thousand dollars in postage, for obtaining material. And the wonderful balance of his mind may be illustrated by the entire satisfaction of all denominations with the manner in which he had drawn the portraits of their distinguished representative men.

While engaged on this and other literary works he never relaxed his pulpit and pastoral duty. Writing with the utmost facility, rising early and not sitting up late, with his writing tablet on his knees, he went through an amount of composition that is scarcely credited as possible. And his style was singularly smooth, faultless, and strong. Every word is in the right place and the sentences well balanced, so that he was heard or read with constant pleasure. He contributed as much to the religious literature of the age as almost any man who can be named.

He was a great collector of books and pamphlets. His own pamphlets were numerous, and, as his name was widely known, pamphlets were sent to him by thousands. These he had bound in volumes and catalogued, and those on secular subjects he presented to the N. Y. State Library at Albany, and a large niche in the Seminary Library at Princeton is filled with his donation of volumes of pamphlets on religious subjects.

When Dr. Sprague was a boy of ten years, the widow of the pastor in his native town gave him an old manuscript sermon of her husband. He took it home, and returned after some days and asked for another. She told him to take as many as he wanted, and he carried off an armful. This was the beginning of his life-pleasure and play, the collection of autographs. It grew upon him, and never diminished while his life was prolonged. That such a passion could take such possession of him, receive so much attention, and produce such immense results by accumulation, without interfering with his highest success in every religious and literary duty laid to his hand, is evidence at once of the power of his moral principle, devotion to his high calling, and intensity of purpose in the service of God. While prosecuting his studies for the ministry he went South as a private tutor in the family of Mrs. Lewis, the granddaughter of Mrs. Custis, who became the wife of WASHINGTON. The family formed a strong attachment to the young tutor, and he retained many memorials of their kindness, among other things the cane of Washington containing on its head the first coin ever made by the United States, and which might well adorn the Centennial Exhibition. But the most precious of their gifts was to him the private correspondence of Washington, which was put into the hands of Jared Sparks to be used in the compilation of the life and writings of George Washington, and afterwards to be the property of Dr. Sprague. This came into his hands, and may be said to be the foundation of the most valuable and extensive collection of autographs in this country, and hardly excelled by any private collection in the world. "Rivers to the

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ocean run," and as his autographs increased in number, his friends caught something of his enthusiasm and poured their treasures into his, delighted to assist him in procuring the rarest and most unique, and so participated in his pleasure. To give any adequate idea of the extent and value of this mass of manuscripts would require a catalogue far longer than this sketch can be. It embraces many kings and queens of the old world (and these are so cheap that two kings are readily given for one Benny Franklin), reformers, martyrs, authors of many languages and countries, all the great poets, philosophers, preachers, statesmen of modern times and some quite ancient, all the Signers of the Declaration, every General of the Revolution, every President and Cabinet officer, and every man or woman of note in British or American history in Church or State. This collection must have a large pecuniary value, and should become the property of the State or Nation, by purchase, as its preservation entire is an object of public interest. It would easily command a high price abroad.

The travels of Dr. Sprague in Europe brought him into delightful associations with the most eminent persons in literary and religious circles, and with many of them an active correspondence was kept up until the death of his friends terminated it, for it was his lot to outlive nearly all the intimacies of his early and middle life. While he was pastor at Albany he was on terms of the closest friendship with the Princeton Professors, New York pastors, and with a wide and numerous circle throughout the country; his hospitable home was the resort of hundreds: strangers from abroad paying their respects to him as one conferring distinction upon the city in which he dwelt for forty years, until he had become its most eminent citizen. Successive Governors and legislators had sat under his ministry, and been his welcome guests. His correspondents were uncounted and scattered over the earth. So that it is quite probable he was personally known and honored by as wide a circle of friends as any private individual now living.

Dr. Sprague was one of the most valued writers to whom the readers of the *New York Observer* have been indebted for their instruction during its existence. His personal recollections of men he met abroad, his lives of the College Presidents and hundreds of miscellaneous articles from his pen have made his style and name familiar. His facility for biographical writing led to his being frequently called on to furnish sketches of public men, and this he was the more ready to do because he pre-

served in manuscript, the important dates and facts in the lives of all great and good men with whom he was associated. Hundreds of these sketches remain among his unpublished papers.

In the quiet shades at Flushing to which the glorious old man retired at the age of seventy-four, he has been passing a serene and beautiful evening of his useful, rounded and remarkable life. Off from the highway of travel, many have yet sought him in his retirement to look on the face and form of one who had charmed them with his pen. Within half an hour of the great city, he could easily mingle with his friends, but as the borders of fourscore were approached, he preferred the circle of wife and children, whose ministries to his comfort, and assistance in his herculean literary tasks are not surpassed in any records of domestic devotion. Here, with his books and manuscripts and the portraits of illustrious friends, most of whom had preceded him to the assembly whose names are written in heaven, he delighted to commune with the past and to take by anticipation the coming future. Never a man of this world, having accepted the Christian religion as a little child, he was meek and simple, and gentle: the victim sometimes of great misrepresentation and wrong, yet never rendering evil for evil, but contrariwise, blessing, he lived above the world and kept himself literally unspotted from it. Old age, very old age, by reason of strength, four score years came on him and his majestic form was bent, and the strong men bowed themselves. But his soul was in the sunshine of divine favor, and his faith beheld the day approaching. No sore disease, no fierce pains disturbed the placid dawn of his eternal life. But as "one wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams," so did our precious father and friend "melt away into the light of heaven."

Farewell! Friend of God, and friend of man! pastor, teacher, delightful companion, blessed friend! Fragrant as a garden of spices is thy memory, more precious than gold the words and smiles and deeds of love that dwell in the hearts of those thou hast left to mourn.