

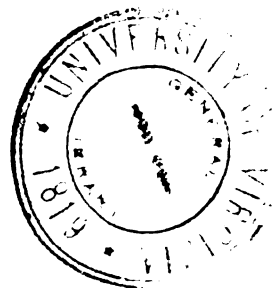
GIVEN TO CHRIST

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

wd BY
JOHN W. PRATT, D.D.

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND LABORS.



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Geo. W. Pratt

PREFACE.

IF the writer of these sermons had published them himself, doubtless they would have had many imperfections removed; but as that could not be, in compliance with numerous requests, I give them just as they were prepared for the various congregations to which he preached; with the daily prayer that God will use them, and feeling assured that could his voice *now* be heard, his language would be that of Dr. Bonar:

“Not myself, but the truth that in life I have spoken,
Not myself, but the seeds that in life I have sown,
Shall pass on to ages, all about *me* forgotten
Save the *truth* I have spoken, the things I have done.”

M. W. PRATT.

LOUISVILLE, KY., 1888.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

BY C. A. STILLMAN, D.D.

THE REV. JOHN WOOD PRATT, D.D., was born at St. Mary's, Georgia, on the 12th of May, 1827. He sprang from an honored ancestry; on his father's side from the grand old Puritan stock recognized as the chief glory of Old and New England, and on his mother's from the English gentry, that class which has been called more noble than "The Nobles."

His father, the Rev. Horace S. Pratt, was a Presbyterian minister and Professor of English Literature in the University of Alabama at the time of his death in 1840. His mother, Jane Wood, died when he was only one year old, so that his maternal training devolved upon his second mother—a most intelligent, godly, and in every way estimable woman. His early youth gave indications of the ability which marked his after-life. When only seventeen he graduated with distinguished honor at the University of Alabama. While a mere boy he consecrated himself to the service of Christ, and very soon resolved to prepare himself for that profession in which he became pre-eminent. Having completed his theological course at Princeton, N. J., he was licensed by the Presbytery of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, May 6, 1848, six days before he reached his majority. The youthful preacher soon attracted attention by his discourses, which were rich in eloquent diction and sound instruction. He was called to the church at Marion, Alabama, in October, 1849. Such was his aptness to teach that he was elected to the Professorship which had been made vacant by the death of his father ten years before, viz., that of English Literature and Belles-Lettres. He accepted this position and became distinguished for the clearness of his instructions, and at the same time an eminent example of the art of eloquence which he taught.

Prof. W. S. Wyman, of the University of Alabama, says of him at this period : " When the Rev. John W. Pratt became the Professor of English Literature at the beginning of the collegiate year 1850-51, I was a member of the senior class. After I was graduated in 1851 I became a member of the Faculty, and I continued to be a colleague of Mr. Pratt during the whole of his fifteen years' stay in the University. I feel, therefore, quite competent to speak of him during this part of his life. It was the duty of the Professor of English Literature to teach Rhetoric, Logic, Ancient and Modern History, and the History of English Literature, to supervise the writing of Essays and Orations by the three higher classes in the University, and to train the classes in Oratory. Mr. Pratt was only twenty-three years of age when he entered upon the important duties of this professorship. He had the enthusiasm of youth and a great love for his work. He was himself an eloquent orator, the master of a polished style, and remarkably well read for one of his age in the great masters of English Literature. At the outset he was fortunate enough to inspire his pupils with something of his own ardor in the study of the great exemplars of a pure English style. From causes not necessary to be mentioned here, the Department of English in the University had been for ten years previously in a languishing condition. The writing of Essays had been regarded by the students as a heavy task ; and the revision of them by the Professors in charge for the time being had been for the most part perfunctory. Practice in oratory had been confined to the declamation of select pieces by the classes once a month before the President of the University. Mr. Pratt at once introduced a new and thorough system for the revision of original compositions, the result of which proved to be so excellent that the same system has been retained with but slight modifications to the present time. In Oratory he began to train every student separately and systematically. Prior to Mr. Pratt's time the Department of Rhetoric had been limited to the study of some short superficial book on literary criticism. His best work here was the introduction of a thorough treatise on the art of Invention, a book which required hard study to master, but the beneficial results of the hard study were soon manifested in the disciplined intellects of the advanced scholars. Mr. Pratt was deeply interested during his residence at the University in the moral and religious im-

provement of the students. He organized classes for the study of the Bible among the students, and trained them in the lessons. The students' prayer-meeting was, as I well remember, conducted by him, and was for a long time held at his house."

Mr. Pratt occupied this chair until 1865, when the University was suspended by the ravages of the Civil War. It was during this period he accumulated the store of varied learning which rendered his preaching so profound and instructive. He never made any display of it, for he despised pedantry, but it gave weight, accuracy, variety, and beauty to his exposition of divine truth. He by no means forsook the ministry while Professor. He loved to preach, and he was often called upon. He preached frequently in the city, but he was especially fond of his little rural charge, preaching with equal acceptability to all classes of people. He charmed and edified the most plain and unlettered, and attracted the most highly cultivated, because he preached the simple Gospel with transparent clearness and earnestness. Many have regretted that so much of the prime of his life was spent in the class-room, but he was thereby acquiring his higher education for the pulpit, and for those triumphs of sacred eloquence which crowned his usefulness and made him famous in after-life.

At the close of the war circumstances led him to open a school in Brooklyn, N. Y. In the second year of his stay there he received and accepted a call to the cultivated and important church in Lexington, Virginia.

Rev. James H. Smith, of Lexington, Virginia, writes of his work there: "It would have been difficult for him to find a centre more favorable for sending out his influence in wide and far-reaching streams, than he found in the church at Lexington. Washington and Lee University, situated there, held within her halls three hundred students, and the Virginia Military Institute three hundred more. His peculiar gifts were exactly those best calculated to attract and influence young men. Every resident of Lexington, and every student of either of these schools during the years of his ministry there, will remember without prompting, how intense was the interest excited and maintained by his preaching. All classes in the community, people of every differing faith, and people of none, were drawn to his services. Old men, whose time-seared hearts had grown callous with long indifference, exhibited an unwonted sensibility. Young men dis-

covered with delight that the truths of revelation furnish worthier themes for a higher eloquence than can be inspired by subjects less supreme. It would be harder, perhaps, to calculate the harvest of this ministry than that of most others, for the sower planted, not in a single field, but stood as it were on a mountain and cast his seeds to the winds, which bore them wherever the Southern youth there congregated around him have made their thousand homes."

He continued to be a diligent student and prepared all his public exercises with extraordinary labor and care. The discerning stranger who happened to hear him at the weekly prayer-meeting on the stormiest night, had as fair an opportunity of estimating his powers as those who sat before him in the crowded church. He spoke words thoroughly credible when he declared that he *always did his best*. He prepared "beaten oil" for the sanctuary—hence the finished and enduring character of his discourses, which could stand the most rigid criticism, and which all his hearers and readers feel assured will secure them a place in the permanent literature of the pulpit. His sermons will live and will continue to delight and edify the Church. In place, however, of any further estimate of our own, we prefer to insert the following true and beautiful tribute from the Hon. J. Randolph Tucker, who had ample capacity and opportunity to form a correct judgment, having been a member of his church while he lived in Lexington, Virginia :

"The death of Dr. Pratt was sincerely a grief to me, for I had been privileged to know him for years as pastor, preacher, and friend. He was a very remarkable man in the endowments of his mind, as well as in the qualities which made up his character. He had an acute and subtle analytic power, which enabled him to discover the germs of truth, and to detect the concealed errors in the logic of his opponent. This keen insight into the subject of his criticism or of his discussion, made his discourse as clear as the sunlight. About his thought, and about his expression of it, there were no clouds of doubt or of uncertainty. No one could fail to see what he saw, to understand what he thought, for it was the pure diamond idea reflected in the mirror of a style which was simple, yet ornate in its strong, fervid, and classic rhetoric. He was logical, and yet imaginative, original, suggestive, and fertile in his conceptions, and powerful in setting

them forth with all the beauties of expression with which a thorough education and refined literary taste could invest human thought.

“He was a genuine Calvinist, and so strongly held the Pauline type of the Christian faith that his mind never wavered in the most profound speculations, and his heart was anchored on the ‘Rock of Ages,’ with implicit and humble trust. The grand truths of the Bible he held with an intellectual enthusiasm which stirred his whole nature with a deeply sympathetic thrill, and which sometimes shook his bodily frame with visible emotion; and yet, though his mind was so nerved by the grandeur of truth, his sympathetic nature was alive to the appeals of distress and affliction. In the chamber of sickness and death he poured the oil of consolation upon the wounds of bereavement with gentleness, judgment, and tender sympathy. As a man he was brave, manly, candid, and sincere. He was liberal in his charity and generous without stint. As a friend he was constant and reliable, because while warm in his regard his feelings never swayed his judgment.

“As a preacher of the Gospel he was cogent in reasoning, luminous in expression, critical in exegesis, earnest in exhortation, and always and eminently instructive, practical, and Scriptural. He adhered to the written word with fidelity, and condemned with force and without compromise all the so-called rationalism which wandered from the Scripture into the mazes of a speculative and false philosophy. As a pastor he was discreet, conservative, and practical. He was not obtrusive of counsel, but ever ready to give it; nor intrusive into the domestic habits of his people, yet ever willing to advise in regard to them. He sought to lead men to the great Teacher to be taught by Him, and never did it by ignoble appeals to fear, nor by an unworthy play upon the animal emotions of his hearers. He preached the truth as it is in Jesus, as the best thing for the man; with which he would have peace and eternal rest, without which he must have unrest and eternal despair. Such is my imperfect estimate of Dr. Pratt. His memory is one of great value to me, in the instructions I received from him, in the guidance I derived from his counsel, and in the support I had from his friendship.”

After six years in this important field he accepted the Presidency of Central University at Richmond, Kentucky, a young

institution established by the Synod of Kentucky. To its organization and management he devoted himself for six years, and found an ample field for his large experience and eminent scholastic and practical ability. At the same time he occupied for three years the pulpit of the Presbyterian church of Richmond. This was his last connection with college work. Professor L. G. Barbour, of Central University, said of him :

“ He had in a high degree two qualities not always conjoined, but both of them needful in the constitution of a first-class teacher : great quickness of apprehension and unusual breadth of view. He saw into the lesser and intricate points of a subject, and his eye swept over the broad relation of its parts and divisions ; hence he gave clearness of detail and logical method in mass. When I first knew him at Princeton Theological Seminary he was noted for vivacity and humor. In his latter years a gleam of his old manner would occasionally flash out and remind me of his early manhood. Add to this his great geniality and unaffected goodness of heart which made him so popular among the students of Central University, and you will have some of the prime elements of a teacher.”

Resigning his Presidency in 1878, he supplied for some time, during the absence of the pastor, Rev. T. H. Skinner, D.D., the pulpit of the Second Presbyterian church of Cincinnati, Ohio, where he fully sustained his already great reputation as a preacher. Indeed he so impressed himself upon a number of Christian gentlemen of that city that they induced him to attempt a novel enterprise, to bring into contact with the masses his strong and attractive presentation of Gospel truth without interfering with the regular exercises of the churches. For this purpose the immense Music Hall was rented, and a service held every Sunday afternoon. It proved all they had hoped for. The attendance was seldom less than three thousand, and often reached five, gathered from all churches and from all ranks in society, including multitudes not accustomed to attend any religious service. Here he found the grandest field for the exercise of his splendid powers. His noble intellectual face attracted every eye. He commanded perfect order and universal rapt attention. His strong, clear, melodious voice, always perfectly modulated, reached every ear and rung out with distinct enunciation, forceful emphasis, and often with tremulous notes as he proclaimed

the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. He made no failures, was always equal to himself, and was manifestly made "a polished shaft in Jehovah's quiver," and doubtless pierced many a doubt-clad mind and many a sin-hardened heart.

In 1881 he became the successor of the distinguished Dr. Stuart Robinson as pastor of the Second Church in Louisville, Kentucky. It is needless to say that in this important charge he continued to exercise his extraordinary gifts and labors as Christ's minister for Christ's people and for the conversion of sinners. The following extract, taken from an address delivered at a congregational meeting by Col. Bennett H. Young, will best show the estimation in which he was held by this church :

"The Southern pulpit, in the past thirty years, has produced many widely renowned theologians and preachers. Part are dead and some remain with us, but Dr. Pratt, in some respects, was surpassed by none. As a writer of sermons, in my opinion he had no equal in the American pulpit. There was a pathos, tenderness, eloquence, combined with a comprehension of man's spiritual and moral forces, which placed him in the very front rank of modern preachers.

"In the elaboration of truth, as set forth in our standards ; in the application of doctrine to daily life and as a solace in human sorrow ; in the dignity and grandeur of the mental and spiritual powers of man, his sermons are a marvel, not only of oratorical finish, but of philosophical acumen and discrimination. His discourses on the value of human life in its relation to God, the resurrection, and man's destiny here and hereafter, are productions which will do credit to any age and any man.

"Confiding in his nature, tender and gentle in all his emotions, affectionate in disposition, firm in his Christian faith, with an unconditional consecration to the cause of Christ, he was a remarkable and unusual character, one the Church should reverence and remember, and one whom his friends will never forget.

"I am aware that these are strong terms I have used in reference to my departed friend, but he was worthy of all of them, and his life has been a blessing to the Church and a comfort and pleasure to those who knew his personal worth and his earnest, constant Christian testimony.

"In a less restricted field than was given him he would have shone with increased brilliancy. He possessed the power of stir-

ring and developing the strongest and highest spiritual aspirations, and none ever heard his words who did not feel impressed with nobler ideas of God and truer and better conceptions of man's duties and responsibilities to his Creator and Redeemer. Wherever he preached, his pure gospel, his zealous, beautiful life, and his strong intellectual force will long be felt in the hearts and characters of his hearers.

"Nor should his efforts be permitted to die. The thoughts of such a mind justify and demand preservation and publication, and the force of his words will influence and direct a better life in those who may read, long after his name and his works are forgotten."

He supplied the Second Church in Memphis, Tennessee, for several months the last year of his life. In the eloquent words of Judge Heiskell we see the impression he made on this people: "My acquaintance with Dr. Pratt extended only through the few months he ministered to us last summer. In that brief period I learned to respect, to honor, and to love him. No man I ever met impressed me more profoundly. I do not hesitate to say he was one of the most scholarly men I ever knew. While his sermons were masterful in substance, his terse and elegant style made them always charming. His diction was ornate, chaste, and wonderfully graceful. His sentences, burdened with logical reasoning and rich and helpful thought, flowed easily and felicitously. He never paused for a word, and always chose the one most suitable to express his meaning, so that the profundity and dignity of his utterances were made thoroughly interesting and enjoyable by the appropriate language in which he clothed them. He was a rhetorician, an orator, and, what seems almost a lost art, he was an admirable reader. But these accomplishments were but the trappings of the sincere faith and Christlike spirit that breathed in every line and word that he uttered. If his prayers were always eloquent, it was because they were the simple pleadings of the child of grace, kneeling at his Father's feet, beseeching His favor, His help, and His protecting care. His daily life was a living epistle, 'known and read of all men,' of the beauty, symmetry, and power of our holy religion. Indeed, he came as near the perfect minister as any one I ever knew.

"With all this and through all, his deep humility and broad

Christian charity made him lovely and beloved by all. Such a man never dies. He only leaves us—to live. The good that he does lives after him and for ever.”

The Rev. M. H. Houston, D.D., our Secretary of Foreign Missions, writes of him :

“In the removal of Dr. Pratt from among us we have lost one of the noblest, most generous and interesting men I ever knew. It was always a pleasure and privilege to me to be with him : he was always kind, always faithful as a friend, always instructive and stimulating, and I loved him. He was a prince among preachers and among men, and the whole Church must mourn his departure.”

Dr. R. P. Farris speaks of him “as one of his dearest friends, a man who honored me with his confidence, a man in whom I could confide, whose naturalness I admired, whose high attainments I recognized and respected, whose grand preaching I enjoyed and boasted of.”

The Rev. Dr. Basil Manly, of the Baptist Church, the friend of his youth, writes of him : “In the year 1837, at the reorganization of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, when my father became President of the University, the only personal request he made of the Trustees was, to appoint the Rev. Horace S. Pratt, of Georgia, to be one of his colleagues. The intimacy and confidence already subsisting between them was only increased by their association in the work of the University. Their diverse characteristics and tendencies made each the complement of the other. It would sometimes be remarked, when Dr. Pratt had preached in the morning and Dr. Manly in the evening, that they had had first ‘the feast of reason,’ and then ‘the flow of soul.’ Boy as I was at the time of Professor H. S. Pratt’s death, I was impressed by the fact that my father mourned over him as I do not remember his mourning over any similar bereavement ; and one of my most distinct recollections of those early days is the funeral sermon which he preached in honor of his friend in the old capitol at Tuscaloosa, with the characteristic text, ‘Alas, my brother.’ The friendship of the parents was naturally inherited by John and myself as boys. Together in our plays, in our studies, in our plans and hopes, even occupying for a time the same room in college, we grew up in the utmost intimacy, notwithstanding he was a year or two my junior. And

even subsequently to college life we spent the greater part of our time in the Theological Seminary together in the venerable shades of Princeton. From the time of leaving Princeton our lives necessarily drifted somewhat apart. Both of us have been busy men, deeply absorbed in important duties, and having little leisure for seeking social enjoyment outside of the immediate sphere of our labors. He soon became an honored and successful teacher, and occupied for years, under my father's presidency, the chair of English Literature which his father had filled, renewing and continuing the intimacy of those earlier years of which I have spoken. Subsequently, during the presidency of Dr. L. C. Garland, Professor Pratt continued to give his valued services to the University, and did as much as any man of his time to train the rising generation of Alabamians for meeting nobly the responsibilities of life. His impress is felt still on hundreds of students there. Of the latter periods of his life others can speak better and more appropriately than I. My memory clings to the picture of the genial, venturesome, affectionate boy, who was the most cherished friend of my boyhood's days, of the young man in college and seminary who shared and lightened my labors by his presence, and of the grand and impressive preacher, who thundered forth the terrors of God's law, or urged with eloquent persuasiveness the invitations and comforts of the Gospel; who made us forget ourselves, forget him, forget all our surroundings, and realize only the presence and authority of Almighty God, whose messenger he was. With a voice of remarkable clearness and force, a countenance that blazed with emotion while speaking, a delivery in which art had succeeded in concealing art, and nature spoke unimpeded; and above all, with a compactness and energy of thought, and a sacred fidelity to the Divine Word, which commanded at once the intellects and the consciences of men,—he was emphatically and eminently a Master of Assemblies. During the brief period of his afternoon services at the Music Hall in Cincinnati, the immense crowds which he attracted and held, and the profound impression produced, gave evidence of a power for popular effect which had hardly been suspected in the quiet and scholarly College Professor. I cannot but think it desirable that some of the choice discourses of such a preacher as he was should be preserved in a permanent form, not only as a memorial of him most

dear and appropriate to preserve his memory among the friends that loved him, but as a means of extending and perpetuating his work, and of enlarging his influence, so that 'he, being dead, may yet speak.'"

These are the testimonies of men competent to appreciate the force, truth, and originality of Dr. Pratt's character and preaching. Yet if all the bereaved whose sorrows he consoled; if all the poor and humble ones, who helpless to explain the mystery of his power, were joyfully able to draw peace from his word; if all the souls whose doubts he drove back forever into the night from which they had come, and all the hearts whose indifference he melted, were to send up their tribute, it would be weightier by far, even than that of these thoughtful analysts of the secret of his success.

His pastorate at Louisville ended his regular work. His health gave way under his heavy pastoral duties. He went to Europe with the hope of restoration, but in 1883 he resigned this, his last charge. Yet even then he continued to preach whenever and wherever he had opportunity: sometimes for a few weeks, and sometimes for a few months at a time, for he was resolved to give his whole life to the cause of Christ, and to die in harness.

He died at his home in Louisville, Kentucky, March 24, 1888. There was no gloom in his sick-room, and we could not believe that death was really coming. When spoken to of dying, he said, "Why, I have no fear of death; it has no terrors to me. I have fixed all that years ago, and if I had not, on this bed would be no place to do it." He talked of dying in the same natural way he would speak of any other act he expected to perform. The evening before he died, in talking to a friend he said: It was such an inexpressible comfort to him now, when too weak to grasp any truth very strongly, to have these grand doctrines come unbidden to his mind. So long had his mind been stored with the consolations of Divine truth for the comforting of other hearts that he now found them adequate for his own supply. Dr. Pratt was twice married. His first wife was Mary Grace Crabb, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She left two children—Grace Winthrop, now Mrs. Clay Stacker, of Clarksville, Tennessee, and Edwin Alberti Pratt, of Louisville, Kentucky. His second wife was Maria Lindsay Waddell, of Lexington, Virginia.

She with two children, Harry Waddell and Nettie Wood Pratt, survive him. Of four sisters and one brother, only one sister is now living—Mrs. James W. Lapsley, of Alabama.

Dr. Pratt was a man of marked characteristics, not always understood—and perhaps he did not care enough for that—but his intimate friends knew, appreciated, and loved him. He was a man of large and free-hearted benevolence. An instance deserving record is that, after the emancipation of his slaves, he made generous provision for them, and some of them still enjoy that kindness, and will continue to do so while they live. All his former servants love and cherish him tenderly. In private life he presented the rare combination of a man full of common sense, eminently practical and systematic in all his business habits, and at the same time deeply absorbed in all the religious and literary work which engaged his thought and attention. He kept himself fully abreast of the times on all questions of interest before the public. With nothing of professional cant about him, he invited discussion on religious subjects with those who seldom met, and never sought the company of Christian people. There are two particulars in which he was unlike many great preachers: first, as a Pastor he was a methodical and conscientious visitor of his flock; and second, while his sermons were so grand and so grandly delivered, he by no means slighted the other parts of the public worship, but filled them all with beauty and power. He was a dear lover of sacred music, and showed great taste in the selection for the service of song. His Scripture-reading was equal to an eloquent commentary. But the prayer surpassed all. It was more than a sermon, simple, humble, reverent, earnest, comprehensive of all classes and topics, yet never tedious, but always refreshing and helpful to devotion. These were never in his view the mere preparatory services to the sermon, but were with him the solemn worship of God. He heard himself, and he strove to make his people hear, “the stately steppings of Jehovah” in His sanctuary.

The sermons which follow give a true idea, not of his delivery, which cannot be reproduced, but of the substance of his preaching. The reader of these sermons who never heard him preach can never be brought up to the vantage-ground on which they will read for whom every sentence will be informed and inter-

preted by the memory of that matchless voice and irresistible delivery. He always preached the grand and profitable themes of the Gospel. This selection is made not to bring out his greatest efforts, but to present a comprehensive and systematic view of evangelical truth.

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA, 1888.