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TABLE OF CONTENTS

MR. GEORGE W. WATTS.....	<i>Rev. W. W. Moore, D. D.</i>	189
THE MYSTICAL PERFECTION- ISM OF THOMAS COGSWELL UPHAM	<i>Rev. B. B. Warfield, D. D., LL. D.</i>	196
THE DEACON.....	<i>Rev. Arthur G. Jones, D. D.</i>	231
JAPAN TODAY.....	<i>Renpei Watanabe</i>	242

EDITORIALS

BOOK REVIEWS

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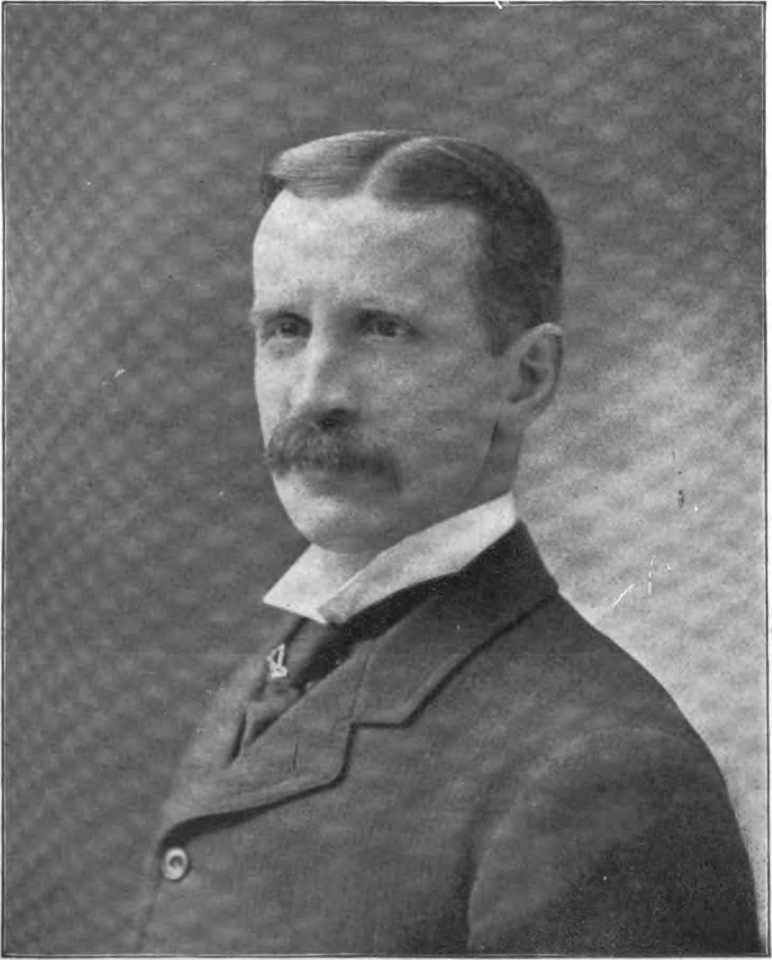
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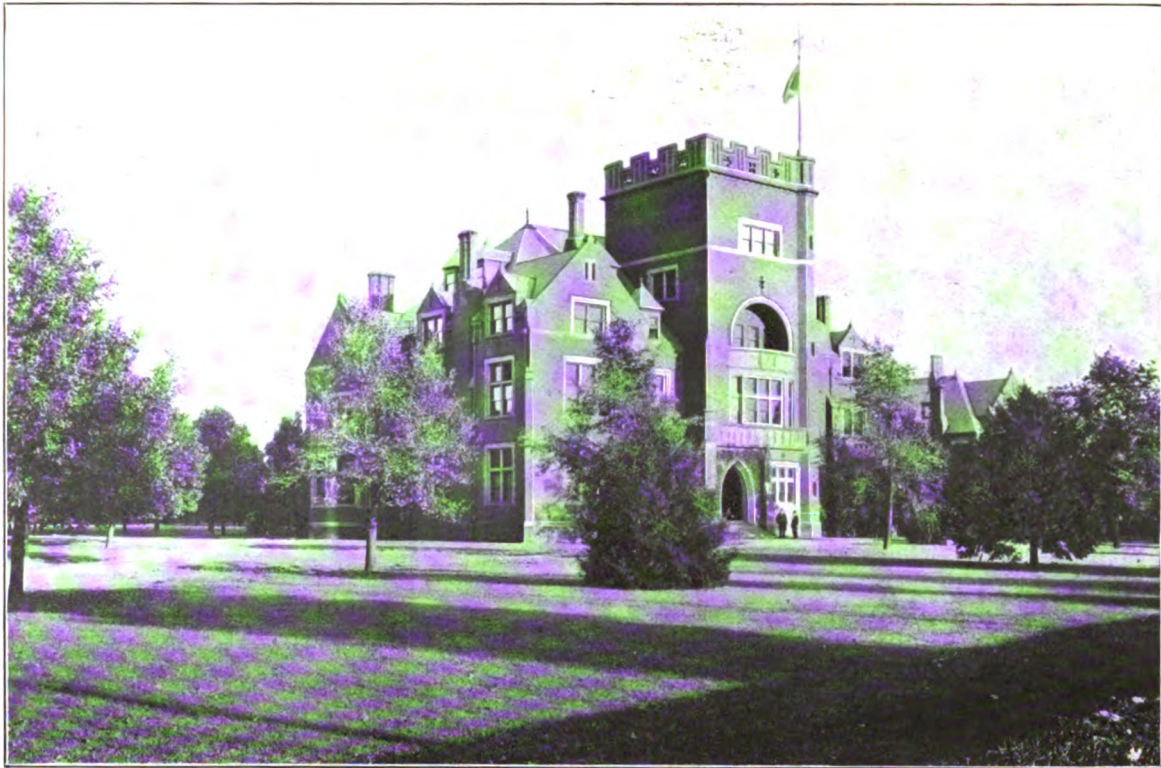
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GEORGE W. WATTS



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MR. GEORGE W. WATTS

By REV. W. W. MOORE, D. D.,

President of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

George Washington Watts was born at Cumberland, Maryland, August 18, 1851, and died at Durham, N. C., March 7, 1921. Born and reared in a Christian home and being of a thoughtful and earnest nature, he set before himself in his youth a high ideal of life and pursued it steadily. Notwithstanding the handicap of somewhat delicate health in his boyhood, he developed studious habits, attending the public schools of Baltimore from 1859 to 1868, and the University of Virginia from 1868 to 1871, and so trained the powers of a naturally quick and vigorous mind that by the time he entered business as a salesman for his father's firm he possessed the qualities which foretold success—clear intelligence, sound judgment, systematic habits, steady industry and inflexible integrity,—so that when his first great business opportunity came to him at the age of twenty-seven he was ready for it. This was the purchase of an interest in the business of the now famous house of W. Duke Sons and Company. When he moved to Durham and entered upon his new duties it soon became evident that, like other able members of that firm, he was a creative force in the business world. Under their joint efforts the business grew with amazing rapidity, passing quickly from its original territory and establishing itself not only throughout America, but in every part of the civilized world.

With the increase of his means, Mr. Watts, like his associates in the firm, engaged in other large enterprises, including banks, railroads and manufacturing companies. Throughout his en-

tire business career he was prominent also as a public-spirited citizen and community builder, as shown for example in his presidency of the Commonwealth Club, his activity in securing new lines of railway to Durham, thus increasing its commercial facilities, his erection of the Loan and Trust Building, his zealous leadership or active co-operation in all the improvements that have marked the civic progress of the town and added to the comfort and convenience of its people, such as the water works and the electric light plant. The most notable of these services to his own community was his splendid benefaction in the erection, equipment and endowment of the Watts Hospital.

But the most valuable contribution he made to the well-being of Durham was the influence of his own character and personality. The city is not an old one. It has made its marvelous growth for the most part in the last forty years. Its citizens can never be too thankful that, during this formative period, when their character as a people was being moulded and their ideals as a community were being fixed, so many of the men who have controlled its capital and directed its energies and determined its business life have been men of God—not only correct men but religious men; not only men of sound morality but of pronounced religious faith. The people of Durham have been greatly blessed with material prosperity, but they are a thrice happy people in the fact that amid the rapid increase of their wealth, their leaders in business have not been indifferent to the things of the mind and the heart, have not undervalued character and culture, and that the man whose memory they honor as their model citizen, the noblest exponent of their life, was not only a capable and successful man of affairs, but a man of living faith and pure character and abounding benevolence—a golden-hearted gentleman, an open-handed philanthropist, an exemplary Christian.

Dr. E. R. Leyburn, who was for many years his pastor, says with truth that Mr. Watts “put God and the things of His Kingdom as the first concerns of his life. This is illustrated by an incident which occurred a few years ago. One of the large business corporations of which he was a director was passing through a critical period of its development.

There was an important meeting of the board of directors to be held in New York on a certain date. On that same date there was an important meeting of the board of directors of Union Theological Seminary, of which Mr. Watts had been president for many years. Without a moment's hesitation he went to Richmond and gave his attention to the business of the seminary, leaving his large business interests to the care of others."

"Mr. Watts was always present at every service of the church, not only on Sundays but also at mid-week prayer service, unless providentially prevented from being present. He was the best Sunday School superintendent with whom I have ever been associated, putting his business energy and enthusiasm and system into the work of the church and at the same time keeping the spiritual side of the work uppermost and foremost, and impressing his teachers continually with the fact that their great business was to lead souls to Christ and train them for His service. In addition to superintending the main Sunday School of his church for over thirty years with marked ability and success, he went down every Sunday afternoon during all those years to the Pearl Mill through fair weather and storm, through heat and cold, and taught a Bible class in the mission school there. Thus this great man who was closely identified with the World Sunday School Association and was a member of the International Sunday School Committee, who was so highly esteemed by that body that they held special meetings to pray for him during his illness, devoted his own precious time and strength through all these years to teaching a mission school. This was characteristic of the man. In addition to teaching this school Sunday afternoons, he and Leo D. Heartt, another saint of God who has gone to his reward, went down every Friday night to conduct prayer meeting at this same mission. Those of us who have heard him teach the Bible class and lead these prayer meetings remember with what clearness and force and aptness of illustration he applied the great truths of the Bible to the present-day needs of those to whom he spoke."

No less remarkable was his interest and activity in the work of the church at large and in all manner of philanthropic

and educational enterprises. The prophet Isaiah, when picturing his ideal of human character, says, "A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Mr. Watts is one of the men whom I always think of when I read that passage. In the strength of his character and the kindness of his heart he was like a great rock, affording shelter to many from the sweep of calamity. In the outflow of his benevolence he was like rivers of water in a dry place. The streams of it have not only flowed copiously through his own community, but they have gone far and wide through this land and other lands, and even to the ends of the earth, pure, refreshing life-giving. He was both a rock and a river. He was both a shelter and a source of fertility.

I shall not attempt in this sketch to enumerate his benevolences, his large donations to all forms of relief work, his princely gifts to educational and religious institutions, orphan asylums, schools and colleges, his unstinted liberality to the causes of Home and Foreign Missions. Always quiet, modest and unostentatious, he made many generous gifts of which the public never heard. Of those that in the nature of the case necessarily became known it is proper that I should mention specifically in this *Review* his benefactions on at least two lines, viz., his abounding generosity to Union Theological Seminary and his never-failing interest in Sunday School work.

Of the Seminary he has been the greatest of all its benefactors. It was largely his liberality that made possible the removal of the Seminary to Richmond twenty-three years ago. The result of this move was a large increase of attendance and a great improvement of facilities, including eleven substantial buildings, so that now it has an equipment second to that of no other institution of its class. The main building of the group was the gift of Mr. Watts, and by action of the Board of Directors is to bear his name through all the future. A little later he provided also the beautiful chapel. Nor was that all. Being himself a member of the board since 1894, and president of it for the last fifteen years, and, therefore,

thoroughly familiar with the work of the institution and its value to the church as the main source of her supply of ministers and missionaries, he made repeated contributions to its permanent funds, all at his own instance. Thus he made large investments in living voices for Christ, and through the successive bands of young ministers going forth from this seminary he will be preaching the Gospel through all time to come. He being dead yet speaketh.

No part of the church's work appealed to him more strongly or engaged more of his time and thought and personal effort than that of the Sunday School. He saw clearly that formation was better than reformation, that it was wiser to build a fence at the top of the cliff than a hospital at the bottom of it, that it was better to mould the characters of boys and girls in righteousness while they were still plastic than to try to reclaim men and women after they had made moral shipwreck, that in the training of the young lay the hope of the church. Hence his enthusiastic and incessant activities as a leader, organizer, teacher and superintendent—hence his arduous and self-sacrificing labors in the Sunday Schools of his own community, as described above by his former pastor—hence his frequent and free-handed gifts to this vital part of the church's work, such as the substantial and convenient building which he erected for the Sunday School of the First Church at Durham, and the endowment he provided for the Department of Religious Education and Sunday School Work at Union Seminary. The last great religious gathering he attended was the World's Sunday School Convention at Tokyo, Japan, last summer, and his last public address was the account he gave of that convention to his own school at Durham.

No other pre-eminently successful man of our time has exemplified more strikingly than Mr. Watts the right combination of business capacity and Christian character. In an age accused of absorption in things merely material and of indifference to the means by which money is made and of selfish misuse of accumulated wealth, he set a shining example of honesty, integrity and benevolence. He was indeed a remarkable business man, but the beautiful thing is that his nature was not dwarfed but enlarged by his devotion to business. Some men become

mere business machines; their nobler powers are atrophied and their natures are narrowed and shriveled by the very intensity of their devotion to business. It was not so with him, With all his sagacity and skill and success in practical affairs, with all his concentration of energy upon whatever enterprise he had in hand, he remained throughout a Christian idealist, high-souled, broad-minded, sympathetic, benevolent, devout, The key of his career was his religion. The core of his character was his faith in God.

Although generally regarded as a rather reserved man, Mr. Watts really had a big, warm heart, a sunny disposition and a rare genius for friendship. Few men of his commanding ability and phenomenal success have ever had so many devoted friends. It is inevitable that men of wealth and power will be sought by some for their influence and aid rather than for themselves, and no doubt Mr. Watts had some such experiences; but no man ever had truer friends or less doubt of their sincere attachment, and none ever derived more genuine pleasure from his friendships. With his clear intelligence and sincere nature and loving heart, he was not a man to make any mistake as to who were his real friends, and when he was among these he was happy in their affection and confidence. In the Seminary community he was especially beloved, and his annual visits were looked forward to by trustees, professors, students and people as those of a dear personal friend. He knew their affection for him and he reciprocated it, and he never seemed more light-hearted and gay than on these visits. All hearts here feel a wistful loneliness when they look forward to the meeting of the board without that alert, strong figure in the chair, and to commencement day without that beaming face on the rostrum and that hearty hand-shake with which he was wont to present their diplomas to the graduates.

When George Howe, the choicest spirit in Drumtochty, was called home to God, and the neighbors, who "a' loved him and were a' prood o' him" gathered to his funeral, Drumshough, their spokesman, said to the bereaved mother: "Marget Hoo, this is no the day for mony words, but there's just ae heart in Drumtochty, and it's sair." There's just one heart in Union Seminary now, and it's sore.

But we thank God for his friendship and his example and his work. We rejoice in all the memories of his life. And we rejoice in all the rewards upon which he has entered in the land of light. As we remember how he labored to teach young and old the will of God and the grace of Christ and how he set in operation forces which will continue that blessed work through all the future we call to mind that great promise of God's Word: "They that be teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."