

THE  
LIFE AND LETTERS  
OF  
Robert Lewis Dabney.

BY  
THOMAS CARY JOHNSON.



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They are to dispense justice! In this hour of awful stress some of Virginia's sons will go over to the oppressors. If Virginia is ever redeemed, will not her better sons have learned political indirection in the meantime? He cannot be indirect. Shall this herd of Gadarene swine trample him in the mire, and his country? Such visions and questions he carried with him night and day at this time. Long afterwards, in happier days, he poured forth, in rough but vigorous verse, the feelings which were now burnt into his prophetic soul by the present and impending degradation of his country:

“How conquerors, ruthless in their pride of power  
Should trample thy fair neck, whose queenly foot  
Found rightful place upon the oppressor's head;  
Cunning and malice rule the dismal hour  
Of thine eclipse, and fraud and force uproot  
Each right implanted by thy fathers dead!  
How doltish serfs and alien thieves should foul  
Thy seats of power once by the sages graced,  
While all thy noblest, fairest, wisest rank,  
In want obscure, hounded by slanderous howl,  
And worst, how some thy sons whom thou hadst placed  
'Neath thy free banner, in the honored rank  
Of thy defenders, wooed by filthy greed,  
Should aid, oh! shame, their mother's chain to draw.

Yea, woeful mother, weep! there is no herb, rue, nor balsam,  
that can buy  
Health for thy deadly hurt.”

The years succeeding the war were awful ones in the Black Belt. One who has never lived in such a region can hardly conceive it. The roads were full of vagrant negroes, and the court-greens, where Randolph and Henry had addressed audiences of freeholders, now resounded with the empty babble of negroes and the base harangues of their leaders, hounding them on against the whites. “Universal change and unrest were the order of the day. The bottom rail was on top, while ‘old master’ stumbled over the clods, and his soldier son drove broken-down army horses to the plow, and planned emigration and how to take care of the old folks. Friction between the races was universal.” There was no furious retaliatory violence in Virginia, as further South; the people were more quiet, but the irritation was not less deep. It could not have been otherwise. Thievery and disregard of property rights were ever