

DISCUSSIONS

BY

ROBERT L. DABNEY, D. D., LL. D.

RECENTLY PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AND FOR
MANY YEARS PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY
IN UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN VIRGINIA.

EDITED BY

C. R. VAUGHAN, D. D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, VIRGINIA.

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AN ELEGY, 1887.

Six days our hearts stood still with keen suspense;
Our champion lay sore smitten of God's hand.
The seventh, our hope was slain, for he was dead!
Our prayers were vain; and now our palsied sense
Knows not our grief to utter. Weep, O land!
Who shall inspire thy threnody, and wed
Thy wails to numbers mournful as thy breast?
Invoke no pagan Muse, whose fabled sigh
And painted tear but mimic woe sincere.
Come rather, thou, the Spirit who dost rest
In truth's eternal seat; it was thine eye
Illumined him we mourn; and thy pure fear
His greatness was. Thee then, we call to teach
Our pain fit voice, who didst thy seer's lament
Attune to chant meet dirge for Zion's fall.
"Oh that our heads were waters!" Then might reach
Our floods of tears to the full argument
Of our calamity, as we recall.
In contrast black, our hero's glorious morn
With this drear night that clouds it at midday.
But twice twelve moons before, Virginia said:
"Hither my sons to meet the invaders' scorn!
They deem we withered in obscure decay,
My bosom dry of that proud milk that fed
My Washingtons and Henrys. O'er my head
They shake the loathed scourge, as though to sway
To slavery this soul to freedom born."
Then of her myriads, rallying to her cry,
Our mother's instinct owned him foremost son,
Modest as prompt, with spirit trained to might
In secret prayer, with Bayard's chivalry
Of faith begotten; with a valor won
From God's own strength and truth's serenest light.
She gave her banner to his stainless hand.
Thence, like the day-star blazed he in her front;
His sweep, the wind's, his stroke the knell of fate
To them who durst pollute her sacred land.
Onward and upward, through the war-cloud's brunt,
He soared with steady wing, as though to' instate

Her flag in freedom's peaceful citadel.
Then, midst his loftiest flight, our eagle fell!
That we were fall'n with him we learned too late.
Yea, bow, O Lee, in grief that kingly front
To which all others bent; and weep thou drops
Such as were shed by Israel's warrior king,
For Jonathan and Saul the mighty slain.
For now from thy right side disaster lope
The arm which wont thy victories to bring;
And could thy grandest purposes explain
In grander deeds. Yea, weep thou hoary chief!
For with his parting soul success hath flown,
To come no more. Not that thy worth is less,
Or patriot-will to win thy land relief;
Nor all thy heroes with their pattern gone.
Still shall ye toil and die; but full success
No more shall crown these toils, stanch as his own.
Still shall your gallant struggles honor save,
Losing all else. And weep, ye rugged hosts,
Who laughed in battle's dead-lock: He is gone
Whose shout worth fresh battalions: "On ye brave!"
Inspired your charge. Weep too, ye martial ghosts,
Who, parting from your bleeding flesh, were glad
That he still battles to avenge your fall.
For none remain that vengeance to demand,
Until the heavenly court's decree be had.
But chiefest thou, Virginia, round thee call
Thy mourning women; drape thy widowed land
In blackest weeds, and let thy eyes be wells
Of bitter waters. Yea, and thou didst mourn!
Twice didst thou bury him; thy maids with flowers,
Thy elders with his mother-earth. Thy bells
With dismal stroke and cannons' bellowing groan
Measured thy funeral step, as all thy powers
Unrolled their gloomy ranks.
But hadst thou seen with his presaging eye,
How much was lost with him; hadst broke the seal
Of fate for thy succeeding years, and read
As he had read, that thy best sons should die.
Yet win no rescue for the commonweal
By their rich blood, as vain, as freely shed:
How conquerors, ruthless in their pride of power,
Should trample thy fair neck, whose quently 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 thy sages graced;
 While all thy noblest, fairest, wisest sank
 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 chains to draw:
 Hadst thou seen this as thy dead champion saw;
 (And that it might not be was fain to bleed)
 Then hadst thou wept, not tears of brine, but blood!
 Yea, woeful mother, weep! There is no herb,
 Euphrasy, rue, nor balsam, that can buy
 Health for thy deadly hurt; this saw thy Lee:
 Hence in the battle's edge the end superb
 Of those who for, and with their country die,
 He sought, but could not find; thus God's decree,
 So as he must not fall, nor could endure
 To see the glories bought with fathers' blood
 So foully ravaged, lost beyond recall,
 His mighty heart-strings brake, his spirit pure
 Went up where wrongs no more oppress the good,
 Lift up thy wail, Virginia; thy stone wall
 Thy tower of strength is prostrate. Mothers, weep:
 Who for your country gave your bodies' fruit,
 Dearer than life; yet willing their dear blood
 Should buy her dearer freedom. Widows, weep:
 And ye, unwedded maidens, wan and mute,
 (Fit mates for heroes) who for country's good
 Could nuptial joys forego, and think her weal
 Full recompense for all your widowed lives:
 For **HE IS LEAD**: your priceless price is spent,
 And no deliverance bought. Ah! harshest deal
 Of sightless fortune! this the thought that rives—
 Your aching hearts. Oh God, why hast thou sent
 Such mockery of hope? Why bid arise
 Such champion of our cause, and let him bring
 The boon so near our grasp, and then withdraw
 Thy gift, his work unfinished, to thy skies?
 Forgive the faithless question, Sovereign King,
 We read its answer with repentant awe,
 In our own sin. He was thine overture;
 Thy merciful proposal to us, writ
 In characters more clear than prophet's word,
 And more divine, in life and deed too pure
 For earth-born virtue: such as could befit
 No source but Heaven. And by his righteous sword,
 Great rescue and defense didst thou bestow,
 Plucked from the jaws of death and peril dread

Not once, but oft; wherein this meaning shone:
 "Would ye be free and great? Your giant foe
 Would ye o'erthrow, and crush his ravenous head?
 Be what your Joshua is: as he hath done
 Do ye. Like unto his, be all your ends
 Your God's, your country's and the truth's: your ease
 Denied for duty, and your valor taught
 Of my true fear. This way your God commends:
 Will ye walk in it to a glorious peace?
 Fair overture and true! The State inwrought
 With this man's virtues, all her sons like him,
 Had been unconquerable, absolute,
 Achilles of the nations, panoplied
 Not by the baptism of the infernal stream,
 Lucre and cunning and the strength of brute
 Conferring; but with holy power supplied
 From that clear flood, that watereth the street
 Of God's eternal city' impregnable,
 So ours, fenced by this righteousness, had stood
 'Gainst Satan's world. On what wise did we meet
 God's overture? Our purpose mutable
 Postponed His call: we fain would have the good
 And yet neglect its source; would seize the crown,
 Yet slight the appointed race. So sluggish peace
 And hope deceitful lure the thoughtless brood
 Not worth the prize; who draw the angry frown
 Of God, and His avenging hand release.
 But thus not all. Thus spake the goodlier host:
 "Yea Lord, we will be free, and on thy terms!"
 And these God's model followed where he went,
 To bloody graves; or else, to mourn their lost
 And chant their dirge, remain. Our sin confirms
 The just decree. "Thy visitation sent
 In mercy's chosen day thou knewest not
 O land! But in thy wealth hebetate and gross,
 Thou wouldst not read aright God's offered gift."
 That question solved, before disaster blot
 The scutcheon of God's knight, or honor's loss:
 Up to his rest doth he his servant lift:
 His task is done; the woe he must not feel.
 Boast not upon his fall, ye haughty foes:
 Ye slew him not. Your stores no missile held
 To touch that sacred life. No bolt, nor steel
 Forged for your greed or malice could uncloset
 The links of heavenly mail the truth did weld
 Across that breast. The' intent was yours, and guilt:
 But impotent as foul. God's was the deed.
 Wherefore, as instruments He chose the friends

Who for this life would joyfully have spilt
 Their dearest blood; unwitting as the steed
 Which bore him, or the lightning's bolt which rends
 The clouds to minister Jehovah's will.
 For not of wrath, but love the stroke was pledge,
 It took God's favorite from the coming doom,
 Whose baleful shade, than Artic night more chill,
 On his prophetic soul now cast its edge,
 Prognostic of the blacker, coming gloom
 Of freedom lost. Thereat his swelling soul,
 Spurning the shameful bonds with grand disdain,
 Burst from the fetters of his earthly frame,
 And soared forever free. Asunder roll
 The' eternal gates; while from their glittering fane
 The spirits troop, his brotherhood to claim,
 Who free from chains of bondage lived, or died,
 But we, alas! unworthy of his fate,
 Live on to wear the chain, and watch his dust
 By venal and contemptuous tongues belied:
 Of manhood scarce retaining such poor state
 As dares to guard aright our funeral trust.
 For on the soil baptized by his blood,
 His comrades raise no monumental stone
 To make his name endure. The lowly grave,
 That keeps what earth reserves of him, had stood
 Unmarked, but that a weeping woman, lone
 And widowed, still than bearded men more brave,
 Planted her modest shaft; and maiden's hands
 Weekly bedeck his sod with wreathed flowers,
 Soon withered, like the cause he loved so well,
 Thus lowly lie, in this dishonored land
 Valor and truth and those imperial powers
 Of genius consecrate (in Heaven they dwell
 In state supernal!) while the sordid dust
 Of coarse oppressors, great but in their crime,
 Greedy of gold and blood, their people's shame,
 Usurps the honor sacred to the just,
 And flouts the heavens with braggart shaft sublime;
 While mercenary mobs resound their name,
 And fawning priests, worst traitors to Christ's word,
 Teach them to cry: "Success, thou art divine!"
 "Be thou our God, for thou dost sate our lust."
 Thou sittest judge of all, O righteous Lord!
 Thou wilt arise and let Thy judgments shine,
 And they shall clear the memories of the just.
 Our grievance we revoke; thou, mighty shade,
 Lackest no mausoleum, while true hearts,
 And such there are, enshrine thy memory.
 These nobler temples of thy fame, not made

By earthly hands, nor graven by men's arts,
Shall keep thy glory! And these mountains free,
Eternal watchmen round thy modest tomb,
They are fit sentinels; their soaring peaks
Point to the skies which thou inhabitest:
Steadfast like thee, whether the winter's gloom
Change them to iron, or Aurora's streaks
Emblazon them like mansions of the blest;
Or glittering snows enwrap their giant forms,
White as thy heavenly robe, so earth meets sky,
And mortal ken can scarce discern their bound;
These keep their faithful ward through calms and storms
Nor cease to speak thy name, till time shall die
And thy great Captain's final trumpet sound.