

# IN MEMORIAM

—

ROBERT LEWIS DABNEY

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Dabney, Charles William,  
1855-1945,  
In memoriam

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ROBERT LEWIS DABNEY,  
Hampden Sidney, Va., 1872 or '73

✓  
IN MEMORIAM

✓  
ROBERT LEWIS DABNEY

Born, March 5th, 1820

Died, January 3rd, 1898

“Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.”

The University of Tennessee Press  
Knoxville,  
1899

## REGNANT MEN.

BY REV. DR. MOSES D. HOGE.

(Address at the Funeral.)

It is not my purpose to attempt any portraiture of Dr. Dabney, or even an outline of the work he had undertaken and accomplished in the world, further than to remark that a man was ordinarily regarded as having fulfilled the great end of life when he had been successful in any one department of useful labor, but that it had been the privilege of the man whose loss we mourn to-day to be distinguished, first as an able and impressive expounder of the Word in the pulpit; second, as one of the strongest of writers on philosophic, secular, and theological themes; and, third, as one of the most successful of teachers in a seminary devoted to the training of young men for the Gospel ministry; that it was his rare lot not only to win distinction in each but to combine and nobly employ all three of these great instrumentalities for wide and permanent usefulness.

The loss of such a man makes a great void in the world, and all who appreciated his worth bemoan the bereavement and say, "How is the strong staff broken and the beautiful rod."

The Bible contains a record of the regnant men of the race, the kingly men of the world, not because of hereditary rank and power, but because of commanding influence through services rendered by which the intellectual and moral progress of mankind has been advanced.

But outside of that inspired register, and continually adding to its length and numbers, are the men of distinguished influence, who in the providence of God are raised up from age to age. Some are endowed with such genius, and their natural capacities have been so strengthened and illumined by vast and varied learning, that they are compelled to occupy conspicuous positions. Their own modesty might induce them to seek private stations, but those who appreciate their worth and power will not consent, and insist that they shall not be allowed to abandon the high positions to which they have been elevated.

Such men are the acknowledged leaders in the State, they are the lights and landmarks in the Church, they are the grand pillars in the temple which God is rearing in the world to the glory of His grace. Among the gifts of God are the gifts of such men to the Church and to the world. For they are the instruments by which society is moulded, and the moral and spiritual influence of mankind strengthened and advanced from age to age. When such men are snatched away we attempt to console ourselves by saying: 'The workmen die, but the work goes on.' It does go on in the sense that God cannot be thwarted in His purposes; that He is never at a loss for instruments to carry them on to completion. Moses and Aaron may drop out of the ranks on that magnificent march of the tribes to the Land of Promise, but Joshua is there at the river to conduct them on and to establish them in their inheritance. Then Samuel comes to lay the foundation of justice and order; then David, to give them an inspired liturgy and to frame a wise constitution of religious worship. One by one the lights in the golden candlestick are extinguished, but the temple still glows with the radiance of the glory of the Lord. The Church still lifts up its voice, though tremulous and full of tears, and cries, 'Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations,' and is measurably comforted. But there is another sense in which it is true that when the workman dies the work does not go on as successfully and steadily as before. Indeed, the death of a single man often arrests that progress temporarily and cripples, though it does not stop the work.

During the last decade great has been the loss of the Church of eminent men. To say nothing of our own Continent, I may look abroad and remark the blanks that have been made by the removal of such men as Christlieb, of Bonn and Bersier, of Paris; Liddon, of England, and Spurgeon—of what country shall we call him? Let us say Spurgeon, of Christendom, for all claim him as their own.

Our Southern Church has been dignified and adorned by an illustrious *Triumvirate*. Born amidst the throes of the greatest revolution in modern times, it needed the wisdom and experience of men qualified by nature and by grace for the responsible task of giving it symmetrical and Scriptural forms; of conserving the

principles embodied in the Westminster standards and of grafting upon them whatever might give these time-honored truths new applications and new efficiency.

No church on this continent has been more favored of heaven in having at its very organization three such men as Thornwell, Palmer and Dabney—each fitted by splendid genius, profound scholarship and consecration to the noblest ends, to give direction to its future life and to enrich it for all time by their published contributions to theological science.

Two of this illustrious Triumvirate have been called to a higher service; one still survives to find each succeeding year crowned with fresh benedictions.

The places of such leaders may be occupied without being filled. And where are the champions who are ready to take up the weapons fallen from their hands and cheer on the Church to renewed victories. We all know how the loss of one great statesman has sometimes defeated measures by which the progress of prosperity of a nation might have been promoted for generations. And who does not know that in a great crisis in national history the death of a single distinguished leader has made the independence of that people impossible for all time. So, in the Church, the work goes on haltingly, wearily, and is often temporarily crushed.

It was so when the reformations which attempted to spring up often before Luther was born were put down, such as that of Arnold of Brescia, and that of Savonarola, and of John Huss. It was so when Coligny and Conde fell. It was so when other reformers were put down; their fall was the signal of the decline of the great work they undertook.

Among the lessons to be learned from the bereavements that make the world poorer and the Church emptier is this: The need of earnest prayer to God that He would raise up and qualify men who can take the places of the departed and efficiently hasten the accomplishment of His great purpose of mercy and grace by which this revolted world is to be brought back to its rightful allegiance—men who, if not inspired men, like Moses and Isaiah, or like David, who composed the psalms which animated the sacramental army on its march to final victory; or like Paul, who

girdled the earth with a zone of light and glory, and wrote the Epistles which have shaped the theological thought of the world; at least, like their successors, who though uninspired, yet possessed the consecrated genius and learning to meet the great exigencies which are always arising in the history of the Church. Who can say that such men are not needed now to combat great errors and arrest the tide of secularism, false philanthropy, and assaults upon the inspiration of the Scriptures which prevail even in lands where Christianity is supposed to exist in its purest form? Let us beseech the Great Head of the Church to bless it with more of power in the pulpit, power with the pen, power in the professor's chair, the power of sanctified scholarship, the power of consecrated lives in every department of Church work and Christian enterprise. The scholar is a product of slow growth, of patient toil, and a rare product even after the most protracted toil. Every day we have new illustrations of the difficulty of finding men qualified for the high positions which death makes vacant by the removal of the great and good, although there never was a time, perhaps, when the Church was fuller of men of average ability.

In deploring such a loss as the one which makes us mourners this afternoon, we will not forget the most blessed of all consolations: Heaven gains what we lose, and becomes richer and more attractive to us. True, the Lamb is the light thereof, but our departed ones stand disclosed in that light, and reflect it down to us. We love them all the more because they shine in the beauty of their Lord and ours. We remember our brother, beloved now in the rest and peace and blessedness of the true home. We remember those whom he has left behind for awhile, and it comforts us to know that there is one hand gentle enough to bind up the bleeding heart and soft enough to wipe away the tears of bereavement; one who is the husband of the widow and the father of the fatherless; one who is able to sanctify to us our deepest distress and to bring us all by ways of His own choosing to the end of life's journey and through the bright gate of Paradise into the land of eternal light and glory.