

THE
LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
Robert Lewis Dabney.

BY
THOMAS CARY JOHNSON.



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and awful, yet glorious, phase of consciousness, to feel the power of those precious truths triumphing over a *real* sense of the woe of life, the blended masses of cloud and sunlight struggling until the spreading radiance is the victor. May your consolations be as vivid as your grief, and your solid profit in the sanctification of your nature be richer than both. It is a phase of life through which you have passed. I have not. It may be my time next. Oh! that we could be what we ought to be, under liabilities so fearful and so unforeseen, so uncontrollable, even if foreknown. Dear Dabney, accept my earnest sympathy, and tell it to your wife, for she shares largely in it. It is a time with you when you need to hear the voice of affectionate communion in your sorrow. Be assured of both mine and my wife's. Your loss is very great; but the grace of your Master is *very, very* great. Your noble boy is gone; for he was noble. I remember him—the young Webster—the calm, steady, great black eye; the mouth and cheek expressing firmness and decision far more than is at all usual in a child; the noble head. I remember all. But he sleeps. Let the Master have him. Farewell.

“Yours most affectionately,

“C. R. VAUGHAN.”

“LYNCHBURG, *December 4, 1855.*

“MY DEAR DABNEY: I received with emotions of distress and almost of terror, on Saturday, the tidings of the renewed affliction which God has been pleased to send upon you. I at once began to make my arrangements to come down and see you, to express in person my deep sympathy in your singular and bitter sorrow; but the sudden sickness of my wife, with other circumstances, has prevented it for a few days, at any rate. If I can come this week, I will, and in case you are not able to come up to aid me at our next communion—a point on which I wish to hear from you so soon as you can make it convenient—I will come some time in the next fortnight and spend a night with you. I write now just to say that my heart is sad for you, my brother. Your two bright and noble boys, both gone! What a grief! what an overwhelming sorrow! God is in this matter, moving amid the cloud and darkness of a throne which is nevertheless all spotless and full of glory. It is a case in which you must trust God, and trust him utterly. There is reason to trust him *at all times*. This is easy enough admitted in the abstract. But in the intensity and vehement energy of the conditions with which your heart is agitated, it is no doubt difficult for you to see into the full significancy, the deep and powerful force of the idea. Yet there is, for all that, a ground for your trusting in him, though he slay you. No doubt affliction now seems to you a far more intense and *real* thing than it ever did before; the griefs of human life are far more awful and terrific to you now than they ever before seemed, even to your most realizing and comprehensive conceptions. But *the power of grace is master of them*, and as you feel with such intensity the

power of the ill, do not allow it to fill up your soul so as to exclude the other truth. Steady your spirit in the storm for an instant, and fix your attention on the fact that, awful as is the grief which darkens your house, yet there is a power to master it, and that no matter how fearful may be the trouble, it may be cast upon the Lord; no matter how great the tribulation, you may still *rejoice* in it. Alas! our minds are commonly as senseless to the real force of the evils of our lot as they are to the grace that subdues them. We are often as senseless to the real weight of the sorrows of a Christian, the real solemnity of the *discipline* of the saint, as we are to the retribution of sinners; and the practical consequence is when the discipline comes it seems so heavy, so real, so intensely and unutterably bitter, it is almost impossible to recognize it as discipline and not retribution, and we who suffer it, as the objects of the love and not the wrath of our Father in heaven. But such a conclusion would be wrong. Has your Christian hope been blown out by this tempest? Have you questioned whether God could deal with you thus if you were his child? If you have, it is a natural, but not a sound conclusion. Was not Job beloved of God at the very time when his children perished at a stroke? Do not give up your trust in him; wait, bow, submit—submit even to bear the rage of your own unbelief, and say to him, 'Even amid my agony; yea, amid the rebellion and unsubmitiveness of the wicked part of my nature, yet I will trust in thee, though thou slay me, too.' I do hope and pray that God may give you grace to exercise a faith which will humble, comfort and cheer your inmost soul. But if you cannot so believe, at least let your faith lay hands on your bleeding and darkened spirit, and drag it along the way of duty. Follow the Master's will, in comfort if you can, but follow it. He will bring you out into a large place in his own time.

"Give my earnest sympathies to your dear wife; it is painful even to imagine such grief as hers and yours. Accept my affectionate solicitude, and also my whole family's. My father seems specially moved for you.

Yours very truly,

"C. R. VAUGHAN."

It is not the biographer's business to explain what God meant in these bereavements to his servant; but the reader may get a glimpse of a further part of the divine intention, in an incident of his life furnished by Mrs. Margaret Kemper Boccock, the venerable widow of Dr. John H. Boccock, pastor, at the time of the occurrence, in Georgetown, D. C. Mrs. Boccock writes:

"About the year 1859, Dr. Dabney came to our house to deliver an address in the Bridge Street Church, before the Bible Society, for my husband, who had the appointment, but for some reason had to be absent. Dr. Dabney was our guest, and I much enjoyed his company.