

THE
LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
Robert Lewis Dabney.

BY
THOMAS CARY JOHNSON.



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brought me to death's door. One of the physicians gave me over to die at once. In the old *States* my death was reported, and my obituaries written and published."

During this sickness, Dr. Dabney was much comforted by the devotion shown him by his friends throughout the church, and by the members of his own family. Numerous and most appreciative letters showered in upon him. The Rev. Dr. Wm. Brown, himself blind already for five years at the time, writes, on February 3, 1890, to his brother in blindness, "whose sufferings, in fact, have been among the very greatest the human frame can endure :

"I trust, my dear brother, that in the midst of all your trials you are sustained by the consolation of him who said to his servant ages ago, 'My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.' I am sure that you will be remembered most affectionately in the prayers of brethren and Christians who have known and loved you, not for your sake alone, but for Christ's sake; and for the great and good work which you have been enabled to perform for the sake of his church."

On the same day, Dr. C. R. Vaughan wrote :

"N. P. MANSE, *February 3, 1890.*

"DEAR DABNEY: Yours of the 28th, just received, relieved a tension of feeling which has held me painfully ever since Mrs. Dabney's last. I dreaded to hear, and then to hear you are in any degree better was an inexpressible comfort. It melted me to hear of your prayers for faith and dying grace. The stress of such constant and severe bodily pain is enough of itself to try you; and the tempter is sure to use it to affect your hope. Pray on, dear old soldier, of course; but listen to me awhile. I want to give you a morsel of honey out of one of my dead lions, though, in fact, there is a large herd of them still living, and they roar on me often till I am sick with fears. You want more faith. Do you remember, in the stress of your trial, how faith comes? Let me remind you, although you know it. You know we are sanctified through the *truth*. Sanctification is just the growth of the particular graces of the spirit, of which faith is one. Just here is where Christians make a great mistake. When they want more faith, or want to know whether the faith they have is the right sort of faith, instead of looking at the *things* to be believed, they turn their eyes inward and scrutinize their *faith*. They want to see something in their faith to trust in, something that will *certify* their faith. Of course, self-examination is all right, but not when it practically substitutes *faith* for our Lord, grace and righteousness. Even a great theological thinker is as apt to make that mistake when he has come into the practical stress of this awful world

as a common Christian. Now, suppose a traveller comes to a bridge, and he is in doubt about trusting himself to it. What does he do to breed confidence in the bridge? He looks at the bridge; he gets down and examines it. He don't stand at the bridge-head and turn his thoughts curiously in on his own mind to see if he has confidence in the bridge. If his examination of the bridge gives him a certain amount of confidence, and yet he wants more, how does he make his faith grow? Why, in the same way; he still continues to examine the bridge. Now, my dear old man, let your faith take care of itself for awhile, and you just think of what you are allowed to trust in. Think of the Master's *power*, think of his *love*; think how he is *interested* in the soul that searches for him, and will not be comforted until he finds him. Think of what he has done, his work. That blood of his is mightier than all the sins of all the sinners that ever lived. Don't you think it will master *yours*? Think of his great righteousness; will it not avail for all you hope to gain? That great work is enough; it needs not to be supplemented; it meets every demand. It warrants you to come into the King's very presence, assured of welcome, because you can come in the name of the King's Son. That work of Christ is like a bankrupt for ten thousand dollars allowed to draw on the revenues of an empire to pay out. Think of the Master when you want your faith to grow.

"Now, dear old friend, I have done to you just what I would want you to do to me if I were lying in your place. The great theologian, after all, is just like any other one of God's children, and the simple gospel talked simply to him is just as essential to his comfort as it is to a milk-maid or to a plow-boy. May God give you grace, not to lay too much stress on your faith, but to grasp the great ground of confidence, Christ, and all his work and all his personal fitness to be a sinner's refuge. Faith is only an eye to see him. I have been praying that God would quiet your pains as you advance, and enable you to see the gladness of the gospel at every step. Good-bye. God be with you as he will. Think of the Bridge!

"Your brother,

C. R. V."

The *North Carolina Presbyterian* of February 19, 1890, on the rumor of his death, published a two-column article headed, "Death of Dr. R. L. Dabney." The article was from the facile pen of Dr. P. H. Hoge, then of Wilmington. While containing the spice of dissent from his great teacher on one point, the paper is a most appreciative one. In speaking of Dabney, as teacher and preacher, this paper says:

"To a greater extent than any man we have ever known, he had the faculty of imparting knowledge. His vast funds of information, digested by his philosophical and original intellect, gave him an inexhaustible store of illustration, upon which he drew *ad libitum*, so that