

THE
LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
Robert Lewis Dabney.

BY
THOMAS CARY JOHNSON.



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Moses Drury Hoge, John H. Boccock, C. R. Vaughan, William T. Richardson, many of his faithful friends at Tinkling Spring, of his old class-mates, his kinspeople, etc.

Not because they are more affectionate in tone than the others, but because they come from one who understood Dr. Dabney's feelings better, perhaps, than any of his contemporaries, these two letters from Mr. Vaughan, of Lynchburg, may be read, viz. :

“LYNCHBURG, *November 20, 1855.*

“MY DEAR DABNEY: It gave me great pain, as I went down to Richmond last week, to learn that your noble boy Jimmy had been taken away from you. At this, the earliest practicable moment for writing, I sit down to tell you and your dear wife that your sorrow is not unfelt by your friends. My heart goes out most earnestly towards you. It is a fearful thing to see a spirit so affectionate and so vehement as yours brought into this sensible contact with some of the griefs of this, our mysterious and awful life. The griefs of life! Gracious Heaven! what stupid sentiment—what heartless rhetoric—what feasts for vanity and pride are made over them! Yet how keen and bitter they are. My poor, dear friend, when they are on us after a real fashion—when the stroke comes so suddenly and so sternly as almost to take away our breath, and leaves us partly amazed in the deep infinite contrast between the sensations of one week or one day and the sensations of the next—I know something of this, although only at intervals of time am I able to see it. You have been looking with a confounded sense—hardly able to believe, then too bitterly convinced of the terrible fact—into the dead face of your son. I have been looking at times—for generally I am very stupid about it—into what seems to be my own last resting-place. It is a fearful thing, Dabney, to feel as I do sometimes, that I am actually stricken with a mortal disease! It must be a fearful thing to gaze on the evacuated countenance and noble form of a child, so dear to poor human nature as they are! I have tried to conceive how I could feel if one of mine were dead, that I might be prepared to sympathize truly with you; but the conception, feeble as it must be by the side of the fact, is painful beyond thought or expression.

“Now, just think that sorrows like yours and sorrows like mine, often far worse, are the common lot of man; that all must come to it, and millions without the support and consolations which I trust that God has given to both of us! What a world! It looks like the ante-chamber of hell, under certain of its aspects! How can any man of ordinary sense grasp the obvious facts of human life and combine them together, and look at them as a whole, conceive them justly, and yet question whether the world is under a curse or not! But there is consolation in the gospel, rich, sustaining, *sufficient*. It is a grand

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