

THE
LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
Robert Lewis Dabney.

BY
THOMAS CARY JOHNSON.



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*Fraternally Yours,
R. D. Dalney.*



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promises and truths of God's Word; to have that faith which will purify your heart and work by love; that will ever lead you to do good, and in every way be useful. Oh! it is worth all labor, self-denial and exertion to be found so engaged as at last to have it pronounced, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' I trust you will make the Bible, and not other professors, your rule and guide. Shrink not from any duty, however difficult and painful; and diligently seek for duties."

Her letters to him abound in homilies similarly helpful. This venerated lady to whom he wrote, often two letters to her one, makes it her business to urge him to return to Hampden-Sidney. She began this as early as November, 1838. She says, in a letter of the 22nd of that month:

"Though I now have a good many letters pressing on my hands, yet I cannot delay yours, if anything I can say will aid in deciding so important a point as your next year's college course. I must say that Mr. Maxwell . . . seems to take hold of the poor old College with the right spirit; and that every son of Virginia, and especially Presbyterians, ought to hold up his hands, and aid him in every way in their power. This I would by no means wish you to do to the least injury of yourself or your dear young brother. Every man must, in a great measure, form himself, or he will not be a good scholar or anything else; and I should think recitations preferable to lectures for undergraduates. The College, as far as I can learn, is now going on admirably. Mr. Maxwell says his duties thus far are pleasures; and we are apt to attend well to what is a pleasure. He says he has to study hard, but he seems to enjoy it. He talks much of putting the place in thorough repair, and making it attractive by having fine fruits, trees, pleasure walks, and so forth, and of doing everything to improve and please, to benefit and render the students comfortable and happy. Professor Smith [this gentleman was soon to become the head of the Virginia Military Institute] is said to be a fine officer. He wishes to put the College under complete martial law, and make it a sort of West Point. Mr. Maxwell is very anxious to make a truly Christian college, and for this, I believe, ardently prays. Now, although the College has not been patronized by the State, it has been a patron of the State, and I do not think the old mother should be neglected for the pampered daughter, who has sucked all the literary resources, and yet has higher expenses. The cost there is considerably greater, and there are many more temptations to indulgence and extravagances. And as to friends, I do not expect you have one near there more interested in you than I am."

In a letter of January 15, 1839, she again speaks in praise of Mr. Maxwell's administration, and of the college generally;

says that the students are becoming better pleased; mentions Mr. Hoge as a special instance of this, and says, "They have talked of writing to you, and perhaps have, and can tell you much more than I can."

On the 9th of April following she wrote:

"I am, of course, no judge of college matters. But Mr. Maxwell seems to have his heart so much in the work, and his views seem to me so much what they ought to be in relation to such a work, that I cannot but hope he is doing very well, and that if he can be sustained the institution will yet be a blessing and a glory to our State. I should have no doubt of his success if it was not for this lamentable party strife."

The reference is to the conflict between the New and Old School Churches, with the spirit of which this good lady had no sympathy. She thought that the defenders of correct principles had shown a want of Christian charity in dealing with their opponents.

On the 16th of July she wrote:

"I am sorry to hear there will be any difficulty or doubt about you and your brother's coming this fall. This is an important crisis with the good old College, and as much as she wants money, she wants students of the right stamp more, and you know how much our country and the church at this time needs her sons to have every possible qualification for usefulness. The more I see and hear of Mr. Maxwell's views and conduct in regard to college matters, the more I approve and wish him every facility for success. He has many difficulties to contend with, and I wish him to have the aid and comfort of such a pupil as my own young friend. This, though, would not influence me if I did not feel fully assured it would be to the permanent interest of yourself and brother."

Having heard of the offer of Mr. Lewis, near the University of Virginia, to give Mr. Dabney free board, Mrs. Rice wrote, on the 22nd of September, 1839:

"I wish I were in a situation to make an offer that might equal your good aunt's. I think it of considerable importance to build up a good Presbyterian institution, such as President Maxwell has his heart set upon, where pure morals and sound learning may be taught. . . . Mr. Maxwell wishes to raise officers from our own College that will feel and act together, and strive to do good to their country through the College. He has set his heart on Mr. Hoge and young Reid, of Lynchburg, and Mr. Hoge recommends you as a suitable person to