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# The Davidson College Magazine.

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## DABNEY'S LAST LECTURE ON STONEWALL JACKSON.

[The following lecture was delivered in the Old Chapel at Davidson College, on the 22nd of October, 1897. A full and carefully written report of the lecture was made for the *Charlotte Observer* (October 23), by Mr. Howard A. Banks. This report was read by the present editor to Doctor Dabney, who made some emendations and additions. It is with the personal permission of Doctor Dabney that the lecture is reproduced in permanent, though more or less imperfect form. Mr. Banks has also very courteously given his consent to this use of his valuable report.]

The little chapel at Davidson College, where morning prayers are daily held, and where many of the public exercises of campus and village take place, was the scene of a noteworthy and memorable occasion to-day. Shortly before three o'clock, at the pealing forth of the college bell upon the restful quietude of an ideal October afternoon, student body and villagers assembled to hear the Rev. R. L. Dabney, D. D., a venerable father in the ministry of the Southern Presbyterian Church—of which ministry Davidson College has for six decades been an important feeder—deliver a lecture upon Stonewall Jackson.

While the audience gathered, the venerable servant of God sat in a chair upon the rostrum, his right hand hold-

ing his cane, his head inclined forward, the sightless eyes closed, the snow-white, patriarchal beard falling upon his breast. He seemed to be engaged in ceaseless prayer, and called vividly to one's mind the picture of the aged Israel as he "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." But as he rose to greet his audience, which filled every inch of space in the chapel, straightening for a moment the stoop of age from his tall form, that in its best days towered like the sycamore, he was transformed. It was a moment of transfiguration of age into vigorous manhood. Greeting the audience, to him invisible, then resuming his seat for the delivery of his masterly address, the speaker formed the centre of a striking picture that will never fade from the memory of those who saw it.

His love for Stonewall Jackson amounted to a passion. His care-worn face lighted up with happiness as he lived over again the stirring battle scenes on the soil of the Old Dominion; and as his thoughts clustered lovingly around the memory of the Southern hero, expression leaped into his sightless eyes and they flashed with the sheet-lightning they had once seen in meeting those of his great commander.

In the audience were many veterans and other visitors from adjoining counties.

Dr. Dabney began by stating that he had been Jackson's chief-of-staff during two campaigns. In speaking of Jackson, he said, he had been forestalled by the many who had written of Jackson. The speaker himself had written an octavo volume on the life of this genius of the Civil War. The graceful and elegant pen of the widow of General Jackson, whose home was only twenty miles distant, had portrayed the interior of his character. Having in mind the amaranthine garland with which her love had crowned the great warrior's memory, the speaker remarked that he himself felt like the wise man of old who said, "What can I do, who cometh after the queen?"

He would narrate, he said, only a train of disconnected incidents setting forth Jackson the man. His audience would excuse the "I" in his discourse, which he might not be able entirely to eliminate, his hearers bearing in mind that he used it only as the sworn witness whose earnest attempt was to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The lecturer said that March, 1861, found him at his home sick of camp-fever, contracted while performing his duties in the Confederate army. To his utter surprise, he, a minister of the Gospel, entirely ignorant of military affairs, received a brief letter from General Jackson, asking him to serve as chief of the general's staff. "If you join me," wrote General Jackson, "it must be with the understanding that you serve as I do—until the end of the war;" and adding that "the qualities demanded of the chief adjutant are diligence, impartiality, and early rising."

Seeking an interview with Jackson, after a partial recovery from the fever, Dr. Dabney found him in the Shenandoah Valley. Dr. Dabney pleaded his poor health as an excuse from accepting an office for which he felt so ill qualified. The Christian soldier answered:

"If God intends you to perform this service, he will give you health. I will equip you with arms, uniform, and mount."

"But I know nothing of military affairs."

"You can learn," briefly answered the General, with a sledge-hammer accent on the word learn.

Then handing him a manual of military law, the General said: "You may have the remainder of to-day and two days more to inform yourself. I will then announce you as my chief-of-staff."

It was quite a matter of banter in the army that Jackson had chosen an "iron-clad Presbyterian parson" for his chief of staff. While the lecturer did not even intimate as much, any one in the audience who, as it were, read between the

lines of the address, must have seen that there sprang up between the chieftain and his staff-officer a silent, subtle understanding of each other, which could hardly have existed between the great Christian fighter and a military man depending for success more upon arms than upon the Almighty. It often enabled Major Dabney to anticipate the wishes and needs of the General.

Major Dabney asked General Jackson what a staff-officer ought to do under fire. The reply was: "Protect himself." Should he avail himself of the protection of a tree while brave men were exposed to fire around him? was asked.

"Yes, sir. Damage your adversary as much as you can and protect yourself all you can."

"General, do you show your faith by your own works?" asked Major Dabney. The General laughed and dismissed the topic.

A vivid word picture by the lecturer, who is a master of English, portrayed Jackson in the moment of victory. It was when he was pursuing the enemy who had taken refuge in Winchester. The battle had begun. Jackson dispatched Major Dabney to Taylor's Louisiana brigade, held as reserve, to engage the enemy on the left. The chief-of-staff rode off on his errand. When the Louisianians reached the point at which they were to go into the charge, Jackson suddenly appeared. Major Dabney did not know what the General's sudden appearance meant, but he entertained a faint suspicion that Jackson had some fears as to whether his new chief-of-staff would have the men in the right place at the right time. "I had them there though," he said, and there was a triumphant ring in his voice over the very recollection.

"I felt," continued the lecturer in substance, "that I knew what Jackson's design was. He meant for the Louisiana men to overlap, on the extreme left, the enemy's extreme right. My conclusions proved to be correct. The

brigade went into the charge. Jackson rode to the top of a small hill, planted in clover which was just bursting into blossom. I followed close at his elbow. He rode near the top of the hill and looked over toward the left of the line. Instinctively he plunged his spurs into his horse's flank and dashed to the top of the hill.

"Taylor's superb Louisianians had fired one volley, and, in unbroken line, were charging bayonets, driving the enemy!

"Jackson was in a state of towering exaltation and intense excitement. His face was set and pale. It was not flushed. There was on it the pallor of death and the grimness of death, and his expression was one of deadly determination. This movement was the crisis of the battle and the dawn of victory. The splendid charge of the Louisiana men had decided the day.

"'Everybody forward after the enemy!' shouted Jackson, and he galloped to the front leading in the charge as the enemy fled through the streets of Winchester.

"Only once afterward did I ever see this expression of deadly determination on the face of General Jackson," Dr. Dabney continued. Strange as it may seem, however, the lecturer stated that the famous French artist, Guillaume, has caught this expression in the equestrian portrait of Jackson on the crest of the hill at Winchester, painted in Richmond. The artist never saw the general alive, but he studied the face of the dead for half an hour as the remains lay in state in Richmond after Chancellorsville. The speaker thought his success was due to his seeing the face in death. The face after death resumed those awful lines seen in battle. Mrs. Jackson, when she first saw the portrait, was apparently disappointed, and half shrinking, but courteous, she said, "I never saw that look on my husband's face." "Of course not," said the speaker; "she never saw him battle!"

Jackson, one May Sabbath, rode off to hear his chief-of-

staff preach to a regiment which had no chaplain. As they rode along together, Major Dabney respectfully and circumspectly questioned General Jackson as to his ideas of the administration of the Confederate government.

"I have heard, General," he said, "that you have rigid views regarding the cartel for the exchange of prisoners."

Jackson's reply was substantially as follows: "We are not conducting our warfare as a country with inferior numbers fighting for its liberties should do. Our struggle is not one for territory or for national renown. It is a struggle for social existence. We should take no prisoners and no prisoners should be taken from us. My opposition to the cartel for the exchange of prisoners is based on humane grounds. Let the Yankee soldiers understand that they have taken their lives in their hands. Let our men have a similar understanding. Some will be butchered. The fighting will be bloodier but the more quickly ended."

"Then," added Dr. Dabney, "General Jackson proved himself a prophet. He said: 'Lincoln has said that this will not be a war for the abolition of slavery, but it will be. Our liberated slaves will be armed to fight us. The Yankees will even demand that they be considered as prisoners of war entitled to all the rights of such prisoners.'

"The general then said that while he was opposed to the cartel for the exchange of prisoners, he would see that his own were humanely treated."

Riding on, the chief-of-staff pointed out what he feared were mistakes on the part of the Confederacy, when the general suddenly turned on his saddle and said: "Major Dabney, please stop. You make me low spirited."

"I apologized for my remarks," the speaker said, "and noted what was often impressed upon me: General Jackson's profound sadness coupled with his profound earnestness.

"After the short silence which followed, General Jack-

son said in a subdued way: 'You know, Major Dabney, that I have much in the way of domestic happiness to live for; yet I can truthfully say I do not wish to survive the independence of my country.' " Continuing, the lecturer remarked: "Some one has impressively said, 'I understand why Jackson died at Chancellorsville. God took him away that his wish might be fulfilled.' "

On another occasion, Major Dabney asked General Jackson if he thought that, after First Manassas, the Confederate plan of waiting two weeks in the rain, thus causing many troops to fall ill with camp fever, was wise. Turning almost fiercely, his eyes glaring, Jackson answered sharply :

"No, sir. It was a deplorable blunder. Did you know, sir, that 11,000 fresh troops came in that night and the next day?"

Dr. Dabney said he knew it ; for he remembered the train loads of fresh troops a mile long, and every coach crowded with men.

Jackson, after his Valley campaign, had sent Lee word, that if he would send him reinforcements, he would go to Washington. But Lee, instead, sent for him to come to the defence of Richmond, which was then threatened. The aged lecturer drew a graphic picture of Jackson at the battle of Gaines's Mill.

"The Yankee were commanded by Fitzjohn Porter. He was the best general they had, and he fought that battle with consummate skill, and yet they dishonored him, and it was only in his old age that his honors were restored to him." The lecturer spoke with evident indignation over the treatment his brave opponent had undergone.

When the battle was joined, Jackson noticed that his chief-of-staff was decidedly unwell. He noticed the fact just after having delivered a highly important message, which was that six reserve brigades should at once move to the front. Major Dabney was about to execute the

order when Jackson stopped him, and another aide-de-camp galloped off to attend to the order. General Jackson then sent Major Dabney off on mission of less importance, which did not entail riding in the intensely hot sun. Shortly after he rode away, Major Dabney had a slight ague. He did not find the man Jackson had sent him to look for. He soon noticed that the six reserve brigades were not moving forward, as he had heard Jackson order. Now he knew that it was his duty to report his suspicions to Jackson; but he knew also that Jackson was moving from one part of the field to another, and that some time would necessarily elapse before the error could be corrected if he must first find the general. At the same time he felt keenly his responsibility in giving an order with which he had not been directly charged. He was morally certain that the aide sent, whom he knew to be stupid, had misunderstood the order. Major Dabney considered deeply for a few moments, then he resolved: "This battle shall not be lost for the sake of red tape: I'll win it for Jackson if they cashier me to-morrow morning." The six brigades, commanded by Whiting, Hood, Law, Longstreet, Lawton, and Charles H. Winder, stretched over a distance of six miles. The chief-of-staff found, as he feared, that Jackson's vital order had not been given correctly to a single one of the six commanders, the message not having been fully comprehended by the aide himself. Major Dabney hastened to every brigadier, telling each of Jackson's order, which Major Dabney had heard though he was without authority from the general to deliver it. To the credit of every one of the commanders, after the matter had been explained, they all agreed with the chief-of-staff that they should execute the command at once. One of them hesitated for a moment in this crisis, but only for a moment.

"I shall never forget," said the speaker, "the splendid bearing on this occasion of the brave General Winder, in command of the Stonewall Brigade."

“ ‘Major Dabney,’ he said, ‘what would you yourself do under the circumstances, if you were now commanding my brigade?’

“ ‘Move forward in one minute,’ was the reply.

“ ‘You are right, Major;’ and the word was passed along the line.”

It was a fearful responsibility resting upon the chief-of-staff. It took two hours to ride down the line of the reserves, find the brigadiers, explain the situation, emphasizing Jackson's orders, and finally get back to his commander-in-chief. When Major Dabney did find Jackson his face had assumed the expression it bore on the hill-top at Winchester. There was the deadly pallor, the grim determination, and the rigidity of features, the eyes were “flaming like sheet-lightning.” He was in intense excitement, but there was at the same time evidence of an unnatural unrest and anxiety. He would dash the spurs into his horse and rush forward toward the front, as if to take personal command and see for himself why victory was delaying. Then he would suddenly check his horse and ride back to his staff-officers. He was delivering his orders quickly, dispatching men hither and thither; his voice, hoarse from shouting, was “a quick, sharp, intense, wolf-like bark.”

Major Dabney, without explaining his long absence, informed the General of his failure to find the officer he had been sent for two hours and more before.

“It doesn't matter now,” said the General quickly, but not unkindly.

At this juncture a man dressed like a private cavalryman, but with an ostrich plume in his hat, came up to Jackson on foot, and stood familiarly leaning his arm on the neck of Jackson's horse. Jackson said something to him, to which the man in the hat with the ostrich tip replied with a shake of the head, in a clear flute-like voice,

"No, no, General; too many cannon over there." Jackson assented to the answer with a quick nod of his head.

The cavalryman was Jeb Stuart.

Jackson then turned to another officer and said: "Captain Pendleton, this thing hangs in suspense too long. We must sweep the field with the bayonet."

Captain Pendleton rode off to carry out the order; but in a moment there broke upon the ear from right, center, and left, coming up through the smoke of the battle, a loud, long, ringing yell!

The six reserve brigades had at last reached the front, and were sweeping the field!

Looking for General Jackson shortly afterward, Major Dabney found him drooping in the saddle, completely exhausted. He said in a voice, not now like the wolf-like bark of the battle, but almost like the tones of an old man, "Major Dabney, I am greatly fatigued. Could you get me some food and a place to rest?"

Riding over the field with his staff the next day, where Hood had charged and left one-third of his men killed or wounded, Jackson saw them burying the dead, and said quietly and reverently:

"These men were soldiers indeed!"

Very shortly afterward Major Dabney was taken ill. Jackson had never asked the reason of his two hours' absence at Gaines's Mill when he had been sent on a fifteen minutes mission, and he had never spoken of it to his commander. Jackson gave him a two weeks' leave of absence, but his sickness could not be conquered in that time. He resigned and never saw his beloved commander again.

"And," concluded the speaker, "Jackson never knew how the Battle of Gaines's Mill was won."

