



REV. THOMAS CARY JOHNSON, D.D., LL.D.

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An Appreciation by His Friends, the Faculty of Union Theological Seminary; Prepared for Them by The Rev.

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On July 19th, 1859, *Thomas Cary Johnson* was born in Monroe County, then in Virginia. He died in Richmond February 15th, 1936, in his seventy-seventh year. After receiving in 1882 the A. B. degree from Hampden-Sydney College he pursued graduate studies at the University of Virginia, in his characteristic way electing for his Master of Arts Studies the University's most difficult course, known in student parlance as "The Green Ticket". After graduating from Union Seminary in 1887, he spent yet another year as a graduate student in the Yale Divinity School.

After such thorough preparation, and through the interest of his old master, Dr. Robert L. Dabney, he entered at once on his great ministry as a teacher, serving for two years as professor of Biblical Exegesis in Austin Seminary, at the same time also as assistant professor of Philosophy in the University of Texas. His work as teacher was interrupted for about one year by an experience in the pastorate as Stated Supply of the Third Presbyterian Church of Louisville.

But already he had become known and marked as a thorough scholar and talented teacher. A demand had risen throughout the Church for the introduction of a department of English Bible into our Seminaries. In 1890 his *Alma Mater*, Union Seminary, called him to occupy this chair, in connection with Pastoral Theology. So began his life-work of teaching, unbroken except by age, for the remaining forty-six years of his life. In 1893, when Dr. Peck was transferred to

the chair of Systematic Theology, Dr. Johnson succeeded him as professor of Church History, for a service of twenty years both as teacher and versatile writer, for it was in this period that the larger amount of his work as author was done. After the death of Dr. Strickler in 1913 he succeeded to the department of Systematic Theology, continuing therein until his appointment as professor emeritus in 1930. After nominal retirement he continued to assist in this department until within a year of his death.

For fourteen years, from 1913 to 1926, Dr. Johnson served as pastor of the Ginter Park Presbyterian Church, which had been organized chiefly from the families of the Seminary and their close friends, but by 1913 had grown to be the leading church of the community. He won from his congregation a tender and steadfast love, and with them accomplished lasting good. Under his wise guidance and conservative training a membership was gathered and edified, which, although not large, was probably not surpassed in liberality and in spiritual vigor by any other church in the Assembly.

To these many important activities and obligations of his resourceful life Dr. Johnson had the will to add yet another wide and valuable ministry, the ministry of writing. He was a true book man, and by reason of such devotion served as Seminary Librarian during a large part of his professorship. He himself might have been catalogued as an ardent lover of books, a wide reader of books, a diligent maker of books, although no page of catalogue or place on shelf could ever have contained and held the man himself. Pressed by many duties, always busy, never tiring, somewhere, in some way, he found time to make to his Church and to mankind the rich contributions of a dozen or more volumes.

But no statistical sketch can describe or contain such a man. For more than his work, although it was great, it is the man who draws to himself our mind and heart. When the message came that Dr. Johnson had died the heart of every friend registered a negative response. "Dr. Johnson cannot die" was our involuntary reaction. In a physical sense he has gone from us, but in the higher meaning of spiritual realities his work

and service and character are irreducible values in the continuing life of Union Seminary. For us as individuals each recollection of him will be a prized asset, a reminder of a privileged fellowship. His earthly days are spent, but the abundance of his works do follow him, inwrought as they are into the structure of Seminary and Church. The fruits of his labors are not ended. Harvests will be gathered from them in the years yet to be, although the worker and the sower has gone.

Dr. Johnson was a man of unfaltering loyalties. He was one son of man, who was a Virginian both by accident of birth and by right of choice, never having allowed even a Federal Government to readjust his nativity. Monroe County may be in West Virginia on all the maps, but he never allowed any geographical prefix to disfigure the State of his birth. He was loyal to Hampden-Sydney and Union Seminary, their traditions and their great teachers. It was with a generous and loyal enthusiasm that he gave the best of his body, mind and heart to the Seminary of his heart's pride. He was always honoring and repaying his debt of gratitude to the great men, who gave direction to his mind and heart. Loyalty to his mighty master, Robert L. Dabney, was always moving him to turn upon the minds of his students the impact of that strong mind, which had so influenced his own thought and faith. He was always loyal, true, dependable.

Although he held and taught a virile and uncompromising theology, his was not a narrow mind. His versatility in knowledge and service has already been mentioned. He taught in at least six departments of theological training. The untiring worker in the study could also be the cheering and welcome pastor in the home. With all the absorbing toil of research and all the reaches of knowledge, he never lost his poise of common sense. Fifty years ago when a phenomenal passion for the study of Hebrew had possessed our country, Dr. Johnson determined to turn aside and see what this strange thing meant. When Professor William R. Harper came to the University of Virginia to conduct a summer school of Hebrew, he found Dr. Johnson ready and expectant. Yale University was at that time the center of Old Testament liberalism. Conserva-

tive though he was Dr. Johnson spent a year at Yale, in order to give honest appraisal to liberalism on its own chosen ground. For him firmness of conviction could not depreciate honesty of inquiry.

This man, our comrade, was no ordinary man. There were united in him excellencies and varieties of genius which lifted him above the crowd. Apparent contradictions in him were not really such. His strong, sturdy character, always discerning, always honest, always fearless, was mellowed by a genial kindness, and adorned with the Gospel's finest graces. Men might not always agree with him, but they always honored and trusted him.

He was an ardent and a faithful lover. He loved his home and its dear ones with a strong and nourishing love. He thought for them, wrought for them, lived for them. Deep and joyous love of wife and children kept the gleam of happy youth in his fine eye. He loved his friends and enjoyed them, giving to them those two highest guerdons of friendship, fidelity and frankness. Trial or need in any home of his flock found him there before all others. Men facing the fearful uncertainties of hospital operations called for him to stand at their side. He loved his Church, wrote the story of her sufferings and her glories, and himself toiled for her purity, peace and power. He wrote much of men and people, because he loved men and people. He loved passionately his work of ministry and teaching. For him that work embraced all the good which was in the past, and guaranteed the best for the future. The crucified and risen Christ and His Kingdom among men held his faith; but they also were given all the riches of his love. He loved his students. They may not have had digestive power to assimilate all the strong meat of doctrine, which daily he spread before them. But they did understand the keen interest and the deep affection which he lavished upon them. And they will not forget.

This brief and inadequate survey of a long and faithful life, always crowded with unsought but accepted obligations, might seem to imply that Dr. Johnson possessed a robust physique. But such was not the case. Through the years he was

encompassed by physical infirmities. Several times he was at the point of death. One of his most useful books was written, in large measure, on a bed which apparently was to be his deathbed. With a conquering faith, high courage, unyielding will be turned physical ills into spiritual opportunities. Out of weakness he was always becoming strong, sometimes also waxing valiant in fight. It was a life well lived, a faith well kept, a ministry fulfilled.

The current estimate of Dr. Johnson dwells on his strong prejudices, his sturdy diligence, his dogmatic force. All these appraisals are true in a degree. Few men have contributed more than Dr. Johnson by precept and example, to the clear mentality, the steady nerve and the perpendicular backbone of our ministry. But he is something more than these and beyond them all to us. We knew the wholesome vigor of his mind and the firmness of his faith. But we cherish even more the understanding of his kind heart, the balm and the cheer of an honest and unreserved friendship, the gentle, generous smile which was ever unveiling the soul of a good and a true man.

The Faculty of Union Seminary would make record of its deep sense of loss and grief in the passing of Dr. Johnson from our fellowship of service.

With those who were nearest to him by blood relationship, we are united in grief, because it is for us, as it is for them, a personal, a family bereavement.

In the memory of his greatness, his goodness, his faithfulness, we pledge ourselves to more earnest and more generous endeavor in the work which he shared with us and has left for us to carry on. Each remembering of him will be as the invigoration of pure air, as the cheer of a kindly smile, as the call for pure hearts and high endeavor.

“Having served his generation by the will of God, he fell on sleep.”