

A

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. JOHN H. RICE, D.D.

First Professor of Christian Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia.

BY WILLIAM MAXWELL.



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I am, as I always have been since I knew you, most truly yours, &c.,

JOHN H. RICE.

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

*Theological Seminary, April 14th, 1827.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I hope you will excuse me for putting you to a little trouble. There lives in this neighbourhood a black man named Billy Brown. He has been free for sixteen years; but has never obtained legal permission to reside in the State. Some gentleman, however, has *stood his master*, and he has remained here in security. He purchased his wife some years ago, and she, according to our law, belongs to him. Should he die, her case will be a bad one. He therefore determines to leave Virginia. And the question is, where shall he go? He says that he is getting old, and has no children, and therefore it does not suit him to go to Liberia. He has accumulated, it is said, a right handsome sum of money, by washing for the students, and hiring them horses, &c. I believe that his character stands fair. He has some thought of going to Princeton, or New Haven; because he thinks business can be gotten there, such as he has been used to. I have some doubts whether he could do so well, because I suppose there are in those places more hands than work. I promised to write and get the opinion of some judicious person on this matter. I do not know whom to trouble with it but you. Will you, if possible, let me hear from you on this subject immediately, and direct your letter to Petersburg, for I expect to be there all the week following this.

This case brings to my mind one on which I feel the deepest solicitude. I hear that the matter from the Synod of Ohio respecting slavery will be brought before the next General Assembly. Should this be the case, I fear that there will be a discussion of the subject. And I am under the fullest conviction that this will do very great injury. As soon

as John Q. Adams was elected President of the United States, I foresaw that there was to be a violent collision between the north and the south; that the subject of slavery would be brought into party politics and religion; and that Presbyterians were to be greatly embarrassed by it. You know the old jealousies that were raised against the clergy, when Federalism was the matter in dispute. These prejudices are not yet dead. The enemies of religion, and the different sects, are willing enough to use them against us; and there is not a single act of our church which can be laid hold of to our disadvantage, but is at once seized with avidity. An individual minister cannot do a thing which is not used for the same purpose. And if the Presbyterian Church will take hold of slavery, they may just as well bid us abandon the Southern country. We must either do that, or make up our minds to bear the violence of persecution. Besides, it is physically impossible for any decision of the church to be carried into effect. Because taking the members generally, three-fourths are *women and minors*, persons not acknowledged in law. What could they do? Of the remaining fourth, three out of four are people in moderate circumstances, without political influence. In this state of things, any direct movement of the church on the subject would, it seems to me, inevitably do harm rather than good.

I am confident that already material injury has been done, in the way of impeding the progress of feeling in this country against slavery. There is a march of opinion on the subject, which would, if uninterrupted, at no distant date, annihilate this evil in Virginia. I have no doubt of it. And every step gained by true religion is a step towards the accomplishment of this object. But as soon as the ministers of religion take hold of it, the old jealousy is revived, and people determine that the clergy shall not interfere in their secular interests, and their rights of property. The difficulty of getting any sound religious instruction to the negroes

is thus greatly enhanced. And in every way we are thrown all aback. There is nothing on which I feel so great solicitude. I have long had it as an object dearest to my heart, to get Virginia free from slavery. I feel that the direct exertions of the church hinder the work. And I am suffering very deeply under apprehensions of mischief from the indiscreet agitation of the subject from Ohio. Perhaps you can relieve my mind on this matter.

Our best love to all.

As ever yours most truly.

J. H. RICE.

TO MRS. ANNE S. RICE.

*New York, June. 1st, 1827.*

MY BELOVED WIFE,

From Monday until Wednesday evening, I was so pressed with the business of the Assembly, that I could not write. On Thursday I came off to New York. My reason was, that I was persuaded we could do little or nothing at this time in Philadelphia; and I would not have the name of that city to a trifling subscription for our Seminary. My plan then is to fix on a time when we can operate without the impediments of the General Assembly, or any interfering scheme of any magnitude. To this end, it will be necessary to write beforehand to the leading men of the city, that they may keep themselves in reserve for our our object. This would have succeeded well this spring, had not my letters to Mr. R——, Mr. H——, and others, been received just after they had pledged the whole of their *charitable fund*, for the year, to the American Sunday School Union. Indeed some of them had gone beyond their annual sum, at least a thousand dollars. And these were the men, too, who are looked to in Philadelphia as examples, and whose *lead* is followed by all others.

The Seminary of Pittsburg has its Board of Directors.—