

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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an affection rendered more intense by this long absence. O! when will it be terminated? God make me submissive to his blessed will.

To-morrow is Christmas. May the blessings which a Saviour came to bestow, rest on you, my beloved friend, and on your house! May the *peace of God* which passeth all understanding keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

My love to Mr. R. and dear Alice. Do remember me to all of the dear little flock. Tell them I thank them for their love, and their prayers. Let them still pray for me.

I can't write more than *ever ever* yours.

JOHN H. RICE.

In the following month, he was so far recovered that he was able to return, or rather to be carried back, to his anxious flock at Richmond; where he continued to grow gradually, but very slowly, better. In the mean time, having duly and solemnly considered the invitation from Princeton, which had been most kindly and urgently pressed upon him by the committee,) he felt it to be very clearly his duty to decline accepting it; for the reasons which he states (with some others omitted,) in the following letter.

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

*Richmond, March 5th, 1823.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I apprehend that the patience of my friends in Princeton has well nigh grown weary with my delay. But if they knew my situation, that alone would plead a sufficient apology. I shall therefore make a short statement of the case.

My constitution has received by the late dispensation of Providence a shock from which I have long doubted, and do still doubt, whether I shall ever recover. And instead of going to Princeton, or to Hampden Sydney, or even staying

here, I have thought it probable that I might have to retire to some quiet and healthy situation, where I should be called on to preach but little, and have opportunity of taking a great deal of exercise; and it is not yet decided whether I shall not be obliged to adopt this course. I suppose that you never saw, as I never have, a case like mine. While I was sinking, and all sorts of stimulants were necessary to preserve life, my nervous irritability or sensibility was such, that a fly coming in six inches of my face, would produce a motion in the air quite distressing. I could feel them flying over me as plain, when my eyes were shut, as I now feel the paper on which I write. Happily, I had taken assafœtida, until they would not light on me. Since my convalescence, I find the senses of hearing and seeing greatly impaired; and company worries me almost to death. I have tried to preach twice, and have been a great sufferer from the effort. And after all, I bid fair to be a cripple from rheumatism. In this situation, how could I do any thing but give a negative to the application from Princeton? In regard to the affair of Hampden Sydney, I have constantly said, "If you call on me to decide, I must say, No." But I was uniformly told, "Take your own time." So, indeed, they have told me from Princeton, until lately; but now there is a little urgency that I should come to a decision; and certainly it is reasonable.

Well, then, the statement which I have made above, seems to me to furnish a strong objection to my undertaking the laborious and responsible office of President of New Jersey College. What, should I, but a remnant of my former self, a poor shattered nervous creature, do at the head of such an institution? But if this difficulty were removed, there are others which I know not how to surmount. I will state them as briefly as I can.

1. There has been no question so often proposed to me, as whether I would accept the presidency of a college. And in reference to nothing have I studied myself so completely,

as to this question. The result of the whole of my examination is, that I am not well fitted for the office. 1. I have a very strong dislike to it. 2. My education has never been sufficiently complete for it. In that station I could not bear the idea of being unable to instruct in any department in college. I do think that a President ought to be able to look particularly into the studies of every class, see that the professors were discharging their duty, and rouse the pupils to activity in their studies. Now, this I could not do, without an intensity of application which would kill me.

2. It is well known that the acceptance of the Presidency would be very advantageous to me in a pecuniary point of view.

Here, my nominal salary is two thousand dollars; my real one, sixteen hundred dollars, very irregularly paid; and my expenses are beyond my income. At Princeton, I should get two thousand five hundred dollars, punctually paid at quarter day, and should have much less company than here. On acceptance, then, it would at once be said, "Ah! this is what his love to Virginia has come to. Northern gold has bought him, and it can buy any of them." And thus my influence at the South would be greatly lessened, if not destroyed. And, with my disqualifications for the office, I never could regain at Princeton, what I should lose here.

3. The state of things in the South is such as, in my view, presents very serious obstacles to my going North. I have been observing, as carefully as I could, how matters are working, and I am convinced that a Theological Seminary in the South is necessary; and that if there is not one established before long, the consequences will be very deplorable. The majority of students in the South, will not go to the North. I think this a settled point. In the state of North Carolina, there are twelve or fifteen candidates for the ministry, now studying divinity in the old field school way. And between preachers brought forward

in this manner, and those who have better opportunities, there is growing up a strong spirit of envy and jealousy on the part of the former. This is so much the case, that among Presbyterians there is actually now an undervaluing of that sort of education which we think very important. And things are like to get worse and worse. If, however, a Seminary can be established in the South, many will frequent it, who will not go to the North. If we do not go on with ours, they will have one of some sort, between themselves in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The more remote, the more dissociated from the centre of Presbyterianism. But my plan is, if we can succeed here, to take Princeton as our model, to hold constant correspondence with that great and most valuable institution, to get the most promising of our young men to finish off at Princeton; and, in a word, as far as possible, make this a sort of branch of that, so as to have your spirit diffused through us, and do all that can be done to bind the different parts of the Church together. And it has appeared to me, that if the Lord does not intend to throw me aside as "a broken vessel," of no use, that I may be more useful here than I possibly could be any where else. I do not speak now of the effect of training up men for the South in the North country, nor of the unfitness of most Northern men for our purposes. You know that, in general, they will not do.

At present, I should think it presumptuous to say that I will undertake any active or important service. But the Presbytery allows me two months from this time to decide. By that time, I may learn the purposes of Providence concerning my future health, and fitness for duty. Now, all is in the dark. My state of suspense is truly painful; but I have nothing to do but submit. The Lord's will be done. It is true, I can say this, that if there were any service for which I thought my-

self fitted, and which I was called by Providence to perform in Princeton, I had rather live there than at any place in this world. But until the difficulties stated can be removed, and my health restored, I cannot see it to be my duty to go there, even to enjoy the benefit of your society, and the pleasure of Mrs. Alexander's.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just lost one of the dearest and most devoted friends I had in the world,—Mrs. Wood, widow of the late General Wood.\*

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TO THE REV. LEONARD WOODS, D. D.

*Richmond, March 22d, 1823.*

REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,

Notwithstanding all my weakness, and the harassing calls made on my attention, I really feel ashamed that your very friendly and most acceptable letter should so long remain unanswered. The state of my health must be my apology. I hope that you will think it sufficient. The Lord has not yet altogether stayed his hand, although his strokes are now comparatively light. I beg for constant remembrance in the prayers of my brethren. Let them

\* He adds, in an obituary notice of her, which he published shortly afterwards in the Magazine :

“ During her last sickness, she was patient and submissive to the will of God; overflowing with affection to her friends, and full of kindness to all. She felt then that she was a sinner, and had no thoughts of building her hopes on any but “the Rock of Ages.” The review of life created anxieties, which gradually gave way as she approached death, and at the last she was enabled to say of God, with an appropriating faith, “he is my God, and my father's God, and I will praise him forever.” ”