

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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energetic measures until we know what sum must be raised, and for what books. But this cannot be known without a catalogue, and an appraisement. My wish is to purchase the Library for our Seminary, and get it all here by the time our new building (for the Seminary,) is put up; and I wish the books all to be kept together, under the name of the *Bruen Library*. I should value it so much the more, because of the beloved brother, whose cherished memory could thus be perpetuated in our Institution.

I do not like the aspect of the religious world at all. There is a fearful spirit of infidelity awake and active in the country. Popery is making its destructive progress. High-church principles are growing in the nation. And the Evangelical men are disputing, some for *old* orthodoxy, and others for *new* metaphysics. The Church stands more in the way of the Millenium than all the world.

I fear the Sabbath cause is losing ground. Have friends pursued the best policy? Is it wise, when we know that the world has the majority, to push matters to a vote? Is it wise to push men until they commit themselves against the cause of holiness? I throw out these questions for your consideration. I confess that I have my serious doubts. In my weakness I write in haste, and hope you will excuse this poor scrawl.

My love to your wife and children; also, to all friends.

May the Lord bless you—pray for us.

Your brother in the best bonds.

JOHN H. RICE.

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

*Union Seminary, March 9th, 1830.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I was particularly gratified with your last letter. I well remember when we first formed our acquaintance at Hampden Sydney; and I know well that from that day to this, there has been no breach in our friendship; nor even the

least unpleasantness in our intercourse—indeed nothing uncomfortable, except that it has not been so frequent, either personally, or by writing, as I could wish. And I gladly accept your proposition to make it more so.

I do from my heart rejoice that Addison has embraced religion—on his account—on that of his parents—their older children—and the church. May the Lord direct his way into the ministry! His talents, his attainments, his opportunities of further improvement, warrant the hope that he may render the most important service to the cause of truth in our country. It appears to me, at length, entirely necessary that there should be a change in our theological literature. I have been for some time distressed to think, that so much of that which candidates for the ministry are directed to study, and which, in the present state of the world, must be put into their hands, should be defiled with heresy or marred by error. In this age, a preacher must, in many cases, prove his doctrine by a reference to the original languages of the Bible. But to enable him to do that, he must use lexicons, which often contain meanings made to suit a purpose, and critical commentators, who employ vast learning to pervert Scripture. There is, too, a continual increase in the number of theological systems, which present views of truth of which we cannot approve. They however are published, and reviewed, and talked of; and young men will have them. The old writers are thought to have lived in times of comparative ignorance; and a recommendation of them as guides in a course of theological study, is regarded as a proof positive of a deplorable *behindness* in reference to the march of mind. In the meanwhile, we have a flood of German books, partly neological, and partly exegetical. We have English books, Arminian and superficial. We have metaphysico-theology from other sources; and true, old-fashioned orthodoxy produces nothing but now and then a valuable little thing on practical religion. If there should be no change, sound Presbyterian doctrine will be destroyed by the very

books which are brought into our Theological Seminaries. Now, I want Presbyterians to form better Lexicons, better Commentaries, better systems, and better Ecclesiastical Histories than any other denominations; and so much better that the people will be glad to get them; and even be obliged to use them. And I have already allotted to Addison the work of making a Hebrew Lexicon, which shall displace every other. I shall never live to see it; but I do not jest about it.

There is indeed a storm raging against Presbyterians. How long it will last, and how far it may destroy, I pretend not to conjecture. It is a genuine display of the opposition of the heart to religion. But I must believe that, in many cases, there has been a provoking of opposition where there was no necessity for it. I fear that this is very often done by ministers of the gospel. They often act as though they thought, that it was a part of ministerial honesty to speak the truth in the most offensive form. And hence, many are thrown off from religion to a *returnless* distance. For my own part, I am more and more convinced that in building up the church, more is to be accomplished by the gentleness of Christ, than by all other methods. If you beat even a christian in argument, unless at the same time you win him by love, he will be more apt to go farther from you, than to come over to your side. I have lately thought that in all our seminaries, we wanted special instructions for students on the duties of *Christian prudence*.

But I am wandering a little from my subject. The tide of prejudice *is* setting powerfully against Presbyterians. This cannot be altogether prevented. For although our strength is overrated, we are strong enough to excite fear. Our talents and learning are estimated too highly, yet we have enough to provoke jealousy. We are thought to have more zeal than we have, yet even as we are, the world is alarmed at the prospect of what we will do. We are thought, moreover, to be more strict in our discipline than the prac-

tice of our church proves us to be, and the *mobocracy* of the age hates us because we are not *liberal* enough to suit their taste. In this way, or somehow else, people of all sects, and of no sect, hate us; and from every quarter there is a hideous outcry against us. Now I do wish from my heart, that all Presbyterians would live so, that "by well doing they should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." But if among all our enemies, and notwithstanding all their vigilance, we have men who are perpetually occasioning offence, I do not know what can be done. I have for a long time been of opinion, that it was our true policy to mind our own business, and let other things alone. Our business I take to be simply this—to be really good christians ourselves, and try to make as many and as good christians as possible. Had this, our appropriate work, always occupied our attention, and all our ministers had let alone presidential elections, and kept clear from party contests, I think that the state of the Presbyterian church would have been very different from what it is.

I have given this long, and I fear tedious *rigmarole*, for the sake of proposing a question for your consideration. Would it not be well for the next General Assembly to appoint a very wise and able committee to prepare a pastoral letter, to the ministers and churches, giving earnest and affectionate advice, suited to the present times? I have thought that some good might be done in this way.

Mrs. Rice wishes you and Mrs. A. to know, that she rejoices with you in Addison's happy change; and that she joins me in the kindest remembrance of the whole family.

As ever, faithfully yours,

JOHN H. RICE.

About this time, Dr. Rice commenced publishing a series of letters to the venerable James Madison, Ex-President of the United States, in the Southern Religious Telegraph (a weekly paper published by his highly esteemed friend