

A

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. JOHN H. RICE, D.D.

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BY WILLIAM MAXWELL.



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The Philip Tabb is arrived, and Mr. Edmund Taylor is come passenger in her. From him you will learn the whole truth.\*

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

*Richmond, November 16th, 1815.*

MY DEAR SIR,

The day after my return from up the country, an old friend, Mr. Lacy came to my house in his way to Philadelphia. He is afflicted with the stone, and is gone with the view of having a surgical operation performed. This, at his time of life especially, is a serious matter. But an event which has taken place since his departure from home, makes his situation as distressing as it well can be. About the first of the present month, Mrs. Lacy was taken with the disease which proved so fatal last winter, and died on the eighth day. Of this melancholy change, Mr. Lacy as yet knows nothing; and it is my wish that he may not hear of it until some time after the operation on him shall have been performed. I do not know what his family will determine to do respecting this matter; but such has been my advice to them. If the situation of your affairs would permit you to pay Mr. Lacy a visit in Philadelphia, it would be peculiar'y gratifying to him. Would that I could do something for the comfort of our old brother. I trust that the God "whose he is and whom he serves," will not forsake him in this distressing hour.†

\* Mr. R's worst apprehensions were soon confirmed. His beloved pupil had died at Cheltenham, in England, on the 18th of August preceding. There was, however, hope in his death; as the lady at whose house he lodged at the time, (and who was a pious Presbyterian,) reported that he had evidently enjoyed the consolations and support of religion in his last hours. "The last words," says Mr. R. in another letter to his mother, "that our dear boy uttered, to be distinctly heard, were, 'dont grieve for me, for I die happy.'"

† This excellent man died at the house of Mr. Robert Ralston, in

Our new house of worship will, I expect, be covered in within the next fortnight; and there is every reason to hope that it will be finished early next spring. There seems to be but little doubt, but that the pews will be taken up, and there will, very probably, be a call for more than the house will contain. So that, after a long and hard struggle, it seems as though by the favour of a gracious Providence, we should get through all our difficulties. While the church is building, I continue to preach in the Mason's Hall. My labours in various ways are very hard here. For although I have not a large congregation, the people are much scattered, and they require much attention. Besides, I am very often called to visit the sick who belong to no church, and frequently those of other societies, to which calls I make it a point to attend.

In addition to this, I have undertaken to edit a paper, which I call the Christian Monitor. In this work I expected much assistance from my brethren, but have received none as yet. I find the business very troublesome. I wish that you would now and then send me something good and practical, in the way of aid to a brother worn out by labour.

The Episcopalians are making a mighty effort in this state to revive their church. At first I thought that they were setting out on true evangelical principles, and was heartily enough disposed to take them by the hand, and bid them

Philadelphia, on the 6th of December, 1815. The operation had been performed upon him, by Dr. Dorsey, with great skill, and at first with good hope; but alarming symptoms soon appeared, and after suffering the most excruciating pains for some days, (which he bore with exemplary patience,) he found a peaceful and joyful rest in death. Mr. L. was a most worthy man, and a zealous and faithful preacher of the gospel; and his memory is still warmly cherished in the hearts of many friends.

God speed; but it now seems to me, as though they meant to pull down the building of others, in order to erect their own. They aim especially at the Presbyterians, I suppose because they find us more in their way than any other class of people. Their conduct is such as, I fear, will make it necessary for us to oppose them. In fact, we shall certainly be plagued with a religious controversy. The combatants are already beginning to rub up their armour, and prepare themselves for the combat. Even the man Moses, who is among us proverbial for meekness, has his spirit roused, and is determined, I believe, to step forth as the Champion of Presbyterianism. I have, for my part, resolved not to strike the first blow; but I wish to be ready to defend myself."

On Tuesday, the 2d of January following, (1816,) having been appointed, as we have seen, by the Synod of Virginia, one of a committee to present a petition to the General Assembly of the state, now in session, for an act to incorporate the Trustees of their Theological Seminary, Mr. Rice appeared at the bar of the House of Delegates, and made a speech in favour of it, which gained him much credit. The petition had been presented early in the session, and had been referred to the committee of Propositions and Grievances, who had afterwards reported it with a resolution that it was reasonable. It had, however, been laid upon the table, for this day, and was now called up, according to order, when a member, (Mr. Baker of Cumberland,) moved to amend the resolution of the committee, by striking therefrom the words, "is reasonable," and inserting in lieu thereof the words, "be rejected;" and the question being upon this motion, Mr. Rice, according to a previous resolution of the house, was admitted to be heard against it. His position on this occasion, was entirely novel, and, of course, rather embarrassing; especially, as

he had learned by this time, that he was about to advocate a very ungracious cause, and one which could expect no favour, and hardly quarter from the house. It is said, however, that he acquitted himself remarkably well, and displayed no small share both of ability and address, in an argument of considerable length, in which he very fairly answered all the objections that had been conjured up against the petition, and "convinced" the minds of many members "against their will." They were, however, of course, "of the same opinion still;" and neither his argument, nor the eloquence of his friend Mr. Wirt, who was subsequently heard against the motion, and made a very handsome speech on the subject, could prevail against the prejudices and predetermination of the majority, who finally carried the motion, and rejected the petition, by a strong and decisive vote.

This result was mortifying enough in itself; but, what was worse still, it was found that the mere preferring of the petition had excited no small odium against the Synod, and against the whole body of Presbyterians in the state, who were now gravely charged, by some, with actually aiming to obtain a new religious establishment for their own sect. It is true the accusation was hardly believed, even by its inventors, but it suited the views of many at the time to affect to credit it, or at least to let it run; and Mr. Rice, who was always alive to every thing that concerned the interest and honour of the denomination to which he belonged, now felt himself called upon to vindicate his brethren and himself from the aspersion, and from other injurious imputations which were being cast upon them. Accordingly, he hastened to write, and soon afterwards published, a pamphlet entitled "An Illustration of the Character and Conduct of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia;" in which, (after briefly reciting the causes which had prompted the publication,) he proceeds to show that the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and particularly in Virginia, had ever proved itself entirely libe-

ral in the whole course of its conduct towards other denominations of christians; particularly friendly and serviceable to the cause of the country during our revolutionary contest, and to all our republican institutions; and uniformly and utterly opposed to every thing like a religious establishment, or the adoption by the state of any one sect to the exclusion of every other. All this he establishes very clearly by copious quotations from the Form of Government and Discipline of the Church itself; (on which he gives us some very proper and pertinent remarks;) by the Memorials of the Presbytery of Hanover presented to the General Assembly, at various times, from the year 1776 to 1784; and a Memorial of the Ministers and Lay Representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia, assembled in Convention, in 1785, all breathing the very spirit of religious liberty, and of devoted attachment to the true rights of man. These documents, indeed, (which are all copied from the originals preserved in the office of the clerk of the House of Delegates, and are ably written,) reflect the highest honour upon the writers, and upon the bodies which they represented; and must ever serve to set the character and conduct of the Presbyterian church, at the periods to which they belong, in the strongest and fairest light.

It still remained for him, however, to show that there was nothing in the late act of the Synod in praying for an incorporation of the Board of Trustees of their Theological Seminary, inconsistent with the principles and fame of the fathers of the church; and this he does at some length, and, as I think all candid readers will agree, with perfect success.

The pamphlet, thus written, was extensively read, and did much good. It had the happy effect at least, in many instances, of softening the prejudices which had been artificially excited against the Presbyterians as a body, and of conciliating the favour of some who were most able to appreciate their merits; so that, in the end, it is probable that the

interests of that denomination were rather promoted than injured by the fate of the petition.

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

*Richmond, March 16, 1816.*

MY DEAR SIR,

A friend has just called on me on his way to New York, by whom I send this, and with it a hastily written, badly printed pamphlet, which I have thought it my duty to write. Will you accept of it as a token of my affectionate regard. Our petition had no effect. The prejudices against us are strong, and many measures are adopted to increase them.

We had the affliction to lose our highly esteemed friend Mrs. Randolph last Sabbath. She died in my house. I have no wish, in reference to my last end, but that it may be like hers.\*

Mrs. Rice desires to be affectionately remembered to Mrs. A. as does yours, most sincerely.

J. H. RICE.

\* Shortly after receiving the intelligence of her son's death, she had embraced the oft-repeated and now earnestly renewed invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Rice, and come down to Richmond to spend her remaining days with them. These, however, were fated to be few; for she was soon taken sick, and, after a painful illness, which she bore with exemplary patience, she died on the 10th of March, 1816. Her life had been a tissue of sorrows; but her end was peace. Her last words were: "*Christ is my only hope.*"

There is one circumstance connected with the death of this lady, which we have been told, and which we think we ought not to withhold from our readers. Finding, it seems, that her end was approaching, and thinking it proper to make her will, she felt very desirous to leave her best friend a handsome legacy, as a last token of her regard for him. Apprehending, however, with that delicacy which belonged to her, that such an act might possibly expose him to some unworthy imputation of mercenary views, and prizing his honour above every other consideration, she resolved to suppress her inclination, and leave him nothing. Still she could not feel satisfied to do so, without having the