

Dr. Dabney and Dr. Estlin.

Mr. Editor,—Rev. R. L. Dabney, a free-school teacher in Prince Edward county (Church school), has a great hatred for State schools, although he is indebted for an important part of his own education to one grand State school, supported in large measure from the public funds, and furnishing a free education to a large number of young men; and this reverend gentleman also has a very great disgust for the colored people, and also for the idea of teaching them to read by schools, or in any other way, their business, he says, being “to work and not read” (the Bible, we may infer, not being intended for them); and these sentiments he has amplified by means of an astonishing selection of hard words (some of them “nigh unto cursing”) in the April No. of the *Planter and Farmer*.

Seriously, it is not often in this conservative old State of ours that an educated man of any profession—least of all a clergyman—undertakes to discuss a grave question of political economy in the style which characterizes this article; and Dr. Dabney's best friends will, I am sure, regret that he so entirely forgot what was due to the subject, and due to himself and to others. Some readers can make allowance for infirmities of temper in view of honesty and ability; but his constant use of such words as “fool,” “humbug,” “perdition,” “iniquitous,” “Quixotic,” “satanic,” “damning,” “accursed,” as applied to the school system and its friends, will not be approved even by his sympathizers, and certainly will not be enjoyed by the vast number of intelligent and worthy citizens of Virginia who are friendly to the public schools.

Some of his offensive personal allusions to me I will notice in the *Central Presbyterian*. Here I will only say that he more than intimates that I get too much salary, and that the nursing of this salary is the real motive of my “pretended” zeal in the cause of popular education. Perhaps I am not worthy of my position, and I certainly do not wish to keep it one moment longer than I am wanted by the friends of education; but I should think that the man who is charged with the supervision of 1,400 officers, 4,000 school-teachers, and 185,000 school-children, ought to get as much salary as a man who, with three other professors, is helping to teach sixty young men for eight months and a half in the year. I get \$2,000 and no perquisites, in an expensive city, and work without ceasing in the duties of my office, having no time for anything else, not even for an ordinary amount of association with my family. Dr. Dabney gets \$2,000 and a house in a cheap country-place, with three and a half months' holiday and plenty of time to make money by farming, publishing books, etc., with a good deal to spare for attending to politics, and to other people's concerns, and to the running of mucks generally. And yet he is the man—and the first man—to intimate that I am playing a hypocritical part for the sake of my salary. He may have believed it himself when the affluence of passion was upon him; he never believed it before or since.

As already intimated, this attack on our public schools, like the most of those I have seen, is chiefly emotional. It appeals to the sentiment that education and other privileges are suited to the few and not to the many; it panders in language full of scorn and disgust to the common aversion felt for the negroes; and it strives to lash into fury all the most violent passions of the war. Whatever just ground there may be for the prejudices and passions to which he appeals, and probably I have a due share of them myself, I cannot think that it is either wise or patriotic to apply that style of treatment to the solemn questions pertaining to this period of our sorrow and perplexity.

Dr. Dabney is not ignorant of the Nicomachean Ethics, which teach that “the world is a Kosmos, an ordered and garnished whole, only so far as it is held together by the harmonizing law of the mean [moderation]; otherwise it jerks asunder, and through violent excess bolts into chaos.”

Although some may choose to regard the allusion as a form of personal defence, I will nevertheless remind such assailants that the old doctrines have not been abolished which teach that some decent respect is due to the laws of the State, even if those who are appointed to administer those laws are regarded as unworthy of ordinary courtesy. Our fathers also thought that something is due to the opinions of mankind. Discussion of public affairs is always in order, and in our situation it is very much needed. For myself and for the cause which I have the honor to represent, I desire nothing so much as calm, thoughtful discussion. For I deeply feel the need of counsel, and I hold myself fully amenable to proper criticism for my official acts.

Having herein disposed of personal matters, I will with your permission write some articles hereafter in reply to the scattering assertions of Dr. Dabney respecting our State schools. I know that your space is limited, and I can only expect the opportunity of giving some connected exposition and defence of public schools. It is only in the way of controversy that such men as Dr. Dabney can be induced to read anything in conflict with their own preconceived opinions. He tells us that he has read “Civis” and Rev. John Miller; but he strikes me a foul blow because I sent him two or three little tracts, some of which had been sent to me for distribution, and the others were extra copies of articles published in the *Educational Journal*, from which extra copies were struck off for a trifling cost; all of which was done in accordance with a requirement of law, which I explained in my last report—a document which Dr. Dabney might look into if he thought he could find some weapon in it, but which otherwise he has not read and never will read. That I have not misrepresented him will be sufficiently seen from the following extract:

“These documents have had no other effect on my mind than to awaken the wish that if we must perforce have this false system imposed on us by our conquerors, any executive agency created to administer the ill-starred plan might at least have the modesty to stick to its appointed business and not waste the money of the people in the attempt to manufacture among the people an erroneous public opinion. It is enough to be taxed heavily, against my judgment, for a Quixotic project which can never do me or any one else any good. I am unjustly forced to surrender my money, but I beg leave to preserve the privilege of doing my own thinking. At least, I do not propose docilely to receive my opinions on it from those who in advocating the system are also advocating their own official emoluments.”

He gloats on “Civis” and Miller, but he scorns the idea of allowing his ear to be addressed by such insignificant and despicable characters as Dr. Thornwell, Dr. Sears, or Lord Macaulay!

But, Mr. Editor, Dr. Dabney will read these articles of mine just that he may see how to hit me again. And your readers can afford to work through several dull articles from me just to get his answer. It will be wonderful! Everybody will read it, and probably it will be copied into the *New York Herald*. Some who did read his article in the *Planter* thought, perhaps, of Jehu, others of Claverhouse, and others of John Gilpin, but I suspect that all agreed in one wish:

“And when he next doth ride,
May I be there to see!”

I know, Messrs. Editors, as well as your most fastidious readers, that such rencontres as this are unworthy of the men engaged in it, and unworthy this great cause of the Commonwealth over which we are wrangling. Perhaps I ought to have borne in silence because of my position, and because I have usually been fully as much honored as I deserved by writers for the press. But this attack comes from a man with whom for thirty years I have walked in peace as a friend and brother. Our intercourse began within the walls of that sacred and beloved seminary whence he has now hurled this poisoned javelin. He is a good man, and will, I believe, sooner or later regret what he has done. But he now intends to fight me and “to put me down,” and I am fully resolved that he shall do no such thing.

W. H. RAYBURN.