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A Lesson in Pastoral Theology from a Tragical Leaf of American History.

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On Wednesday, July 11, 1804, at 7 A. M., Alexander Hamilton was shot and mortally wounded in a duel with his political foe, Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States, at Weehawken, on the New Jersey shore, opposite New York City. He was at once carried to New York and lingered in great agony until the next day, when death came at two o'clock in the afternoon. He left a distressed wife and seven children, the youngest a babe in arms, the oldest a son, sixteen years of age, while a still older son had fallen in mortal combat only two years before. Hamilton died in his forty-eighth year, in the fulness of his great powers, and was buried in the churchyard of old Trinity on Broadway, on the side towards Rector St., opposite the site occupied in 1664 and later by old St. Matthew's, now united with our Synod.

Hamilton until then seems not to have been a professing Christian and member of a church. The loss, in so ignominious a way, of this great man, Revolutionary hero, trusted companion and aide of the unforgotten Washington, illustrious statesman and generally respected citizen, caused a revulsion of feeling throughout the country which has not subsided to this day and which makes it well-nigh impossible for the historian to judge calmly the subsequent turbulent career of his antagonist "damned to everlasting fame." All this is not only extremely interesting, but that part pertaining to Hamilton must be held in mind if we wish to measure aright the difficulties confronting any one that was to be called in for spiritual consolation by the dying man. It seems that Bishop Moore was first sent for, but left the house without complying at that time with Hamilton's wish to receive Communion; that Dr. Mason was then sent for, who, as he says, told him he could not

accede to his request; that the bishop was sent for a second time, who then came and administered the Sacrament, as related by himself. Leaving out of consideration this episode, which cannot be fully explained at this date, and proceeding to the relation of facts by these two worthy gentlemen themselves, we cannot help but admire their firmness of behavior, their Christian consistency, and their evangelical treatment of a soul thirsting for consolation, of a man who was among the most respected and highest in the land, and whose fame had spread throughout the world.

After these preliminaries, deemed necessary, though somewhat long drawn out, we proceed to publish two documents in the form of two letters, written at the time and published in the *New York Evening Post* as taken from *A Collection of the Facts and Documents relative to the Death of Major-General Alexander Hamilton*, etc., etc., New York, 1804. It would seem like marring the picture of a sad and somber deathbed scene lighted up and hallowed by the ministrations of the Gospel bearers to make excerpts only from their letters, and they are therefore reproduced complete with headings and subscriptions, the first one by Bishop Moore, the second by Dr. Mason.

Thursday Evening, July 12.

MR. COLEMAN: —

The public mind being extremely agitated by the melancholy fate of that great man, Alexander Hamilton, I have thought it would be grateful to my fellow-citizens, would provide against misrepresentation, and, perhaps, be conducive to the advancement of the cause of religion, were I to give the narrative of some facts which have fallen under my own observation during the time which elapsed between the fatal duel and his departure out of this world.

Yesterday morning, immediately after he was brought from Hoboken to the house of Mr. Bayard, at Greenwich, a message was sent informing me of the sad event, accompanied by a request from General Hamilton that I would come to him for the purpose of administering the Holy Communion. I went; but being desirous to afford time for serious reflection, and conceiving that under existing circumstances it would be right and proper to avoid every appearance of precipitancy in performing one of the most solemn offices of our religion, I did not then comply with his desire. At one o'clock I was again called on to visit him. Upon my entering the room and approaching his bed, with the utmost calmness and composure he said: "My dear Sir, you perceive my unfortunate situation, and no doubt have been made acquainted with the circumstances which led to it. It is my desire to receive the Communion at your hands. I hope you will not conceive there is any impropriety in my request." He added: "It has for some time past been the wish of my heart, and it was my intention, to take an early opportunity of uniting myself to the Church by the reception of

that holy ordinance." I observed to him that he must be very sensible of the delicate and trying situation in which I was then placed; that, however desirous I might be to afford consolation to a fellow-mortal in distress, still it was my duty, as a minister of the Gospel, to hold up the Law of God as paramount to all other law; and that, therefore, under the influence of such sentiments, I must unequivocally condemn the practise which had brought him to his present unhappy condition. He acknowledged the propriety of these sentiments, and declared that he viewed the late transaction with sorrow and contrition. I then asked him: "Should it please God to restore you to health, Sir, will you never be again engaged in a similar transaction, and will you employ all your influence in society to discontinuance of this barbarous custom?" His answer was, "That, Sir, is my deliberate intention."

I proceeded to converse with him on the subject of his receiving the Communion, and told him that, with respect to the qualifications of those who wished to become partakers of the holy ordinance, my inquiries could not be made in language more expressive than that which was used by our Church.—"Do you sincerely repent of your sins past? Have you a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of the death of Christ? And are you disposed to live in love and charity with all men?" He lifted up his hands and said: "With the utmost sincerity of heart I can answer those questions in the affirmative. I have no ill will against Colonel Burr. I met him with the fixed resolution to do him no harm—I forgive all that happened."

I then observed to him that the terrors of the divine Law were to be announced to the obdurate and impenitent; but that the consolations of the Gospel were to be offered to the humble and contrite heart; that I had no reason to doubt his sincerity, and would proceed immediately to gratify his wishes. The Communion was then administered, which he received with great devotion, and his heart afterwards appeared to be perfectly at rest. I saw him again this morning, when, with his last faltering words, he expressed a strong confidence in the mercy of God through the intercession of the Redeemer. I remained with him until 2 o'clock this afternoon, when death closed the awful scene—he expired without a struggle and almost without a groan.

By reflecting on this melancholy event, let the humble believer be encouraged ever to hold fast that precious faith which is the only source of true consolation in the last extremity of nature. Let the infidel be persuaded to abandon his opposition to that Gospel which the strong, inquisitive, and comprehensive mind of a Hamilton embraced in his last moments as the truth from heaven. Let those who are disposed to justify the practise of dueling be induced, by this simple narrative, to view with abhorrence that custom which has occasioned an irreparable loss to a worthy and most afflicted family, which has deprived his friends of a beloved companion, his profession of one of its brightest ornaments, and his country of a great statesman and a real patriot.

With great respect,

I remain your friend and servant,

BENJAMIN MOORE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "EVENING POST."

SIR: —

Having read, in the *Commercial Advertiser* of the 16th, a very imperfect account of my conversation with General Hamilton, the day previous to his decease, I judge it my duty to lay the following narrative before the public.

On the morning of Wednesday, the 11th inst., shortly after the rumor of the General's injury had created an alarm in the city, a note from Dr. Post informed me that "he was extremely ill at Mr. Wm. Bayard's, and expressed a particular desire to see me as soon as possible." I went immediately. The exchange of melancholy salutation, on entering the General's apartment, was succeeded by a silence which he broke by saying that he "had been anxious to see me, and have the Sacrament administered to him; and that this was still his wish." I replied that "it gave me unutterable pain to receive from him any request to which I could not accede; that, in the present instance, a compliance was incompatible with all my obligations, as it is a principle in our churches never to administer the Lord's Supper privately to any person under any circumstances." He urged me no further. I then remarked to him that "the Holy Communion is an exhibition and pledge of the mercies which the Son of God has purchased; that the absence of the sign does not exclude from the mercies signified, which were accessible to him by faith in their gracious Author." "I am aware," said he, "of that. It is only as a sign that I wanted it." A short pause ensued. I resumed the discourse by observing that "I had nothing to address to him in his affliction but that same *Gospel of the grace of God* which it is my office to preach to the most obscure and illiterate; that in the sight of God all men are on a level, as *all have sinned and come short of His glory*; and that they must apply to Him for pardon and life, as *sinner*s, whose only refuge is in *His grace reigning by righteousness through our Lord Jesus Christ*." "I perceive it to be so," said he; "I am a sinner; I look to His mercy." I then adverted to "the infinite merit of the Redeemer, as the *propitiation for sin*, the sole ground of our acceptance with God, the sole channel of His favor to us, and cited the following passages of Scripture: "There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus." "He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." This last passage introduced the affair of the duel, on which I reminded the General that he was not to be instructed as to its moral aspect, that the *precious blood of Christ* was effectual and as necessary to wash away the transgression which had involved him in suffering as any other transgression, and that he must there, and there alone, seek peace for his conscience, and a hope that should "*not make him ashamed*." He assented, with strong emotion, to these representations, and declared his abhorrence of the whole transaction. "It was always," added he, "against my principles. I used every expedient to avoid the interview; but I have found, for some time past, that my life *must* be exposed to that man. I went to the field determined not to take *his* life." He repeated his disavowal of all intention to hurt Mr. Burr, the anguish of his mind in

recollecting what had passed, and his humble hope of forgiveness from his God. I recurred to the topic of the divine compassion, the freedom of pardon in the Redeemer Jesus to perishing sinners. "That grace, my dear General, which brings salvation, is rich, rich" — "Yes," interrupted he, "it is *rich* grace." "And on that grace," continued I, "a sinner has the highest encouragement to repose his confidence, because it is tendered to him upon the *surest foundation, the Scripture* testifying that *we have redemption through the blood of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins according to the richness of His grace.*" Here the General, letting go my hand, which he had held from the moment, I sat down at his bedside, clasped his hands together, and, looking up towards heaven, said with emphasis, "I *have* a tender reliance on the mercy of the Almighty through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ." He replaced his hand in mine, and, appearing somewhat spent, closed his eyes. A little after, he fastened on me, and I proceeded. "The simple truths of the Gospel, my dear Sir, which require no abstruse investigation, but faith in the *veracity of God, who cannot lie*, are best suited to your present condition, and they are full of consolation." "I feel them to be so," he replied. I then repeated these texts of Scripture: "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and of sinners the chief." "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "This," said he, "is my support. Pray for me." "Shall I pray with you?" "Yes." I prayed with him, and heard him whisper as I went along; which I supposed to be his concurrence with the petitions. At the conclusion he said, "Amen. God grant it!"

Being about to part with him, I told him "I had one request to make." He asked what it was. I answered that whatever might be the issue of his affliction, he would give his testimony against the practise of dueling. "I will," said he, "I have done it. If *that*," evidently anticipating the event, "if *that* be the issue, you will find it in writing. If it please God that I recover, I shall do it in a manner which will effectually put me out of its reach in future." I mentioned once more the importance of renouncing every other dependence for the eternal world but the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; with a particular reference to the catastrophe of the morning. The General was affected and said: "Let us not pursue the subject any further, it agitates me." He laid his hands upon his breast with symptoms of uneasiness, which indicated an increased difficulty of speaking. I then took my leave. He pressed my hand affectionately and desired to see me again at a proper interval. As I was retiring, he lifted up his hands in the attitude of prayer and said feebly, "God be merciful to —" His voice sunk so that I heard not the rest distinctly, but understood him to quote the words of the publican in the Gospel, and to end the sentence with, "me, a sinner."

I saw him a second time on the morning of Thursday, but from his appearance and what I had heard, supposing that he could not speak without severe effort, I had no conversation with him. I prayed for

a moment at his bedside in company with his overwhelmed family and friends; and, for the rest, was one of the mourning spectators of his composure and dignity in suffering. His mind remained in its former state; and he viewed with calmness his approaching dissolution. I left him between twelve and one, and at two, as the public knows, he breathed his last.

I am, Sir,

With much respect,

Your obedient servant,

New York, July 18, 1804.

J. M. MASON.

Besides showing that the utmost delicacy of feeling and urbanity of manner are compatible with adherence to eternal truths, and that in the solemn hour of a soul's departure from this life everything perfunctory in the ministration to the dying must be abhorred, this historical example seems to us a worthy supplement to those examples which our own Dr. Pieper adduces in his *Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pages 442 and 443, as illustrating the truth that all Christians *in extremis* must and do stand on the Lutheran basis, clinging to the very words of the scripture Rom. 10, 8.

A little may be added as to Aaron Burr in order to round out the narrative. Burr, a maternal grandson of Jonathan Edwards, the noted divine, and son of President Burr, the first president of Princeton College, now University, after his trial for treason and acquittal, fled to Europe. Here, followed by the relentless hatred of Jefferson, he roamed from one asylum to the other. He finally effected his return to New York and again took up the practise of law. Shunned by most of his former connections, but sustained by some of his old friends, he lived to an old age. When, after the second stroke of paralysis, his life drew towards a close in the hotel near the landing at Port Richmond, Staten Island, an effort was made, at frequent visits of the Rev. Dr. P. J. Vaupelt, at the instigation of one of Burr's relatives, to prepare him for his demise. As related by Parton, page 680 sq., Dr. Vaupelt gave this account: "I did not administer the holy Sacrament, nor did he suggest or request me to do it. . . . Observing a paleness and change in his countenance, I asked him how he felt. He replied, not so well as when I saw him last. I then said: 'Colonel, I do not wish to alarm you, but judging from the state of your pulse, your time with us is short.' He replied: 'I am aware of it.' It was then near 9 o'clock P. M., and his mind and memory seemed perfect. I said to him: 'In this solemn hour of your apparent dissolution, believing, as you do, in the sacred Scriptures, your accountability

to God, let me ask you how you feel in view of approaching eternity, whether you have good hope, through grace, that all your sins will be pardoned, and God will, in mercy, pardon you, for the sake of the merits and righteousness of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in love suffered and died for us the agonizing, bitter death on the cross, by whom alone we can have the only sure hope of salvation?" To which he said, with deep and evident emotion, 'On that subject I am coy,' by which I understood him to mean that on a subject of such magnitude and momentous interest, touching the assurance of his salvation, he felt coy, cautious (as the word denotes) to express himself in full confidence. With his usual cordial concurrence and manifest desire we kneeled in prayer before the throne of heavenly grace, imploring God's mercy and blessing. He turned in his bed and put himself in an humble, devotional posture, and seemed deeply engaged in the religious service, thanking me, as usual, for the prayer made for him. Calm and composed, I recommended him to the mercy of God, and to the word of His grace, with a last farewell."

Burr died September 14, 1836, aged eighty years, seven months, and eight days. According to his last wish he was interred at Princeton, near the graves of his ancestors, with Christian burial ceremonies.
