

A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF MRS. HAMILTON.

The following is a true account of the dealings of God with the Widow SARAH HAMILTON, who was born and educated in the Romish Religion, and afterwards converted to the Christian Faith, as will appear in this Narrative.

I WAS born in the city of Frankfort, in Germany, in 1745. In the 7th year of my age my father came to Charleston, in South-Carolina; his name was George Beckhouse, by profession a Roman Catholic. He lived at Charleston, until I was about 16 years of age, when I was married to Mr. Alexander Hamilton, an eminent merchant, who, in the contest between Britain and America, was shot dead in his own house, which was consumed, with all our property, by fire. In this distressed situation, having no children except an adopted daughter, thus contemplating on my misfortune, my best friend with all our substance snatched from me, as it were in an instant, created in me new and awful sensations, which are beyond my power to relate. I then fled to a rich uncle for an asylum, who treated me with the greatest respect and attention, and welcomed me to his house and servants, with all the accommodations that they could yield or afford; he offered to make me his heir, and directed his servants to treat me with all the kindness and respect as though they were really mine. I lived there in the enjoyment of all the comforts this world could afford, but was still disconsolate, in consideration of my heavy loss, and dressed myself in mourning, and thus passed through some lonesome days and wearisome nights, for a considerable time; at length being desirous to obtain some relief, went to a theatre, or play-house, where I saw divers plays acted on the stage; and one in particular, exhibited General Washington and Lady Montgomery, whose husband was killed in battle, in Canada; and the agitation that she manifested in the scene brought the death of my husband to my mind with such powerful sensations, that I had nearly fainted. The shortness of life, and certainty of death; the fading nature of all worldly enjoyments, were then plain to my view, and my distress was inexpressible. I went home, took my bed with a heavy heart, drowned in melancholy, and with pensive mind and wearied limbs I fell asleep and dreamed.* I thought I was in a beautiful place as ever I saw; where there was all the most truly delightful and fashionable things in the world; also cards and dice, plays that I had been familiar with in my younger days. We drank wine out of golden bowls, and had every thing the world deem delightful. I sat at the card table with an Episcopalian priest, and took a golden bowl and drank a health to him, and then casting my eyes forward, I beheld a beautiful field adorned with flowers of various kinds and fine colours, and a great company of shining people, dressed in white robes, with white palms in their hands. They all sang with melodious harmony, such singing as I had never heard before. I saw also the angels from heaven, joining their songs with

* Although some people may make light of all dreams, yet I would beg your pardon for inserting this, for it was peculiarly interesting to me, however foolish it may look to others.

them. The melody, union and harmony of the scene was true, expressible. I then looked on the before mentioned Priest, and he looked black, and very disagreeable, and myself likewise. I then sat down the bowl, and said to them, I must be gone. As soon as I rose up I saw a great wall between me and those shining ones, the materials of which seemed to be of metal, stone and glass. As I looked earnestly, I saw a place where I could go through, only I must take off an extravagant head dress which I had on. I was determined that no ornament in the world should hinder me from the enjoyment of so happy a situation as I saw the other side of the wall, or to deliver me from my disagreeable company. So I cast my head dress into the fire and came to the wall; but I discovered a great sea before me, and must of necessity pass through it in order to get to that beautiful field. While I was meditating how I should get through the sea, a negro came and pushed me into it; and it was very boisterous and the waves were so high that I was soon drove ashore on dry land again. The captain of those shining ones then came to me and said, do you see a beautiful palace? I answered, yes: which was as large as this globe, but it was still above this world, and had seats of solid gold all around it. And this beautiful man asked me if I saw the golden seats. I told him I did: he told me I should have one of those seats, provided I conquered my enemies. And I went with the greatest joy expressible; and there opened a bottomless pit immediately before me, and the mouth of the pit reached from wall to wall: and about three stories down there was a beam, and with grief I thought it was impossible for me to get to the palace; as I made a turn to go back, the ground gave way from under me, and I fell into the dismal pit, but happened to hit upon this beam, and there I sat three days. Then there came another man from those shining ones, and asked me what I did there. I told him the pit was deep and I could not get out; and then he put his hand in his pocket and took out a small ball of thread, and told me to take hold of one end thereof. I told him, I was afraid the thread would break, and I should be entirely lost; but he told me to take hold, nevertheless, for this is Christ the rock. I got hold of it with both hands, and to my inexpressible joy, was immediately out of the horrible pit. I then awoke, and behold it was a dream.

After some months meditation on my dream, I fell asleep and dreamed the same dream again, and also a third time. This brought me to such serious reflections that I hardly durst sleep at all; yet was at a loss for the interpretation of my dream. I arose very early one morning and went to my uncle and aunt, and told them that I saw my uncle and aunt, the priest, and the people, extremely black in a dream, and that I felt very much concerned about it; but not so much as to prevent my going to balls, and other public places, where they asked me to tell my dream, out of curiosity. I accordingly told it them frequently; and after a while my troubles entirely left me. But in about a year and nine months, there came a gentleman from Georgia to visit me; he was a very rich man; and possessed wealth in abundance. The second time he visited me, he invited my uncle and aunt and myself to visit him and see his plantation; accordingly we all went together, and beheld his situation, which was truly elegant. His house was very large, and ornamented inside and out; on the top was a balcony, and a summer seat therein. As he led me to the summer seat, I thought of my dream. We returned home from our visit well suited with his seat. The third time he came to visit me, he brought me just such a head

drefs as I dreamed about, and it pleased me. We concluded to marry, and appointed a time when the nuptial ceremony should be solemnized. But about that time there was a people called Baptists in that place, who were ridiculed, and all manner of evil spoken against them. I confess that I hated the very sight of them, and had it been in my power would soon have banished them out of my sight and the country too. The aforesaid gentleman took a walk one day, and when he returned, he told my uncle, that one of his slaves was that day going to be dipt by a man that looked more like a hangman than a priest; this much displeased me. I immediately replied, that I wondered gentlemen of note would suffer such fellows to go about the country cheating and deceiving poor ignorant people in such a manner. My uncle said he would go and flog the slave home, and not suffer the dirty wench to be so deluded, were it not that a gentleman had appointed to visit him that day. I told him that I would go, if he would furnish me with a carriage. Accordingly I went. I no sooner came to the place, than I saw the minister, and knew as soon as I saw him, although I never saw him before, that it was the same man I saw in my dream, that handed me the ball of thread and helped me out of the pit. The sight of this man so affected my mind, that I was as one thunderstruck. He was the very one whom I saw amongst the shining throng of happy people, and I amongst the accursed black crew. I then thought I was cursed in very deed, which flung me immediately almost into despair; and in the greatest agony I fell to the earth. Viewing myself undone forever, and eternally lost, I was in the most deplorable situation conceivable, and despaired of ever going from that place. I thought that the earth was just about to swallow me up alive, into everlasting destruction, of both soul and body, and really expected to fall immediately into the bottomless pit, where there was no recovery. My distress was so great, the people discovered it, gathered around me on all sides, and supposed me in a fit, and sought means to recover me, but in vain; for my distress was of such a nature that medical assistance was entirely baffled; I fainted and fell to the ground; they lifted me into the coach again, and carried me home to my uncle's house. A great company of people followed me. This situation of mine greatly exasperated the minds of the people; some swore they would kill the minister, because they supposed he had bewitched me: and my uncle immediately sent for the Romish Priest to dispel the witchcraft from me; but his presence was very disagreeable to me. I told him to be gone, for we were all going to hell together. Another minister then came to me, but I could not bear the sight of him neither; for it appeared to me he had helped me to commit the unpardonable sin. I told him to be gone quick; and that he was a wicked wretch, and a wolf in sheep's clothing; that he would neither go to heaven himself, nor let others: and as he was turning to go from me, my aunt told him not to mind what I said, for I was crazy. Then this minister began to weep to see me in such a situation, and advised my uncle to send for that Baptist minister to see if he could take the witchcraft from me. He accordingly sent for him seventy-five miles. The minister willingly came—they set victuals and drink on a table for him, but durst not let even a servant go into the room where he was, lest he should bewitch them also. At length he came to speak with me, and asked me how I did: I told him I was a poor, miserable, lost creature. He told me if I was lost, I was one of those very persons whom Christ died for, and came to seek and to save. I told him that was impossible, for I had committed the unpardonable sin: he said that,

he thought it was my mistake, for I did not know enough. After he had talked some time, he put his hand into his pocket and took out the New-Testament; it was the first that ever I saw. He read the third chapter of Mark, and gave his mind concerning the unpardonable sin. He told me he was going to visit a gospel sinner, whose case he thought was much worse than mine, which frightened me very much indeed; for I thought he did not understand my case at all: he said, God willing, he would see me again to-morrow. I said, pray Sir, don't forget me; and when he saw me so affected, he said, shall I pray for you before I go? I answered, yes: what shall I pray for? I told him to pray that the Lord might have mercy on me; with these words he seemed affected, which gave me to understand that he thought there was no mercy for me; but he kneeled down and prayed; I kneeled also; and when he spake of the spotless purity of God, before whom sinless angels veiled their faces, crying, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, and that the holiness and purity of God filled immensity, I thought it was impossible that I could have mercy; and when he had finished his prayer, he went away. After he was gone, I remembered that the man of God told me that Christ came to save even the worst of sinners, and I thought that I could not be worse than the vilest. I then considered that the spotless angels, of whom he spake, would rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, though ever so vile. I then imagined myself in a great king's house, who had an only son, and one of the king's servants committed a crime worthy of death, and the executioner was about to strike the fatal blow, when the king's son came forward and offered to die that the servant might live, which he did, and set the servant at liberty; which circumstances most readily applied to my case. I thought I was the very servant; surprising astonishment filled my soul. I beheld the Son of God expiring in agonies unknown, to gratify the malicious rage of wicked men. I thought he died to save my life, and arose again for my justification. I also viewed him as having died for all men, but was at first at a loss to see how one could die for so many; but when I saw and considered that the natural sun could shine on thousands, and each person have as great a share of the sun as though he was alone, I by this similitude understood the mystery, that, although Christ died for many, yet each one had a whole Saviour. I then saw that God could be just and justify him that believeth in Jesus, even such a wretch as I was. In this view, no tongue can tell the extacy of joy that I was the subject of; my distress left me, and I could give glory to God with all my heart. I longed to praise him with every breath; my prayer was, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Lord, speak; for thy servant heareth.

Upon my uncle and aunt hearing this of me, they came to the door: I said to them, dear uncle and aunt, I shall not go to hell, for Christ died for me, and I have got a whole Saviour. My uncle then shut the door, but my aunt burst into tears in hearing me talk on this subject. It then came into my mind that Christ was baptized of John in Jordan, and I must follow the example, and convince the world that I was not ashamed to own my Saviour before men. The next day the minister came, as he told me, with the man whom he went to visit, and I told them that I had found comfort, that Jesus had appeared for my relief, and that I was now willing to take him for my prophet, priest and king; that I felt determined to obey him in all things; that I thought his laws and commands were perfectly just and happifying to every obedient soul. This declaration from me came so unexpected to the minister, that he was overjoyed and surprised, and said to the other man, that yesterday was the first time

that ever I heard any thing read from the Bible ; and now she is able to teach me, (said he.) Glory to God in the highest, for he teaches as never man taught, neither is heavenly instruction dependent wholly on human education. I then asked him if he was willing to baptize me ; he told me he was glad of the opportunity if I desired it ; I told him I longed to follow my Lord and Master down the banks of Jordan, and that he would have to fend for me, for I could not go to the place myself ; he told me he would, and accordingly sent for me the next Lord's-day morning. When I came down to the water side, I related the dealings of God with me, which account proved instrumental in God's hands of the awakening of fifteen souls. After the baptism was administered, they helped me home to my uncle's ; but behold he shut the door against me and refused to let me in. I called to my daughter, but she gave me no answer. I now began to conclude, that he that would live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.

I was disowned by all my former friends and relations, in that place, and the minister seeing me in this distressed situation, pitied me, and told me that as long as he had one shilling of money left, I should share part of it, and desired me not to give way to trouble of this kind. He then carried me away and hired my board for three weeks ; at the end of which time he came again and baptized those fifteen persons before mentioned, for they all gave satisfactory evidence of the work of grace in their hearts, and also brought a carriage for me to go with him to North-Carolina, where I lived with him and his people three years ; and a happy three years it was to my poor soul, though rejected by my natural relations : yet I think that I had daily communion with a friend that sticketh closer than earthly friends and relations ; even Jesus, who was to me the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. I really enjoyed that peace of mind which the world can neither give nor take away ; yea, this peace was like a river flowing from the right hand of God. So great and inexpressible was this peace and happiness, which I then enjoyed, that all other happiness looked extremely despicable and unworthy my attention. The world with all its gay and enticing charms courted my affections to no purpose. I thought I had rather suffer afflictions with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, having respect to the recompense of reward, which I daily enjoyed ; esteeming the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : yea, I esteem the present afflictions not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed hereafter ; and I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness, being possessed of all the pomp, grandeur and affluence that this world can afford. I think, therefore, that however unworthy I may be of such honour, I wish to invite and exhort all who know not these things by happy experience, that they would try the experiment for themselves. You may think it strange that I talk as I do ; but O, my friends ! I long for your happiness : I long to see you rejoice in hope of the glory of God ; yea, I long to see the saints on earth join their rejoicing songs of praise to God, with the seraphic angels in heaven, at the news of the return of one more prodigal. Come then, O sinner ! come and be happy ; for why will ye die ? That God in whom you live, move, and have your being, tells you plainly that he delighteth not in the death of him that dieth ; but that he turn and live ; saying, Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die ? Behold Jesus interceding at the right hand of the throne of God for you ; that God would exert his almighty power, in turning your minds from sin to righteousness.

How can you reject such pathetic expressions of Divine Benevolence? Why shall Jesus entreat in vain? Why will you oppose the wishes of your best friends? How can you bear the thoughts of being cast off from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, sentenced to everlasting destruction? O, my dear friends! think of these things, lest sudden destruction come upon you, and you cannot escape. But lest I weary your patience, I will pursue my narrative:—

After living three years in North-Carolina, as I observed, I began to think of my father, and his family, all buried in misery and Popish superstition, and wilfully ignorant. I thought it was possible, in case I could see them, that I might be an instrument in God's hands, of leading them to a consideration of the folly of their ways. I therefore felt very anxious about the matter. I also felt a natural affection for them. I also considered that my father was a rich man, and I in a dependent situation, and knew that if he had not lost his former regard for me, that he would help me, notwithstanding our difference of opinion; and that he would delight to have me live with him. When I told my intentions to the brethren, they told me I need not go away on account of being burthensome to them, for they were willing I should live with them as long as I wished; that I need not regard their expense, for they had as liesves maintain me as their own children; for we are one, said they; but still, if I could not content myself to stay, that they would help me—which they did. I thanked them and took my leave. I rode in a carriage, and the driver conducted very disagreeably; I resented his conduct towards me, and was angry with him, which gave me scruples. I was filled with doubts concerning myself, and began to think I was not a Christian, but a mere hypocrite, and had been trying to deceive myself and others; but I could not deceive God, for he knoweth all things. I had thought I never should be angry again, let what would happen to me. This gave me great anxiety of mind, which lasted for a considerable time. We at length arrived within three miles of my father's house, where I stopped, in hopes that my father would send for me to come home. But the next day my brother came to the house where I was, and the woman of the house said to me, there's your brother. The reader can hardly imagine the joy I felt to see my brother again, whom I had not seen for many years. I thought he would rejoice also to see me, and therefore went to meet him, and reached out my hand to him as a token of friendship; but, shunning to relate, I saw in his face signs of disapprobation; he frowned and stepped back, and refused to give his hand; and said to me, My father says you shall not enter his house, for you are a disgrace to the whole family. He esteems you as a runaway, and a deluded heretic. These reflections from my brother, you may well think, excited powerful sensations in my mind. To be disowned by my own father and brother, and called a heretic; now came a fair trial of my faith and confidence in God. I concluded that the cause of their alienation of affection towards me, was because I was a Christian, and if so, it would become me to act like Christ; who when he was reviled, reviled not again; and when he was persecuted, threatened not. I think I can truly say, that all he said to me only served to engage my soul to give glory to God that I was counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, which I through grace was determined to do; but still Satan tempted me to give up my determination to live devoted to God; I was almost tempted to go to my father, and feign a repentance of my dissenting from the Romish Church. But no sooner had I looked

into the consequences of such a thing, but I took up my Testament which my brethren had given me, and had a desire to read some directions from God, what to do; and the first sentence I read, was, "*He that will not forsake father and mother for my sake, is not worthy of me.*" And immediately I saw my duty plainly, and felt resolved to obey God rather than man. Nevertheless, I thought I would go to the Romish Church, where I might see my father, and that he might see me also; peradventure, all his parental affection was not lost for me, and that when he saw me in a reduced state of poverty and distress, it might possibly affect his heart. I accordingly went. But, O! how my heart ached to see those stupid mortals bowing to their images and priests, expecting they had power to pardon sin. Shocking thought! I even trembled at the sight, and could hardly contain myself. As soon as the exercise was over, my father came out. I went to him, but was so overcome, that I could not speak for some time; at length I recovered strength, but could not forbear screaming, and fell down before him; but instead of exciting pity in him, he turned from me, as from an heretic unworthy of his notice, and would say nothing to me. I then went home again, and hired my board for a short time, with what money I had left, which my brethren had given me for the expenses of my journey. Soon after this, my father, whom I still hoped had not lost all regard for me, sent a gentleman to me, who addressed me in the following language:

Mrs. Hamilton—Your honoured father sent me to state to you the conditions on which he will receive you as his child again, and forgive you all your past disgraceful folly; which shall not once be mentioned against you. And in case you comply, you must return to the church from whence you have revolted, and confess your sins in revolting as you have, and renounce your frantic notions of witchcraft and Christianity, as you call it; and you shall become my beloved daughter: but if not, you must expect nothing from me, not even to own you as a daughter; for I am determined to disown you in case of your obstinacy. I told the gentleman, that it was impossible that he should disown me, for my name was on his record with the rest of his children, and also my looks so favoured his, that all who saw us would know for a certainty that I was really his child. But notwithstanding all my confidence, I considered that I must of necessity leave that place soon, for my money was now almost spent, and where to flee I did not know, being destitute of any Christian friends there, which put me in mind of Nicodemus, who followed his Lord by night. But still I had great trouble of mind; I feared that I was like Judas, who denied and betrayed his Lord for filthy lucre's sake, in consideration of the temptation that I before spake of, concerning my going back to the Romish church, with a lie in my mouth, notwithstanding I thought to serve my God privately, which I now disapproved of with great indignation; however, my father was unwilling to give the matter over so, without another trial to reclaim me from my heresy, as he named it: he therefore employed a Romish Priest, and a certain Mr. Smith, who lived near me at that time; crafty men indeed. I had already lived there until my money was about gone, and my clothes were then selling at a low rate, almost nothing, and in this melancholy situation not a friend to tell my troubles to, I had none but God to appeal to for redress of grievances. The woman of the house where I lived seldom spoke to me on any subject whatever: in this forlorn situation, where to go or what to do I could not tell: one consideration still comforted me; I viewed God to be my friend, and would deliver me out of all trouble in his own way; and I felt willing to place my dependence on

him. One day, to my great astonishment, my landlady invited me to go with her on a visit : Come, said she, Mrs. Hamilton, go with me to visit Mrs. Smith to-day, perhaps it may have a tendency to shake off this sober melancholy, that seems thus to hang about you. I accepted the invitation, not thinking of any plot against me. Mr. Smith began soon after I went in, to talk with me concerning my faith, and dissenting from the Romish Church. I asked him, if he believed the Bible ; I hope so, said he : well you recollect Sir, in Revelation, how St. John attempted to fall down and worship the angel, who said, see thou do it not, but worship God : Now if John was torpid worshipping the holy angel, shall or can I fall down and worship a sinful priest ? 'tis Jesus has died and spilt his blood to pardon my sins, and make an atonement, and now sits as an intercessor at God's right hand : God forbid therefore that I should worship any other than the living and true God. Upon which the Romish Priest sprang from behind the curtain where he had been concealed, in the greatest heat of passion imaginable ; it so affrighted me to see a man in such a rage, that I rose up to go out of his sight : but it dropped into my mind, that there was now an opportunity for God to display his power, and that if the Lord would help me I would now speak in vindication of his cause. I accordingly stepped back ; and I really believe that the Lord assisted me in discharging my duty at that time, yet notwithstanding all that was said, he accosted me with rough language, which it is unnecessary to repeat. At this time Mr. Smith was so enraged I saw he would turn me out of his house ; I therefore went out of my own accord ; and I believe that if ever I prayed to God in my life, it was then. I had strength from God to talk to them ; my tongue seemed to be let loose, and my heart was enlarged ; it seemed that my mouth was filled with arguments ; the scriptures flowed into my mind, text after text, as though the whole Bible was committed to my memory ; it being in the city, about two hundred collected before I had done speaking : after which I returned to my former residence. But my brother being fixed against me, and the Protestant religion, raised a mob of a considerable number, to take me away by force ; and what they would have been suffered to do, had they prevailed in their design, the Lord only knows. But fortunately for me, the man of the house, fearing he should meet with difficulty in that case, took me privately out to a back place, where he had a horse prepared with a man's saddle on him ; the first horse I ever rode in my life. I rode as I could, and he led the horse seven miles, and left me with a Presbyterian minister, where I was treated with great respect and friendship ; and he told him how it was, and made him promise not to tell who brought me there. The minister concealed me in an upper room, and said he would expose his life to save me in case of need ; therefore bid me fear nothing. The next Sabbath he went to meeting and informed the people concerning me, and they contributed fifteen dollars to my relief. After these things, it came into my mind, that my adopted daughter, who was then living in Springfield, in Vermont, if I could find her, would afford me a home the little time I had to live in this troublesome world. With the assistance of my brethren from place to place, I at last arrived at Springfield, where I found to my grief, that my daughter was dead, and her husband moved out of the country.— But still, I wish to inform my readers, that religion shall, through God's assistance, be my principal object ; for I sincerely believe there is nothing more worthy of our highest regard and attention ; and I am resolved to pray for Zion still, let what will become of me.

WOODSTOCK, SEPT. 26, 1803.

SARAH HAMILTON.

[BOSTON : Sold by E. Lincoln, Water-Street. Price 6 cts.]