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Leonidas Polk, Bishop and General.

IN discussing the lawfulness of clergy engaging in military service insufficient notice has been taken of the recent precedents furnished by the American Civil War, where a number of clergy took part as combatants, at least on the Confederate side. At the beginning of the war a battery of artillery "commanded by the Rev. Dr. Pendleton, Rector of Lexington, an old West Point graduate, who was afterwards distinguished as Lee's chief of artillery, and recruited largely from theological colleges, soon became peculiarly efficient."[1] Jackson's chief of staff was a Presbyterian clergyman.[2] But the most distinguished of such clerical combatants was Bishop Leonidas Polk of Louisiana. His life, written by his son,[3] is also in other respects of great interest.

Polk came of a leading family in North Carolina. His grandfather and father won distinction in the War of Independence. James K. Polk, President of the United States, 1844, was of the same family. Leonidas, born in 1806, entered the Military Academy at West Point in 1823. While there he was converted under the ministry of Dr. McIlvaine, then Chaplain, afterwards Bishop of Ohio. His example and influence led to the conversion of many other cadets; and Dr. McIlvaine was told that if he had chosen one man out of the whole corps whose example would have the greatest influence on the minds of his comrades, he should have chosen Polk.

At the completion of his course, he decided to give up the Army and to enter the ministry. He was ordained in 1830, taking a curacy at Richmond, but being threatened with consumption he was ordered a sea voyage and a visit to Europe, and was on his return recommended to live as far as possible in the open air. He therefore turned to farming his own land in Tennessee, at one time taking charge of a neighbouring parish, and later officiating regularly to a congregation consisting of his own and his brothers' families and their servants. But in 1838 he was consecrated as Missionary Bishop of the South-west; an enormous jurisdiction, embracing Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, and the Indian Territory; his visitation took him from home six months at a time.

[1] Henderson, *Life of Stonewall Jackson*, I, 123.
[2] *Ibid.*, 181. [3] Longmans, 2 vols.

He performed episcopal acts wherever there was occasion; but his main work was that of an evangelist, preaching from house to house as he had opportunity, and constantly exhorting the people to care not only for their own souls, but for the spiritual welfare of their negroes. In 1841 this jurisdiction was divided, Polk becoming Bishop of Louisiana. He had already determined, in order to be near his work without being too far away from his family, to purchase a plantation in that State; feeling that in order to exercise the best influence on a community of planters he must himself be a planter, and believing that an example of dutiful care of his own people on his own estate would be the best possible exposition of the duty of the master to the slave. In this he succeeded,[1] but his episcopal duties interfered with proper attention to the management of the plantation, and he lost nearly all his money. In 1853 he removed to New Orleans, accepting the Rectory of Trinity Church there; and was at once recognized as a great power in that city. The progress of the Church in his diocese is shown by the fact that while in 1842 he had found only five clergy, in the Diocesan Conference of 1853 twenty-five took part; and in eighteen years he saw the number of clergy increase sevenfold, that of communicants more than tenfold, and that of parishes and missions more than twentyfold.

Dr. Fulton, Bishop Polk's curate at New Orleans, gives several examples of his good sense.

"I would not have you be anybody but yourself. If the good Lord had not some use for you in the world, you would not be here; and if He had wanted you to be any other sort of man, you would have been a man of that sort, and not the man you are. Your part is to consider how the Lord Jesus Christ would wish a character like yours to be developed and restrained. . . . Only be your best self, your ideal self. Keep yourself well in hand. When a man gives the rein to his own peculiarities of character, he is sure to miss the purpose of his life, and to become a caricature of the man God meant him to be.

"There is nothing so good as a word in season; but there are few things more likely to do harm than good words out of season. Learn to wait for your chance. . . . Make it a point to leave no man further off from spiritual things than he was when you met him; and when men are moved, be content to carry them as far as they will go freely."

The idea of a great University for all the Southern States came originally from Polk; it was worked out mainly under his influence and that of Bishop Elliott of Georgia. Hitherto no real University

[1] *Life*, vol. I. ch. v, "The Plantation Home in the Diocese of Louisiana."

existed in any of these, except in the border State of Virginia; for higher education it was necessary to go to the North, while the divergence between North and South was steadily growing. Polk in particular felt painfully the dependence of the South on other parts of the country for the supply of clergy. His plan, published in 1856, was for a fully equipped institution of learning provided by the Church and governed by the Church, but open to all the people of the South and intended for the benefit of all. The scheme was soon accepted by many various dioceses, and Sewanee, on high ground in Tennessee, was eventually chosen as the site, a charter being granted by that State. The foundation-stone of the "University of the South" was laid in October, 1860. But the outbreak of the Civil War brought everything to a standstill; everything except the splendid site was swept away in the War, and at its close all had to be begun anew. But the University of the South, though only fulfilling a comparatively small part of the original grand conception, yet holds a high place among American Universities. "It yields to none of its wealthier and more imposing competitors in the affectionate reverence of its sons." Among theologians it is especially associated with the name of Dr. Du Bose, whom Dr. Sanday calls "a real sage and seer" (*Life of Christ in Recent Research*, chap. x.–xi.).

The rest of Bishop Polk's life is mainly concerned with the conflict between North and South. In December, 1860, he wrote to President Buchanan, expressing his conviction that Louisiana and the neighbouring States had deliberately and inflexibly resolved to cut themselves off from the Union, and that any attempt to prevent this by force of arms would bring about a conflict to end only after the most ruthless carnage had desolated the land. (It must always be remembered that the question at issue was the rights of individual States as against the whole Union; these rights had always been emphasized in the South.) After the withdrawal of Louisiana from the Union (January, 1861) Polk declared this action to have removed the diocese from within the place of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, avowing, however, that the loss of Church union in legislation did not involve breach of unity in Christian doctrine and Catholic usage. He and Bishop Elliott took the lead in calling together the convention of bishops and delegates from Southern dioceses at Montgomery.

In June, 1861, he went at the request of the Governor of Tennessee, to Richmond, to impress on President Davis the importance of prompt measures for the defence of the Mississippi Valley. As one of the best known men in that district, recognized as a natural leader, he was asked by the President to take charge of the defences of the Mississippi above the mouth of Red River, and was urged by many to accept the post. Believing the cause of the South to be a righteous one, he never doubted that to draw the sword in its defence would be consistent with his vows to the Church; the one question was whether his services were really needed. After a week's thought and prayer, and having taken counsel with the most judicious of his friends, he found himself unable to refuse the call of Providence. He wrote, "I have undertaken this work, because it seemed the duty next me, a duty which I trust God will allow me to get through without delay, that I may return to chosen and usual work." A friend half seriously exclaimed to him: "What! you, a bishop, throw off the gown for the sword!" "No, sir," was the instant reply, "I buckle the sword over the gown." Later on he said, "I feel like a man whose house is on fire and who has left his business to put it out. As soon as the war is over I shall return to my proper calling." At first he regarded his appointment as merely temporary. When General A. S. Johnston was appointed to the Army of the South-west, Polk, feeling that things were now in thoroughly competent hands, sent in his resignation, but the President refused to accept it, and he was told on all hands that he could not be spared. A few months later he again thought his services could be dispensed with, but the authorities again thought otherwise.

This is not the place to go through the history of the war in the South-west, nor even to describe in detail the part taken by Polk. In November, 1861, he defeated Grant at Belmont. As Lieutenant-General in the Army of Mississippi he shared in the battles of Shiloh, Perryvale and Murfreesboro, and took great part in the victory of Chickamauga, the fruits of which were lost by subsequent inaction. On his appointment to the charge of Alabama and Mississippi, he foiled Sherman's advance into the latter State. When in May, 1864, Sherman began his march into Georgia, which turned out to be the beginning of the end, Polk brought a considerable force to support General J. Johnston, now at the head of the Army of Tennessee. Soon after his arrival General Hood was baptized by him,

one evening in a room dimly lighted by a single candle ; and a few days after, General Johnston also. The Confederates slowly retired before Sherman's superior force. On June 14 Generals Johnston, Polk and Hardee, with their staffs, rode out to examine the position on Pine Mountains. Guns opened upon them, and as Polk turned to take a last view, he was killed by a cannon shot. He was buried at Augusta, by the Bishops of Mississippi, Arkansas and Georgia, the last of whom, his old friend Bishop Elliott, delivered the Burial Address. Of his death, Jefferson Davis says in his *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, "Our army, our country, and mankind at large sustained an irreparable loss in the death of that noble Christian and soldier, Lieutenant-General Polk." He sets this side by side with the fall of A. S. Johnston at Shiloh and of Jackson at Chancellorsville.

Polk's history is a proof, if any were needed, that a devoted clergyman may feel himself called to combatant service without losing either his own religious ideals or the respect of his fellow churchmen.

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