

REPORT
OF THE INITIAL MEETING OF THE
*Descendants of the
Schwenkfeldian Exiles*



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1921

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*Held in the Assembly Hall
of the Historical Society of
Pennsylvania, April 29th,
1921*

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REPORT OF THE INITIAL MEETING OF THE DESCENDANTS OF THE SCHWENKFELDIAN EXILES.

Philadelphia, Pa., April 29, 1921.

The initial meeting of the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles was held in the assembly hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania on Friday evening, April twenty-ninth, nineteen hundred and twenty-one.

The meeting was called to order at 8.15 o'clock by the president, Dr. James M. Anders, who spoke as follows:

Unusual significance attaches to this occasion, since it is the first meeting of the society recently organized under the name of "The Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles." As your presiding officer tonight, I am permitted to extend to all in this presence—newly elected members and invited guests—a most cordial welcome. The holding of the initial meeting of this association in the assembly hall of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania affords a favorable environment for catching, at the very outset, the true historic spirit.

It is hoped that the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles will derive both pleasure and profit from their connection with this organization. It is likewise hoped that every member of this society will manifest a lively interest in its aims and objects, which are "the preservation of the history of the Schwenkfelder religious exiles and their descendants in America and the promotion of social intercourse among its members, now and hereafter." Without doubt, this organization will prove to be a means of disseminating valuable and welcome information among the present and future generations of Schwenkfeldian offspring; it will also increase sympathy and friendliness between persons who are connected by ties of blood and

humanity. More than this, if it fulfills its true function this society will keep each succeeding generation in touch with its antecedents near and remote, as well as their educational, economic and social affairs.

In passing it should be pointed out that the Schwenkfelder exiles left their homes, which had been in Silesia, on account of religious persecutions. The majority of those who came to the American shores, or 184 souls, embarked on the English ship, the St. Andrew, at Rotterdam, which touched at Plymouth and arrived in Philadelphia on September 22, 1734. The following day all male persons over the age of sixteen proceeded to the State House and there subscribed to a pledge of allegiance to George II, King of Great Britain, and his successors, and of fidelity to the province. The 24th day of September was spent in thanksgiving to Almighty God for deliverance from their persecutors. Immediately thereafter began the double process of separation and migration, the majority settling in Montgomery, Berks and Lehigh Counties. Since then their numerous offspring have become scattered throughout many states of the Union, and whereas those who emigrated to this country on the historic ship, the St. Andrew, numbered less than 200, their widely disseminated descendants now compose an army of not less than 50,000.

It has long been felt that the virtues, achievements, as well as the notable impress which the immigrant Schwenfelders and their descendants of the past, made individually and collectively upon the body politic should not be lost. But it remained for our first vice-president, the Hon. W. W. Porter, to suggest the formation of a society such as has been recently organized.

The Schwenkfelder immigrants staked everything on the desire for religious and personal liberty. When this fact is coupled with others, namely, that the Schwenfelders were, in the opinions of the late Governor Pennypacker, Prof. Brecht and other historians, the most intelligent body of immigrants that ever came to our shores, and contemplate their high ideals and the part they played as useful citizens

in the community, as well as the splendid record of their numerous descendants, the wonder is that a society with aims and objects similar to those of the "Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles" had not long since been organized.

My friends, I feel that all will be well for the memory of the Schwenkfelder immigrants and their descendants, that all will be well for us and those who come after, if we of the present generation vigorously prosecute the work planned by this society. It seems to me we should with eagerness seek to render tribute to our heritage, including the social and moral traditions to which we owe our warmest gratitude and best efforts.

The officers of the association point with pride to the fact that it has upwards of 130 original members. I claim that the need of such an organization is well shown by the interest already evinced on the part of those eligible for membership. I feel that nothing more need be said to indicate the *raison d'etre* of this society, but I should like to stress the fact that it is designed to be a non-sectarian body, made up of loyal, patriotic and all-American citizens.

In this connection it is gratifying to be able to state that the Schwenkfelder immigrants and their descendants have ever shown a most commendable loyalty and devotion to the country of their adoption, and that their record in these and all other respects is one of which we may feel justly proud. But though fame may not remember the great majority of our ancestors by a familiar name, yet there were among them celebrities, and as a group they were quite notable, more particularly when interpreted in the terms of spirit.

The president then presented Mr. Hampton Lawrence Carson, who delivered the following address:

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I fear that I have committed an imprudence in yielding to the enticing and persuasive words in which Doctor Anders invited me to speak on this occasion. I told

him I had not a drop in my veins of the blood represented by Caspar Schwenkfeld, and that I knew little or nothing of his career, except in the most general way; hence, I was startled by the appearance of the card of invitation when I found myself singled out and my name so placed as to lead one to suppose that I was prepared to deliver an address on the life, the deeds and the works of Caspar Schwenkfeld. Such is not the case. Judge Porter ought to have made this address, and I intend to yield to him and give him an opportunity as soon as I can.

Doctor Anders has touched, however, upon a key which finds a responsive chord in my breast. I did tell him that while I could not talk specifically on the career of Schwenkfeld, I was quite ready to discuss in a broad way the position which Schwenkfeld's singularly illustrious and productive life occupied in that larger movement of events which led to the selection of Pennsylvania as an asylum for the oppressed and persecuted of all races and all creeds, and which has made Pennsylvania the Keystone State and the most representative American State in the Union. I can never enter these halls or look at the pictures that you see around you, or catch the voices that whisper from our crowded book shelves, or look through these vistas which arrange by appropriate centuries and divisions the onward march of ideas, without realizing the splendid part which Pennsylvania has played in the unfolding drama of American History which can never be stricken from the volume of human affairs without causing a gap that would yawn for centuries. I say this in no spirit of boasting, but from a conviction that under the Providence of God and His mysterious dispensations we have been so placed in time, in territory and in those exigencies of human affairs as to make the part played by our sires, of whatever blood they were, a most important part in shaping the destinies of the future; and that as in the past, so in the present, the sons and daughters of Pennsylvania have never failed in the performance of their duty.

We realize more and more that human history, after all,

is but a unit. Some of us may get interested in a particular section of history. We may study a single individual life so as to concentrate attention on but a small segment of biography. But, after all, we can know nothing of the importance relatively of that life unless we look behind the man, beyond him, around him and about him, and see where he is, in the crowd of the living dead, and learn what he did, how he influenced future events and what impression he made of a lasting character upon the generations that followed. If we find that he has survived in the respect and in the esteem of thousands of earnest, serious-minded people, who regard him no longer as a mere man or the mere narrow founder of a sect, but as a great apostle of free thought, of religious freedom, leading to political freedom, then may we take some measure of the man and place him in an appropriate niche, elevated above the statues of smaller men. And as we gaze at him, and the centuries recede, and we find that he looms larger and larger, then can we reach that degree of comparative judgment which results from broad knowledge and general reading. In this way only can we appraise the real value of a great life and a great career.

For myself I am Scotch-Irish on my father's side and English and Welsh on my mother's. My children are more American than I, for they have a strain of Moravian and German blood coming through their mother, and my grandchildren are still more American, for they have Swedish, Swiss and, perhaps, a strain of Silesian blood in their veins. That is a true American condition, a fusion of the bloods of intelligent, God-fearing, high-minded, right-acting people. With us no nationality can exclusively claim for itself the privilege of asserting "I and my strain alone is American." It was because Pennsylvania, of all the States now in the Union, and particularly of all the Old Thirteen Colonies, represented America in miniature more effectively than any other Colony, that the Schwenkfeldian exiles came here instead of elsewhere when in search of a freer atmosphere to breathe, where the soil had never

been burdened by the weight of a feudal prison or the air tainted by the smoke of human sacrifices. Pennsylvania was then as she is now—America in miniature, an American microcosm. What made her so?

Without going into detail, let me rapidly run over events as they present themselves to my recollection. I have prepared nothing and have to think as I talk and talk as I think. The movement which set towards these shores in the way of colonization was caused by events somewhat remote in the centuries which preceded. Nothing that occurs in this world is accidental. Nothing happens without having an origin, a cause. If we look close enough, and with intelligence at historical events, we can see how definite currents set in the direction of our shores, just as distinctly as the marine cartographer can trace the course of the Gulf Stream in the sea. I will begin with the Thirteenth Century. That is quite far enough back. About the Thirteenth Century the world began to awake from the torpor and the dense darkness of the Middle Ages. By some people, and I have read a book about the subject, the Thirteenth has been called "The Greatest of the Centuries," because it was in strong contrast with what had preceded and was in a definite sense the progenitor of what was to come. In England, King Edward the First, the greatest of the Plantagenets, reorganized English law and laid the foundations of our modern jurisprudence. Prior to that time Anglo-Saxon customs and Norman grafts had been asserting themselves more or less irregularly until the organizing mind of the great king, acting through distinguished chief justices and chancellors, formulated and organized the basis of modern law. Philosophers, too, began to stir in their sleep. Within the last week we had explained to us at the American Philosophical Society, by Professor Newbold, of the University of Pennsylvania, the mystery of the Roger Bacon cypher, in which an important manuscript, which had slept in Italian vaults long unknown, was brought to light. Bacon, regarded as a necromancer, an astrologer, an alchemist, and a dealer in witchcraft and the

black arts, dreaded by Churchmen and Laymen alike, was the first of the great philosophic minds that attempted to inquire into the cosmogony about them, but compelled to conceal his real thoughts and discoveries in cypher lest he fall under the execration of the Church and be excommunicated or stifled for heresy. Philosopher after philosopher stirred under a mysterious impulse, not because they knew of each other's work, but because of an intellectual tremor communicating itself from individual to individual, just as a thrill will run through a crowd not knowing what it is, but generating an impulse which moves it in a given direction and turns faces towards the light; thus philosopher after philosopher began to think and the old darkness of the monasteries began to be dispelled. Then came the open Bible of Wickliffe. Then came the invention of Printing. Think of what an awakening! From printed type human thoughts which had been buried for centuries, buried in vaults, castles, dungeons and cloacae, under the debris caused by the destruction of the Roman world by the invasion of the Huns under Attila, began dimly to assert themselves, and men gazed at the stars, gazed at the heavens, studied the earth and wondered and mused and conferred. Then, too, religious zeal for the recovery of the sepulchre of Christ had taken hundreds of thousands of soldiers in armor, including one hundred thousand children in a single crusade to the Holy Land. For three hundred years distant nations had exchanged ideas as well as goods, but the invention of printing promoted and facilitated the exchange of thought begun by the intercommunications of nations through the Crusades, so that men began to wonder whether there was not truth in what had been taught or insinuated through whispers, despite the terrors of the rack and the dungeon. After printing came the discovery of America. Columbus had, by sailing across a stormy and unknown ocean, thrown open to the eyes of philosophers and adventurers what was properly called a New World. The thoughts of men broadened and still further expanded. Two years before the discovery of America Caspar Schwenkfeld was born. The Age of the Reformation had dawned.

Who were Schwenkfeld's contemporaries? Martin Luther, Copernicus, Keppler, Bruno—thinkers, philosophers, reformers, men of conscience, men of courage, men of insight, men of sublimity of soul. In a broad sense the differences between Luther and Schwenkfeld were insignificant. The monumental volumes which Doctor Kriebel has shown me at Perkiomen Seminary at Pennsburg,—wonderful volumes they are,—of the controversy between Schwenkfeld and Martin Luther are very important and most interesting to discuss, but chiefly, as illustrating the main fact that the minds of men were in conflict, irrespective of the details. The important phenomenon was that both of them were thinking, thinking freely and bravely. For their thoughts, for their boldness, their courage and their freedom they were persecuted, just as Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo, as Scientists, were persecuted. Why? Because their visions of a broader world, of a larger humanity, of a profounder destiny for man, came into conflict with the rigid doctrines, creeds and rituals of the Church. For this they were proscribed. It was arrogance and heresy that any man like Keppler or Copernicus should revivify the doctrine of Pythagoras that our portion of the heavens was subject to the heliocentric theory instead of the geocentric, which was the doctrine of Ptolemy. In effect, it was said, "You deny the Holy Scripture and come into conflict with the Book of Genesis. You are undermining the foundations of faith and authority. You are dangerous enemies of the Church and State, and you are proscribed." Reflect, too, upon the cruelties practiced on the thinkers of that day, the burnings, the tortures, the imprisonments and, worse than all to thinkers, the denial of the right to think. The worst punishment to any man who desires to speak is to put a gag on his lips and a weight on his heart; to say to him, "You shall neither think nor speak. You may claim it as a God-given right, but we deny it to you." Such were the burdens which men in that day had to carry, but they carried them at the risk of their liberty and of their lives. It is because they were true to the faith that was in them that we are here as their de-

scendants and amply should we acknowledge the debt we owe to them.

Think again of what an awakening of the world it was. The telescope of Galileo proved that the assertions of Bruno and of Keppler were correct, but it was not allowed to be generally known that the telescope had affirmed it. In the Roger Bacon manuscript, to which I have referred, which is two centuries older than the time of Galileo, there are certain drawings composed of stars and constellations, which it would have been impossible for the eye to see, unless the author had had some sort of magnifying glass, telescopic in its range, though of very moderate dimensions. And so with regard to certain minute forms of animal and plant life with which he illustrated his manuscript, he must have had some kind of glass which like a microscope would reveal minute peculiarities. Clearly, the light was breaking and sifting through the centuries, and men were growing intellectually taller, stronger, broader and better. The mistake we make in reading human history is to be too eager in expecting results. We suffer from impatience, even today. We see some wrong existing and we imagine that we can cure it in a single session of the Legislature. Many people say "All you have to do is to go to Harrisburg and get an Act passed," or "If the Governor would only sign the bill," or "If the President would do this and Congress would do that, then we could put the half of the community that does not agree with us in jail, or legislate evil out of existence, and the rest of the world would be happy." That is not the way in which this world has grown nor this State has grown. There are centuries upon centuries of unsounded thought and unmeasured time behind us. I have listened to Sir Auckland Geddes, the British Ambassador, who is an anthropologist by profession, talk by the hour about the antiquity of man and of discoveries which he himself has made. Man has been on this globe hundreds of thousands of years instead of the six thousand years which Archbishop Usher computed from the time of Adam to

the reign of Charles the Second. Sir Auckland asserts, after examining human remains assorted geologically, as well as instruments and weapons and ornaments belonging to the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, that man has been here but little short of 500,000 years, and yet we have only six thousand years of recorded history to appeal to so far as documents are concerned. Why should we be impatient that certain desirable results are not worked out completely in the course of a generation or even in the course of a century? The processes of God are orderly and to Him a thousand years are as but a single day. Looking at time past as practically infinite, and viewing the results we must have faith in the uplift of humanity. Notwithstanding all the errors and crimes perpetrated under our own eyes and in our own midst, I do not hesitate to assert that the world is getting better, broader, purer, holier and higher, and that it will continue to advance until it is the will of God that it shall stop.

Schwenkfeld and his doctrines were of a mild, humane sort, much like those instilled by William Penn, the founder of this Commonwealth. He realized the Divine character in Christ and preached not so much works as the spiritual contemplation of character as having an effect on human conduct. His mild and gentle followers did not wish to tear their enemies nor to persecute and to oppress, and so they came to these shores. Many people have thought that prior to the landing of Penn at Upland or Old Chester in 1682 this part of the world was a howling wilderness. Not at all. The Dutch and Swedes had been on the shores of the Delaware for fifty years before Penn came and brought with him Englishmen. Following them came the Germans and settled in Germantown. The Welsh went into the North Wales country, around Bryn Mawr, Gwynedd and Merion and those places that carry Welsh names, during the period of time between 1682 and the opening of 1700. Then came the Scotch-Irish. In fact, if we run over the various nationalities in our minds we have, first, the Dutch, then the

Swedes, then the English, then the Germans, then the Welsh, then the Scotch Irish, then the Irish without any Scotch, and the Silesians. One of the reasons why the quiet Quakers of Pennsylvania in this part of the State, constituting but one-fifteenth of its territory, taking the line of the Kittatinny Mountains, from the Delaware Water Gap to the Susquehanna just above Harrisburg, prospered, and the Schwenkfeldian exiles from Silesia were able to enjoy their peculiar principles without Indian raids and massacres, was due not only to the Treaty which Penn made with the Indians, but also to the fact that before an Indian tomahawk could reach a Quaker scalp it had to fly through fifty miles of Scotch-Irish.

In addition to the varied nationalities we had almost every form of religious faith besides Quakers. We had Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Reformed Lutherans, Swiss and French Huguenots, Roman Catholics, Schwenkfelders, Mennonites, Amish, Dunkards, Seventh Day Baptists. What other colony presented such elements? None. This is not boasting. It is simply an historical fact. When critics of Pennsylvania talk about Massachusetts or Virginia and say "See what they did there," you can say "They had no such perplexing problems as ours. Massachusetts was settled by people of pure English blood and of but one religious sect, and they were intolerant at that. The Puritans claimed religious toleration. They wanted it for themselves, but the moment Quakers went there, they were whipped through the streets of Boston at the tails of carts, and poor Roger Williams was driven down into Rhode Island in search of religious freedom." I much admire the New England character and respect it highly. Its self-reliance, its courage, and its audacity have accomplished great things, but I feel inclined to dissent, in fact, to become rebellious, when it is asserted that all the great, good and growing things in this country have been due largely to New England. It is not true. When the men of Connecticut found they could not indulge too freely in their favorite pastime of town meetings

because rocks had to be upheaved from an inhospitable soil, and log huts and stockades had to be built against Indians, hovering about the settlements, they concluded to save time by coming together in an open glade of the forest and pass this resolution: "*Resolved*, That we will be governed by the Laws of God until we have time to make something better." That was a splendid spirit, but it was a little narrow. Here, under the benign institutions and influence of William Penn we had all races, all nationalities, all sects, all creeds, all enjoying equal rights, but, my fellow Pennsylvanians, the problem in Pennsylvania was a difficult one. It meant the amalgamation of races. It meant the extinguishing of lines of separation between thought and habit which it took time to overcome. The result was that there was mixed in the alembic of America by the hand of Divine Providence, blood wrung drop by drop from the brows of suffering nationalities, to be distilled by the fierce fires of our Revolution into the most precious elixir of the ages. That is the reason we are proud of our American and our Pennsylvanian blood; that is the reason we honor these missionaries, these statesmen, these soldiers, these teachers, these poets, these men and women, whose portraits are on these walls for having helped to build up Pennsylvania, a State where the air was free, where the laws were just, where the people were tolerant, and humane, and where we now frequently assemble in hall or in library to do honor to the memory of some great man such as Caspar Schwenkfeld. All honor to his memory and to the memories of men like him, who braved Indians, Tories, the wilderness and all the dangers of the sea and the hardships of pioneer life. It is because they made their sacrifices that we are enjoying the fruits of our inheritance. Plainly, the duty rests upon us to transmit that inheritance to our children unspotted and unspoiled.

Mr. Carson's address was well received and after the applause had ceased the president then called upon Hon. William Wagener Porter, Esq., first vice-president of the

society, who with characteristic modesty responded in a brief speech inspired by the spirit of the occasion.

A vote of thanks was given to Mr. Carson for his admirable address, after which the president declared the meeting adjourned.

Following the meeting an informal reception was held which was well attended and was the culmination of a very pleasant and profitable evening.

J. E. BURNETT BUCHENHAM,
Secretary.