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Caspar Schwenkfeld and the Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania

By PROF. WM. J. HINKE of Auburn Theological Seminary

Address before the Schwenkfeldian Exiles, at Pennsburg, Pa.,

May 23, 1925

I CONSIDER it a high honor and privilege to be asked to address the Society of Schwenkfeldian exiles at its annual meeting. It is, I fear, an honor which I hardly deserve, for my studies of Schwenkfeldian history have been so incidental to other studies that I cannot be expected to speak with authority on this subject. I wish to make it plain at the outset of my address, that my information is entirely derived from recent histories, excellent though they are, and does not at all depend on any prolonged study of original sources.

Among the recent histories of the Schwenkfelders there are two which I wish to single out for special mention, for I have read them with the greatest interest and profit. They are Prof. Kriebel's excellent book "The Schwenkfelders in Pennsylvania," published by the Pennsylvania-German Society in 1904. This is an admirable summary of the main events in the history of the Schwenkfelders and it sets forth their characteristic and outstanding religious beliefs with sufficient detail and clearness, that the reader gets a faithful picture of Schwenkfeldian history.

The other is the monumental work of Prof. Samuel K. Brecht, "The Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Families," published in 1923. This is a wonderful work of painstaking research, which traces all the descendants of the original Schwenkfelder immigrants with surprising accuracy and fullness of detail. Its introductory chapters give the necessary information about Caspar Schwenkfeld, the history of the Schwenkfelders in Europe and the history of the various colonies that came to Pennsylvania. It was certainly a gigantic task to assemble all the material contained in this massive volume. It was a task that was well worth doing and a task that has been done exceedingly well. It is doubtful, whether any other colony of immigrants into America has ever received such full and adequate treatment. With such ample materials before us there is hardly anything left for the future historian but to sit down and digest the wonderful bill of fare spread before him.

An outsider like myself can hardly do anything else than give an appreciation of some of the striking incidents in this history which have aroused his interest.

The first thing that arrested my attention in reading this history was the discovery of the fact that Schwenkfelder history

was to a large extent determined and shaped by the history of their illustrious founder. It is but an illustration of the truth which we observe constantly in general history as well as in church history, in the case of Luther and Calvin, as well as in the case of Schwenkfeld, that *great minds* succeed in impressing their personality, their mode of thought and even their peculiar beliefs with irresistible power upon their followers.

In order to bring out this fact more fully in the case of Schwenkfeld, let me give a brief outline of the outstanding events of his life, as they have impressed themselves on my mind.

Caspar Schwenkfeld was born in the year 1490 at Ossig, a little village of Silesia, the son of a nobleman and of Catholic parentage. Looking for a moment at the other reformers let us note that Luther was by seven years his senior, while Schwenkfeld himself was by seven years the senior of Luther's famous assistant, Philip Melancthon.

As a boy Schwenkfeld was indoctrinated in Catholic beliefs and customs, while as a young man he studied at Catholic Universities, Ignitz, Frankfort and Coblentz. As a man of culture and social standing, he became a courtier, first at the court of Duke Carl of Münsterberg, a grandson of the King of Bohemia, and later at the court of the prince of his native duchy, the Duke Frederick of Liegnitz. At first he participated freely and unreservedly in all the frivolities and gaities of court life as it then existed. But suddenly a change came about in his life. The details of the outward circumstances which produced the change seem to be unknown. At least I was not able to discover them in the books at my command. So much is certain, that Schwenkfeld began to take a great interest in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, and in order to understand it more fully he engaged in the study of the Greek language. Here we discover the influence of humanism, the new interest manifested in the study of the classical languages. Erasmus was one of the leading humanists, who in 1516 published the first New Testament in the original Greek text. The study of the scriptures in the original languages produced a new spirit of inquiry, which soon extended to the realm of theology. Questions of medieval theology, which had remained unchallenged for centuries, were examined anew with the result that many were found to be without adequate support from scripture. Thus came about the Reformation. It was a protest against the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church.

The movement of the reformation was hailed with delight by Schwenkfeld whose study of the Bible had prepared him for its favorable reception. Schwenkfeld threw himself into the new movement with zeal and ardor, which secured him the approval of such leaders as Luther.

But, as the movement progressed, Schwenkfeld found him-

self out of harmony with many of its most important positions. At first he wrote letters to Luther, later he visited Wittenberg personally, in order to reach an understanding by conference and personal exchange of opinions. But the more he argued the more stubborn and immovable Luther appeared. He said in effect to Schwenkfeld as he said later to Zwingli: "Believe as I do, or be damned. We can't both of us be right. Hence one of us must be the servant of the Devil."

Gradually the split between Luther and Schwenkfeld developed into open antagonism, which exposed Schwenkfeld to violent and determined persecution. In 1528 he was compelled to leave his native province and henceforth, for more than thirty years, Schwenkfeld was a fugitive and a wanderer, compelled to move from place to place, violently assailed and often exposed to bodily danger.

During the last thirty years of his life he labored incessantly for the spread of the truth as he saw it, through books and pamphlets, through letters and messages, carried by messengers to friends and foes alike. When he died at last in Ulm in 1562, he left behind him a vast body of writings, which it is estimated will fill seventeen folio volumes, when published in the great *Corpus Schwenkfeldianorum*. That marks him, like Luther and Calvin, as a man of great mental activity, a tireless writer, a fearless defender of the truth as he understood it. He died sixteen years after Luther and two years before Melancthon, so that the larger part of his career was contemporaneous with that of the other great reformers.

In the outward circumstances of his life there is nothing very striking and original. There were at the time of the reformation thousands of other young noblemen, who were caught in the swelling tide of the reformation and by changing their religion were compelled to give up their homes and friends. That in itself was not so very remarkable. The significant fact lay in his own personality and in the contribution which he made to the religious and theological thought of his times by his writings.

Above all Schwenkfeld was an original and independent thinker. There were no doubt many men who influenced him in his thinking. I have neither the time nor the opportunity to delve into his writings, in order to discover to what earlier Catholic writers he was indebted. This is, I hope, a subject on which Dr. Johnson will enlighten us in his forthcoming volumes on the works of Schwenkfeld.

There were two great schools of thought in medieval catholicism. The one, represented by Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, emphasized the rationalistic element. According to them Christianity is a reasonable system of truth, capable of rational explanation and philosophical statement. The other school, represented by Tauler and Thomas A'Kempis, emphasized the mys-

tical element in religion. According to them Christianity is chiefly not a system of truth, but communion and fellowship with God.

Now it seems to me that the whole attitude of Schwenkfeld reveals clearly his kinship with the second school of thought, that of the Mystics. They dwelt on the spiritual elements of religion. The Spirit of God active in the hearts and lives of men, and the spirit of man, allowing itself to be guided and drawn into harmony and fellowship with the Spirit of God.

So Schwenkfeld insisted in all his writings on the spiritual knowledge of Christ, the inner unwritten Word of God, on the inner spiritual element of religious service by which the sinner hears God's word directly from the Father. God is a Spirit and must be worshipped in the spirit by the heart and cannot be adored by material things, such as divine services or even the sacraments.

One of the vital points on which he disagreed with Luther was the position of the scriptures as the seat of authority in religion. The medieval Catholic theologians had made the church the ultimate seat of authority in religion. Whatever doctrines the church formulates, through her theologians, councils and popes, on the basis of the scriptures and tradition, must be accepted as Christian truth by the individual believer. This position was challenged by the reformers, who maintained that only that doctrine was to be accepted as true which could be demonstrated as such from scripture. Thus they put the scriptures in place of the church as the ultimate source of authority. Hence, man is saved by a saving knowledge of the scriptures.

Schwenkfeld, on the other hand, held that scripture in itself was dead and without power to heal and save. That it is not the scriptures that save, but Christ as revealed in the scriptures. Redemption is not by the scriptures, but by unwritten, uncreated Word of God, the Logos that was the beginning. This transfers the seat of authority from the outward written record to the inner testimony of God's Spirit in man. It is ultimately God's Spirit in man which directs and saves him.

However much we may approve of this position nowadays, it is clear that at the time of the reformation, when the struggle between Catholics and Protestants was so intense, a struggle in which the supremacy of the scriptures for Christian faith played the most important role, it is clear that such a position of Schwenkfeld with regard to scripture led to an irreconcilable conflict with the other reformers, for to them the scriptures, the written record, was of supreme importance in religion.

Moreover, from this fundamental position of Schwenkfeld, all his other positions become intelligible and follow by logical necessity.

If God saves man by a direct working of his Spirit upon man's spirit and man becomes a Christian when he allows himself to be drawn by the Spirit of God and to be regenerated by him, then the sacraments lose much of their significance. They cease to be means of grace, channels by which God communicates his grace to man. Hence their observance is not essential and absolutely necessary.

Again, if redemption takes place through the inner, uncreated, eternal Word of God, the Logos which was from the beginning, it is clear that neither the incarnation, nor the life of Christ on earth, neither his teaching nor his death, neither the knowledge of the scriptures nor of Christ, are vitally concerned in redemption.

We can also understand why it was that Schwenkfeld emphasized Jesus Christ as the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and that God gives his grace through Christ. He refused to believe that when Christ appeared on earth he emptied himself of his divinity, that he lived and suffered as man rather than as God-man. This position caused many enemies of Schwenkfeld to charge him with Eulychianism, a tendency which fails to recognize the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ.

Here then you have the picture of Caspar Schwenkfeld. It is the picture of a bold and original thinker, a man who could say with the Latin poet Horace: "I am not bound to swear by the words of any teacher." Although he was doubtlessly influenced by the thought of the medieval mystics, although he was stimulated by the teaching of the reformers, yet he was not afraid to go on his own way, to follow truth wherever it might lead him. And he had to pay the penalty for daring to think for himself. He was persecuted and exiled. He was maligned and slandered, unwittingly he brought upon his followers persecutions similar to those which he himself endured.

But while Schwenkfeld claimed the right to think for himself, he granted the same right to others. He was not intolerant, but stood for freedom of thought and religious toleration. In that thought he was far in advance of the great men of his time. Luther claimed the right of private judgment for himself, to decide what the teaching of scripture was on a given question. But he was unwilling and, by reason of his temperament, unable to grant to others the same freedom of thought. He denounced with the same vehemence Catholics and Protestants who failed to agree with him. He did not treat Schwenkfeld any differently from what he treated Zwingli and Calvin. He denounced all dissenters as children of the devil. It was the spirit of the age, which burned Servetus in Geneva and drowned Crypto-Calvinists, in Wittenberg. But we, in this day and generation, must greet Schwenkfeld as the herald of a new age in religious history, the age of religious liberty and religious toleration.

There is another point, on which we can express our hearty approval of the position of Schwenkfeld. It is his insistence of the higher, spiritual elements of the Christian life. We agree perfectly with him that Christianity is not principally a set of rules and doctrines formulated by the Church, and a Christian is not one who accepts these rules and doctrines as true and recognizes them as guides of his conduct. But the Christian religion is primarily fellowship and communion with God through Jesus Christ and that the Spirit of God working in the human soul saves man, independent of all outward agencies. That a man does not become a Christian when he goes to church, repeats a creed or partakes of the sacraments. The Christian life is a spiritual relationship and not dependent upon the observance of outward forms and ceremonies, otherwise many a rascal, who parades as a Christian and observes all the outward forms, would be a true child of God. Let us be thankful to Schwenkfeld that he emphasized the true, inner, spiritual values in religion. Mere human creeds had to him no lasting value. They might be landmarks in the development of the theological thinking of the church. But creeds as such should not bind the lives and consciences of men. They can tell us what the best minds thought in past ages, but no sooner were they put into writing than men moved away from them. They are useful and important in the study of church history, but they are not essential to the maintenance of the true Christian life. What we need is not creeds, but the Spirit of Christ in the lives of men.

The only question in my mind, when looking upon the teaching of Schwenkfeld as a whole, is, did he not, by emphasizing the supremacy of the spiritual in religion, Jesus Christ as the uncreated, eternal Son of God, redemption as through the unwritten eternal Word, the true church as being the Body of Christ, and divine service as the inner spiritual element, by which the sinner hears the voice of God directly, did he not by this strong emphasis of these things spiritual underestimate, to some extent at least, the importance of the physical, the merely human, the visible and what may be called the symbolical elements. Should we not attach considerable importance to the earthly life of Christ and the meaning of his death? Can we overlook the importance of the written Word of God, the record of divine revelation, the necessity of preaching this Word by men properly trained to divine aright the word of truth, the importance of organizing the believers in Christ into an outward visible church, which maintains the services of the sanctuary and employs the sacraments as visible symbols of the higher, spiritual mercies of God?

We are led to ask these questions in view of the later history of the Schwenkfelders. As I said at the beginning, a large part of its history finds its explanation in the position originally taken by Schwenkfeld himself.

I have dwelt so long on the history and theological positions of Schwenkfeld to make the second part of my paper brief and easier of exposition: The Schwenkfelders, the heirs of the legacy left by Schwenkfeld.

Even during his life time Schwenkfeld gained many adherents to his views, not only in various parts of Germany, but also in neighboring countries, such as Italy, Switzerland, Bohemia, Moravia and Holland. Daring, like their leader, to stand up for their religious convictions, they were exposed to all sorts of persecution. Not recognized by other Protestant parties, they were excluded from the peace of Augsburg and the treaty of Westphalia. This left them without legal protection, to be robbed, wounded and exiled, according to the whim or pleasure of the prince in whose dominions they lived.

Schwenkfeld himself made no efforts to organize his followers into a regular church. It seemed to be contrary to his conception of what the true Church of Christ ought to be, the invisible Body of Christ, moreover to organize seemed to imply fight and that was contrary to his peaceful nature. Yet in spite of their unorganized condition, the Schwenkfelders succeeded in maintaining their identity for more than one hundred and fifty years, mainly in seven villages of Silesia, where at the beginning of the eighteenth century their number was reduced to less than fifteen hundred souls.

They might have been gradually absolved by the neighboring Lutheran congregations, if persecution had not set in. This proved to be a blessing in disguise, for it saved them from gradual extinction. The persecution was started through the efforts of the Lutheran pastor at Harpersdorf to convert the Schwenkfelders to the Lutheran faith. Failing in this, he appealed to the authorities. This directed the attention of the imperial court at Vienna to the Schwenkfelders. And, as a result of the imperial government concluded to convert the Schwenkfelders to Catholicism. A Jesuit mission was sent out to accomplish this purpose. At first they used argument and persuasion, and when these failed recourse was taken to force and compulsion. Driven to desperation, the Schwenkfelders decided to escape their persecutors by flight. An appeal to Count Zinzendorf brought them the assurance that they would find refuge in his dominion. As a result between four and five hundred fled to Saxony 1726, where they found temporary shelter.

But their position in Saxony was precarious, entirely dependent upon the good will of the Elector. When in 1733 the Elector Augustus I died, the Jesuits soon succeeded in persuading the new Elector to order their removal. Hence an electoral edict was issued at Dresden in April, 1733, commanding Zinzendorf to insist on their departure within a year. Strenuous efforts were then made to secure a place of asylum

in the neighboring countries, Prussia, Poland and Holland. When all these efforts failed, their thoughts turned to the new world.

It is hardly necessary to tell again in this presence the story of their emigration to Pennsylvania. That has been done ably and at length by others, better qualified to speak and write on this subject than myself. Suffice it to say that the plans of the leaders proved to be most satisfactory and were carried out with remarkable dispatch. They selected Pirna, along the Elbe river, as their place of embarkation. It took the forty odd families, who participated in this exodus, about a week to find their way to this meeting place. There they took ship and sailed down the Elbe River to Altoona, a trip of nineteen days. On the 23rd of May, 1734, they left Altoona in three vessels and reached Amsterdam on the 6th of June, and soon afterwards Haarlem, where kind friends received them, who not only provided for their entertainment, but also secured their passage to Pennsylvania, at their own expense, on the ship St. Andrew, Captain Stedman. They were very fortunate in the selection of their captain. He was an excellent seaman, who piloted thousands of Palatines to the New World. Christopher Schultz testifies: "He was a very good captain who strictly observed the articles of contract and we had very good sailors, who observed great patience with us." It took them seven weeks to cross the ocean. On the whole it was a successful and uneventful journey, although they experienced a calm, some contrary winds and one severe storm, when all hatches were closed and the passengers were almost stifled in the hold, tossed about by the waves, unable to lie down or sit down. Ten persons, most of them children, died on the journey.

But it was a pleasure trip compared with the awful experiences of other emigrants. We have the record of one ship in 1731, leaving Holland with one hundred and fifty passengers, mostly Reformed people, of whom one hundred starved to death, in a journey that lasted more than twelve weeks, and finally landed fifty walking skeletons at Martha's Vineyard near Boston, who, when they complained of their wretched treatment, were thrown into prison as slanderers of their inhuman captain. The Schwenkfelders fell into better hands. Under a fine captain they reached Philadelphia on September 22, 1734. On the following day sixty of the men signed the oath of allegiance in the Court House, then at Second and Market Streets. Under the leadership of their pastor, George Weiss, September 24th was observed as a day of thanksgiving, and has since been observed annually as a memorial day. The Schwenkfelders are the only body of immigrants having observed such a day for nearly two centuries.

We must pass over their settlement in the Perkiomen valley and in the neighboring Lehigh and Bucks Counties. I was

interested to find that they were also instrumental in founding Penn Yan, a village in the State of New York, not very far from Auburn, my present home town. It was called Penn Yan, because here some of the early settlers of Pennsylvania met with Yankees and established this village. A Schwenkfelder, Abraham Wagner, was the first village president.

But their main settlements were in Pennsylvania. Here they became for the most part farmers, children of the soil, who lived close to nature and nature's God. As farmers they showed marked thrift and intelligence, who soon turned the virgin forests into fertile fields and blooming gardens. They lived quiet and useful lives, for they were people of deep religious feelings and earnest piety. Their interests outside of their farms and homes, soon turned to educational institutions. The original body of immigrants were well educated and therefore prized mental training. The late governor of Pennsylvania, Samuel W. Pennypacker, said of them that "they were the most intelligent group of people who came to America in the colonial period."

Having brought with them such deep interest in education, they soon established schools. The first schoolhouse was built in 1765 in Towamencin, and a school fund was gathered aggregating over eight hundred Pa. pounds. Neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran people were able to raise funds of such a size for their parochial schools. The salaries of the school teachers were rather low, one of £5, or \$13, yearly is on record. This low salary did not indicate, however, that the subjects were lowgrade, for they included English, German, Latin, French, Geography and History. Among the Latin text books were Cornelius Nepos, Biographies and Latin selections from the Old Testament. The interest developed thus early in education is evidenced at present nowhere more strikingly than in the flourishing Perkiomen Seminary.

In religious matters the unorganized condition prevailing in Germany followed them to the New World. Being forbidden for centuries to organize separate congregations, it took them a number of decades to rally their religious forces in Pennsylvania and perfect their religious organization. A constitution or system of church government was not drawn up till 1782, when Christopher Schultz prepared such a document. But even after that several years passed until the first church building or meeting house was erected in 1790.

What impressed and pleases an outsider in the history of the Schwenkfelders is that many of the original peculiarities have gradually disappeared. The influence of American church life is making itself felt, obliterating differences and sweeping them more and more into the broad stream of American Christianity.

Modern church buildings are being erected. Pastors are

trained for their life work and paid for their services. The sacraments have been introduced as a regular part of church life. Missions in foreign lands have been started. A church paper maintains the interest of the members in the growing activities of the church. Large literary undertakings, such as the publication of the works of Caspar Schwenkfeld, have been launched. The interest in education and in the history of the church is fostered more than ever before. The membership of the church has been more than quadrupled in the last thirty years. Surely everything points to a promising future, to larger usefulness and still more effective service.

Thus there is every reason to hope that the great and noble principles which Caspar Schwenkfeld first enunciated and which his followers have exemplified in their lives for so many centuries, will continue to be upheld as a blessing to their descendants and an enrichment of our American Christianity.

Robert Burns in his *Cotter's Saturday Night*, emphasizes this simple piety that made Scotland great, and we may add, made the Silesians great, and will be the strength and peace of any people :—

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, revered abroad :
Princes and Lords are but the breath of kings,
"An honest man's the noblest work of God" ;

And certes in fair virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind ;
What is the lordling's pomp ? a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
Skilled in the arts of Hell, in wickedness refined !

O Scotia, my dear my native soil !
For whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent !
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil,
Be blessed with health and peace and sweet content !
And, Oh ! may heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
And then however crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace will rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around her much-lov'd Isle.

The Job of Being an Ancestor

BY BENJ. H. LUDLOW

*Extracts of address before Society of Schwenkfeldian Exiles
November, 1924*

I ATTENDED another meeting before this one this evening, and on my right sat a man who was in Harvard in 1894. One day he, intending to become a social worker, and another man, a minister, went to call on Oliver Wendell Holmes to counsel with him as to their choice of profession. They got to talking about ancestry, and that man Holmes, whose name in all its three parts meant so much to him—up there in Massachusetts they say, the Cabots speak only to the Lowells, and the Lowells speak only to God, that man Holmes said, as if he were talking out of one of his books, "One's ancestry should be like the sweet potato,—the best part of it should be above ground!" And with that almost inspired text thus lately acquired, I want to speak for a few minutes on the subject I choose,—*"My Ancestral Job."*

I can look back, as can you, to a long line of men and women who have taken their part in life. They didn't come from Silesia and they haven't had pamphlets written about them. I came to Pennsylvania and corrected the mistake of not being born here by marrying a girl from an old Pennsylvania family, residing in Delaware County. Her people had been there for a couple of centuries.

What is the value of my inheritance? I have it in hand. What is it worth to me? What part shall I take in my community? If there were some kind of telepathy so that ancestors could listen in on a great celestial radio, would my ancestors be pleased to know that this thing which I have inherited has been nobly handled, or would they learn that it has been man-handled and brutally mistreated? I have always felt that what has gone before, over which I had no control, is far more valuable than what may be left to me in my father's will. My father's will leaves something that may be disposed of, but my father and my father's father, and my mother, and my mother's mother, have brought something different to me that was handed to me on a platter. What shall I do with it?

If you will permit me, I wish to transpose myself from the eyepiece of the telescope to the other end of it and look back at the generations which have gone,—look at myself from the viewpoint of the generations which are to come, and say, "Who was this fellow Ludlow?" And I wish you would think this same thing of yourselves. "Who was this fellow—this grandfather, this great-grandfather of mine," they will say in years to come. "What did he do? How did he live? Was he worthy of the line?" What leads primarily to the question

of what are the standards of success in this good state of ours, and this good country of ours.

To most men, success is measured in terms of worldly wealth. But that is not right. Success is measured in terms of hopes to which you aspire and you successfully reach. It means that in the humdrum of life, in the homely platitudes of which Calvin Coolidge has so earnestly spoken, we are not as good as the best of us, and not as bad as the worst of us, but we are successful as, shall I say, the average crowd. My job is to take that which was handed to me, perhaps those commonplace things, and pass them on, so that my sons and daughters and my children's children to the third and fourth generation of those that love me (not the other side of that old commandment) shall in their turn, do their best with them. That might sound as though we were preaching, but we are not.

I can think of gentlemen here tonight, some of whom have attained a name for themselves in medicine, some as preachers, some as presidents of colleges and some as judges. It is fine to have such people among us; it is fine to have them belong to the group of Schwenkfeldian Exiles. There is a man here, who on his mother's side traces his ancestry back to the best of your Schwenkfeldian exiles, and on his father's side he traces back a similar ancestral line. How heavy his responsibility has been! One of his ancestors was on Washington's staff as a general. That man's son was a Governor of Pennsylvania. That Governor's son was a Judge of our Supreme Court. That Judge's son was a Judge of our Superior Court. That Judge's sons were both men who served this country in 1917 and 1918. Think of the responsibility that comes to these two boys who are contemporaries of mine. We talk laughingly of the straight and narrow path, but there are certain of us who don't dare go wrong because we would not only dishonor our posterity but also our ancestry. You remember the man who cried "I would rather be right than President", and the one who said to him, "never mind, you couldn't be either." Well, I may never be President, yet only recently at a certain place I came within five of the President! On my left sat a distinguished Schwenkfeldian exile's descendant, the Hon. Wm. W. Porter. When the President came to the Academy of Music recently, Judge Porter was also on the platform and the audience was puzzled to know which of the two was the President of the United States, and the doubt was only dispersed when the President arose to make the address of the evening.

I cannot stand in this hall, with all that its shelves contain, or go down Chestnut Street and pass Independence Hall, without a feeling of reverence. One cannot go through your neighborhood in Montgomery County without feeling the same way. And yet today, some of our biggest problems are our own ancestral jobs. What are we going to pass on to our youngsters

with relation to the preservation of the fundamental institutions of the country. Take, for example, the institution of the political party? It is all right for some folks to "knock" parties. Unless we have the two party system, we are not following out what your ancestors and mine passed down to us. We are not true to our trust unless we are on the job every day and every month. What are we doing for the education of our State, which until a few years ago was lamentably lacking in its failure to keep up with the times? Unless we personally help to crush the viper of religious bigotry which so suddenly has taken voice in our midst,—unless we give attention to all these things, we are derelict in the trust imposed in us, and we will not be people to be proud of when our posterity looks back at us. Shall I, in the days when I have gone beyond, be one of whom my posterity shall be proud, not perhaps because I may have been a judge or a lawyer, not because I may possibly have been some great person in the community, but because I was a man who lived an honorable life and helped his brother man. This is something we should bear in mind when we consider what our ancestors did for us. Let us stop and think that someone some day will look back and say, "What did he do for us." That truly is my ancestral job. That is your ancestral job.

Balzer Hoffman

(1687-1775)

*An Address delivered by REV. H. K. HEEBNER to the Society
Of the Descendants of the Schwenkfeldian Exiles*

Philadelphia, Pa., November 8, 1923

IN examining some of the sources for this sketch, we spent a few days in the Historical Library of the Perkiomen School, delving into the old tomes and manuscripts and transcriptions made by patient and faithful hands. One is amazed at the mass of documents and manuscripts written by our ancestors, and gathered from many libraries and homes in Europe and America, and now being filed and indexed. There is valuable material for scores upon scores of essays, and books and articles, and the urgent call today is for men and women to broadcast these literary treasures, and thus resurrect them from their vaults. Translators, transcribers, publishers, forward! To Prof. Howard W. Kriebel, one of the custodians of the Library, I want to give my sincere thanks for his ready assistance offered in locating the sources. Only those who browse among these shelves can know the amount of work that Prof. Kriebel expended in preserving and making accessible these literary remains of a noble past. To Dr. E. E. S. Johnson, likewise, I give my best thanks for several hours taken out of a busy day, in directing my search and getting my bearings in a new field.

His Early Life

Of Hoffman's early life, we have been able to find few details. His own account of his youth and the sketch of his life by his son Christopher, deal principally with the state of the church, and the persecutions that raged about them, for we must remember that modesty concerning reference to oneself, was considered a virtue.

He was born in the year 1687 in Harpersdorf, Silesia, then a part of Austria, of "Poor, plain, and unpretending parents." In winter he was employed in spinning, a trade that he early learned, and throughout his life he kept the spinning wheel humming. In summer months he was a day laborer and devotee of all work. With his zeal for labor ran a parallel zeal for learning. And with great effort, in view of the paucity of books and his own poverty, he procured a small library of great literature; and by indefatigable zeal, satisfied his insatiable thirst for an education by gaining a good knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, which languages allowed him to read the Bible with new insights and understanding. He was also zealous in the pursuit of Christian theology and doctrine as propounded by the outstanding theologians of his time, and especially as taught by Caspar Schwenkfeld.

With him Balzer Hoffman felt a spiritual kinship that grew in intensity and loyalty through the years. He was impressed by his poise, which he maintained against all the assaults of his adversaries, never rendering evil for evil; he admired him for his piety, that deep spiritual nature which shines forth with healing influence from his many writings; he honored him for his manliness which flew the white pennant of a blameless life and which honored conscience as his king; he was amazed at his courage for before whom did he servilely bow when immunity from arrest or when special privilege was offered him? He accepted his Christianity, which was Christo-centric, declaring Christ the heart of the Gospel, the living word, and the light that lighteth every man coming into the world.

At the age of eleven he is transcribing the writings of Michael Hiller and Martin John (Jr.) and others, and steeping himself in the lore and doctrines of the Middle Way. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which closed the Thirty Years War, the Schwenkfelders were at the mercy of proselyting denominations. The Lutherans under their local pastors in Silesia, were doing their utmost to win them to their church, and in large measure succeeded, but there was a remnant, sturdy, true, that did their own thinking and stood firmly against any approach at proselyting. Like a Gideon surrounded by threatening Midianites, Balzer Hoffman grew up. Is it any wonder that this sapling harassed by the storms of persecution all about him, should develop into the oak of shade and defence that he became to his people? In this university of adversity he soon learned life's stern lessons, independence of thought, ceaseless labor, thirst for the truth, faith in God, and hope for the future.

The Roman Mission

All of the sources for our sketch hurry from the meager accounts of his youth, to his activities in connection with the Jesuit Mission which threatened the very life of our people, as a religious entity. When we remember that this mission was attempted against us just 200 years ago, we cannot but marvel how the mental climate of the world has moderated since that time. January has changed to June. It is simply beyond us to think that a great church or churches could dare to make us their adherents by force. Today we hold no ill will, for we count these experiences that force us to lose land and fortune and life, as inevitable incidents along the via dolorosa that we with all followers of the gleam, had to meet.

Their sorry plight can be imagined as we read his account of the times. "We lived scattered in different villages and belonged to the church and under the minister with reference to church dues. We had no knowledge of our own system of doctrine. Indifference, lukewarmness and ignorance prevailed.

One family after another gave up the faith. Those who saw the tendency hardly dared to speak of it, in view of the minister, neighbors and government. Books of strange doctrines were eagerly listened to and the teachings of the fathers neglected." Their cup of adversity was not yet full, but the Jesuit Mission filled it to overflowing.

The immediate reason why the Jesuits sent their two missionaries, Milan and Regent, to convert the Schwenkfelders was the effort of the Lutherans headed by their local pastors Neander and Schneider and others to win our fathers to their doctrines and church. Failing in their strenuous efforts they appealed to the magistracy. The attention of the imperial court in Vienna was then called regarding the status of the Schwenkfelders and contrary to the plans of Neander, they were henceforth assigned exclusively to the Jesuits, for them to proselyte and win. The court made it plain that they did not want the Schwenkfelders to leave the country, but simply to repose in the bosom of the Mother Church.

Our people were now outcasts. Denied the rites of funeral, baptism, and marriage by the Lutheran church, they were to experience nothing better by the Catholics. The Vie Weg (Cattle Path) Cemetery in Harpersdorf, Silesia, is eloquent witness of the sufferings of that time. Here in common ground where was thrown the offal of the village, the Schwenkfelder dead were interred.

The missionaries at first began mildly but soon committed deeds of violence to win their prospective members.

The Embassy to Vienna

On the 5th of May, 1721, the year of the arrival of the Jesuits, the Schwenkfelders sent a Commission of three men to Vienna to plead for tolerance. Their names were: Christopher Hoffman, Balzer Hoffman (father and son) and Balzer Hoffrichter. The latter soon returned, but the Hoffmans stayed almost five years at court, in which time they presented at least seventeen memorials. Balzer who mentions himself as being President of the Embassy remarked that at first he had a valuable friend in Court in the person of Chief Counsellor Count Schlick, who was not on the side of the Jesuit Mission and gave earnest hearing to the appeals of the Embassy. But upon his death, Hoffman said, "A great support fell. . . . His successor Count Kynsky was not for us and in many ways it was costly for the Schwenkfelders." His mind was constantly harassed by letters from home telling of the growing persecutions there, and he mentions lifting many a prayer for his family and people. During all this trial, he found time to write hymns and compose sermons and send many letters encouraging his friends to stand firm in the faith. Like the nightingale and

the Psalmist himself, he sang his sweetest songs as night closed down upon him. Approximately \$12,000 was spent during these five years to maintain the Embassy. We wish that we could lay our hands upon these memorials with which died the hopes of the Schwenkfelders of ever remaining in their beloved Silesia, but to date, no trace of them has been found. Only last summer a letter from Balzer Hoffman, found in the effects of the late Daniel Schultz, and written from Vienna during this Embassy was read at the pilgrimage services in the Salford Church by Dr. E. E. S. Johnson, a translation of which follows:

"Oh, my beloved, how noble it is to be humble, and how futile to vain-glorious. Oh, happy the man who could live his life in simplicity and who knew nothing about royalty, even though he is despised. All human pleasure, all jollifications, all worldly festivities, all splendor, all elegance, all music of stringed instruments, in short, everything in this world, that brings carnal pleasure brings joy of brief duration. Soon or late one and then the other of all these things disturbs the soul and pricks the human conscience. I may speak from experience. since I have myself examined into the matter and I have observed so much in the experiences of others that I am sick and tired of the world. I am longing to spend the rest of my life after this present season of unrest in quiet retirement. I know that this statement will make you sad, and yet it is true that a sincere soul cannot close itself against another. God will without doubt keep alive in my heart a spark of life enabling me to bear my lot."

Vienna—September 16, 1723

Trials and temptations now befell him. A bribe was offered to induce him to keep away from Court. He does not mention the source. It presumably came from officials at Vienna. The other test was the threat of attack and imprisonment. Then came the ultimatum. Taking his father with him like Aneas who helped his aged father from the destruction of Troy, Balzer went to Upper Lausatia, Saxony, and found with other refugee Schwenkfelders protection at the hands of Count Zinzendorf. With him were also his wife and two daughters, Anna and Rosina. His son Christopher, who in America followed him as minister to our people, was born in Saxony.

Always seeing the silver lining upon the cloud, he moralized thus upon the defeat of their Embassy to Vienna: "It was God's providence, for it was His time and will that this testimony and witness of the Truth should leave its place," and here follows what is perhaps to be expected under his trying circumstances, a bit of the introspective brooding of a tired prophet. "For the people were no more worthy of it."

The General Flight to Saxony

We noted that during the Embassy at Vienna, the plight

of the persecuted in Silesia was growing steadily worse. Balzer Hoffman did not dare to show himself by day after the Ultimatum from the Court in Vienna, and we can imagine how other Schwenkfelder leaders fared at home. The fact that he sold his house in Harpersdorf for \$80 shows how cheaply he regarded his residence after all protection was now taken away. This group of believers who when their faith was making rapid strides in Europe, numbered 10,000, dwindled during the 16th and seventeenth centuries to perhaps 2,000 at the beginning of the 18th century.

After the Mission forcibly baptized the child of George Menzel and imprisoned its grandparents for not bringing it to the priests when they were told to do so, consternation spread in the hearts of our people. Approximately 170 families one by one and in groups in the early months of 1726 left their lovely Silesia and settled in Saxony in the towns of Hernhut, Glatz, Bertelsdorf and others.

"Count Zinzendorf took us under his care and thus showed his humble spirit," said Balzar Hoffman. "There was more toleration in Saxony than in all Silesia—by night they fled and had to leave all that was 'immobile' . . . He (Zinzendorf) left them practice their worship in peace, but there were sly indications that he aimed ultimately to have them in the Moravian Church." For that we can hardly condemn him. Hoffman noticed a cooling of religious zeal among the Silesian exiles as they bought and sold, amassed property and became established in their new surroundings. "Our spirit and heart naturally became pretty cold, light and worldly, and zeal for the truth and confession was not much refreshed, yet no matter how we consider the situation, the Lord exercised oversight and patience."

In his brief history of the Schwenkfelders in Silesia, Saxony and America, Hoffman remarks that he does not want to create the impression that the Schwenkfelders were an exceptionally good people who merited special Providence and dispensations, but their leading and deliverances were to show that a few can defend the truth by the help of the Almighty.

The Jesuits, peeved at the escape of the Schwenkfelders by midnight flights, tried to secure an imperial mandate to have them return to Silesia. Being commanded in 1733 to migrate within a year they cast about in Europe to find a place of security and peace. They were invited to come and settle in Berlin. They appealed twice to their Mennonite friends in Holland but there was no room there. Poland then loomed as a possible haven, but this proved a will-o-the-wisp also. Place after place was investigated and all in vain. Finally America loomed in the Western sky as a star of hope. They obtained from the English crown the permission to migrate to this new home in Penn's-woods, and turned into money whatever they

could. Count Zinzendorf had hoped to take the Schwenkfelders to Georgia but he could not meet the English conditions at the time and hence we became free from the count, a fact that had a great bearing upon our future relations with the Moravian missionaries among our people in Pennsylvania.

The sources tell but little of Hoffman's activities in Saxony. In fact, if the leader of a church does not chronicle the events of his life or those that deeply concern him, many details will never be known. The great modesty of the man is revealed in his disguising his real name under the name "Barachia Heber," which name is subscribed to many of his works. At the foot of a beautifully written hymn book from his steady pen, can be disclosed the fact of his authorship by two prominent initials B and H in capitalizing two adjoining sentences. Instead of rushing into print, he had to be led into it.

The Flight to America

The great deliverance is now at hand. All doors towards refuge and settlement in Europe being shut, the door towards the west alone stands open, and they enter it. Family after family left in small companies, since the Government would not allow them to travel in a large group, and came down to Pirna on the Elbe River where on the 29th of April, 1734 they sailed away for freedom. Dresden, Magdeburg, Hamburg, Altona, Amsterdam, Haarlem (where the Byuschanse brothers, Menno-nites, lodged and cared for them fifteen days), were successively reached. At Rotterdam, they boarded the ship St. Andrew (Captain Steadman), and on the 28th of June sailed away for Plymouth, England, where they arrived on the 17th of July. On the 29th of July, they sailed into the deep for Philadelphia where after almost three months of unusual woes after nine of their number had been committed to the sea, they arrived September 22. On the 23d, they signed their allegiance to the King of England, and in the ship's list, preserved in the Historical Library of Perkiomen School, we find Balzer Hoffman's name eleventh.

Upon his arrival he did not stay long in Philadelphia but went into the country where he founded a home near the present Salford Meeting House, where, after many adversities, he and his wife and three children could at last live in peace. Here he again joined labor with learning. For eight weeks he and George Boenisch, who with Christopher Wiegner and Christopher Baus were appointed by Zinzendorf to exercise supervision over the Schwenkfelders, helped George Schultz to build his house in Goshenhoppen, Hoffman acting as apprentice. On Sundays he would hold divine services at which his employer and foreman were present. He served as assistant to George Weiss, the first pastor in America, and upon his death in 1740

he was chosen as his successor. The field was a scattered one, reaching from Philadelphia to Macungie, and the difficulties of travel made it almost impossible for them to cover it.

There was no regular church organization till 1782 and having no Meeting Houses or church edifices till 1790, we can imagine the difficulties he met in holding together this group, or "Little Heap," of believers as he used to call them. To these difficulties were added the divergent tendencies in religious thinking among the Schwenkfelders. They would read books of various authors which weakened their allegiance to the old faith, and this gave him increasing concern. We might add that since the Schwenkfelders in Europe during the era of persecution were not allowed to have a church organization, and did not have one in America till 1782 they naturally were a more or less difficult group to organize, because "accustomed to do their own thinking"; but when once organized, history has shown that they held together.

Count Zinzendorf, who believed he had a divine commission to reform the Schwenkfelders, sent Spangenberg to live among our people to see if a way would open to win them to the Moravian faith. He lived for several months with Christopher Wiegner, near the present Towamencin church, but evidently the way did not open. Finally, Zinzendorf, in 1742 fixed a time of three months to consider meeting him in conference at which the steps for union would be discussed. In his letter to them, Zinzendorf said: "Then rather than permit you to become scattered here and there to desert and connect with other sects to become false separatists and thus to permit your entire ruin, I would concern myself earnestly about you . . . to visit you, to gather and improve you, to remove the hirelings from you, . . . to tear the sheep out of their mouths."

To this letter Balzer Hoffman replied that they would not attend the conference or synod but commend themselves to God, and that they conceded to all the right of acting as it seemed best to them. Zinzendorf then proposed a form of release:—"We the undersigned, release Count Von Zinzendorf in the sincerest and most effective manner before God and man of and from all temporal and spiritual care of the Schwenkfelders in America during the term of our lives."

The following reply was then given for the Schwenkfelders by Balzer Hoffman: "Out of veneration to your person we have in sincerity replied to all demands heretofore made upon us, but finding that our simple yet truthful declarations are construed as sophistry, we are compelled hereafter absolutely to decline to take notice of any and every importunity that may be made, written or oral, until we are shown that written power of submission which we are said to have executed. It is not the accusation but the evidence that proves the case. We do

not believe in that entrusted instruction from Christ to our religion . . . etc." The Count finally consulted a magistrate to see if he had by law any right to exercise authority over them, but received the answer that since he had not paid their passage money, he could go no further in the matter. Thus ended our dealings with the Count, but it must be said, that the relations with the Moravians have been always most pleasant before and since that time. Their courtesies to our people during the eight years in Saxony can never be forgotten. The sixteen years during which the Count tried to convert our people to the Moravian faith, has not estranged them, for they consider that he believed himself ordained for this task, and wished us well.

Balzer Hoffman was an exponent of Schwenkfeldian Puritanism, looking with misgiving upon the new customs, and we may add, costumes, and manners of the changing times.

He regretted the fact that city styles and manners were spreading through the rural communities and affecting the young Schwenkfelders. He urged "plain and simple, one colored clothing," else who could distinguish between "farmer and burger"? "It is a pity," he said, "that simple spinning is not in general practice in this land, so that the youth may have an occupation to fill up too much leisure time, and thus prevent them from desiring to be "out" and away from their parents. He feared that the day would come when the inrush of many worldly interests would cool the zeal for the doctrine and the life of the fathers.

As a spiritual legacy for his children and his friends, he wrote in his age, a short sketch of the Schwenkfelders in Silesia, Saxony and America, but true to his mystic, pietistic temperament, he devotes almost one half of his history to exhortation and admonition that all who read may uphold the simple, spiritual deposit of faith as handed down to us. He closes this patriarchal admonition and history with the following words:—"Be and continue, my dear children, whatever you have and are in material goods, small and humble. Do not let pride capture and control you. Whatever comes to you, consider as a providence and Mercy from the All Highest, and consider that you possess them only as long as God may ordain. If your station in life is not equal to that of the high and noble, strive not after it, meanwhile dealing with thrift and honesty. If you do not gain possessions by inheritance from your parents, so as to possess a great fortune, then remember that we also from our parents, received nothing, and if we did possess anything, we had to leave it behind." (Closed July 1750).

Unto the last he was busy night and day in manual or mental labor. Let us take a glimpse of him as he passes the last days of his life in his little room, spinning, reading, writing, singing and praying, a quintette of activities that expressed the

richness and fullness of his great soul. Many of his church come to him there in his growing debility as the church of the beloved John the Disciple, would come to him in Ephesus and hear him utter weakly but heartily: "My little children, love one another." On July 11, 1775 he passed peacefully away.

Next to Suderman and Schwenkfeld himself, Hoffman perhaps ranks as the most prolific writer of the Schwenkfelders. Some would place him next to Schwenkfeld. A catalog of his writings in the clear manuscript of his son, Christopher, in the Johnson collection in the Historical Library at Pennsburg, has the following entries. (The catalog was made in 1776) :—

First part:—17 items, books in Mss, *Expositions of Scripture* passages in Old and New Testament, in some instances entire books of the Bible for example the HEJATOMUS or, exposition of the Book of Hebrews.

Second part:—22 entries, Viz:—treatises on *Christian doctrine* some written in the form of Catechism, question and answers. They cover the range of Theological encyclopedia. Also contains Christian institutions, as Marriage, etc., also Bible Dictionary of names.

Third part:—16 entries—*Expositions of hymns*, he being a noted author and student of hymns and the "singing pastor."

Appendix:—Sixteen Yearly Meeting (Gedaegnis Tag) sermons. They are for the years:—1743, 1746, 1747, 1749, 1751, 1753, 1754, 1755, 1757, 1758, 1763. The Catalog also speaks of 83 letters extant in 1776. In summary we can state that there are 71 documents in Mss. apart from many letters referred to. If the literary remains are examined, many more may still be found even in the Historical Library at Pennsburg.

His pastoral labors were difficult due to the scattered congregation and the disintegrating influences working against unity, peculiar in the New World. He purchased a horse and travelled to and fro among his people. On returning from Machungie to Franconia, on one of his circuits, he felt his age so much so that he should present his resignation to the elders but he was persuaded to continue, on account of the youth of the congregation.

He catechised the children, arranged the times and order of the services, consecrated infants and kept a record of births, officiated at funerals, and laid great stress upon appropriately observing the Yearly Meeting. It would make a profitable study in itself, to scan the sermons that he preached on these days, and the hymns that he expounded. He constantly remarked upon the freedom of America. "Here everything is free . . . how must it be with those left behind?" Hoffman long felt the need of a printed Schwenkfelder hymn book and was a leader in the

movement for the publication of it, and while the book was being printed, he wrote twelve hymns for it, including the hymn that heads the collection.

His addresses to the elders of the church as well as to the youth, will remain classics of pastoral literature among our people. In them he asks: Do we realize the heritage of the fathers? Do we all submit ourselves to the will of God? Do we willingly bear and forbear? Is our doctrine planted in your heart in love and do you want to know more of it?

In Conclusion

We may ask the reason why in Saxony and in America there was a diminution of zeal for the doctrine and the path of the Middle Way? May the explanation not be found in the fact that in Silesia, although many did grow faint and leave the way due to persecution, there the very persecutions gave our people an objective for united endeavor and consequent exertion which always creates a bond of unity among people? In Saxony and in America life became increasingly easy and free and the bond of persecution was relaxed. Like many other people, they could not stand prosperity, and the voice of Hoffman was the veritable voice of a prophet calling like Moses: "Lest ye forget, lest ye forget." Today the Schwenkfelders have tasks that call out from them every energy and talent, and may it not be that the closer unity of our people in these last years of our history has been due to the fact that, as we all have been putting our shoulders to the heavy wheels of our common tasks, we have felt in cooperation the bond of friendship and unity? Certainly, considering the amount of work that seems to be laid out for us, this sense of oneness should develop with increasing intensity.

In Ohio there is a river that disappears at Bellefontaine and flows underground, emerging at Castalia. It is a phenomenon wonderful to contemplate. Its issuing forth to the light creates a beautiful fountain, that forms a stream of living, sparkling water. Not otherwise, the stream of spiritual influence, of the Middle Way that seemed to cease in Europe with the persecutions of church and state, was not lost, but flowed on, as it were, underground, issuing in these latter days in fountains of living influence, in our educational, charitable, missionary, ecclesiastical and literary endeavors. "Truth may be crushed to earth, but it will rise again," since in principle and essence it is invincible.

Into that stream of spiritual influence, Balzer Hoffman fed his life energies. Nobly living, faithfully working, greatly dying, he lives in the Schwenkfelder soul, a deeply-flowing, spirit.

Nations are not measured by the number of years of their

history, nor by the material grandeur and power, but by their soul. It devolves upon us, whose ancestors were providentially turned towards America by the failure of the Embassy at Vienna, to contribute to its wealth those simple, spiritual virtues, exemplified in Balzer Hoffman.