REMINISCENCES

OF THE

POLITICAL LIFE OF THE GERMAN-AMERICANS

IN BALTIMORE,

DURING 1850—1860.

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Political Life of the German-Americans in Baltimore during 1850—1860.

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THE decade from 1850 to 1860 in the political life of the German-Americans in Baltimore is specially interesting. It was a period of independent original thought, of high intellectual activity, of aggressive propaganda, and of great suffering.

The older German immigration had quietly adopted the political opinions of their American fellow citizens and according to inclination fell into the ranks of the existing Whig or Democratic parties. The political life of the German people before the memorable year of 1848 had been for a long time dormant. The attempt of 1833 to start a revolution in Germany was confined to the academic youth and a few literary men and never had a hold on the masses. In 1848 the idea of a liberal parlamentary government for the German empire, or the formation of a republic, had taken hold of and stirred up the entire German nation. Want of experience in political party life, lack of organization and excesses of the radical faction, which frightened the conservative element, enabled the governments, who still had the control of the army, to regain the ascendency, to crush armed resistance and, a short time thereafter, to inaugurate the so-called reactionary period in Germany which lasted until about the year 1861. Whoever had taken an active part in the revolutionary movement was treated as a criminal. The prisons and dungeons were filled with the best men of Germany. Even men of liberal, moderate views were placed on the list of suspected persons. They knew themselves to be under surveillance

and found obstacles placed in their career which made life intolerable. The censor of the press exercised his office with the utmost rigor. The leaders of armed resistance were banished from the country and men of high spirit and character voluntarily emmigrated to escape a petty tyranny against which resistance appeared for the time to be in vain and without hope. No other country in the world offered them an asylum under such favorable conditions as the great American republic. Here they expected to find in full operation what they had fought and struggled for in their own country. Here they came, in ever increasing numbers, and I doubt whether at any time in the history of mankind, so many men of learning, talent and exalted character, of various accomplishments and public spirit, were driven away from one nation to find a home with a kindred nation, than there were from Germany to America in the decade from 1850 to 1860. Some of these men had held high positions under their governments, some of them had been officers of rank in the army, many professors and teachers in public institutions, lawyers of great ability, journalists and authors; most all were persons, who by their social standing, their popular influence and liberal views had become obnoxious to the reactionary governments. What great sacrifices these men made to enjoy political freedom! They all yielded their material welfare and social positions to commence the struggle of life again in a foreign country, but under a free republican government. Those who were well advanced in years could not strike root again here and perished in the struggle, often in great poverty and distress; yes, some of these grand heroes have filled a pauper's grave, when they, but for their yearning for freedom could have lived in affluence in their own country. But others have since been enrolled among the famous men of our republic in every department of life, in legislative halls, in the forum, in schools and. seats of learning, on the battle field and in lecture rooms, in art, science, music, in commercial, industrial and agricultural pursuits they have risen to prominence.

A fraction of these men came to our good City of Baltimore, and soon gave direction to the political thoughts and

feelings of many of our German-American citizens and more so to the incoming immigration, who were to some extent accustomed to look upon them as leaders. They were all zealous republicans of the more ideal character. They had suffered for their political views in the old country and now would not change or bring their political views in accord with the existing economic condition of Maryland, a slave state.

They were all abolitionists to the very core and could not be otherwise. They hated slavery and immediately commenced to attack it by word and pen. It was their good fortune that their attacks were made in the German language and their agitation among the German-Americans, who held no slaves, although most of them were content with the existing order of things. If their writing and speaking had been understood by the English speaking community in the then existing temper on the slavery question, their stay in this State would have been of a short duration. The Turner, society, which then rose to a numerically flourishing condition, was in full accord with the political, socialistic and religious views of the abolitionists. From the platform in the Turner hall on Pratt street they delivered their lectures on scientific, political and religious subjects. In 1853 we find on the members' list of the Turner society on Pratt street the names of the poet and journalist Karl Heinrich Schnauffer, the learned Dr. Wiess and Dr. Charlier, the journalist William Rapp, the poet and teacher Johann Straubenmüller, the novelist and agitator Samuel Ludvigh, Jacob Schmidt and others. Among the public speakers, lecturers and leading men from other parts of the country who visited the Turner hall in those years, I may name Gottfried Kinkel, Gen. Aug. Willig, Gen. Frederick Hecker, Gen. Schimmelpfennig, Gen. Joseph Gerhardt, Dr. Doviat, Reventlow and Thielmann. There were literary and debating societies and in the reading room a mass of literature, that treated of natural science and physical development, but more often on political, socialistic and religious subjects of liberal and frequently radical tendencies.

There were at the time three German papers published in Baltimore which, in their position on the slavery question, we may well style abolitionists. They were the only anti-slavery

papers published in Maryland, as the "Turners" were the only anti-slavery society in Maryland.

The leading paper was the "Wecker," a daily published by Karl Heinrich Schnauffer. Mr. Schnauffer was born at Heinsheim, Wurtemberg, in the year 1823. He studied at the University of Heidelberg and obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Whilst at Heidelberg, he acquired fame as a poet and man of letters, and on leaving the university he became the editor of the "Evening Journal" of Mannheim. In 1848 he entered with great enthusiasm the fight for a republican form of government and being driven into exile, he turned to the adjoining Switzerland, where he became one of the editors of "The Volksfreund," a republican paper published by his compatriot Fred'k Hecker, who afterwards was one of the generals in the Union army in our war between the States. In 1849 Schnauffer returned to Baden, where he fought in the ranks of the Republican army, and on its defeat again fled to Switzerland, from thence he went to England and about 1850 or 1851 came to Baltimore. His inspiring songs of freedom, and other poetical works, his noble courage and patriotism aroused the enthusiasm and love of his fellow countrymen of our city. They enabled him to publish the ,,Wecker," a daily paper, wherein he poured forth all his exquisite poetic ideals of freedom and love for mankind. He published here a volume of poems entitled "Todtenkränze" (wreaths for the dead) wherein he sang the praise of the patriotism and bewailed the death of the fallen heroes of the revolution in Germany. Shortly before his death he published his drama "Cromwell" and left unfinished his drama of "Washington." A volume of his poems was published after his death by his widow. Some of his songs were set to music in popular melodies by Prof. Chas. Lenschow, and are still in vogue among the Turners at their festive gatherings. Schnauffer died on the 5th of November 1854, his widow and two infant children surviving him. His death caused a deep sorrow among our population; he was a brilliant man, of amiable character, of unbounded love for his fellow man, and gave promise of the highest poetic and literary development. His widow continued the publication of the paper and later married William Schnauffer, a brother of her

deceased husband. August Becker, an able journalist and political writer, also one of the patriots of 1848, now became the editor of the "Wecker." He continued in the political tendency of Schnauffer, and in the presidential campaign of 1856 supported Gen. John C. Fremont, the candidate of the Republican party. Becker was succeeded by William Rapp, who is now the chief editor of the "Illinois Staatszeitung;" the paper vigorously supported Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and on the memorable 19th day of April 1861 a mob attacked the "Wecker" office, completely riddled the windows, and would have destroyed the building, but for the heroic conduct of Mrs. Schnauffer, who appeared in the door with her infant on her arms and speaking to the howling mob, appealed to their better sentiments. The editor and publisher however were compelled to flee for their lives and sought refuge in York, Pennsylvania.

The second abolition paper in our city was "Die Fackel" (The Torch), published by Dr. Samuel Ludvigh. It was a so-called periodical, published monthly, and devoted solely to make propaganda for the peculiar views of its publisher, which were radically extreme on most every subject. Ludvigh was an Austrian born in the town of Günz on the 13th of February 1801. He had studied jurisprudence at a university, had travelled several years in the Orient, had been secretary to Prince Frederick of Schwarzenberg at Constantinopel in 1835 and had returned 1836 to Austria. He published several novels and also a book on Hungary in which he criticised the Austrian government. He was summarily requested by the government to sign a pledge that he would not publish any more political criticisms on Austria. This disgusted him so, that he emigrated to America in 1837. On his arrival here he received the appointment as editor of "Die alte und neue Welt" (the old and new world) published in Philadelphia. His independent spirit caused him in a short time to leave this place and publish a paper, a weekly, called "Der Wahrheitssucher" (the Seeker after Truth). He commenced with a violent attack on the church, and most existing conditions of social life. As a matter of course only fifteen numbers of the paper appeared when the funds gave out. His brilliant style

and his many other accomplishments had attracted attention. The Van Buren campaign was about to open and the Free Soil Party engaged him to take the management of a campaign paper in Baltimore. Although the Free Soil Party was defeated, Ludvigh managed to continue his paper for two years longer, his views however were so radical, that the subscribers deserted him und he was compelled to sell the material of his printing press. William Raine, the father of Col. Frederick Raine, publisher of the "Correspondent," bought the material. Ludvigh was now convinced that he was a failure as a practical editor of a popular newspaper. His soul was however filled with the idea that he was sent to enlighten mankind, and he resolved to devote his life to spread among his fellow men, what he conceived to be the truth.

He therefore commenced the publication of a periodical, called "Die Fackel" (The Torch). All his erudite learning, his great literary ability, his time and energy was employed in writing, publishing and circulating this paper. He became therefore known as "Fackel-Ludvigh." The publication contained some excellent scientific articles and essays on mental and physical culture, but in addition to this, was principally directed against the Catholic church and against slavery in every form. On all social questions it was radical to the core. Under great hardship, often poverty, he continued to publish his paper in our city until 1859, when he removed it to Cincinnati, where he died in 1869 greatly respected by those who knew him personally.

General August Willig delivered his funeral oration. Ludvigh was a man of refined appearance, polished manners, and great learning, of stern integrity of character, austere life and of kind heart. He was a bold original writer and a persuasive, accomplished lecturer; had it not been for his intense devotion to his peculiar views regarding the truth on this earth, he would most likely have had a brilliant career. Although the readers of his paper were few in number, they were men of some culture, of independent thought and strong convictions, and whatever was good and worth preserving of his intellectual labor has undoubtedly been absorbed in the great arteries of our national life.

The third German abolition paper at that time published in our city was "The Turn-Zeitung" under the auspieces of Turner societies. It was removed to Baltimore about the middle of the decade under the editorship of that bold and able journalist William Rapp. Although principally devoted to physical culture, it was outspoken in its fight against slavery, as well as against the church. We must not forget that by the Germans of 1848 the church was considered in league with the government against which they had fought, and was thought to have performed, to some extent, the duties of a police force against the liberal element; that as a servant of the State it was inimical to the best interests of the people and was looked upon as a part of the rude despotic power which had crushed them, and driven them from their homes and firesides.

The intensly independent, literary, political and religious activity caused among the German-Americans by these men of the revolution of 1848 started a deplorable movement among a part of the American people, who, not comprehending its nature nor its scope, formed the American or so called Know-Nothing party. The extravagant radical platforms adopted by the Free German societies of Louisville, Richmond, Va., and other places, were represented not only as a menace but a danger to American institutions. A spirit of hatred and indiscriminate persecution was cultivated against the Germans, which degenerated into a frenzy against everything called Dutch. The word Dutch which was almost universally used for German, denoted something hated and detested. This prejudice based on gross ignorance and the infirmities of national vanity often called patriotism, was engendered, cultivated and at last inflamed to an insane passion by designing politicans to further their own selfish ends. The German-Americans of Baltimore suffered terribly under this fanatical spirit of persecution during the decade of 1850 to 1860. It is often named among the Germans who lived through it, as the reign of terror, and by the Americans as the mob rule.