

THE MISSOURI SYNOD

Address by E. F. ENGELBERT

Pastor of Martini Evangelical Lutheran Church

It was with pleasure that I accepted the invitation to read to you some jottings from the history of the Missouri Synod, the more so in the knowledge that for almost a hundred years membership in the Missouri Synod implied German origin. To this day when I am asked with what church body I am connected, and I reply that I am a member of the Missouri Synod, the rejoinder is almost invariably something like this: "My mother was a German." Despite the fact that the Scandinavian countries are more Lutheran than Germany, and despite the fact that the Missouri Synod has members among practically all races represented in the United States, one is classed as a German as soon as one acknowledges membership in the Missouri Synod.

Well, the Missouri Synod certainly was German in its origin. For reasons which we need not enter into here, Martin Stephan, pastor of a large congregation in Dresden, undertook to lead an emigration of Saxon Lutherans to America, one hundred years ago this year. Of the five ships which he chartered, one, the *Amalia*, was lost during the voyage. The other four reached New Orleans in safety. From New Orleans the immigrants sailed up the Mississippi to St. Louis. After a large section of land had been purchased in Perry County, Missouri, the great majority again left St. Louis to take up their residence in the colony. There they built a number of villages — Frohna, Altenburg, Wittenberg, all well-known names in Saxony.

The hardships and privations which they endured form a dark chapter in the history of the colony. The land had to be cleared, and then proved stony and poor. The lack of all conveniences, change of climate, inadequate shelter, unbalanced food and unaccustomed labor caused sickness and death. And not only were their bodies troubled, but

their souls as well. Their leader, Martin Stephan, proved himself unworthy of the trust that had been reposed in him. They began to ask themselves whether they had displeased Providence by emigrating from Germany; they, who had come to build a sound and true Lutheran Church, asked themselves whether they were a church at all.

Great souls are trained and steeled by the fires of adversity. The sore trials and tribulations of the colony brought out the sterling qualities of the man who was to do more for the Lutheran Church of America than any other man—Dr. C. F. W. Walther. When everything seemed lost, when some returned to Germany and others scattered, he rose to restore the equilibrium, to allay fears, to reunite, and to inspire. He led them not only to renewed effort in improving the colony, but gave them courage to look for larger fields in which the church might be established. He realized that the work among the scattered Germans elsewhere in America could not succeed unless an efficient ministry was trained. One of the first ventures was the building of a college. Trees were felled, and a log hut was erected, which bore the proud name, Concordia College. It was probably the smallest college that was ever erected in America. It still stands. Some years ago a canopy was built over it to protect it against the elements. But while the building differed little in outward appearance from a cowshed, its curriculum was imposing. The obligatory course included religion, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French, English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Botany, the Fundamentals of Philosophy, Music, and Drawing. The first school-year was opened with six students.

After a few years the college was removed to St. Louis. Four years after the landing of these immigrants Walther

edited a bi-weekly periodical which he called "Der Lutheraner," which became instrumental in turning the faces of other scattered Lutherans toward St. Louis. "Der Lutheraner" still appears regularly. The next step was to build a publishing house, for the printing of catechisms, hymnals, Bibles, and other theological literature.

Another colony of Germans, coming from Bavaria, had settled on a large tract of land in Michigan. Here, too, towns were erected that betray their Bavarian origin—Frankenmuth, Frank-enlust, Frankentrost, etc. Here, too, the first undertaking of the various villages was the building of their church. Congregations were established that still flourish. The congregation at Frankenmuth, for instance, today maintains eight separate parochial schools. In my seminary days thirty-eight boys from this one congregation were preparing themselves for the ministry. Principally from these two colonies the strength was drawn to create the Missouri Synod, which was organized in Chicago in the year 1847.

The real founder, the guiding star, and, for many years, the president of the Missouri Synod was Dr. C. F. W. Walther. It has been said that the Missouri Synod, especially in the Middle West, did more for the Germans in America than any other organization. If that is true, then it can be said also that Dr. C. F. W. Walther did more for Germans in America than any other individual; for if ever a man left his impress on an organization, then Walther left his on the Missouri Synod.

By their fruits ye shall know them. Two of Walther's contemporaries were household names in those days; namely, Henry Ward Beecher and Thomas Talmage. They spoke the language of the country; space in the newspapers was theirs for the asking. They had men of wealth and influence in their congregations. Henry Ward Beecher is still remembered for his anti-slavery agitation, and Thomas Talmage is remembered as an orator, but there is little of anything that is concrete in our country today that had its origin in them.

Walther was an immigrant. He did not speak the English language fluently. He lived on the frontier. He himself was poor and those who rallied around him were poor. But he had faith in the Savior's promise of the mustard seed. The synod he organized became a powerful factor in the church life of our country; the little log college, transplanted to St. Louis, became the largest Protestant theological seminary in America; the little publishing house he founded became the largest denominational publishing house in America. From the seed sown down there in the stony ground of Perry County have sprung two theological seminaries, two seminaries for the training of teachers, nine preparatory colleges in the United States and one in Canada, as well as a theological seminary in Brazil, in Argentina, in India, in China, and in Australia. Other institutions of the Synod today are Valparaiso University, hospitals, sanitaria, homes for the aged and orphan homes scattered over the country.

Walther was unknown in Germany, leaving, as he did, while still in his twenties. But the Vaterland learned to appreciate him in America. Dr. A. Brömel, Superintendent, wrote in his *Homiletische Charakterbilder*: "Walther ist so orthodox wie Johann Gerhardt, aber auch so innig wie ein Pietist, so korrekt in der Form wie ein Universitäts- oder Hofprediger, und doch so populär wie Luther selbst. Wenn die Lutherische Kirche ihre Lehren wieder ins Volk bringen will, dann wird sie so treu und gewiss in der Lehre und so ansprechend und zeitgemäss in der Form sein müssen wie es bei Walther der Fall ist. Walther ist der Musterprediger in der Lutherischen Kirche. Wie anders stünde es in Deutschland um die Lutherische Kirche, wenn viele solche Predigten gehalten würden."

Count Ernst zu Erbach-Erbach, who visited Walther in St. Louis, in his "Reisebriefe aus America" wrote: "Eine höchst interessante Bekanntschaft, die ich jüngst geschlossen, mag ich nicht verschweigen. Sein Name ist Walther, in der theologischen Welt nicht unbe-

kannt. Ich stehe nicht an, ihn zu den aller - bedeutendsten, interessantesten und fesselndsten Männern zu zählen, die mir im Leben begegnet sind. Professor Walther ist ein überaus lebenswürdiger, sanftmütiger Mann, mit scharfgeschnittenen, edelen Zügen und hellem, glänzendem Auge. Sein Umgang ist in jeder Beziehung fördernd und lehrreich. Ich habe in Walther meine bedeutendste Bekanntschaft gemacht."

Let me point to but one action, characteristic of the man. From Germany came a communion cup, a personal gift to Walther. It is of solid gold, studded with more than six hundred diamonds of one carat each, set in platinum. It is worth a king's ransom. Walther, a poor man, at the time possessed only the barest furniture in his own home. One diamond was the equivalent of his salary for a year. Yet he at once presented the cup to Trinity Congregation in St. Louis, which still treasures it as its most cherished possession.

A few months before Walther, another German pastor, had come to America, who was to play an important part in the founding of the Missouri Synod, namely Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken. He landed here in Locust Point, one hundred years ago this coming summer. As a student he had reaped high honors in Göttingen and Halle. Wyneken was an excellent student, a thorough theologian, and above all a manly man. Arriving in Baltimore as a total stranger, he asked to be directed to a Lutheran Church. He was directed to a certain church, which still stands, but which never was, nor is now, a Lutheran Church. He was asked to preach. He accepted the invitation. Then he was asked to conduct a prayer meeting. He did not know just what that might be, but he knew how to pray; and he did. As he prayed the people began to groan, to go through contortions, to shout "Amen" and "Hallelujah." It was a bedlam. After the service the immigrant was asked: "How did you like the service?" His blunt answer was typical of the man's straightforwardness. He said, "I am not certain whether it is of God or of the devil, but

it's not Lutheran." Continuing his search for a Lutheran Church, he came to St. Paul's on Saratoga and Holliday Sts. This church had been organized when about two hundred members had left Zion. The pastor was a man by the name of Haesbert. Wyneken had read of the sorry plight of the Germans in our Middle West, which was then a frontier section of our country. They were without churches and schools, suffering from material and spiritual poverty. Their need had brought him to America. But during the week of his arrival Haesbert became sick, and Wyneken was asked to fill his pastorate until he should recover. That kept him here in Baltimore for about six weeks. But when Haesbert returned, Wyneken carried out his original plan. From here to Pittsburgh he could travel by train. There the railroad ended. From Pittsburgh to Zelianople, Ohio, he could travel by canal. There he purchased a horse, and continued to Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Now followed four years of travel on horseback from one German settlement to the next, and from one hamlet to the other. Wyneken was unquestionably the ablest and most active missionary the German Lutherans in this country ever had. That today there is a Missouri Synod church in almost every town and village in Indiana, and in a large part of Ohio and Michigan is due to Wyneken's untiring mission work. However, four years after leaving Baltimore, Haesbert having resigned his pastorate, St. Paul's, on Holliday and Saratoga, called Wyneken, whom the congregation had learned to love and respect during his stay of six weeks while he had filled Haesbert's place. Though he remained only four years, after which he accepted a call to Trinity in St. Louis, his work in Baltimore bore rich fruit. He filled the congregation with missionary zeal. St. Paul Church was not only one of the first congregations to join the Missouri Synod, one of the founders, but it was also one of the most liberal financial supporters of Synod. Wyneken was followed by Keyl. Under him the congregation erected three schools in the east, west, and south sections of Balti-

more. A few years later, three churches were built—the present Immanuel on Caroline near Baltimore, St. Paul on Fremont and Saratoga, and Martini on Sharp and Henrietta. Since then twenty-nine other congregations have grown out of these three congregations in and around Baltimore.

Time has brought changes. All of these congregations today have more English than German services, and

many have no German services. But there has been no change in the doctrine of these congregations, and little change in their spirit and practice.

The transition from the German to the English language brought many storms, to which we today look back with more amusement than concern. But the German-Americans always had a way of wading through their difficulties, and they did in this respect also.

"SPIRITUAL TREASURY OF FAITH'S TRIUMPH"

Mrs. Gaylord Lee Clark, a descendant of Jonathan Hager, founder of Hagerstown, has in her possession a book of sermons governing the various days and seasons; in two parts.

Title page, dedication and preface to Part I is missing.

Title to Part II, freely translated is:

"Spiritual Treasury of Faith's Triumph (through) St. Paul (based) upon his Epistle to the Romans Ch. VIII, V. 28 et seq. to the end of chapter."

Wherein is also the wholesome teaching of divine mercy and how a believer in the true faith may attain lasting salvation.

Contra the unique Calvinistic heresies of Hon. Theophilus Newberger, court preacher to the princely house of Hesse-Cassel [as set forth] in his sermons: *"Golden Treasury* and the joyous and comforting triumphal faith of St. Paul, brought to light." Expounded, agreeably to the plumblin of God's work; set forth in six sermons that good-hearted folk may receive the truth. Arranged for printing by Mennonem Hannekenium at Marburg.

Printed at Marburg by Caspar Chemlin in the year 1635.

In the dedication:

To the illustrious and high-born Prince and Lord: Lord Louis, Landgrave of Hesse, Count of Katzenellenbogen, of Dietz, of Ziegenhain, of Nidda, etc.

Hannekemnus recites — That though Solomon counsels abstention from controversy and strife, and St. Christosemus counsels peace and moderation, he, in all humility, feels called upon to preserve the faith true and unalloyed, and to protect all simple folk from the damnable heresies preached by Newberger.

So through 9/10 pp.

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Throughout the book words and sentences have been underscored—probably for emphasis, or to serve for discussion.

Again: Marginal notes indicate dissent, or mark errors in the text, vide "errant," "absurd," etc.

Interesting as all such old works are for the fierce certainty in which the writer sets forth his articles of faith, and exposes the errors and heresies of all who differ.

Glory be! those days are—at least for the present—past.