BAPTISMS OF INDIANS IN OLEY PRIOR TO 1732

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Few sections of Pennsylvania are so full of historical lore, so rich in traditions and legends, as the beautiful and fertile valley of Oley. For many moons before the coming of the pale-faces it was a favorite haunt for the Indian. The Indian lore of the Oley Valley would make, if published, a most interesting and delightful volume. This article is limited to the baptizing of Indians in this far-famed valley, and in attempting to play the role of a historian I will accept for myself the newer definition for history, "History is the record of eye witnesses."

BEGAN TO PREACH IN 1725.

Among the early settlers of the Oley Valley were a number of Reformed adherents. They were occasionally visited by Rev. John Philip Boehm, a Reformed school teacher, who, at the request of the Reformed settlers in and about Germantown, White Marsh and Skippack, began to preach and to administer the sacraments in 1725. In September, 1727, Rev. George Michael Weiss, a Reformed pastor, came into the colony and, finding Rev. Boehm performing the functions of a minister without ordination, immediately protested and planned to supplant Rev. Boehm. Pastor Boehm and his friends went to New York and requested ordination at the hands of several Reformed pastors there. The request was granted and Rev. Boehm returned a regularly ordained minister of the gospel. Rev. Weiss, however, still refused to recognize Rev. Boehm and continued to interfere with his work.

COMPLAINED OF MINISTER'S CONDUCT.

In a letter dated November, 1730, Rev. Boehm complains of Rev. Weiss' conduct, that he "intrudes" into his congregations,

causes strife, etc., and concludes by charging him with two irregularities, that of baptizing Indian children and celebrating the Lord's Supper without previous preparatory service. "Finally Mr. Weiss celebrated the Lord's Supper, without previous preparation, at a place named Oley (where the sect calling themselves the 'New Born' originated), and baptized at the same time a number of children, among whom (as is reported) were also Indian children, who, as unbelievers, go about like wild animals, without a knowledge of God or His word, of which he boasted with his own mouth before Peter Zenger, sexton of the Reformed Church in New York." See Life and Letters of Rev. John Philip Boehm.

WROTE TRACT AGAINST "NEW BORN."

It may be interesting to recall at this time that Rev. Weiss was the author of a tract against the "New Born," in Oley, published by Andrew Bradford, in 1729, a translation of which recently appeared in the Penn Germania, and that Peter Zenger afterward became famous in a libel suit against him as the owner of the New York Journal. He was ably defended by Alexander Hamilton. The case has become famous "because it established the freedom of the press in this country, and the principle that in cases of libel the jury are the judges of both the law and the facts."

Here, then, we have the evidence that Rev. George Michael Weiss administered communion according to the Reformed kind in Oley and at the same time baptized the children of natives (Indians). The exact date of this baptism cannot be definitely determined, but must have taken place before his departure for Holland, which occurred in May, 1730.

GOES TO EUROPE FOR FUNDS.

Rev. George Michael Weiss was baptized at Eppingen, in the Palatinate, January 23, 1700. He studied theology at the University of Heidelberg, where he was ordained in 1725. In 1728 he was sent by the consistory of the Palatinate to Pennsylvania, where he found Rev. John Philip Boehm, an unordained school teacher, ministering to the spiritual wants of the settlers.

Rev. Weiss protested against Rev. Boehm's activities and tried to gain possession of Rev. Boehm's congregations. He visited the remote settlements, administered the sacraments and organized several additional congregations. In 1730 he, together with Elder Reiff, returned to Europe to solicit funds for the churches in Pennsylvania. His stay in Europe was brief. Elder Reiff, however, continued and succeeded in collecting about 2,000 gulden. When Mr. Reiff returned to Philadelphia in autumn of 1723 he failed to account to the congregations. The result was a suit which extended over a period of 15 years.

PREACHED IN SCHOHARIE VALLEY.

Rev. Weiss, no doubt fearing being implicated in the affair, left the colony and went to the province of New York, where he labored among the Germans in the Schoharie, Mohawk and Hudson valleys. In 1746 he accepted a call from Goshenhoppen and returned again to Pennsylvania, fearing Indian outbreaks. Here he continued to labor until the time of his death, which occurred in the month of August, 1761.

While laboring in New York he continued his efforts among the Indians, to which the following extract from his letters to the Reformed authorities in Holland abundantly testify:

PLEADS FOR CHURCHES FOR INDIANS.

(Classis of Amsterdam, Acts of the Deputies—Extract from a letter of George Michael Weiss, minister at Burnetsfield (German Flatts), in New Netherland, Herkimer county, New York, July 14, 1741.)

"1. He informs the classis at Amsterdam, that inasmuch as he has excellent opportunities to observe the ways of the wildman (Indians); and inasmuch as these people are very interesting, he having on several occasions spoken to them by means of an interpreter, about Christian doctrines, and had baptized many of them, at their request.

"2. He expresses his surprise that no sufficient urgency is felt for the conversion of these savages; that he is aware of only one English minister who has devoted his labors to this end; that

most of them were left to run about without instruction, like the beasts.

"3. He says that the French in Canada are of quite different mind; that they cause schools and churches to be established among the savages, whereby they win their affections. This is the cause of great injury to the English in time of war, as the present war teaches.

"4. And in view of the fact that he has encountered many difficulties, and knows not what more may be expected of him, nevertheless he declares that he will not cease his efforts, until everything turns out to the satisfaction of the Rev. Classis, in Pennsylvania. Of this, there is hope; and to this end the counsel of the Rev. Classis has been made known at Philadelphia, and elsewhere.

"5. Finally he concludes with cordial salutations, xxii, 564, 565."

PAINTS INDIANS.

(Acts of the Classis of Amsterdam, letter from Rev. Wys (Weiss), in Pennsylvania.)

1742, September 3d. A letter from Rev. Wys in Pennsylvania dated May 10, 1741, in which Rev. Weiss asserts (1) That he doubts not that the letter which he sent over last year, came duly to hand. (2) That at the first opportunity he will communicate to us a faithful description of the savages (wild men) in North America, composed by himself, and from his own experience, with a picture (painting) of those wild people, both men and women, in order to give us a better idea of them. (3) That in case we desire to know anything more about these American countries, and he was able to inform us, we had only to let him know; for he was very ready and disposed to serve us in that matter as time and opportunity offered. His letter ended with a wish for a blessing on us.

"This letter was accompanied by a package, in which the Rev. Weiss sends over: (1) A small painting of the wild men of North America mentioned above in the letter. (2) 'A faithful description of the savages in North America, as to their persons, qualities, tribes, languages, names, houses, dress, ornaments,

marriages, food, drink, domestic implements, housekeeping, hunting, fishing, war, superstitions, political government, besides other remarkable matters, composed from personal experience, by George Michael Weiss, V. D. M.' Thus reads the title. This description covers 96½ pages, in eight volumes, besides the preface, (dedication) which is brief, to the Classis. In this he states the reasons which induced him hitherto, (viz: to prepare this book) and to communicate the same to the Classis. He doubted not that it would be agreeable to the Classis, and would be looked upon favorably, since he is cognizant of the paternal love which the Rev. Classis bears toward him. It ends with a wish for our prosperity and blessing. The introduction is signed at Albany, N. Y., by Rev. Weiss, of Burnetsfield, October 4, 1741. Then follows the description itself, xii. 35."

ACCOUNTS OF SAVAGES PLEASE CLASSIS.

(Classis of Amsterdam, Acts of the Deputies and their Correspondence. The Classis of Amsterdam to Rev. George Weiss, June 18, 1743, No. 46. To Mr. Wys:)

"Rev. Sir and Brother in Christ: We learn with much satisfaction from your last letter that you continue in your work, and that you are zealous to bring over that waste and wild heathendom of the district in which you find yourself, to the sheepfold of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the meek Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord in every way bless these your endeavors to His glory and the good of the savage souls. The account of the savages in North America, composed by you, greatly pleased us and we thank you for it. We shall be pleased if in the future we receive further information about these people. We also heartily wish to learn that you find yourself in good condition and are blessed of the Lord with strength of body and soul. Our congregations have occasionally the misfortune to be robbed of their pastors. Last year two ministers of the gospel were taken away, viz: Rev. Messrs. Cauzlus and Reytsma, and on the 10th of January death also took away Rev. Mr. Bakker. The Lord grant that we may conduct ourselves faithfully and prudently in His strength, that when He comes He may find us doing His will, and may He place us over all He has. Wishing

the same, also, in the name of the Rev. Classis of Amsterdam, we sign ourselves, etc., etc.

"CASPAR GORS, Praeses.
"WILLIAM SCHIPHOUT, Scriba."

BAPTIZED IN BARN.

The second baptizing of Indians in Oley, on record, took place in the barn of Isaac DeTurck, January 12, 1742, in connection with the Great Meeting of the Congregation of God in the Spirit, which was an attempt to unite all the different Protestant denominations and sects in the colony in one body, when three Indian converts from the mission station at Shekomeko, N. Y., were baptized. They were the first fruits of the Moravian efforts among the aborigines. Their names were Shabash, Slein and Kiop, and they were given the scriptural names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Moravians, at the time, believed that the American Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Hence they were given the above-mentioned names as the patriarchs of the New Israel. It is said that the baptism was followed by the Indians testifying as to their conversion, preaching by various ministers, singing and exhortations, which continued far into the night.

But to return to our definition of history with which we limited ourselves at the beginning, "history, the record of eye witnesses." The first contemporary reference or description of the baptism is again from the pen of Rev. John Philip Boehm, who bitterly opposed the Moravians and saved the Reformed element in the colony from being absorbed by them.

ORDAINED BY MORAVIAN BRETHREN.

"Andreas Eschenbach, whom the writer (secretary of the Union Synod) calls the late elder of the Brethren of the Wetterau and Holland, now deacon of his dear congregation in Oley, together with three others was ordained a priest by the Mt. Moravian brethren, Bishop Daniel Mischman, etc. Also they proceeded with the baptism of three dear brethren from the heathen. The brother, Christian Henry (Rauch), the missionary to the heathen, who with Andreas Eschenbach was ordained a

priest, had concluded because of important reasons to pour out 'the love of God through the water and blood of Jesus Christ and likewise the Holy Spirit, whom those who believe in Christ are to receive.'

"Now note, dear brethren, this one of the new falsely called apostles desires to pour out the love of God through the water and blood of Jesus Christ, and likewise the Holy Spirit upon these three Indians. Judge it yourselves, my friends, and all who see this judge for yourselves.

"Finally the covers were taken off, they knelt down around the water, then Brother Christian Henry (Rauch) poured the water three times upon each one. I have heard in Oley that he poured the water with a gourd (calabash) over their heads and said: 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the death of Christ.'

"Where did Christ command this or that which immediately proceeds, behold beloved the unscriptural actions and manner of the Hernhutners."

INDIANS' LONG WALK TO OLEY.

Another contemporary annalist gives us the following account:

"Two years previous one of their (Moravian) number (Christian Henry), Rauch, came to New York and there went to the interior among the Indians to convert them, because he claimed to have had from his youth up an extraordinary call, preparation and inclination to such a work. This man did his best in the Dutch (Holland) language, which they understood, to bring them to the knowledge (of God), lived and suffered with them and brought some of them to accept Christ and to forsake their wild and unrestrained life. When, however, Count Zinzendorf came in (from Hernhut) and Rauch was requested to come (to Philadelphia), he brought three Indians with him, a considerable distance via New York city to Philadelphia, where they had to lodge with Count Zinzendorf in his hotel (Mieth-Hause) to eat with him, to be prepared for their baptism, which they were to receive in Oley, and subjected by him to many public embarrassments. Likewise, when in February (January), they

were led up through the county as on parade, for where they came from there was much water, and there at the third conference were baptized by their evangelist Rauch with the designations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by having water poured out upon themselves. 'Fresenius, Vol. III, page 156-157.'"

The journey from Philadelphia to Oley was made during a heavy and intensely cold snow storm, which continued for several days. John Adam Grube, a Separatist, and a bitter opponent of Count Zinzendorf, in a letter dated Germantown, March 27, 1742, makes the following statement concerning this baptism:

"One of them brought several Indians so far that they exhibited more modesty and retirement than at other times, who in order to be baptized first for show and enticement had to be led 200 miles (from Esopus) to Philadelphia and then again 40 miles up the country to Oley, where is located Andreas Eschenbach, who is one of the Hernhuter stationed teachers and for whom the people there erected a church and school house and were baptized.

"Fresenius bewahrte Nachrichten Hernhutischen, Sachen Volume 3—P. 773."

WITNESSED BY CONRAD WEISER.

Conrad Weiser witnessed the baptizing of the three Indians in Oley. The following extract from a letter to Pastor Brunholtz, in Philadelphia, dated Tulpehocken, February 16, 1747, gives us additional information of the work of Rauch among the Indians and relates how he interviewed them before their baptism:

"This Christian (Henry) Rauch had been in the country some time before the Count (Herrn Graf) and had settled at Stifing or at Shecomeko, and had labored very faithfully for a German who lived there, during which time he visited the Mohican Indians, which lived near the German until he won their confidence and finally able to speak to them concerning the things of God in the low German (Dutch) language, which they partly understood. This Christian Rauch exhibited a heartfelt love towards the Indians and a burning zeal for their conversion. At the Oley conference three awakened (Indians) were baptized Christians. I was present. They were named Abraham, Isaac

and Jacob. They were earnest men who sufficiently took to heart the love for truth and the newly begun work of grace. I discoursed with them before their baptism in their own language, and found so much in them, that I began to love them from the bottom of my heart and have not, to this time, been able to forget them. It did not remain with these three first converts, but their number increased until they grew into a small congregation. Gottlieb Buttner came to them and worked with blessing among them. The desire to lead souls to the Lord Jesus consumed this Mr. Buttner and through his journeys in cold and rain, privations and fatigue he contracted a disease and finally died. In 1743 I journeyed to Shecomeko to visit my father, who lived ten miles from there, and also at the same time to visit my friend Buttner and his Indian brethren; but I did not find Buttner at home, but remained with these Indians for several days, and freely talked with them and was present at several of their meetings and heard them exhort one another and pray. I said to myself they are the children of God and the Lord is among them and have not found that I was in error. And now, indeed, some of their number have removed to Bethlehem and some have located near Bethlehem and several still remain in Shecomeko, the bravest of whom have lately died of various diseases.

"I am afraid that ones anxious to rule have some among Christians. Rauch has been called to Bethlehem, Buttner is dead, others are anxious to gain the ascendancy and the whole matter has reached a crisis. May the Lord soon let the fulness of the heathen enter into the church of Jesus Christ to the honor of His glory. It is to be remembered that the Indians of Shecomeko dwelt among the white people, were born and raised among them and enjoyed privileges and advantages, the other Indians born in the wilderness where the very air as it were is charged with evil spirit, over against them born among the socalled white people where the name of Christ is often heard and which has some effect; to what extent one is not able to clearly determine."

INDIANS BAPTIZED AT BETHLEHEM.

Two Indians were baptized at Bethlehem in the fall of the same year. Bishop Levering in his history of Bethlehem describes this baptism in detail, which compliments the several descriptions of the ceremony in DeTurck's barn in Oley:

"The first baptism of Indians at Bethlehem took place on September 15, 1742. There were two of them. The first was Wanab, also called Gabriel, who was baptized by Zinzendorf and given the name of David. The second, Tassawachamen, was baptized by Buettner and named Joshua. At the same time a white man of Oley, Joseph Bull, was baptized by Eschenbach and given the additional name John. This man figured later very conspicuously in connection with the missions among the Indians. He married an Indian wife and was called by the Indians, Shebosh, the name by which he became most generally known. The following details of this interesting ceremony are on record:

"The candidates were seated in the center of the chapel on three chairs. Three men stood back of them and those who were to perform the baptism took their places on either side of Seiffert, the elder, who sat at the table and led the singing. In front of the candidates was placed a tub of water covered with a large white cloth. Just before the baptism the men who stood behind them removed the blankets of the Indians and the blouse worn by the white man, and they all knelt on the edge of the white cloth at the tub of water. Zinzendorf, Buettner and Eschenbach at the same time drew near, each with a bowl in his hand, and dipped water out of the tub. At the moment when the appropriate words of the appointed verse were being sung, Zinzendorf repeated the names of the three and said: 'We baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.' Thereupon the water was poured on the heads of the three. During the continuance of the singing, Seiffert and the helpers approached and joined in the imposition of hands, after which the baptized men took their seats again, the blankets and blouse were replaced and the service was concluded with bensions sung by the congregation." History of Bethlehem, page 143.

The writer does not share in the bitterness of feeling against the Moravians expressed in some of the quoted statements above, but on the other hand greatly admires the remarkable missionary work of the brethren among the isolated groups of German

settlers in Pennsylvania during the middle decade of the eighteenth century, and of their efforts to convert the American Indian. From the various descriptions and references to the baptizing of the three Indians in Oley, a picture accurate in almost every detail can be obtained. This alone is the purpose of this article.

WORK OF DR. GEORGE DE BENNEVILLE.

It is not generally known that the Dr. George de Benneville, the first doctor to reside in the Oley Valley, and who is frequently referred to as the father of Universalism in America, also attempted to evangelize the Indians. The following extract from a letter of John Adam Grube, to whom already reference has been made, and who bitterly opposed Count Zinzendorf, gives us this additional fact. Germantown, Pa., November 19, 1744:

"Of their (Moravian) progress among the Indians one also hears nothing (at present). Friend Beneville (George de Benneville), who under a considerable impulse goes about the country holding meetings and calling people to repentance and earnestness without any attempt to gain adherents or to establish a party, for which he is by the sects, and in particular by the Seventh-Day Baptists (Siebentager) violently opposed and censured, was this fall (1744) also among the Indians, where Count Zinzendorf had been and was received by in a very friendly manner, but could not find any trace of an awakening or stirring of hearts or change among them with the exception of a French woman (Madame Montour) among them, who for a number of years had a measure of godly conviction, thus the Moravians' boastful claim of their conversions among the wilderness, has little to it."

JOHN BAER STOUDT.