



Rev H. A. Dietterich

April 21, 1838 – March 22, 1899

Chapter 1

Birth, Parentage, and the Great Mistake of My Life

I feel that the salvation of God has been so great in my case – and has done so much for me – that I should make it known to others, and record it where it may be read by them “when this poor lispings stammering tongue lies silent in the grave.”¹ Therefore I make this feeble effort to do so in this little book, which shall contain a short sketch of my history and of God’s wonderful dealings with me.

I was born in Columbia County, Pennsylvania, April 21st, 1838. My father’s name was Henry Dietterich² and my mother’s name Mary Catharine. Her maiden name was Freas. I received the name of Henry Alonzo. My father was a farmer, a man of great industry and of comfortable circumstances. I had five brothers and six sisters – a family of twelve, of whom I was the youngest. We all lived to arrive to years of maturity – and were all married and settled down in life, but myself and my youngest sister, before the family circle was broken by death.

Father, mother, and all my brothers and sisters save one brother, are now (1891) gone to their long homes. And I have this confidence: that most of them, but I fear not all, are in “our Father’s house, in which there are many mansions.” Mother died in 1866, aged seventy-one years. Her last words spoken to my sister shortly before she breathed her last were, “I have finished the work given me to do” – words similar to those of our blessed Savior and of the great Apostle Paul in their last moments. Father died in 1868, aged seventy-four years. I was with him during all the time of his sickness, and he frequently spoke to me very encouragingly of his hope for the future – even to the last.

One sister said to me when I saw her last on her death bed, “We will meet again in heaven.” The last words of another to her weeping husband were, “O don’t weep, for it is a comfort for me to die.” Thus they are gone before. My brother Hiram A. Dietterich³ studied for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church. He graduated at the Easton College and spent a year at the Princeton Theological Seminary, but his health became so poor that he was obliged to relinquish his studies, lingered a few years, and died July 25, 1855, aged 32 years, 11 months and

¹ From the hymn text “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood” by William Cowper (1731-1800) – #189 in the Evangelical Hymn Book in use during Dietterich’s ministry. This is the English hymnal of the Evangelical Association printed in Cleveland OH that contained 1262 numbered selections, and all hymn numbers reported in this article refer to that hymnal.

² Henry Dietterich (1794-1868) and his wife Mary Catharine Freas (1794-1866) are buried in the Fowlersville Lutheran Cemetery.

³ Hiram Augustus Dietterich (1822-1855) was a student at Princeton Seminary 1851-52 and then worked as an agent for the American Bible Society. He died, and is buried, in Chester County PA.

3 days. He was the first one to die in the family. My brother John F.⁴ graduated at Selin's Grove in 1866 and is in the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

My parents being Lutherans, I was baptized in infancy by Rev. Isaiah Bahl,⁵ their pastor at that time. I was raised on the farm until fifteen years of age, when father apprenticed me to the trade of plastering, brick laying and stone masonry to Mr. Adam Kester⁶ at eight dollars per month. At the expiration of the first year Mr. Kester went West, and I returned to father on the farm. That spring of 1854 a snow two feet deep fell on the 14th day of April, killing all the spring birds which had already come from the South – March having been so spring-like that the farmers had their oats sowed. I remained on the farm with father until after the harvest, when he again hired me to the trade with Mr. James Wright⁷ of Light Street, Columbia County, at \$16.00 per month. I worked with him until I took sick with bilious fever – which was followed by fever and ague and finished my work for the season. I again returned to father and remained with him, working on the farm and at the trade, alternately, until eighteen years of age.

Here, at eighteen, I made the great mistake of my life. Father said to me, "Now you are eighteen. If you wish to remain at home with me until you are twenty-one, I will do thus and so for you. If you wish to go for yourself, you are at liberty to do so. If you desire to go to school and take a collegiate course, I will advance you the money as I did to Hiram." O how many times I have regretted that I did not accept the last offer. But I was thoughtless and wild, and my brother having offered me a clerkship in his store at Evansville, Columbia County, I thought that would be the place for me – and I hired myself to him for one year for one hundred dollars, and I was with him the full year. O if I had but gone to college instead, and fitted myself for the duties of life to which I was afterwards called by God, how much better it would have been.

⁴ John Frees Dietterich (1824-1903) felt called to the ministry after four of his first five children died of diphtheria in 1861. He studied at the Missionary Institute in Selinsgrove and was ordained in 1866. He served Lutheran charges in Pennsylvania in Milroy, Lamartine, Schellsburg, Dickinson, Rossville and Loysville before retiring to Lamartine in 1880. He is buried in Lamartine, Clarion County.

⁵ Isaiah Bahl (1803-1862) was licensed by the Danville Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania in 1825 and ordained in 1828. He served the Berwick parish from 1830 until his death on March 6, 1862.

⁶ Adam H. Kester (1826-1906) was born in Lehigh County and moved to Michigan, where he was married in 1857. He is buried in Marcellus MI.

⁷ James Wright (1825-1900) is buried in the Pine Grove Cemetery in Berwick.