

Chapter 13

Conference in Baltimore, Md. Returned to Big Spring Circuit

I attended conference, which met the first Thursday in March, 1869, in Baltimore. I was returned to the Big Spring circuit, with Rev. J.W. Bentz¹ as my assistant. Having an assistant, we branched out and took up a number of new appointments. The one perhaps of the most importance and success was in Mifflin township,² north of Newville. Here we had a few members and preached in the school house. In the winter we held a protracted meeting here and met with great success, but in the midst of the meeting and during my absence for a few evenings, the school directors closed the school house against my colleague – and expected by doing so to close the meeting. But in this they failed, as we continued the meeting in a private house, the house of brother William Hoch, which resulted in a number of conversions and accessions – mostly heads of families, and we organized a good class at the close of the meeting. The school house being closed against us only prepared the way for a new church. We proceeded at once and got out a subscription. And by conference time we had secured a location, had the money subscribed, and the church underway.

I think the devil was very short sighted, or over shot his mark, in stirring up the directors to close the school house against us and thus close the meeting and stop the work in the community. Had the school house remained open to us, the people would have thought it good enough, and no church could have been built for years to come. But now we had no place to preach in, and something must be done to get one. And in less than a year the church was completed and dedicated to the Triune God, and thus the congregation was fully and firmly established. It would have been a blessing to many a congregation if the school houses had been closed against them – then churches would have been built long before they were. But having a place to worship, the building of churches was neglected in many cases to the great detriment of the congregation.

At Leesburg we had another very successful meeting, resulting in thirty conversions. The church was densely packed every night. One evening when penitents were invited to the altar, among others who came forward a young man who sat in the rear of the church was noticed to arise and start for the altar. And as he passed the stove, the door of which was standing open, I saw him throw something into it. He came and knelt at the altar, beginning to pray most earnestly to God for pardon and salvation. After the congregation was dismissed, as I passed out of the aisle, I stopped and looked into the stove – being anxious to know what

¹ John W. Bentz (1839-1912) was originally a licentiate in the Reformed Church, but he left that denomination in 1867 to receive a license and appointment from the Evangelical Association. He retired in 1911 and is buried in Mount Holly Springs.

² This appointment is now the Mt. Hope UMC.

he had thrown into it – I discovered it to be a pack of cards. It appears he was addicted to card playing, and had these in his pocket, but felt that he must put these away if he would come to the Lord for salvation – thus heeding the exhortation of Isaiah, “Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” – Isaiah 55:7.

During this meeting³ on Saturday evening, while on our knees in prayer with a number of penitents at the altar, there was a racket in the vestibule of the church which caused nearly all but the penitents to spring to their feet. I at once began to sing, and all quieted down again, when a brother came in and passed down the aisle and beckoned for me in a most excited manner. Calling a local minister present to take charge of the meeting, I hastened to the brother in the aisle to inquire what was the matter. He was terribly excited and said, “There are two drunken men out here, tearing everything to pieces. You must come out and settle them.” I went with him at once and found two drunken men from the furnace. They had come to the hotel in town and got pretty full, then came to the meeting – swearing that they would red⁴ out the church. They came into the vestibule and behaved badly there, when this brother, being notified of their conduct, went out – but he could do nothing with them. He then sent for the constable, who lived at a distance – and meanwhile came in for brother Carl, the village blacksmith, to quiet them. He tried to coax them to come in or leave, but they would do neither – and swore there were not enough men in the church to put them out. When everything else failed, this brother, being a very muscular man, seized one with each hand and chucked them both out of the door – which caused the racket above referred to.

When I came out, these men were stripped for fight – and swearing at a terrible rate. I went into the church to the justice of the peace and told him he must go out and settle them. And if there was no other way to do it, he must take men enough to tie them – and I would help him do it. We went out and got them away, and quiet was again restored. After the meeting was closed for the evening, the constable arrived and arrested them and took them four miles to Shippensburg – where he placed them in lock-up until morning, when they were bound over for their appearance in court. It cost them a nice sum by the time they got through with it, and they never again attempted to red out the church or to disturb us in any way.

When I had been at this meeting four weeks, I stated on Saturday evening that I would preach for them on Sabbath morning at 10 a.m., it being my regular appointment – but in the evening a local brother would preach, as I must go to my other appointment. Having remained with them at the meeting and sent a substitute to preach at the other appointment two weeks previous, I must go this time myself. I then pronounced the benediction. Immediately after the benediction, one of my

³ While Dietterich places this incident within the second year of this appointment, it occurred during the end of his first term and is reported in *The Shippensburg News* of January 30, 1869.

⁴ In the Pennsylvania Dutch colloquial speech “red” is a verb meaning “to clean.”

official members, who was in good circumstances and had pledged his word before conference that if I would come back on the circuit he would give me forty dollars salary, came to me and said, "See here, you cannot go to that appointment tomorrow night – but you must stay here and send a substitute there." I said, "My dear brother, I have done so once, and it won't do for me to neglect my appointments entirely – so I must go this time myself." His reply was, "I say you must not go, and if you do I will keep ten dollars off your salary and only give you thirty dollars." I said, "I can't help that. When it comes to right or wrong, dollars and cents have no bearing with me. It is right that I should go, and wrong that I should stay – and I am going if you keep the forty dollars. For that, you must answer – while I must do my duty." On Sabbath morning he came to me and repeated the threat. But I told him I could not be bribed to do wrong – if it was ten times ten dollars. I owed it to that congregation to preach for them. The local brother could preach for them, and I would be back on Monday evening, but it is my duty to go – and go I will, and leave the results to the Lord. And go I did.

When the time came for settlement, he said he would give me but thirty dollars – that he was sorry for it and would cheerfully give the forty, but that he had said that if I would go he would withhold ten dollars, and he must be as good as his word. And so he kept the ten dollars. So King Herod would not go back on his word, in the case of John the Baptist, but "for his oath's sake, he beheaded John." – Matthew 14:9. But what of his word when he had promised the forty dollars? This brother went home from the settlement that evening, and the next morning when he went to the barn to do his feeding, he found one of his domestic animals dead – which was worth several times the ten dollars he had unjustly withheld from me. Mrs. D. always believed it was a judgment sent upon him for the wrong he had done me, and I guess she was right. "In as much as ye did it not unto the least of these, ye did it not unto me," says the Master. We are but stewards, after all, of the world's goods, and we should remember whose they are. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

During our meeting, sister Carl, one of our most active and best Christian women here, was sent for on Saturday to come to Stoughstown on account of a nephew of hers, a young man, being very sick and not expected to live. She went and when she arrived there, it being four miles distant, she was taken sick. And the following Saturday she was brought home a corpse, having died a few hours before her nephew. I was to see her during her sickness. She died a most happy death. Her family were all with her and the room was full of friends, knowing the end was near. They had several prayers with her, and the Lord blessed them altogether. She had a large family of children. She now called these to her, one after the other, and bade them good-bye – giving each a few words of good counsel and advice. She then called for her husband, and as he approached her bed side she turned away and said, "Stay a few moments. I cannot give you up yet." She gave herself to prayer a few moments and then said, "Now come, I have gained the victory." She took him by the hand, gave him advice as to the children, and then gave him good-bye.

She then said, “Now sing.” But none could do so. She then began to sing, and she was a most beautiful singer. She sang the hymn No. 393,⁵ “Nearer my God to thee, Nearer to thee” with as strong and clear a voice as ever. Suddenly she reached out with both arms and said, “Oh, it was an angel. I thought it was Mrs. Dietterich’s baby.” And then she continued to sing, and while singing the last verse

Or if on joyful wing cleaving the sky,

Sun, moon and stars forgot, upward I fly,

Still all my song shall be, Nearer my God to thee... Nearer to thee.

Her spirit took its flight. “O how blessed is the righteous when he dies.” I preached her funeral sermon, and her happy death had a great influence for good on our meeting. O, that I may die as happy as she.

The Leesburg, Mount Rock, McAllister, Waggoner, and Mifflin township appointments were all now in a very prosperous condition. During the year I preached the funeral sermon for a small child about one year old, who pulled a coffee pot full of hot coffee from the stove hearth and scalded itself to death. The mother was away, and the hired girl had dinner ready and stepped away to the door to call the father to dinner. And just at that moment the child, which was playing on the floor, jumped to its feet and pulled the coffee pot off with the above fatal results. It was purely an accident, or an act of the child, and no one was to blame – though the girl felt very badly about it. I also preached a funeral sermon for a little girl four years old, who fell into a cistern and was drowned.

While living in Leesburg the second year, our eldest son James Eugene gave us an example of faith in prayer which I frequently used in my sermons as an illustration on that point. He was now ten years of age. He had always been a trusty boy from a little child, and we were accustomed to send him to the store and elsewhere on little errands from the time he was four years of age, giving him various sums of money – and he never lost a penny, or spent one without permission. Here we were accustomed to send him some distance to a farm house every Saturday afternoon for butter. One afternoon he went for the butter as usual, and to shorten the distance to avoid an approaching thunder shower, he crossed a large clover field of some twelve or fifteen acres. When he arrived at the house and went to pay for the butter, he had lost his money – a fifty sent scrip, being a fractional currency in circulation during the war and for some time afterwards. It was now night and too late to hunt for it, and a heavy shower of rain had fallen.

He came home feeling very badly about it, and told his mother. We knew he could not help it and tried to comfort him by telling him, while we were sure it was lost, we knew he was not to blame and that it could not be found – as the clover was quite tall, there was no foot path to follow, and the heavy rain had beat it down into the clover or had torn it to pieces. We retired at the proper time, but he still felt badly about it. On Sabbath morning he arose bright and early and, without

⁵ “Nearer My God to Thee” is #900 in the Evangelical Hymnal. The number given here likely refers to the Lutheran Hymnal in use as Dietterich was writing this.

saying a word, started out on the hunt of the lost money. And before his mother had breakfast ready, he came running into the house with the scrip in his hand and said, "Mother, I knew I would find it this morning." She said, "Why Eugene, how did you know you would find it?" "Why, because I asked God to help me find it, and I knew I would find it." O, what an example of faith in prayer. "I knew..." Not, "I hoped...or desired...or thought...I might find it," but "I knew" – it was positive. And as evidence of his faith, he rises early and runs out with a haste and finds it. Jesus says, "A little child shall lead them." And little children often teach us very important lessons. O, that we might always have like faith in our prayers. He has always been a boy of great faith in prayer, and he has had many remarkable answers to prayer. He is now a minister of the gospel and has charge of a Lutheran congregation in the city of Bridgeton, New Jersey.

Here also I saw what liquor would do. On a certain Saturday a middle aged family living a couple of miles from town received word that the wife's mother, living up the valley near Green Village, had died and the funeral would take place Sabbath morning. That afternoon the parents left home for the house of mourning, leaving their children who were grown up to take care of things at home and come to the funeral the next morning. Saturday evening was most beautiful and moonlit, and the eldest son, a young man, accompanied by a neighboring young man, came to Leesburg on horseback – desiring to buy a pair of black gloves to wear at his grandmother's funeral the next day. But unfortunately these two young men stopped at the hotel and there met two neighboring young men, and all drank pretty freely. About nine o'clock the two on horseback started for home pretty full. Just in front of our house the young man who purchased the gloves either fell or was thrown from his horse – which kicked him, or stepped on him, and then ran home. The young man arose and said he was not hurt, then walked twenty-five rods and sat down in a fence corner. His comrade left him there and rode home. The other two soon started for home in a buggy. When they passed this man, they stopped and asked him to get into the buggy and ride home with them – but he made no reply. Then one of them swore, "He is too drunk to ride," and they drove home and left him there.

When they arrived at home, they related these circumstances to a young man who was spending the evening with the family. This man remarked, "Perhaps he is hurt." And being alarmed, he hastened out of the house, mounted his horse, and started in pursuit of his friend – accompanied by one of these young men. And when they arrived on the spot, they found this man dead in the fence corner. He was a son of a good, respectable family and was not in the habit of drinking – but these young men got him drunk and then left him to die alone in the fence corner. Surely, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." – Proverbs 12:10

And we see here, too, the evil effects of bad company. O, what news to a fond mother. She expected to attend the funeral of her own dear mother accompanied by her entire family, but is now called upon to hasten home at once because of the death of her first born son – and was denied the privilege of attending

her mother's funeral at all. And then to be informed of the circumstances of his death. How sad indeed! It was enough to break a mother's heart, to have a son die thus. And what a warning to his comrades! But what will strong drink not do? And yet our government will legalize the sale of it, and protect the rum seller in this hellish traffic of ruining the souls and bodies of his fellow man. O, when will this curse be done away with by our authorities?

In the fall, accompanied by my wife, I drove up the valley to the Hagerstown circuit, Rev. H.H. Ream, pastor, to officiate at a quarterly meeting by appointment of the presiding elder. I also officiated at a quarterly meeting in Carlisle.

On this circuit I had my first experience at baptizing by immersion. A number of the converts at Leesburg desired to be immersed, so I appointed a certain Sabbath afternoon to attend to this ordinance and requested all who desired to be immersed to meet at house near a certain mill pond at two o'clock. When I arrived at the place, I found a large crowd assembled to witness the ceremony, as there generally is. The subjects to be baptized were at the house nearby. I went to the house, met the subjects for baptism, and we marched in regular procession to the bank of the stream singing, "Yes, we'll gather at the river." Here we held religious services, and then I waded into the stream and went to work. I do not remember the number I baptized. Some were baptized once backwards; others after the mode of the Dunkards, kneeling in the water and immersed three times forward – once in each name of the Trinity. Others knelt in the water and I poured water on their heads, with my hand. All passed off pleasantly. At first I dreaded it, but as soon as I stepped into the water all fear left me and I enjoyed the services very well.

But why this difference of opinion on the mode of baptism? And why cater to the notions of every one? Why not have a fixed mode and practice that and that only? I do not believe in trying to suit ourselves to the notions of every one on so important an ordinance of the church.

Here I also joined the "Independent Order of Odd Fellows," Manor Lodge, No. 560, in February 1869. Our third daughter was born here in Leesburg, May 24th, 1869, and received the name of Sallie Emma.

Thus closed my second year on the Big Spring circuit, and a good work was accomplished. The first year we rebuilt the Leesburg church, had one hundred conversions, and enlarged the work so as to make it a two-handed circuit – as it required two men to do the work needed. We also started two brethren in the ministry, and three of the converts became ministers of the gospel. The second year Brother Bentz and myself got along very pleasantly together and had sixty-five conversions. We also started the building of a church in Mifflin township, which was completed the next summer. I preached five hundred and eighteen sermons in the two years. It was truly a great work. We became very much attached to the people, and it was with difficulty that we could tear ourselves away from them. But so the "fates" decreed, as our two years, which was then the limit, had now expired. So good-bye, dear friends, we must part – perhaps only to meet in the eternal world.