

Chapter 14

Conference in Williamsport, Pa. Appointed to Conewago Circuit, York County

This spring, March 1870, conference met in Williamsport again. On Sabbath at 10 a.m. I preached in the 3rd Street M.E. Church, by appointment of the conference. When the stationing committee reported, I was appointed to Conewago Circuit, York County, with headquarters in Lewisberry. Shortly after conference a deep snow fell, so I filled my sleigh with canned fruit and drove down on Saturday to fill my first appointments on Sabbath – and to make arrangements to move. I filled my appointments on Sabbath, then left the sleigh and rode the horse home. On Monday I then hitched to the buggy, and we moved.

We moved by rail to Mechanicsburg, and from there by wagons to Lewisberry – where we found a very pleasant home rented for us. There, for the first time in our ministry, the friends turned out to greet us and gave us a grand reception, which was very encouraging to myself and family. I enjoyed this circuit as well as any I ever served – except Buffalo.

During the first year we built a new stone church near the home of brother John Parks,¹ and it is known as the Emanuel Church. The building of this church was largely due to the hearty cooperation and energetic efforts of brother John Parks. Rev. H.B. Hartzler² and Rev. U.F. Swengel³ assisted at the dedication, and it was dedicated free of debt.

I held a number of protracted meetings during the winter, and we had a camp meeting in August on “Polk Hill,” near the Emanuel Church. As a result of these meetings we had sixty-five conversions.

In the fall I was called upon to preach a funeral sermon for a young man who died under most distressing circumstances. He was about fifteen years of age. The circumstances of his death were as follows: He in company with a neighboring young man, each having a revolver and a bottle of whiskey, spent the Sabbath in drinking, shooting and carousing – until night, when he was accidentally shot. The ball penetrated the throat near the larynx and lodged in the back of the neck, where

¹ John R. Parks (1831-1900) is buried in the Emanuel Cemetery.

² Henry Burns Hartzler (1840-1920) was born near Yorkanna PA and was serving Carlisle circuit, his second Evangelical appointment. He is a younger brother of Jacob Hartzler, Dietterich’s senior partner on the Luzerne Circuit – see chapter 4. The author of several poems that became hymn texts, he would go on to be an editor of the denomination’s newspaper and a bishop. He has a biography in the 1974 *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*. Following his death, the publishing house printed a hardback book *The Poems of Henry Burns Hartzler*, a copy of which is in the conference archives.

³ Uriah Frantz Swengel (1846-1921) was born near Paxtonville PA and was serving Big Spring circuit, his fourth Evangelical appointment. He would go on to be a district superintendent and a bishop. He has a biography in the 1974 *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*.

it could not be removed. He lived fifteen days, until he died of starvation – after most extreme suffering – being unable to swallow any food, except a little liquid. How terrible to starve to death – with a craving appetite and plenty in the house. He would beg for something to eat – and yet when given him, he was unable to take it. As he spent his last Sabbath, so he died – without repentance and without hope. How sad for the family, and how terrible for the young man himself! What a warning to boys and young men against carrying pistols, drinking whiskey, and violating the holy Sabbath. In three months from the day of his funeral, I preached the funeral sermon for his mother – who died of a broken heart on account of his tragic and impenitent death. Surely, “The way of the transgressor is hard, and the sinner is a plague to his own family.”

In the fall, on invitation, I visited Mifflin township, Cumberland County, to assist at the dedication of the new church – built where we had been locked out of the school house the year before, but had succeeded in organizing a congregation and secured the money on subscription to build the church before I left the circuit. The church was now completed and ready for dedication, which duty I had the pleasure of performing. To my joy I found all the converts faithful to the Master. Sister Hastler, one of the old members, had crossed over to the promised land – gone to rest. I was accompanied by my wife, and on our way home we made a very pleasant visit in Leesburg.

In September myself and wife visited my sister and family, and also my eldest brother’s son, in Philadelphia. We also went to Wilmington, Delaware. This was our only visit there, and the farthest either of us have ever been from home.

At this time there was a great excitement in our church on the subject of entire sanctification. It was preached, and urged, as a special instantaneous and perfect work. This excitement ran so high in the church, and with many of the preachers, that a man – and especially a preacher – was hardly considered a Christian unless he professed entire sanctification. I had never imbibed, preached or believed this doctrine. I believed and preached that sanctification begins in regeneration and is progressive, progressing through life, sometimes called the developing or progressive system: “first the blade, then the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear” or “the babe in Christ, then the young man, and finally the Father, in Israel” – a constant growth in grace and the divine life. But this was hardly considered scriptural, or orthodox, by many now.

In August I was ordered to the York camp meeting, out the Plank Road, below the city of York. Here but little was preached except this special work, and all the preachers present professed to enjoy this special blessing – but myself. Two benches were set out – one for seekers of justification, and the other for members to kneel at as seekers of entire sanctification. I could not fall in with these views and methods. But being a new man at the camp, I was given some of the most important appointments and preached with good success – and apparently to the

satisfaction of the people in general. I was even appointed to preach the communion sermon, and did so.

From here we came to my camp on "Polk Hill," near Lewisberry. Here they preached the same doctrine, but it was new to my people and did not take so well. They did not get so far as to use the two benches, and had no need of them. I had too much influence with my people for the preachers to run away with them on that subject. And when the brother who preached on Saturday afternoon stated in his sermon that all the preachers on the stand enjoyed and professed entire sanctification, but Dietterich, it was too much for my people to endure. Unknown to me, they appealed to the presiding elder and demanded that I be appointed to preach on Sabbath, as they considered me publicly assailed. And whether I was entirely sanctified or not they could not tell, but they knew I could preach with any of them, and I must be heard on the Sabbath.

The elder reasoned with them, telling them that it was contrary to custom for a man to preach at his own camp – especially on the Sabbath. He had all his arrangements made for the Sabbath – and all his men appointed to preach, and notified to that effect. But all to no purpose – their preacher had been publicly assailed and he must be heard, and they knew he could help himself. They insisted so strongly that the elder was obliged to yield.

He then came to me, saying, "Brother Dietterich, I have all my arrangements made and my men appointed for tomorrow, and notified to that effect, but you must preach some time tomorrow." I said, "Why? What is the matter now?" He then told me of the interview he had with the members above referred to. This was the first I knew anything about it.

I replied, "No. You carry out your programme. I preach for them every two weeks. They can hear me some other time."

"But it will not do. You must preach some time tomorrow. You select your own hour. You can preach in my place in the morning, or at any time you choose – but you must preach. The people will not stand it. That remark of the brother who preached this afternoon was too much for them," was his reply.

I said, "It must do; I will not preach tomorrow."

"Well, then you preach the communion sermon, and I will announce it every service until that time."

I replied, "No. I preached the communion sermon at the York camp."

"Well, but you must preach sometime. Then when will you preach? Choose your own time and I will publish it at every service."

I then replied, "I will preach the last night of the camp. I know it is a time when preachers generally do not like to preach, because of the noisy crowd that generally gathers at that time, but I do not fear it."

"Well, then I will publish it every service up to that time." And he did so.

It occasioned quite an excitement, and was the subject of conversation at the camp – and in the entire community. When Tuesday evening came, the grove

was thronged with the multitudes who had come to hear that man preach who was not yet wholly sanctified. But I was hale and hearty, with good lung force and an excellent voice. I knew the circumstances, and had the sympathies and prayers of the people. I also prayed much for myself – and had no fears. After the trumpet had sounded to call the people together for the services, and while sitting on the stand and the multitudes came flocking in, a good brother,⁴ with whom I had preached my first year and who has since been editor of the church paper for several years, after which he was in Japan in charge of their mission work, and is now a presiding elder, was sitting by my side. He laid his hand on my knee and, looking me in the face, said, “O, Brother Dietterich, but I do pity you.” I said, “Why?” “O, you will have such a noisy crowd to preach to.” I replied, “That will be all right. I know these people, and I am known of them. Have no fears.”

The service began, and all the people came as close to the stand as possible – eager to hear. I announced the hymn. And during the opening prayer the mighty power of God came down upon the congregation, and upon myself, and I arose from my knees feeling qualified of God for the occasion. After singing another hymn, I announced my text as follows: “Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.” – Jeremiah 23:29

God blessed me powerfully, and for one hour and fifteen minutes I held the assembled multitude spell bound. After I sat down, the same brother above referred to said to me again, “I did not believe there was a man living who could hold the attention of that congregation, but you did it.” All acknowledged that Dietterich, by the grace of God, came off victorious. I visited that community thirteen years afterwards, and that sermon was yet spoken of. I was in that community again in 1888, being eighteen years afterwards, and it was yet spoken of by some of the older people who were present at that time. To God be all the praise.

I would also mention the sad death of brother William Fisher,⁵ the Sunday School superintendent in Yocumtown, which occurred July 3rd, 1870. I preached there in the school house on Saturday evening, it being my regular appointment. This brother was present and enjoyed the services very much, as he usually did. After the congregation was dismissed, he came to me and we had a very pleasant conversation as we walked together on the street. And when we parted I promised, at his urgent request, to take dinner with him in two weeks, when I preached there again at ten o’clock, if we lived so long – and we bade each other good night. I was accompanied by my wife, and we remained in town over night. On Sabbath morning we proceeded to Newberry, where I preached at ten o’clock. About nine o’clock brother Fisher, who lived in Yocumtown, started for Sunday School –

⁴ This is Jacob Hartzler, Deitterich’s senior pastor on the Luzerne Circuit (see chapter 4) and the older brother of Henry Hartzler mentioned earlier in this chapter.

⁵ William Miller Fisher (1821-1870) was a cabinet maker and served in the Civil war with the Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, 192nd regiment, company K. The Salem United Brethren Church in nearby Fishing Creek was erected in 1844 on land once part of the farm of his father, David M. Miller (1803-1884).

apparently in perfect health. He was bright and cheerful. His wife said he started off on a little trot, like a boy, smiling as he said, “Good-bye. We will meet at preaching after Sunday School is over.”

He opened the school by reading the hymn beginning
 Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me.
 I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind but now I see.
 He read the first two lines a second time, when all arose to sing. And while singing the second line, he fell to the floor and died in a few minutes – without a struggle or uttering a word. Rev. Mixel⁶ of the Bethel Church was to preach immediately after Sabbath School. He was present Saturday evening when I preached and was in the school when this brother dropped dead. We had stayed at the same place over night. I was greatly shocked on Monday morning when they sent for me to attend the funeral. He was an excellent Christian brother, and a member of the U.B. Church,⁷ in the prime of life. O, how uncertain is life. Yet how blessed for him and what a comfort to his family and friends that he had so lived that no one doubted his salvation, for he had led a Christian life without a doubt to the mind of any who knew him. He left a wife and family of small children. I attended the funeral, and his wife insisted that I should take dinner with them, as I had promised him to do – and I did so.

While at this funeral, July 5th, we received a telegram informing us of the death of my wife’s father, Mr. George Evans of Evansville, Columbia County. He died very happy. He lay on his bed while all the room were expecting every breath to be his last – when he raised up and looked upon every one in the room with a smile and said, “I think I hear Jesus say, ‘Come home.’ Glory be to...” And his spirit was gone to the God whom he had served for many years.

O, how blest the righteous when he dies,
 When sinks a weary soul to rest.⁸
 No wonder one exclaims, “Let me die the death of the righteous. And let my last end be like his.”⁹

I was but a small boy when the Evangelics [sic] first began to preach in our neighborhood. They had no churches but preached in school houses, and sometimes in private houses. They met with considerable opposition, and their meetings were characterized by considerable excitement and bodily exertions. When I was a boy of nine years, they held a meeting of several weeks in an old log

⁶ The Newberrytown Church of God confirms that J.F. Mixel served the local circuit of the Church of God denomination at the time, but no other information is available.

⁷ The United Brethren maintained a congregation at Yocumtown, first in the school house and then in the union church, from 1857 to 1896, at which time they relinquished the work in favor of the Church of God – which became sole possessor of the building and continues to have a congregation there.

⁸ These are the first lines of the hymn “How Blest the Righteous When He Dies” by Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld (1743-1825) – #1036 in the Evangelical Hymnal.

⁹ Numbers 23:10

house one mile from father's. Father did not attend but one evening, and I accompanied him. The house was a long one and we entered the door which was near the end of the building – and could get no farther, as it was full. Behind the door was a ladder to go upstairs, instead of steps. The meeting was conducted by Reverends Vallerchamp¹⁰ and Emanuel Kohr.¹¹ I remember nothing of the service, except the chorus. They sang, “Turn to the Lord and seek salvation, etc.” The meeting got pretty lively, and after a while a man began to jump and shout quite near where we stood – and three or four tried to hold him, but could not. I became alarmed and climbed up the ladder and cried like a good fellow. Father then came to me and said, “We better go home” – and I was glad to get out, and neither of us ever went back again. Father said, “They are like a pack of wolves when they get into a flock of sheep – they yell and howl until they get every one of them.” Others said, “It is but a straw fire and will soon go out.” But for years there have been five churches within five miles of that old house, where there was not one at the time. The man who so frightened me that night afterwards became my father-in-law, and went to heaven with a shout.

During the winter my eldest son, J. Eugene, now twelve years of age, while going to school earned three dollars by chopping wood for his aunt. He now gave me the money and requested me to get “The Libby Prison Hymn” printed, and then sell them, and give him the proceeds. I thought the idea a good one for a boy, and so got the “Crider Brothers¹²” to print a lot of them. I sang them on my charge and at the different camp meetings, and realized eighteen dollars from the sale of them – which was a nice profit for the boy, besides the good they accomplished. That they accomplished good I have no doubt – for nineteen years afterwards, while serving the Rossville charge of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, an old Father in Israel died. And though a member of a sister denomination, on his death bed he requested his family to get me to preach his funeral sermon and sing the “Libby Prison Hymn” at his funeral. I here insert the hymn as a relic of the past.

LIBBY PRISON HYMN¹³

This hymn was found in written form on the dead body of a local Methodist preacher, who was a soldier and died in Libby Prison, and it is supposed was composed by him, while in prison.

1. I am a poor wayfaring stranger,
I'm journeying through this world of woe.
There are no sorrows, toils, or danger,

¹⁰ Azima Vallerchamp (1805-1854) was an early fiery Evangelical preacher – see Stapleton's 1908 *Flashlights of Evangelical History*, pages 145-165.

¹¹ Emmanuel R. Kohr (1823-1894) was licensed in 1844 and retired in 1891, his pastoral service including 21 years as a district superintendent.

¹² Best known for their late nineteenth century marriage certificate forms with cutouts for individual photos, the Crider brothers of York were also inventors and entrepreneurs.

¹³ This hymn apparently is not well-known. While it was printed as a broadside in 1864, it does not appear in standard collections of music from the Civil War era.

- In that bright world to which I go.
CHORUS – I'm going there to see my father,
I'm going there no more to roam,
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home.
2. I know dark clouds will gather o'er me,
I know my path is hard and steep.
But beauteous fields lie just before me,
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep.
- CHORUS – I'm going there to see my mother,
She said she'd meet me when I come,
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home.
3. I feel my sins are all forgiven,
My hopes are fixed on things above.
I'm going away to that blest haven,
Where all is peace and joy and love.
- CHORUS – I'm going there to see my children,
I know they're near my Father's throne,
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home.
4. I want to sing salvation's story,
In concert with the blood-washed band.
I want to wear a crown of glory,
When I get home to that good land.
- CHORUS – I'm going there to see my classmates,
They're gone before me one by one,
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home.
5. I'll soon be free from every trial,
My body asleep in the old church yard,
I'll drop the cross of self denial,
And enter on my rich reward.
- CHORUS – I'm going there to see my Savior,
To sing his praise in heaven's dome,
I'm just a-going over Jordan
I'm just a-going over home.

Thus ended my first year on the circuit, and a good work was accomplished. We built a new church and paid for it. Our meetings resulted in sixty-five conversions, and the work of the Lord was generally revived over the entire charge. But the time for conference is here, and I must go.