

years later on the floor of Synod, at its session in Lewistown. He had just delivered an appeal in behalf of the *Lutheran Observer* and Lutheran literature. He finished his appeal and sat down. He then arose and stepped to the window. Taking a lead pencil and envelope from his pocket, he laid the envelope on the window sill and was seen to write something on it. He then put both into his pocket, sat down and expired. He was to preach that evening and had his sermon in his pocket. O how uncertain is life! After his death it was seen that he had written down the following on the envelope at the window: “The sting of death is here.”

My brother, Rev. J.F. Dietterich, was present and saw this brother pass thus unexpectedly from earth to glory. We were very strongly attached to each other, and when he heard that I was about to apply to the Susquehanna Synod for membership, he wrote a letter to one of the ministers of that Synod urging my reception by that Synod very strongly. Peace to his ashes. But we shall meet again. My first year on Perry Circuit closed, and I went to conference.

Chapter 18

Conference in Carlisle Returned to Perry Circuit

This spring, 1874, Conference met in Carlisle, Cumberland County, and I drove over accompanied by my wife – which was the first and only time she ever attended conference with me in the Evangelical church. I was appointed by the conference to preach at Mount Rock on Sabbath evening, and did so. I was again assigned to Perry Circuit, with R.W. Runyan¹ as my colleague. Rev. A.L. Reeser was presiding elder.

Runyan was a young man of some experience in the work, and a fine preacher. Before returning home, after adjournment of conference, we drove to Centreville to visit my brother – who was pastor of the Lutheran Church there at the time. It so happened he had a very successful meeting in progress, and the altar was crowded nightly with penitents. I remained and preached two evenings for him and enjoyed the services very much. Rev. Dutt² of the Lutheran Church was also present. We then returned to our home in Elliottsburg and went to work on the circuit.

¹ Robert Wilbur Runyan (1850-1935) was born in Watsonstown and received his license and first appointment in 1872. This was his third appointment, his first two being at circuits previously served by Dietterich – Conewago and Cumberland. He served in the Evangelical Church until 1893, when he transferred to the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church – where his brother Marion Joseph Runyan (1853-1930) was already a preacher. He retired in 1921 and is buried in the Gray’s Church Cemetery, Centre County PA.

² Ephraim Dutt (1831-1915)

During the summer we rebuilt the Milford Church³ and A.L. Reeser, presiding elder, officiated at the rededication. This year we held a camp meeting on our circuit, and I attended a camp in Cumberland County and one near Clear Spring, York County. Here I again took dysentery and was confined to bed for some time at the home of brother Jacob Brandt, near the camp ground – but finally recovered sufficiently to return home. The Cumberland camp was held in a grove on the west side of the pike leading from Carlisle to Mount Holly, perhaps two miles from the latter place.

At this camp I saw the roughest time on Sabbath afternoon I ever witnessed at a camp meeting. The congregation was not very large in the forenoon, I presume because the people in town had attended their own churches. But in the afternoon all came to camp, and the turnout was very large. Unfortunately, the brother who preached made his sermon very short – and the congregation was dismissed. It was yet quite early, and a long time until the evening service, and here was all this vast concourse of people waiting for the evening – and nothing to interest them. The members and officers of the camp came to the presiding elder and said, “Why don’t you have another sermon?” Here are all these people – and nothing going on. You ought to have preaching.” He replied, “I have no one appointed to preach until evening, and I won’t appoint a man to preach on the spur of the moment, without time for thought. If you can get someone to consent to preach, I will call the people together – but I will not appoint one.” I was standing nearby, and they asked me whether I would preach. I said, “Yes – that is my business.” The presiding elder then sounded the trumpet and called the people together. The seats were soon filled up, but there was yet a vast concourse of people at the head of the ground and on the pike. We began the services, and I preached. I held the attention of all on the seats, but not of those outside and on the pike.

While preaching, I saw there was something going on in the crowd on the pike. Every now and then I could see the dust fly and the crowd gathered thicker and closer. At one time the fence, sitting full of men, went down with a crash – yet it did not disturb my congregation. I continued until done with my sermon, undisturbed – but the tumult continued to increase on the pike. When I finished my sermon, I said without sitting down or consulting the elder, “Arise and be dismissed.” I then pronounced the benediction. I hardly had time to run around until there was not a minister on the stand, nor a person on the camp ground – and I could see it was getting very rough on the pike. I had noticed during preaching a blind lady sitting near the stand, and I looked for her and thought I would take care of her – but her friends had taken her away.

I then jumped off the stand and ran to the preachers’ tent to get my hat. I got the hat and then came out. I then saw two of the officers coming down through

³ Also known as Wila Church, in 2003 this congregation united with Newport Calvary (former Evangelical) and Newport Market Street (former Methodist) to form Newport Hope Eternal and erect a new building across the river.

the grove carrying a man between them – and the whole crowd like a mighty wave following them. These two men, with their captive, rushed up into the stand – while the mass of people rushed in on every side, amid the crashing of seat-boards and the whinnying of horses and the screams of women and children. Horses had torn loose and were rushing frightened through the excited crowd. For a time it appeared as though half the people might be killed – and everything destroyed. But the excitement now soon subsided, and quiet was again restored. A number of women had fainted.

But what was the cause of all this? One man from Carlisle was the cause of it – and whiskey was at the foundation of it all. This man saw another one there with whom he was not well pleased and, being full of whiskey, was determined to fight him. But that man tried to keep out of his way. But he followed him up, and several times came very near catching him – and it was that which made the dust fly while I was preaching. Just at the time I dismissed the congregation, two of our guards arrested this fighting man in the crowd – when his comrades attempted to rescue him from the officers. Just at that time I dismissed, and the brethren ran up to see what was the matter. They at once saw the situation of things and rushed to the assistance of the officers – and considerable knocking down was done right and left for a short time. Then the officers, fearing lest their prisoner should get away from them in the fight, took him up and carried him down to the preachers' stand, where they could keep him securely. It was this that occasioned the rush and excitement. This over, we had no more disturbance during the camp.

We held a number of protracted meetings during the fall and winter, which resulted in sixty-five conversions. In Newport we had a good sister who was very faithful in her attendance on the public means of grace, but her husband was an infidel and seldom came to church. I spoke of visiting them, but was advised to stay away on his account. But the second year during my meeting I did visit them, as he came to meeting quite regularly. He treated me very kindly, and I stayed with them over night. In the morning, while the wife was getting breakfast, we sat in the parlor alone and I said to him, "They tell me you are an infidel, how is it?" He said, "No, I am not. I was, but I have watched the life of my wife for the past twelve years, and her consistent life has convinced me that she enjoys a something which I do not – and that there is a reality in the religion she professes, and I am an infidel no more." From that time he attended church with her. Whether he ever became a Christian or not I cannot tell, but I have no doubt he did. We see here the power of a consistent Christian example.

When I was ordained, Bishop Long insisted very strongly on this point in addressing the candidates for ordination. He related an example of the power of true and consistent Christian example. He said, "A certain Christian father had but one son, and he was very anxious that he should become a minister of the Gospel. With this in view, he sent him to college. The father looked forward with great anxiety and pleasure to the time when his son should graduate and enter upon the great work of the ministry. But unfortunately, while at college this young man got

hold of and read some poisonous literature. And when he came home after graduating at college, the father learned to his great sorrow that his son was a confirmed infidel. The father talked to him, reasoned with him, and prayed for him – but all to no purpose. He got ministers to reason with him – but all in vain. After some time the father died and eventually the son became a Christian and a minister. When questioned as to the cause of his change of views, he said, ‘It was not reasoning nor argument, for I could always find some argument to rebut any argument they could produce in favor of religion. But there was my father’s consistent example. That was an argument I could never get over. It was that which led me to become a Christian.’”

We see in both these cases the truth of the saying “Actions speak louder than words” and the important of the Savior’s admonition “Let your light so shine that others seeing your good works may be led to glorify your Father which is in heaven,” O, for a pious life on the part of all professors of religion.

I announced a protracted meeting to begin on a certain Saturday evening in Baileysburg. The friends began at once to prepare the way for the meeting by speaking to their neighbors and urging upon them the importance of religion. One man, the head of a family residing near the place, but who had neglected “the one thing needful” until now, past middle life, promised to attend this meeting and to become a Christian. But he put it off a little too long, as many do. The week before the meeting was to begin, he walked up the railroad to Newport, and at the lower end of town he was struck by a passing engine and instantly killed. “Too late, too late” will be the cry of many a one in the eternal world. O if men would but “first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness” how much better it would be for them.

I was conducting a successful meeting in the Markel school house, with a number of penitents at the altar. At this meeting the young men were in the habit of standing in the aisle and blocking up the way, so the people could not pass out after the congregation was dismissed. I had requested them repeatedly to keep the aisles open, but to no purpose. Finally one evening, the house being unusually crowded, I again requested them to keep the aisle open so the people could pass out. I dismissed, but it was the same as before. I then started out the aisle and cleared it – telling them to stand back or pass out. The aisle cleared, I turned and walked back to the desk. And as I did so, I overheard a burly-looking school teacher who stood near the door with a whip in his hand, having come to meeting in a sleigh and who had again stepped into the aisle, making an insulting remark which provoked me. I turned on my heel, walked up to him, clapped my hand on his shoulder, and looking him in the face I said, “See here, stranger, we have not come here to insult – nor to be insulted, and we will not be. I asked you all very kindly to clear the aisle so the people could pass out, and when I turned to walk away I heard your insulting remark. Now if you do not clear the aisle, I will.” He stepped back, and I opened the door and said, “Now come on, and I will keep the aisle

open.” I kept my station by the door until all had passed out, and we had no more trouble during the meeting.

Sometimes firmness is necessary, and at that time I was stout and able to help myself, if necessary, and feared no man or set of men – as long as I was in the right and doing it to maintain peace and order at church. If he had made any reply, or had not stepped back out of the way, I would have chucked him out the door headlong – or at least attempted it, and I had no fears as to my success in doing so.

At Elliotsburg, during the meeting, as soon as the benediction was pronounced the young men and boys would push out and over to the door on the ladies’ side of the house and so block up the way from the door – and on the steps to the yard gate, so that it was impossible for them to get out. All I could say did no good. So one evening, when they had crowded even to the inside of the door, I went out and forced my way to the door. And standing at the door, I told them now to stand back and open up the way – or I will open it. I then addressed the ladies and said, “Now follow me, and I will open the way for you.” And they did so, and I walked to the gate using both arms to make the crowd stand back. I then remained there until all the ladies had passed out, and that ended the trouble for that meeting.

In the fall, Rev. Ruyan drove to Liverpool, Perry County – and leaving his horse and sulky with sister Bair, proceeded by rail to visit his parents in Watson town, Northumberland County. One night during his stay with his parents, an ungodly wretch set fire to a stable in the upper end of Liverpool – and while that was in full blaze all the people had rushed to the fire, he ran to the lower end of town and set fire to sister Bair’s stable. And before the fire was discovered and the people could get there, it was too late – and Runyan’s horse, sulky and harness were consumed by the flames, which was a severe loss to him. The culprit was finally arrested and sent to the penitentiary for his crime.

In the winter after the holidays, my wife had a severe spell of sickness. She took erysipelas in the face, and after some days it went to her brain – and for a time her life was despaired of. On Saturday night, after midnight, she sat up in bed and told me that she was dying. She requested me to call the children, who were all in bed, as she wished to see them once more. I had them brought into the room, when she called them to her bedside and bade them all good-bye – and gave such arrangements and gave such instructions concerning her burial as she thought best, and the end appeared to be at hand. But earnest prayer went up to God from many a warm heart in her behalf, and I requested the brother who led the Sunday evening prayer meeting to state her case and make her recovery the special subject of prayer that evening – and they did so.

God heard prayer in her behalf and in mercy spared her to the family by restoring her to health. And we both claim to this day, that she was restored to health and lives today in answer to prayer. It is very interesting now to hear her tell of the angels she saw, the music she heard, and the sensations she felt, when so near death’s door that she could look through the lattice work to the glory world. She

has often told me that death appeared to her simply like passing from one room to another, and that she need but close her eyes and she was in heaven – that heaven appeared to be all around her, and she was perfectly happy. But I shall never forget how dark the day to me, when I thought we must part and I be without a companion – a wife – and my children without a mother. What joy when she was restored to health and able to go out and come in with us again.

But while death came so near to us, and yet passed us by, he stopped at the second house below us. And sister Hench,⁴ wife of brother John Hench, a very good Christian lady and a very kind neighbor, who was frequently to see us during my wife's illness, was suddenly cut down. She was in to see my wife one evening, and rejoiced at the improvement of her health, went home, took sick with inflammation of the stomach, and died in six days. I preached her funeral sermon, assisted by Rev. S.W. Siebert.⁵ My wife had so far recovered as to be able to sit in her chair at the window and see the funeral procession – as we passed our house on the way to the church, bearing this good sister to her last resting place. She had rejoiced in the improvement of my wife's health and the hope of her final recovery the last time she was in to see her, and no doubt had but little thought that she herself would be laid into the silent tomb before my wife would be sufficiently recovered – even to attend her funeral. Yet so it was. But she was also prepared for the solemn change, and to her death was eternal gain – while her family and friends felt their loss most deeply.

My sister and her husband, Mr. James Kocher, from Columbia County, spent the holidays with us. On New Year's evening, by request, I preached a sermon for the I.O.O.F in our church in Newport. They turned out in regalia and the house was packed full, it having been previously announced in the papers. All passed off very pleasantly and all appeared well pleased – and I certainly was, as I received a present of sixteen dollars cash for the evening. Our fourth and last son was born in Elliottsburg, September 13th, 1874, and received the name of Willie Alonza.

The circuit was now in a prosperous condition and had increased in membership, spirituality and liberality. Peace and harmony prevailed, and all were well pleased. So closed my second year on the old Perry Circuit. And I left for conference in March expecting to be returned to Perry again – as the General Conference at its last meeting had extended the time, making the limit three years instead of two as before. I was returned, but not as I expected.

⁴ Mary Ellen Hench (1847-1875), nee Dum, and her husband John B. Hench (1841-1900) are buried in the Mt. Zion Evangelical Cemetery in Elliottsburg.

⁵ Samuel W. Seibert (1824-1913) served Perry Circuit 1870-72 and is buried in the Mt. Zion Evangelical Cemetery in Elliottsburg. He was now assigned to the Mifflin mission, in Juniata County – but he appears to be living in Newport.