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## JOHN ETTWEIN AND THE MORAVIANS IN THE REVOLUTION

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Bethlehem, Pa.

THE centenary anniversary of the death of the Marquis de Lafayette brings to the fore the town of Bethlehem and the Moravians who nursed him back to health during Revolutionary times. Lafayette learned to love the quietness and peacefulness of the little town where he convalesced, and was greatly interested in the simple, everyday manner in which these friends of his professed and practiced their religion.

The Moravians were members of an early Protestant sect, established in the fifteenth century in Bohemia and Moravia following the Bohemian Reformation of which John Hus was the most distinguished leader. They taught that the Bible was the only source of Christian doctrine, that the form of public worship should be based on the Scriptures and the Apostolic Church, that the Lord's Supper should be received in faith without needless human explanations, and that a godly Christian life was more essential than the dogmatic formulation of a creed.

When the adherents of this faith were forced to flee from Bohemia and Moravia, the center of the church organization remained for a time at Lissa, Poland. It ceased to exist, however, when Lissa was destroyed in the war between Poland and Sweden in 1656, although the hidden seed of the church remained in spite of continued and bitter persecution.

A revival of the church took place at the beginning of the eight-

eenth century when the Moravians were given an asylum in Saxony by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Soon afterwards, the North American province of the *Unitas Fratrum* was opened, partly to provide a refuge safer than Saxony for the Moravians, and partly to undertake missionary work among the Indians.

Conscientious scruples concerning the bearing of arms led to the abandonment of the colony founded in Georgia after the outbreak of the war between England and Spain, and the Moravians moved to Pennsylvania, the haven of many religious sects and creeds. The town of Bethlehem, established in 1741, became the main center of Moravian activity in North America, and many smaller settlements sprang up in the surrounding countryside.

Due to the excellence of organization and to the leadership of Bishop Spangenberg, Bethlehem through its Economy system supported not only itself, but also bore the expenses of all Moravian activity in America. The "Economy" consisted of a communal system of work under the direct supervision of church authorities, through which farms were cultivated, different industries were operated, evangelistic work was carried on among neglected parishes of the German population, missionaries were sent out to engage in missionary work from Maine to Georgia, and schools were established for the children of Indians, settlers, and Moravians.

The work which was carried on in the North American province of the *Unitas Fratrum* was calculated to call forth all the energy and talent of John Ettwein. Born in the little town of Freudenstatt, Wurttemberg, in 1721, Ettwein had joined the Moravian community at Marienborn, where his zeal and diligence attracted the attention of Count Zinzendorf, who appointed him to various church offices in Germany, Holland and England. His stay in England proved later to be of the greatest value to him, for it was there that he learned to speak English fluently.

In 1754 John Ettwein and his family received a call to the evangelistic field in America. His sturdy manliness, his stern devotion to duty, his fluency in English and German, made him an exceptionally valuable man in the land of pioneer opportunity. He spent the first few years traveling through the country, undergoing great hardships in order to bring the Gospel to the Indians, the Germans, and the English. During these years his short,

stocky figure could be seen pushing intrepidly through the wilderness, yet retaining such nobility of manner and dignity of bearing that the governors and ruling men of the colonies treated him with deference and respect. Later, he turned their friendship to good account, standing as a buffer between the Moravian communities and those who attempted to convince the authorities of their treasonable activities, refusing to be intimidated by the blustering of magistrates or the threats of a suspicious countryside.

The various positions to which he was appointed during the next few years led to many journeys between the colonies in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Maine, and it was on one of his official visits that he spent several days with Henry Laurens in Charlestown. The warm friendship which grew between the two was an invaluable aid to the Moravians in revolutionary times. In 1766, before Governor Tryon of North Carolina, he defended the Moravians against severe accusations brought by neighbors who were suspicious of the Moravians' attitude towards the Indians and jealous of the prosperity of their settlements.

Bethlehem was suffering from similar suspicion. The principle of not bearing arms for conscience' sake, resulting from the many years of warfare in Bohemia and Moravia, was a sore point, particularly as the Moravians themselves were "foreigners." A more serious charge was the close relationship of the Moravians with the Indians, for it was hard to tell the difference between Christianized, peaceful Indians and those on the warpath. Many outsiders believed that roving Indians were carrying gunpowder and lead from secret magazines in Bethlehem to the French.

The Brethren recognized the danger of their position. They tried to serve the government by placing a missionary in the Wyoming Valley whose duty it was to send down advance information of important tribal movements. They forwarded confidential reports on Indian activities to Philadelphia. Strict measures were also taken for the defense of Bethlehem.

In 1766 John Ettwein was appointed assistant to Bishop Nathaniel Seidel, with Bethlehem as his headquarters. Bethlehem was at this time the center of Moravian activity. It superintended the administration and policies of its own congregation, those at Nazareth and Lititz, and the fourteen other congregations and preaching stations scattered through Pennsylvania, New Jersey,

Maryland, New England and the Ohio Valley. It was Ettwein's duty to make official tours, preaching to Moravians, Indians, and settlers, besides superintending the affairs of the congregations.

Bethlehem was still undergoing the change in organization which had been made necessary in 1764 with the discontinuing of the system of Economy, and through which a more complete union was effected between the American settlements and the European Church. About this time, talk of a break between England and the colonists became rife. Opinions in Moravian towns were by no means uniform, for they had been settled by English, Germans and native born Americans. Some, particularly the young men, favored a revolution and were eager to fight for their country. Others were violently opposed to any break with England. Many felt that although their sympathies were with those who desired separation from the mother country their consciences would not allow them to bear arms, and the possibility of harming the international *Unitas Fratrum* was too great to allow a public declaration of partisanship.

In reply to a letter written by the perplexed Bishop Seidel, Benjamin Franklin urged the Brethren to put themselves "in a good posture of defence," and suggested that young men who wished to fight be allowed to do so. After consultation it was decided that the sentiment against arms in the Moravian communities was still too strong to allow the younger Brethren to fight. Many felt that they had no quarrel with the English king, who had given them a place of refuge from the continued persecutions of Europe. Stronger ties existed between the Moravian Church in America and the Church in Germany and in England, than between the Brethren and their American neighbors.

John Ettwein, who was becoming the most influential man in Bethlehem, openly disapproved of all revolutionary sentiments. He persistently declared for loyalty to the king, although at the same time through his honesty and courage he retained the respect and confidence of the high officials to whom he voiced his disapproval.

An appeal to the Pennsylvania Assembly for exemption from bearing arms according to the rights and privileges granted by Parliament in the Act of 1749 aroused the neighbors of the Moravians to further resentment against these presumably Tory-

minded Brethren, who clung to a government with which they were at war. A letter to Benjamin Franklin did more good, and a resolution of the Assembly on June 30, 1775, recognizing the scruples of many of the people of the province, also helped.

By that time news reached Bethlehem of the battle of Bunker Hill and the burning of Charlestown. On all sides of Bethlehem, companies of soldiers were being recruited. The county resolved that those who had scruples about military drill should pay a fine in cash for each time they did not appear at the drill ground. This the Moravians did. When the news arrived that the Declaration of Independence had been signed, the Moravians officially omitted the prayer for the king and substituted one for the ruler of the land.

Refugees from war-stricken areas were streaming continually through Bethlehem, and the town resounded constantly with the marching of the militia, and the weary footsteps of bedraggled bands of prisoners. On December 3, 1776, news was received that the general hospital of the army was to be moved immediately to Bethlehem, by order of General Washington.

Ettwein assured Dr. Warren and Dr. Shippen, who arrived that evening, that the Brethren would do all they could to assist them, but begged that the arrangements should not alter or demoralize the Moravian routine. The Moravians, in spite of a suspicion that the news of the moving of the hospital was common knowledge in Philadelphia before word was received by Moravian officials, were encouraged by the daily text of the Church, which significantly related to bringing in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind.

The Brethren's House was selected as the most suitable building for the hospital. Some apartments in other buildings were prepared to receive wounded army officers. It had originally been intended to quarter 500 patients in Bethlehem, but the willingness of the Moravians to house the hospital caused the burden to be lessened, and some of the sick were quartered at Easton and Allentown. On December 4, 1776, the wagons bearing their loads of suffering soldiers began to arrive. The stores for the hospital did not arrive for several days, and the Moravians provided the soldiers with food and as many comforts as possible.

The administration of the affairs of Bethlehem fell largely to

Ettwein, who was also chaplain for the hospital. Village industries had to be carried on in spite of the crowded conditions caused by the hospital, its staff, and the many companies of militia and officers which made Bethlehem their resting place as they passed to and from the war districts. It was also Ettwein's duty to receive officially the men of high rank and position who visited Bethlehem, and to make arrangements for the families who fled in panic from Philadelphia.

The summer of 1777 saw the troubles of the Moravians grow especially concerning the Test Act. The demands of Congress became more stringent, and some of the county officials, who were particularly resentful towards the Moravians, began a process of petty hounding and harrying them. As long as it was possible to substitute an affirmation for the oath, it probably would have been better if they had formally transferred allegiance by taking the Test Act, for further loyalty to the King could scarcely be regarded as a religious duty.

In September, 260 British prisoners were quartered in the large Family House in Bethlehem, in spite of the Moravians' protest to the Board of War. Military stores were transported in seventy wagons to Bethlehem, and an influx of further refugees from Philadelphia added to the confusion. More wounded soldiers were sent in large numbers to Bethlehem and among them was the young Marquis de Lafayette.

Visitors to Bethlehem at this time included Henry Laurens, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and other members of Congress. Ettwein conducted a party of the delegates through the Sisters' House, where they were entertained with organ music and singing. He took the opportunity to get from them an order preventing the buildings in which the Moravian women were housed from being turned into an addition to the hospital, as some of the surgeons had suggested and requested. It is to the credit of Ettwein that he had the foresight to recognize the good which this document would do in upholding the rights of the Moravians.

During the fall and winter of 1777 Bethlehem suffered heavily from the demands of war. Clothes and bandages were supplied to the inmates of the hospital and to the soldiers, who, Ettwein says, "had nothing but torn breeches, full of vermin." In November, 700 sick and wounded were crowded into the Brethren's

House alone, which had a normal capacity of about 200. Additional tents and a frame building were set up behind the house, and sick officers were quartered in other buildings. The Brethren were advised to keep away from the hospital, for the intolerable stench had made many of them sick. In spite of this some of the Brethren helped the stewards and assisted with the general work of the hospital, while Ettwein moved through the wards, administering the consolations of religion to the men lying on beds of filthy straw. Often he was called in the middle of the night to come to the side of some poor dying wretch who desired a word of comfort and prayer. And Ettwein's nineteen year old son, John, showed the same courage, risking his life to help the hospital nurses, and willing to perform the most menial of duties.

A still greater calamity came, one which must have made it hard for Ettwein to continue ministering to men wounded in a cause which he repudiated. The crowded conditions caused an outbreak of malignant fever. The sick soldiers died like flies and were hastily laid in trenches dug on the other side of the Monocacy. The plague spread to the town and many of the Moravians became ill, some of them dying. Among those who died was young John Ettwein, who passed away on December 31, 1777.

In March, 1778, Dr. Shippen told Ettwein that the hospital would probably be transferred to Lititz. Ettwein wrote to General Washington, explaining the close financial and industrial connection between the towns, asking that the hospital be moved elsewhere, but Washington's answer merely pointed out the necessity of quartering the hospital somewhere. The hospital was moved from Bethlehem during Passion Week in April.

During the spring and summer of 1778, Moravians were hailed into court many times because of their refusal to take the oath and abjure the king. Some of them were thrown into prison. A few county officials were over-anxious to prove that the Moravians were traitors. Since some of the Brethren had already suffered imprisonment and all had been forced to pay extortionate fees, and also because the Moravians feared that their lands would be confiscated, the Brethren decided to send a protest to Congress and another to the Assembly. John Ettwein was appointed to deliver the Memorial.

Ettwein arrived in Yorktown, where Congress was assembled,

on May 11, 1778, and showed the Memorial to his friend, Henry Laurens, who encouraged him to present it to Congress without corrections or additions. He approved the spirit that Ettwein had shown in the wording of it, and promised to interview several members of Congress privately concerning it.

The Memorial was delivered to a committee especially appointed to examine it. It opened with the story of the settlement in Georgia, where the trustees had promised them full liberty of conscience, but where it had been found best to withdraw to Pennsylvania, keeping intact the principle of not bearing arms. Being anxious to preserve their peace and their settlements, they had induced the Parliament of Great Britain in 1749 to grant them indemnity from bearing arms and to accept their affirmation instead of oath.

On account of the enforcement of the Test Act many of the Brethren were imprisoned, and by the added severity of the Assembly in April they found themselves subject to be outlawed and exiled. Yet the Moravians held no principles dangerous to the government and had in no way infringed the laws of the land. They had previously been examined by other nations concerning their principles. They had borne heavy taxes without murmuring; they did not act against the government in any way. If, in spite of their peaceable attitude, the government would confiscate their property, they felt that they should receive indemnity for the buildings and improvements to the land.

The Memorial went on to say that the Moravians could not subscribe to the Test Act, particularly because of the many missions they held in other countries under English dominion. The taking of an oath was also against their principles. In view of the distressing situation, they begged Congress to give them a recommendation granting full liberty of conscience, and asked Congress to intercede for them with the General Assembly of the state.

The Memorial was examined by the committee, with the further recommendation by President Laurens, who said: "Should the Moravians be expelled, I could let all lie and go with them." The committee included one member unfriendly to the Moravians, Judge McKean. Probably through his influence the committee reported two days later that while the Moravians were still in



possession of their lands a recommendation to the Assembly would have too much weight.

Laurens decided to bring the matter before Congress as a whole, while Ettwein in the meantime set out to present another Memorial with a letter from Laurens to the Pennsylvania Assembly at Lancaster. John Ettwein appeared before the Assembly the afternoon of May 17, 1778, and was honored with a seat next to Speaker Bayard.

This petition reminded the representatives that the Brethren had settled in Pennsylvania to enjoy liberty of conscience and to preach the Gospel to the heathen. It emphasized the Act of Parliament in 1749. It stated that since the troubles of war had begun, their rights as freemen had been denied. Exorbitant fines had been exacted and their industries and properties had been damaged. Because many of the Brethren had recently been imprisoned without legal privileges through their unwillingness to subscribe to the Test Act, which they could not take because of its effect upon them internationally and their abhorrence of oaths, they had decided to protest.

As an alternative to the Test Act they suggested the following promise, saying: "None will scruple solemnly to promise: 'That he will not do anything injurious to this State or the United States of America, and that he will not give any intelligence, aid or assistance to the British officers or forces at war with this and the other States.'"

After the Memorial had been presented John Ettwein explained to the Assembly that he had first submitted a petition to Congress because the Moravians had settlements not only in Pennsylvania, but also in other states. The speaker of the Assembly informed Ettwein that the committee had decided that nothing could be done, but that the entire Assembly pitied the sad plight of the Brethren.

A formal reply, sent to Ettwein a little later by the Assembly, stated that the petitions of the Moravians could not be granted for the following reasons: Congress had declared that all political connections between Great Britain and the United States should be severed; many had secretly sided with the British while openly professing neutrality; a general allegiance to the states was not consistent with a reserved allegiance to the king of Great Britain;

and also it was impossible to discriminate against other religious societies for the sake of the Moravians, particularly when some of the Brethren in Lititz and Lancaster (unable to withstand a combination of threats and persuasion) had taken the Test.

John Ettwein, still undaunted, at the suggestion of the Assembly, addressed the Executive Council, asking for a letter of recommendation to the justices and other officers of the government to execute the laws with moderation and to grant them protection against all riotous and lawless proceedings of the people. The Council decided that it would not be wise for the Council as a body to give the desired recommendation, but some of its members were asked to write to the county officials.

Constable Yost appeared with a warrant for all those over eighteen years of age in Bethlehem to appear before the justices on September 14, 1778. He was persuaded "by kind words and a good dinner" to give the warrant to Ettwein in place of serving notice to each man. Assemblyman Van Camp examined the warrant, and wrote to the justices, urging them to suspend prosecution because a supplement to the Test Act was then being agitated in the Assembly. Ettwein went to Philadelphia, where he showed the curious warrant to the speaker of the Assembly. The Council decided that the summons was not legal, and could at least be postponed by court, adding that the next Assembly would probably modify the law.

Two of the Moravians informed the justices on September 14, 1778, of the Council's decision. The justices, spurred on by a disappointed crowd, which had hoped to see the Moravians dispossessed of their rich lands, sent a peremptory summons to John Ettwein, with whom they were particularly angry for going over their heads by his appeal to Philadelphia. For three hours they cross-examined John Ettwein. He was finally allowed to leave with the threat that the Moravians would not be allowed to keep their taverns, industries and mills much longer. However, the Test Act was amended before the Brethren were subjected to further displeasure.

Ettwein became involved in difficulties on other occasions. Once, he was imprisoned in Easton for a few hours for indiscreetly thanking God during a public service for a British victory.

Bishop Reichel came over to America from Germany and

brought the approval of the course which the Brethren had taken in regard to the Revolutionary War. He added that if the pressure by the government became too extreme, each individual should be allowed to choose for himself. The Brethren were warned to be sure that it was a matter of conscience and not plain obstinacy.

By the close of the Revolutionary War the Moravians found that the contact with American patriots had broadened their outlook so that they themselves were becoming true Americans. The war had broken down the barrier between these people, who were originally German, and their government, but it had not permanently injured their industries. They had come to look on the American cause as their own. The official church diarist no longer spoke of the "American army" but of "our army."

No member had changed his opinion more than had John Ettwein. Partly through the influence of de Schweinitz, the administrator at Bethlehem, and partly through his broadening contact with the leaders of the government, he came to recognize the fact that the Revolution was justifiable and that the Moravian Church should not protest against the independence of the colonies.

As peace settled down on the land John Ettwein, by then Bishop Ettwein, continued to enlist governmental interest on behalf of Moravian projects, drawing the attention of Congress to the claims of the remaining Christian Indians, organizing the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen, and sending a statement of the purpose of the society to General Washington. He also obtained grants of land from Congress for Indian operations, officially addressed delegations of Indian chiefs, proposed a search for the so-called Welsh Indians, which he believed to be the descendants of a lost and forgotten Welsh colony, and superintended the affairs of the Bethlehem community.

It was in the beginning of the year 1802 that John Ettwein finally laid down his work. The good people of Bethlehem no more saw his short, rather stoutish figure, clad in gray homespun, walk slowly up the streets of Bethlehem.