



*Yours in Christ,
J. J. Schmucker.*

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

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CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

THE MINISTERIUM OF PENNSYLVANIA AND THE GENERAL SYNOD.

MOTHER SYNOD ABANDONS HER CHILD—MOVEMENT FOR REUNION IN 1839 FAILED—REUNION IN 1853—STRONG OPPOSITION BY THE MINISTRY—CONDITIONAL ENTRANCE—CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO GENERAL SYNOD AND SEMINARY—ADMISSION OF FRANCKEAN SYNOD AT YORK, PA., IN 1864—WITHDRAWAL OF THE PENNSYLVANIA DELEGATION—FORT WAYNE—SPRECHER'S RULING—SECOND WITHDRAWAL—REASONS FOR THE WITHDRAWAL—NOT A MERE TECHNICALITY—CENTRALIZATION OF POWER—UNEQUAL REPRESENTATION—OBJECTION TO CONDITIONAL REUNION—DESIGN TO FORM A NEW GENERAL BODY—ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL—FAILURE TO UNITE ALL SYNODS—WITHDRAWAL OF OTHERS—"THE FOUR POINTS"—RENEWED EFFORTS FOR REUNION—EULOGIES OF JACOBS AND KRAUTH.

Dr. Schmucker had been associated with and most deeply interested in the General Synod for over half a century. From its very inception at Baltimore in 1819, until the year of his death in 1874, he was present at every one of its meetings, either as a delegate or as a visitor. During about fifty years he devoted his time, his talents, and his means to the promotion of the interests of the General Synod and the theological Seminary. After the Mother Synod had abandoned the General Synod—the child which she had brought into being,—and it was generally

supposed it must inevitably go into callapse, he by almost superhuman effort rescued it from destruction. The original design of the General Synod was the union of all the Lutheran district synods in North America into one organized ecclesiastical confederation for the promotion of her common interests and for the extension of missions and educational work.

After the recession of the Pennsylvania Ministerium the hope of realizing the union of the Lutheran Church in this country was not abandoned. Continued efforts were made to induce the Ministerium to return, and other synods to connect themselves with the General Synod.

In 1839 a movement was made in the Pennsylvania Synod for a reunion. In the Lutheran Church at Reading, Pa., the pastor, Rev. Dr. Miller, was opposed to a reunion, and the vote of his congregation was unanimously against it. At a subsequent meeting of the Ministerium the resolution for a reunion was not adopted by a vote of 33 to 28, a majority of only 5. But the subject continued to be agitated until the year 1853. In that year the Ministerium met in Reading, and after a prolonged and heated discussion, resolved to re-enter the General Synod. The vote was not unanimous; it stood 52 for union and 28 against—some of the members were excused from voting. It was my privilege to be present at that meeting of the Ministerium, Dr. Schmucker was present also, and I distinctly recall a scene which was exhibited immediately after the vote was taken and the result announced. The Dr. walked over to the other side of the church and grasped the hand of the most violent opponent of the reunion; but his friendly overture was met by an insult. Peixoto, that was his name, told him in effect that he could not enter into union with a Rationalist! The Dr. did not resent the insult, nor make any reply, but he must have been amazed, after having all

his lifetime contended against Rationalism, to be himself publicly called a Rationalist! Pastor Peixoto was a German immigrant, if I remember correctly, a proselyte from the Romish Church. He was a very excitable man, singular in his personal appearance, tall and slender, with a very long neck.

Accordingly, when the General Synod met that year in Winchester, Va., the Ministerium was represented by its delegates, and was unanimously received into membership. At the same meeting the Synod of Northern Illinois, the Pittsburg Synod, and the Synod of Texas applied for admission, and were also received. The latter three synods presented no extra conditions on which they wished to be received, so far as I can find, but the Ministerium presented a series of resolutions, stating its doctrinal basis and special conditions on which it demanded to be received. The most important item in these resolutions, which eleven years later became very troublesome, is the following :

CONDITIONAL ENTRANCE INTO THE GENERAL SYNOD.

“We neither intend nor ever expect, that the principles which have hitherto governed our synod in respect to church doctrine and church life shall suffer any change whatever by our connection with the General Synod ; but that, should the General Synod violate its constitution, and require of our Synod, as a condition of admission, or continuance of membership, assent to anything conflicting with the old and long established faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, then our delegates are hereby required to protest against such action, to withdraw from its sessions, and to report to this body.”

There was no open protest against this extraordinary conditional reunion with the General Synod, because there was a general desire for union in the Lutheran Church, and

a rejoicing over the fact that the Pennsylvania Ministerium had returned. The return of the Ministerium, together with the addition of three other smaller synods, greatly increased the numerical strength of the body. Yet many members felt that this was not the proper or courteous way of renewing the union. It implied a want of confidence, held out a threat, and manifested a domineering spirit over their brethren, and was uncalled for and superfluous. The proper way would have been, simply to subscribe the constitution of the General Synod, like the other district synods had done, and if at any future time they should have been dissatisfied with its constitution, doctrinal basis, or decision of the majority on any point of doctrine or usage, they could have withdrawn, if they saw fit to do so, without any such conditional entrance. Any district synod even now has a perfect right to withdraw whenever it pleases to do so.

But the opposition to the General Synod and the Seminary did not stop with the reunion of the Pennsylvania Ministerium. The leaders of the minority kept up a constant tirade against the General Synod and the Seminary; against the former on account of the so-called "New Measures," and "revivals of religion," and its inadequate confessional standpoint, and against the latter on account of its alleged neglect of the German language. The opposition found expression in the columns of the "*Jugend Freund*," Pastor Brobst, of Allentown, editor, and sometimes in speeches during synodical sessions.

This opposition culminated finally in the meeting of the General Synod in 1864, at York, Pa. The occasion was the admission of the Franckean Synod, of New York. This Synod had never formally adopted the Augsburg Confession, just as the Pennsylvania Synod had for many years previously never adopted it. Objection was made to

the reception of the Franckean Synod on this ground. The delegates declared, that in adopting the constitution of the General Synod, the Franckean Synod understood that they were adopting the doctrinal position of the General Synod, viz: "That the fundamental truths of the Word of God are taught in a manner substantially correct in the Augsburg Confession." The Synod was admitted "with the understanding, that at its next meeting it declare in an official manner, its adoption of the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession as a substantially correct exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God." Carried by a vote of 97 to 40.

The Pennsylvania delegation of the Ministerium declared this action unconstitutional. But it was answered, that the Franckean Synod "has really, although not officially, complied, and the constitution of the General Synod is indefinite in its requirement on this point."

The Franckean Synod did at its next meeting officially adopt the doctrinal platform of the General Synod, as its delegates had promised to do. But the delegates of the Pennsylvania Synod were not satisfied with this, but withdrew, in accordance, as they said, with their instructions. It was a portentous movement, followed by momentous results.

The sessions of the General Synod were held in Christ Lutheran Church, previous to its present remodeled state. I can yet see the procession, headed by the tall form of Dr. C. W. Schæffer, slowly and solemnly marching down the long aisle in single file, amid profound silence. They entered the Oswald book-store, next door to the church, now occupied by the Drovers' Bank, to consult, and then returned to their homes. Dr. Schmucker was present at the sessions, but I think he was not a delegate, and was not allowed to take part in the discussions.

This withdrawal of the delegates was generally regarded as a virtual recession of the Synod itself, especially as their action was endorsed by the Synod. Had they contented themselves with simply protesting, and then retained their seats and participated in the proceedings of the General Synod until the close, no one would have thought of disputing their right to membership. But when in the midst of the session they withdrew in a body, without leave or license, the conclusion was inevitable, that they had voluntarily and actually severed their connection.

But it seems the Pennsylvania Ministerium did not regard its action in that light; for at the next meeting of the General Synod in Fort Wayne, 1866, the Ministerium sent its full number of delegates, who expected to occupy their seats and take part in the elections and proceedings, as though nothing had happened to interfere with its relations to that body. But the president (Rev. S. Sprecher, D. D.) decided, that the Synod "was out of practical union with the General Synod up to the time of the adjournment of the last convention," and could not be received until it applied for re-admission.

The General Synod sustained the president in this decision. After a long and animated discussion the Pennsylvania delegation withdrew again. A few weeks afterwards the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, at its 119th convention, in Lancaster, declared its connection with the General Synod dissolved, on account of the "unjust deprivation of rights, and the conviction, that the task of uniting the conflicting elements in the General Synod has become hopeless."

Thus the Ministerium went out ostensibly on a mere technicality; but it has been denied that this was the real cause of the withdrawal. Professor Jacobs acknowledges as much, when he says, in his "History of the Lutheran

Church in America," p. 468: "Looking back at the contest at Fort Wayne . . . it seems at first sight to have been one mainly of parliamentary fencing. But back of this there were certain principles at stake."

One of the principles objected to was the "centralization of power in the General Synod." "As the ultimate court of appeal, its decision was to be final, and to this the district synods were to submit." "The lessons of the war were fresh. The increased centralization of power in the national government gained in that conflict, and the weakening of the theory of states' rights seemed to give encouragement to an application of the principles within the ecclesiastical sphere. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania, always jealous of its rights, would have speedily reversed the concessions of its delegates on this point. The life of the old Synod could not be merged or lost in that of any general organization."

The Southern States undertook to secede from the United States on the theory of States' Rights, and according to Dr. Jacobs, the Ministerium seceded from the General Synod on the theory of the rights of district synods.

Another principle to which the Ministerium objected was the inequality of representation. It was by far the largest district synod in the General Synod, and yet according to the constitution it could never have more than 18 delegates,—9 ministerial and 9 lay,—while the smallest synod had two delegates, one ministerial and one lay, which it is claimed was out of proportion according to the number of communicants and ministers. If this rule had been changed in accordance with the demand, then of course it would have given the Ministerium the dominant power in the General Synod. The same disproportion in representation prevails also in the Congress of the United States; for example, Rhode Island, the smallest state in

the Union, is entitled to two senators, and New York, the largest state, is entitled by the constitution to only two senators. I do not remember of ever having heard this urged as an objection to the constitution of the United States.

It was also understood that the Ministerium would not be received again with the condition attached to its application with which it had entered in 1853; namely, that its delegates should withdraw and report, whenever they thought a violation of the constitution had been committed. The determination seems to have been reached, that there must be no more distinction in the admission of district synods, and if the Ministerium would apply for re-admission, it must be received like any other district synod that applied.

But perhaps the principal motive for withdrawing was the hope of forming a new general body by uniting all the other Lutheran Synods, hitherto outside of the General Synod into another general organization. In the resolution of withdrawal the Ministerium expresses its "conviction, that the task of uniting the conflicting elements in the General Synod has become hopeless." Individual members gave utterance to the expression, that, as the General Synod had failed to effect the union of the Lutheran Church in this country, they would undertake the work of organizing a general body, in which all the other synods could be united. In accordance with this object, therefore, the General Council was formed. In how far it has succeeded in uniting the church, time has now sufficiently shown. Already in Fort Wayne the delegates courted the favor of the Missourians. Instead of partaking of the Lord's Supper with their brethren in the General Synod during its sessions, a number of them received the communion from Dr. Sihler of the Missouri Synod. "There was doubtless," says Dr. Jacobs, "an earnest, but at the

same time a vague desire for the union of all who were clear in the confession of the distinctively Lutheran faith."—*Jacobs' History*, page 471.

Accordingly a correspondence was entered into by the Ministerium with other Lutheran Synods with reference to the calling of a convention for the organization of a general ecclesiastical body, "on a truly Lutheran basis," and an invitation sent "to all Evangelical Lutheran Synods, ministers and congregations of the United States and Canada, which confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession."

In response to this invitation a convention assembled in Trinity Church, Reading, Pa., December 12-14, 1866. "Thirteen synods were represented. Parts of five had been in the General Synod; namely, Pennsylvania, English Ohio, New York, Pittsburg and Minnesota; the Joint Synod of Ohio, as well as its English District Synod, the Wisconsin, Michigan, German Iowa, Canada, Norwegian, and the Missouri Synod, had sent delegates; Drs. Walther and Sihler sent friendly communications." The first meeting of the General Council took place in Fort Wayne, on November 20th, in the very church where the division had taken place the year before. But the Missouri and Ohio Synods and the German Iowa Synod never connected themselves formally with the General Council, and since then the Michigan and Texas Synods have withdrawn.

The refusal to unite with the Council by the Missouri, Ohio, and German Iowa Synods, and the subsequent withdrawal of other synods, was caused by the so-called "Four Points," Chiliasm, Secret Societies, Exchange of Pulpits and Close Communion. The two latter points found expression in the motto;

"Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran Ministers Only, and Lutheran Altars for Lutheran Members Only."

For the last thirty years from 1866 to 1896, the Gen-

eral Synod and General Council have existed as rival bodies, occupying the same territory side by side, often interfering with each other's congregational and missionary work. During all this time efforts have been made to bring about a reunion, notably by colloquiums, uniform order of worship by the "Common Service," and Luther League. Last year, 1895, the first exchange of friendly "visitors," was agreed upon by both bodies. What these efforts will result in, and when this hoped for union shall be consummated, time only can tell, and God only knows.

In the conclusion of this chapter it will be refreshing to our readers to see what Dr. Jacobs in his "History of the Lutheran Church in America," and Dr. Krauth, Jr., in a series of articles in the "Missionary" paper, have written in praise of the General Synod. Dr. Jacobs says, "The General Synod must be regarded as a very important forward movement. . . . The General Synod was a protest against the socinianizing tendency in New York, (and in Pennsylvania also—*Ed.*), and the schemes of a union with the Reformed in Pennsylvania, and the Episcopalians in North Carolina. It stood for the independent existence of the Lutheran Church in America, and a clear and unequivocal confession of a positive faith. . . . Lament defects as we may, the General Synod saved the church, as it became anglicised from the calamity of the type of doctrine which within the New York Ministerium had been introduced into the English language. It had an outlook that included in its sweep the entire church in all its interests, as the reports on the state of the Lutheran Church in the various synods in this country and throughout the world, appended to its minutes show."

Here is Dr. Krauth's eulogy. "Never," says Dr. Jacobs, "was the cause of the General Synod pleaded with more eloquence."

DR. C. P. KRAUTH'S EULOGY OF THE GENERAL SYNOD.

In 1857, Dr. C. P. Krauth, Jr., published a series of articles in the *Missionary* paper, in which he asserted, that the General Synod was the "hope of the Lutheran Church in this country, 'the offspring of a reviving Lutheranism, born in the dawn that followed the night which fell upon our church in this land, when the patriarchal luminaries of her early history had set on earth to rise in heaven.' Its formation was a great act of faith. When it became completely organized, 'it was the only voluntary body on earth pretending to embrace a nation as its territory, and bearing a Lutheran name, in which the fundamental doctrines of Lutheranism were the basis of union.' 'Heaven pity the fate of the man who looks upon the General Synod as having been a curse to the Church, or an inefficient worker in it, who imagines that the Lutheran Church would be stronger, if the General Synod were weaker.'"—*Jacobs' History, pages 428-9.*