

NOTES ON AMOS AND ELIAS E. ELLMAKER

The demolition of the long, low, frame building in the first square of North Duke street, known as the Ellmaker law office, removes a landmark on "Barbary Coast." Generations of lawyers occupied it, and, while the widow of the late N. Ellmaker lived, it remained a fixture on a valuable lot, centrally located, and which is now to be improved with a handsome modern office building. In the attic of this structure great masses of letters, briefs and other manuscripts have long been stored; and dust deep and thick had settled upon them for years. Some interesting and valuable papers have been found there, though the best of the historical material had been winnowed out before; but none of the correspondence of so distinguished a man as Amos Ellmaker, during nearly a-half century of active literary and professional life, could fail to have some public or private interest.

One of the treasures that has come to light was the notes he took of law lectures at Litchfield, Connecticut, where he studied early in the last century; and, as appears from a letter still extant, the taking of written notes as a student was rather irksome to him.

It will be remembered that he was born in 1787; graduated from Princeton College in the class of 1805, and after completing his law studies he established himself in the practice

of his profession in Harrisburg, Pa. He was an officer in the army which marched to the defense of Baltimore in 1812. Later he was appointed Prosecuting Attorney for Dauphin county, Pa., and was elected three times from the same county to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. In 1814 he was elected to Congress, but declined, having been appointed President Judge of the Dauphin-Lebanon-Schuylkill district. A little later he resigned his Judgeship to become Attorney-General of Pennsylvania, which he also resigned, and in 1821 settled down to the practice of law in Lancaster. In 1817 he declined the portfolio of the War Department in President Monroe's Cabinet. In 1832 he was the candidate of the Anti-Masonic party for Vice President of the United States, on the ticket with William Wirt. In 1834 he was defeated by James Buchanan in the election for United States Senator. Buchanan and George M. Dallas, in 1810, later President and Vice President of the United States, respectively, had been among Ellmaker's deputies when he was the Attorney General of Pennsylvania. He died in Lancaster, Pa., on November 28, 1851.

Mr. J. Watson Ellmaker, of this city, is a son of Esaias Ellmaker, who was a younger brother of Amos, and the uncle of the late Nathaniel Ellmaker. He came into the possession of much valuable correspondence of his distinguished forebears. Among them is this interesting letter, written by Amos Ellmaker, from College, to his father:

"To Mr. Nathaniel Ellmaker,
"Lancaster County.
"March 20, 1804.

"Dear father:

"I received your letter of the 9th Instant, in which was one enclosed for Dr. Smith, but of which you made no mention. I gave it to him. I am rejoiced to hear that you and the family are well. I am in good health. This season of the year renders the health the sedentary, precarious. I caught a violent cold some days ago, which confined me a while, tho' all was soon over. I will this day send for a small trunk to take my cloathes home in. I have to studies to write for next session. Each person must, when he enters the Junior or Senior class, purchase studies at the beginning of the year. I therefor got studies last fall which will serve untill next fall. The vacation after the next will be the time to prepare the studies. But nothing is lost by buying studies for the junior & senior years, as they always can be sold at least for the same price unless abused. I would not like to write my studies; It is true I write much now but never more than a few minutes at a time.

"From your ever Affect. Son

"AMOS ELLMAKER."

"The 'studies' referred to in this letter were probably copies of certain sets of lectures, such as President Witherspoon's discourses on Moral Philosophy; there are several of these in the handwriting of Witherspoon's students, now in the alumni collection of the Princeton University Library. From this letter it appears that these lectures or 'studies' were copied during the vacations, from loaned copies, no doubt, or bought outright by those students whose state of health would not permit such violent exertion. In

them may possibly be found a remote ancestor of our modern half-tolerated and half-encouraged syllabus," says the "Princeton Alumni Weekly," of February 9, 1801, at which time Mr. Ellmaker had loaned the original letters to the University Library.

Another Noted Ellmaker.

It is not so well known hereabouts, however, that Amos Ellmaker had an elder brother, who had strong intellectual qualities, which by reason of his early death never so matured as to earn for him the distinction of his kinsman. Elias E. Ellmaker was graduated from Princeton in 1801, having previously graduated, in the class of 1799, from Dickinson College, Carlisle—then a Presbyterian institution, later and now under Methodist control. He was prepared for college by instruction at the Pequea Academy, under Rev. Dr. Robert Smith. Then the classical academy kept close to the Presbyterian Church, and the preacher was generally a teacher of the youth as well as an intellectual, social and even political leader of the adults. It was of this Parson Robert Smith that the writer, in his monograph on the "Scotch-Irish in Lancaster County," says:

"How simple, for example, these entries in the Bible of a Londonderry immigrant, converted by Whitfield at fifteen: 'Dec. 27, 1749, licensed to preach the gospel; May 22, 1750, married Betsey Blair; Oct. 9, 1750, accepted a call from Pequea and Leacock; March 25, 1751, ordained and installed; March 16, 1751, on Saturday, at 10 o'clock p. m., my son Samuel was born. I Samuel, 1:xx., "She bare a son and called his name Samuel, saying because I have asked him of the

Lord." ' Then in rapid succession—before the days of 'race suicide'—the Lord so heard him—within thirteen years, eight in all! And yet in that humble parsonage, up there almost in the wilderness, where Robert Smith served his God and ministered to his people continuously for forty-two years, 'a great part of the clergy of this State received the elements of their education or perfected their theological studies.' Under that lowly roof, associated for a time with the great divine who was the head of its household, was James Waddell, the 'Blind Preacher,' whom William Wirt immortalized, whom Patrick Henry declared to be the greatest orator of his time, and who became the progenitor of the giant Alexanders of Princeton. One of Smith's pupils, John McMillen, became the apostle of Presbyterianism in Western Pennsylvania, founded Jefferson College, and, from a log cabin in Washington county, sent more young men into the ministry than any other individual in the continent before the days of theological seminaries. From the loins of that same Robert Smith sprang a son, John Blair, who became president both of Hampden Sidney and Union Colleges, and that eldest son, Samuel Stanhope, whose birth he reverently chronicled as 'asked of God,' lived to become Professor of Moral Philosophy, reorganized Princeton College when the incidents of the Revolutionary War had dispersed its students and faculty, married Witherspoon's daughter and succeeded him in the Presidency of Princeton."

Strangely enough, William Wirt, the brilliant Virginia lawyer, whose speech on this "blind preacher," James Waddell, became an American classic, ran

on the same Presidential ticket with Amos Ellmaker, whose brother—possibly himself—was an academy boy on the log benches of the high school at Pequea Church.

This Elias E. Ellmaker, elder brother of Amos, and uncle of the late Nathaniel, is recalled to the writer, who recently "picked up" a volume entitled "The Revelation of Rights, by Elias E. Ellmaker, Esq., published at Columbus, Ohic, in 1841." It was apparently "printed for the publisher" ten years after the death of its author—and it would be interesting to know why, having prepared it for publication, it never was printed in his lifetime. He inscribed it "To the Human Family," instead of dedicating it, after the earlier fashion, to some patron of wealth or person of fame. He sought the "humble approbation of the honest and independent heart wherever it may be found;" and in his preface he recognizes that he "rows against the wind and stems the tide;" he fearlessly declared against "all tyranny or bondage," and planted his "eternal veto against all usurpation by man, and all tyranny, slavery, rapine and murder, in the name or under the titled authority of government." It was throughout a passionate appeal against African slavery and every other form of physical or intellectual bondage.

The author of this book began the practice of law at Waynesburg, Greene county, Pa.—then as yet one of the most backward county seats in the State—and died in Philadelphia at the age of thirty-one—about ten years after his graduation. After another decade, one J. S. Morris published his book.

In the annals of Princeton College

and University this Ellmaker is notable and important because one of his letters throws a flood of light on the student riots that played so important a part in the early history of the institution. The Princeton Weekly, heretofore quoted, says:

“The various histories of Princeton mention the Great Fire of 1802, when Nassau Hall was burned and an investigation failed to prove that the students started the fire, though they were, apparently, the only ones suspected; and of the Great Rebellion of 1807, when the undergraduates barred the doors and windows of Nassau Hall, repulsed the faculty’s attack and withstood the siege for several days. It was a time of tactless discipline, that defeated its own ends and bred a spirit of discontent among the students probably unparalleled in the annals of the college. Besides, they had no athletics in those days, to teach self-control and to afford a safety-valve for superabundant physical energy. It was the same spirit of discontent, doubtless, that gave rise to the ‘revolution’ so graphically described below, and which, so far as The Weekly knows, is not mentioned in any of the histories, though, in the opinion of Elias Ellmaker, it ‘exceeded any that has heretofore ever happened.’

“to Mr. Nathaniel Ellmaker

“Lancaster County

“Pennsylvania.

“P. Colledge February 28th 1800.

“Dear Father

“I this day received yours dated the 23....I have (as I conceive) made considerable progress in my studies this session. I have studied Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry & am now studying Surveying; & my leisure

hours, which are few, I employ in reading such books as are & will be applicable to my studies in Colledge.But I must also tell you now that we have had a revolution in colledge perhaps that exceeded any that has heretofore ever happened, the circumstances of which I shall mention in as summary manner as possible. The mornings being very cold this winter & the tutors praying very long in the morning, some of the students fell into a practice of scraping & disturbing them during their performance they past undetected for some considerable time. At last they took up three members of the Senior Class on suspicion they told them that they had proof of their guilt the students thinking that they had, immediately confessed thinking by that means to be cleared however it proved the contrary & they were immediately suspended from college. two of the Gentlemen being Virginians & the greater part of the students being from that settlement, thought the determination of the faculty to be too severe they according together with a number of others determined to resent it by disturbances Bullets, brick-bats &c, barrels of stones and other combustibles rung through the colledge for two or three days. Dr. Smith lectured us, all was silent for about two weeks one of the other Gentlemen who was suspended took it in his head to beat some of the tutors. he accordingly by a concerted plan, lay in weight in the entries (it being after night) whilst one of the students rolled a three pounder the tutor coming out to pick up the bullet, he immediately attacked him & beat him, then cleared himself unknown. This again stirred up the students & for about three days

the Colledge re-echoed with stones. Dr. Smith lectured us, called us together about ten o'clock at night, but all in vain, he then determined to shut up colledge, till a board of trustees met. But fortunately all disturbance ceased & the Colledge returned to its former regularity &c

"No more at present

"from your affectionate &c

"ELIAS ELLMAKER

"To Nathaniel Ellmaker.

"P. S. You mentioned that Margaret was preparing some stockings for me. I also wish that she would make me some shirts which might be sent on by Hand's Sons. I shall not want any money this session unless something unforeseen should happen."

The "Weekly" continues: "Who the unfortunate tutor was for whom the Virginian 'lay in weight' is not certainly known, but as Henry Hollock 1794 and Frederick Beasley 1797 were the tutors for the year 1800, it was probably one of these. Tutor Beasley was afterward Provost of the University of Pennsylvania."

The "Margaret" referred to in the "postscript" was, of course, Margaret Ellmaker, afterwards married to George Kinzer, of Earl township. The "Hand's Sons" referred to were sons of Gen. Edw. Hand, who lived and died at "Rockford," on the Conestoga, near "Indian Hill" and "Williamson Park," between Witmer's Bridge and Reigart's Landing. He was Washington's Adjutant and a member of the Continental Congress, 1784-5. He sent his boys to Princeton. One can see his grave and tombstone at the southeast corner of St. James' Episcopal Church, by glancing over the Orange street church-yard wall. The blood spots of the Hand suicide will never fade from the parlor floor at "Rockford."

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