

DR. ALBERT DUFRESNE,

A MAN OF MYSTERY

There are certain words of the Divine Wisdom which are full of encouragement—be it reverently spoken—to those among us who know the care, research, time and patience required in the preparation of the briefest paper to be read before this society.

“For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.”—St. Luke. 12: 2.

It is a well-known fact that some of the most useful discoveries in science have been the result apparently of accident. In a like manner some of our best “finds” in the historical line have come to us, and have given a clue to much which has proved interesting and important. In this way the very curious document which has been the inspiration of this paper came to light. It was found among a number of old French papers belonging to the Le Roy family, who, as Huguenots, left Switzerland and sought a home and religious liberty in a new country. When Mr. F. H. Breneman handed it to me neither he nor I knew to whom or to what it had reference. With his permission I brought the paper home, and soon found that there was much that was interesting connected with it. So much by way of explanation as to how it came into my hands.

The Document in Question.

The document in question, brown and worn with age, yet with the ink as black as in the day it was written, consists of four closely written pages in a clerkly hand. The language is French, and the words are so misspelled and run together that it was not only hard to read, but difficult to translate. The signatures, of which there are many, are adorned with wonderful flourishes. The localities mentioned in it are all connected with the early history of the Le Roys, which may partially explain the fact of its being among their family papers. In fact, it was with the hope of learning some new facts regarding our common ancestry that I studied it; and it was a great surprise to discover that it gave considerable insight into the past history of one of the most remarkable characters in the medical profession in Lancaster—a man of whom little is known but of whom most of us have heard.

Of Honorable Lineage.

According to Mr. Stapleton, in his work on the Huguenots, the name Du Fresne, De Frain, Du Frain, belongs to an honorable lineage, and to the French nobility. The subject of this paper was born, as he himself states, on June 20, 1748. He had a brother, Samuel, and a sister, Ann Margaret, but nothing is said as to his birthplace, which was probably somewhere in that part of Switzerland known as Neufchatel. He became a minister, and until the year 1786, when he was thirty-eight years of age, was pastor of the parish of Sornetant. His troubles seem to have begun the preceding year. Serious charges were brought against him, and his trial was ordered Nov.

12, 1785, by the Aulic council of the Bishop of Basle. This name Aulic is applied to the two highest Courts of the old German Empire, co-ordinate with the Imperial Chamber. These courts held aloof from politics, but decided matters of feudality and settled questions of appeal on the parts of the States from decisions of minor courts in favor of the Emperor. As at this date the Canton of Neufchatel was a Prussian tributary, it came under the laws of that country. In this case, however, the trial seems to have been before an ecclesiastical court.

Charges Against Albert Fresne.

There were seven distinct and separate charges brought against Albert Fresne. I shall touch upon them very briefly here, to return to them later in full. He is accused of being a poacher, a maligner, a disturber of the peace, a brawler, an endangerer of life and of society, with other and various misdemeanors. In reading all this we would have thought the case one to be brought before the ordinary law courts, and at first glance it seemed like the ordinary Huguenot persecution. But the seventh and last charge seems to explain the whole thing. He is accused of attacking Christianity, saying that "the Word which he had hitherto preached was only falsehood and imposture, and that he was without delay going to embrace another religion." In the meantime, Fresne had left Sornetant, although he must have returned for a brief period. He was "a fugitive" during the trial. He was found guilty of all the charges against him, and was deposed from "his office of Minister and Pastor," sentenced to be pilloried, to pay the costs of the trial, and "to a perpetual banishment from

the Lands of the Principality." The sentence could not be "executed against his person, because of his flight." It was therefore ordered to be read on a Sunday at the close of the morning office, in the churches at Delemont and at Sornetant, and afterwards posted up on the "Black Table." It was torn down in one of these churches.

It would be interesting, in view of these facts, to know to what form of religion Dufresne belonged. Many in the Canton were Protestants. If he professed the Huguenot faith, it is a little hard to understand by what authority "the Aulic Council of the Bishop of Basle, Prince of the Holy Empire," could depose "him from his office of Minister and Pastor of the Parish of Sornetant."

Under these circumstances, it was impossible for Albert Fresne to remain in Switzerland. From that country he seems to have gone to Italy, and to have studied medicine at the famous University of Padua.

Sought Fortune in America.

Two years later, in 1788, with his sister, Anna Margueritte Carnal, a demand was made for a "reparation of honor" at Chaux de Fonds, also in Neufchatel. By this time Fresne must have decided to seek his fortunes in the New World, and in consequence desired to come to America with a clean record. His request seems to have been refused. In the Penna. Archives, 2d Series, Vol. XVII, page 533, in the "List of Passengers who arrived at Philadelphia from London, July 8, 1788," is the following entry in the French language:

"The Minister and Doctor, Albert Fresne, his wife Lidia, two children, Albert and Albertine."

In the same ship, name not given,

came Charles Frederick Dubois. We shall hear of him later.

In the number of "The Lancaster Zeitung" of August 19, 1789, the following advertisement appears:

A. DU FRESNE, DOCTOR,

Of the high School of Turin, Master of Surgery of the Faculty of Balenz, and graduate of medicine in the Faculty of Padua, has the honor to inform his friends that he will shortly be located and can be found in the house on Queen street lately occupied by Frederick Mann."

In this manner he made himself known to the people of Lancaster, and also appears to have resumed the aristocratic "du" in his name.

Nov. 30, 1789, in the same paper, he and Josiah Lockert offer \$40 reward to find out who broke their doors and windows in the early morning of Nov. 19.

In the U. S. Census of 1790 for Lancaster Borough he appears as head of a family, with two males under sixteen years of age, and three free females, probably his wife, his daughter, and a servant. According to Ellis and Evans, p. 248, he was known as the "Swisser Doctor," and the "Old Doctor." He had a run on a salve which he put up in small bladders, and which was quite efficacious. His name appears quite frequently on the books of the Recorder's Office, the earliest date being Feb. 1, 1790, F. 3, p. 122. He seemed to have lent money on mortgage to several people. Our "Doctor in Physick," as he calls himself more than once, must have had an eye for profit. One of his conditions as to payment reads thus: "To be paid in English guineas of full and sufficient weight," F. 3, p. 746, June 7, 1803; another, "In English guineas to weigh five pennyweights and six grains each," F. 3, p. 172.

Evans says he lived in the second square of North Duke street. Perhaps he did in the latter years of his life; but according to an advertisement in the Lancaster Journal, April 28, 1809, "P. and D. Reigart removed their general store to the house of Dr. Dufresne, between the taverns of Messrs. Adam Weaver and Samuel Carpenter, N. Queen Street, lately occupied by Mr. William Haverstick."

This house had been offered for rent, Jan. 10, 1809, by Christopher Mayer.

A Bank Director.

In January, 1810, the Farmers' Bank in Lancaster was founded. One of its directors was Dr. Dufresne. It was decided to locate it in his house, where The New Era building now stands, and it was rented for three years, at \$200 per year, from Feb. 1.

Something in the management of the bank must have displeased the Doctor. In the Journal of June 23, of July 7, 14 and 21, 1810, appear the following:

"To the Stockholders of the Farmers' Bank of Lancaster.

"Whereas the Directors of the Farmers' Bank of Lancaster act contrary to the articles of association of this bank, and the profit and benefit of the subscribers, the subscriber hereby makes known his intention of withdrawing from this association; and offers for sale 150 shares in said bank.

"Dr. A. Dufresne."

Here is the Directors' response on June 30:

NOTICE

"At a meeting of the directors of the Farmers' Bank of Lancaster, on Tuesday, June 26, Mr. John Gundacker was unanimously elected a director of said bank in the room of Dr. Albert Dufresne."

On April 11, 1811, the bank was removed, probably for the above reasons, to the house of Michael Gundaker, now 108 East King Street. (Centennial number of the Lancaster Intelligencer.)

It is rather curious that after all this the Farmers' Bank should finally have been established in a piece of property which once had been owned in part by Dufresne. He sold the "undivided moiety" of the lot, 32 feet 2¼ inches fronting on King street, east on Duke street, 117 feet to a nine foot alley, to Philip Reigart, July 8, 1813, for \$7,810. (Book 7, p. 502.) Nov. 23, 1813, Reigart sold the same to the bank for \$17,000. But, after all, as is shown by the bank records, our doctor did not sell his stock. He held on to it as a profitable investment and drew the dividends with unfailing regularity.

Dufresne's Observatory.

Back of The New Era building there was an old odd-shaped edifice. It was known as Dufresne's Observatory, and is said to have been used by him as a laboratory and dissecting room, and to have been built by him.

Dr. Dufresne must have had a large and lucrative practice. He is said to have been quite wealthy, and to have been a lavish entertainer. His sons, Albert and Samuel, both followed their father's profession.

He died in 1823. In the Intelligencer of Aug. 8, 1823, is this notice of his death:

"In this city, on the 2nd inst., after a protracted and painful illness, in the 80th year of his age, Dr. Albert Dufresne, a native of Prussia, and many years an inhabitant of this city. He was an indulgent parent, an ardent friend, a successful practitioner, and an honest man."

He was buried in the cemetery of the Reformed Church, but about 1850 his remains and those of the other members of his family were removed to the Lancaster Cemetery.

Dufresne's Will.

It has been said of him that he was one of the eccentric characters of Lancaster. The only proof of this which can be given is in the following extract from his will, which is dated Dec. 8, 1820, and was proved August 18, 1823, N. 1, p. 331, Peter Reed and Philip Gloninger being named as executors. The latter refused to serve, and Dr. Samuel Dufresne was appointed in his place. The witnesses are John Bachman and Dan. Reigart, Albert's death having preceded that of his father. The will bears his own seal. The impression seems to have been made with a ring, for it is small. The wax is black. Around the device, an eagle or some other bird "displayed," as nearly as could be made out, is a garland of leaves:

"My body I cheerfully commit to the earth, to be interred as has been my custom in the interment of my dearly in God departed wife, and of my dear son Albert either in the morning before sunrise or in the evening after the setting of the sun without the ringing of bells or any other procession or ceremony as is here the custom." He goes on to say: "It is my will and I do order that a Tombstone be procured and placed over my grave with the following inscription engraved thereon in the German language:"

"Here lies under the protection of God in the expectation of blessed resurrection the Body of

DR. C. S. A. ALBERT DUFRESNE, SR.,

Born June 20, 1748.

"He gave up his blessed soul into the hands of his Creator the ____ day of _____, was buried the ____ day of _____.

"I was, I am, and I will be thine forever, my dearest God. With the dates inserted therein as the times when the same ~~small~~ happen may require."

His wishes were obeyed as regards his tomb. There are no public bequests in his will. Everything goes to his natural heirs, and it may be said, in this connection, that there are no descendants of his in our city. There are two other legacies, one of \$500 to his sister, Ann Margaret, and one of \$1,000 to his brother, Samuel, "if he should ever come to the United States of America, or if he be in necessitous circumstances no matter where he be."

According to the inscriptions on the tombstones, Dr. Dufresne died Aug. 2 and was buried Aug. 3, 1823. The inscription is in German, as is that of his son, Dr. A. B. Albert, who died Nov. 12, 1812, aged 35 years, 3 months and 20 days. Next to the "Old Doctor" lies his wife. Her inscription is in Latin, and is almost illegible:

"Here lies awaiting a blessed resurrection the body of

DONA LIDIA DU FRENE,

Born Floteron,

Wife of Doct. Alb. du Frene.

"She fell asleep in the Lord the 16th day and was buried the 19th day of August, 1799."

His daughter, Albertine M. H., died March 8, 1812, and his son, Dr. Samuel Dufresne, on Aug. 8, 1835, in the 45th year of his age. These inscriptions are in English.

A Man of Rare Ability.

Dr. Albert Dufresne must have been a man of more than ordinary ability.

He seems to have been familiar alike with German, French, Italian and English. Leaving his home under a cloud, the shadow of which followed him, he abandoned his first profession, and at the age of forty began life afresh, under a new name, as it were, and in a new country. Here he gained fortune and success.

By his side in the Lancaster Cemetery lie his wife, Lidia, his daughter, Albertine, and his sons, Albert and Samuel. The latter was a fine physician and had many friends. He died Aug. 8, 1835. His will, dated Aug. 6, 1835, proved Aug. 11, 1835, executors, "my friends and neighbors, George H. Bomberger and Henry G. Long," witnesses, John Bomberger and John W. Hubley, R. 1, p. 142, contains a few items of interest. He exempts all persons on his books from any payment. In case he has no heirs, the whole estate is to go to the Orphans' Asylum of the city of Philadelphia; \$500 to the President and members of the Phylharmonican Society of Lancaster, of which he was a member, and his Aeolian crescenda and musical glasses, with their stand and case.

Remembered Dr. Dufresne.

Since the above was written, Mrs. S. A. Cox, residing at the Bishop Bowman Church Home, tells me that she distinctly remembers Dr. Samuel Dufresne. He took his meals at the Grape Hotel, directly opposite his residence. Mrs. Cox was a little girl, eleven years old, and frequently was in the Doctor's house. She describes him as a slight, spare man, shy and retiring, but with charming manners. He was quite a musician, and she had often heard him play on his musical glasses. His parlor was full of beautiful things, and the yard of the house was carefully cultivated as a flower

garden, with many choice and beautiful plants, which he was very fond of, showing to any one who appreciated them.

This is all that the most careful research has brought to light. In conclusion, I will read the old document which prompted the writing of this paper:

Translation of Old Document.

On the part of the Aulic Council of His Highness, Monseigneur the Bishop of Basle, Prince of the Holy Empire. The suit begun officially against Albert Fresne, minister of Sornetan, a fugitive, the depositions of the witnesses heard and the public citation and trial decreed against him the 12th of last 9th (November) in the Sessions of which he has not presented himself to justify himself, if he had been able from the faults, crimes attempts and scandals with which he is charged in the information raised against him, and in view of which he no longer can be considered but as a man brutal, ferocious and dangerous, wanton an impious seducer, scandalous and incorrigible. The Council has declared the accused well and validly informed and contumacious, in consequence and in judging the said Albert Fresne duly attainted, charged & convicted.

1st Of having been a poacher by profession who, not content with having personally violated the laws of the chase which hold in the Provostship of Moutier Grand Val, has carried his audacity to the point of giving himself up openly to these misdoings and that several times even during the holy days of Sundays in associating with himself a number of his Parishioners to hunt every kind of Game with him with noise, clamor and crowd, so much

the more dangerous that no one without exposing themselves could have dared to go near them, and be far from putting the slightest obstacle to the liberty which they gave themselves, or to the ravages which they dared to commit in all the hunting grounds of the environs; it was he who by virtue of his office, should have turned away his Parishioners from everything which could injure the rights of his Sovereign, who himself hastened to seduce them to become with him, the open and rash transgressors of the Laws of his Prince.

2nd Of having signalized his character of disobedience. independence, and a species of rebellion, in speaking against the person of the Prince of happy memory, against their excellencies of Berne or his ecclesiastical Superiors, against the Seigneurie and its orders, and against other persons placed in dignity in this Country with the most outrageous scorn and lack of respect, by permitting himself on all occasions the most insulting expressions.

3rd Of having vilified, insulted, beaten, attacked and struck the subaltern officers of His Highness and others of the Parishes of the Community by treating them unworthily even in the exercise of their functions so that in his Parish no one could perform his duty without being exposed to the blows and fury of this furious and brutal man.

4th Of having by his speech and conversation both impious and unmannerly, as well as by his horrible invectives and imprecations so degraded and debased both ecclesiastical and temporal discipline that only the greatest scandals and the most frightful disorders could result from them.

5th Of having inflicted blows on several private individuals, often with instruments capable of inflicting death, which added to the most atrocious and terrible threats, by aiming at them with a gun and announcing to them that he was ready to take their lives, caused him to be looked upon in the society as a formidable, ferocious and dangerous man.

6th Of forgetting what he owed to religion, to his reputation, and to himself, of having in the most scandalous and infamous manner offended the modesty of a number of matrons and maidens in the Parish entrusted to his care, having shown his evil mindedness by traits which made him appear more as a public pest than the Shepherd of souls whom he should have guided and preserved in virtue.

And finally 7th That far from showing any signs of repentance, to have had the effrontery during the course of his citation and the peremptory term which was finally accorded to him to appear in court and justify himself, if he could, from the charges against him; to come back to the precincts of Sornetant with three pistols and other arms there to renew his threats, excesses and misdemeanors, and brazen forth his impieties, tumults and disorders in expressing himself in the most disrespectful terms against the orders of His Highness and of his court, as well as against Christianity, by even saying that the Word which he had preached until to-day was only falsehood and imposture, and that he was without delay going to embrace another religion. On hearing this the Attorney General in these conclusions and considering the criminal ordinance of the Emperor Charles V. the Council, in

just punishment for his crimes, to inspire horror of them and to serve as examples, has condemned and does condemn the said Albert Fresne to be exposed during the space of half an hour at the side of the pillory at Delemont, having a scroll on which shall be written these words:

“An impious, scandalous, turbulent and dangerous Minister, that he be taken to the foot of the grand Staircase of the Hotel de ville, where on his knees, bareheaded, and carrying in his hand a lighted wax candle, he shall ask pardon of God, of His Highness, and of justice for these impieties, disorders, and scandals. And in deposing him from his office of Minister and Pastor of the Parish of Sornetant, which they declare vacant and impenetrable, he is besides condemned to a perpetual banishment from the Lands of the Principality, after having sworn the customary oath, and to the costs of the Trial.” And as the present Sentence, because of his flight, cannot be executed against his person, the Council orders that it be published both at Delemont and at the Parish of Sornetant, for the following assembly one Sunday at the close of the morning office, and afterwards posted up on the Black Table, in both places, so that he can under no pretext be ignorant of the cause; and enjoins on him to keep his exile under penalty of being punished as disobedient and refractory to the orders of justice. So ordered in Council held at the Chateau of Porantreux.

The 6th February, 1786.

Signed

DE SCHONAN,

with “flourish.”

The present sentence was read at the going out of the Parish before

the whole assembly, this 12th February, 1786. Attested.

JEAN JACQUES KOCHET
Grand Constable.

The undersigned attests having taken down the same Sentence on the evening of Tuesday, 14th February, from the Black Table of Sornetant, to which it had been affixed by the Grand Constable after the publication which he had made of it on the preceding Sunday to the People, at the going out from the morning office,

Signed

AUBRIG,
Actuary.

The undersigned certifies having published and affixed to the Black Table of this City, on the 12th of February 1786, a copy of the present Sentence which he did not find there again, having desired also to take it down that the information of Albert Fresne which had been placed by his act at Delemont, March 13, 1786.

Signed

S. MISREZ,
Prothonotary

Compared and found comformable to the true original under the placing of the great Seal of the Seigneurie of Moutier Grand Val and the Signature of the Lieutenant of His Highness in his aforesaid Seigneurie of Moutier at the request of Anne Margueritte feu Jean Pierre Carnal de Sonceboz at Delemont, February 25, 1788.

Signed

B. BAJOL
Lieut.

L. S. The undersigned, Notary Public and sworn at Locle, a place dependant of the Counts of Neufchatel and

Valangin, in Switzerland, declares he has taken the extracts above and below transcribed upon the record of a Proceeding before the honorable Justice of the Chaux de fond, Signed T. T. Strand, Notary and Prothonotary (greffier) of the said Chaux de fond, dated March 14, 1788. Which proceeding was instituted on the occasion of a demand for "reparation" of honor made by Anne Margueritte Carnal and Albert Fresne. Certifying in consequence to all and to each to whom it will appertain, that the contents of the above writing is entirely in conformity for its substance to what is carried on the said expedition, having been duly compared, at the requisition of the Sieur Esaye Matheu, Sous receveur Come, having charge from Sieur Charles Fredrich Dubois of Locle, at present in Philadelphia. In faith of which I have signed the presents at Locle, the 23, 8 bre, 1789.

JEANNERET.

We, Jean Henry Vagneux, Mayor and Chief in the Jurisdiction of Locle, a place dependent of the Principality of Neuchatelle and Valangin in Switzerland, in the name and by the authority of His Majesty the King of Prussia, our Sovereign Prince and Lord.

We certify to all those whom it may concern at present and in the future—That the Sieur Charles T. Jenneret, who has verified the copy here before informed is truly a Notary Public and sworn in in all the extent of this Principality, so that to all the acts and writings which are given and signed by him as thus qualified, and under this relation full and entire faith can and ought to be added to them in judgment. And besides in declaring moreover that stamped paper is not

the custom of the country; in witness of which we have signed this Legalization with our own hand, have put on it the Seal of our Arms, and ordered our Greffier to send them and countersign them with his customary Seal. Given at Locle, the 18th of November, 1789.

By Ordinance Vagneux.

JEAN HENRY VAGNEUX.

Mayor of Locle

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