

LITITZ AS AN EARLY MUSICAL CENTRE.

THE history of music in Lancaster county begins with the early religious movements. The county of high agricultural destiny was in the making—with axe and plowshare—and there was neither opportunity nor occasion for serious or organized effort in the field of music outside of the religious communities. Religion, from the earliest times, has been embellished and strengthened by the subtle coloring with which melody invests verse. Locally, life in religious communities was favorable for musical development, not so much because music was part of the religious ceremonial, but because it afforded one of the few diversions which the rigorous community laws allowed. Fortunately for our subject, Ephrata and Lititz, the two prominent settlements where spiritual and secular interests were under a common supervision, have both handed down sufficiently accurate historical records, in the *Chronikon Ephratensis* and in the Moravian archives, to indicate the musical character of these communities. A sketch of the early music of the county rightly involves a consideration of both places.

In an exhaustive paper on the "Music of the Ephrata Cloister," read in 1902 by Dr. Julius F. Sachse before the Pennsylvania-German Society, it is shown that the versatile and confident Conrad Beissel, with no musical

training and with the most rudimentary knowledge of the common chord and its inversions, evolved a distinctive system of harmony, on the basis of which he composed numerous hymn tunes and part songs. These compositions, transposed into standard notation, are quaint in melody, crude in harmony and entirely lacking in metre and rhythm; but they are remarkable as being original in fibre, as well as weave, and they form a most interesting chapter in the history of music in America. Beissel instructed his followers in his musical system and taught them to sing the hymns and part songs falsetto voice, without opening the lips. This produced a weird effect which has been described in contemporary accounts of visitors as beautiful, though this impression was no doubt attributable to the quality of the voices, the way they were used, and the enthusiasm that was back of the ensemble; for the old scores as we have them to-day are not only musically incorrect, but being without definite measure, metre or rhythm are musically incoherent and impossible. Beissel's compositions and activity in music date from 1739. A considerable collection of hymns, written mostly by him and published in 1747, appeared as *Das Kirren der Einsamen und Verlassenen Turtel Taube*—a title possibly of Biblical reference, but one suggesting the reflection that the gravel shallows of the Cocalico were the watering places of the turtle doves of the Eighteenth Century as they are to-day, and that the mournful call of this bird accorded in Beissel's mind with the ideal earthly joylessness of his sect.

However praiseworthy and historically interesting the music of the Ephrata cloister is, it is clear that it

cannot be classed as true music by the elevated standards that existed even in the Eighteenth Century.

The historical and traditional data concerning Lititz was obtained from Abraham R. Beck, a man whose age, knowledge of music, and present activity as archivist of the Moravian congregation, qualify him fully to furnish it. The first accounts of anything beyond hymnal music in the Moravian community at Lititz date from 1765. In that year Bernhard Adam Grubé organized an orchestra among the brethren. Grubé had been a missionary among the Indians of Pennsylvania before he became pastor of the Moravian Church at Lititz. He was a man of varied talents and university culture, having studied at Jena, and an accomplished all-around musician, with sufficient skill on several instruments and knowledge of others to instruct the likely members of the community on the various pieces of a full orchestra, as well as in the principles of harmony. Grubé may be considered the pioneer musician of Lancaster county. The orchestra was composed mostly of the young men of the Brethren's house. The purposes of its organization were that it should supplement the music of the church, and that it might give many of the brethren useful and pleasant occupation between hours of work; for the principles of the community abhorred idleness and frowned upon all light pastime, such as checkers and chess. Even the simple play of fig-mill (a game played with yellow and red corn grains on a board, and written "reek meer" in the archives) was absolutely forbidden.

The musical activities of the Lititz community apparently were prosecuted with thoroughness and consid-

erable taste and skill, for the general culture of the place was high and the people took to music naturally. Among the compositions then and there practiced, which are extant in the church archives, is to be found a series of musicianly suites, named on their covers "Partien," which were scored for two oboes, two horns and a bassoon, and which seem to have afforded the players an occasional pleasant change from their usual full orchestra labors. All of the music is in beautifully copied manuscript.

Many of the instruments of this orchestra are preserved in the museum of the Lititz Church. They include violin, viola, violoncello, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, key bugle, trombone, French horn, ophokleide and serpent, the latter a curious woodwind instrument with an oxhorn mouthpiece, and so named because its lines follow exactly the conventional pictures of the embodiment of original sin as found in antique illuminated editions of the Old Testament. The serpent is called for in the scores of some of the older compositions, like Mendelssohn's Oratorio of St. Paul; but it seems to have been of uncertain musical value, for it was discarded by composers many years ago. The French horns are valveless, the tones and semi-tones being produced by skillful manipulation of the player's fist in the bell.

The number and variety of these instruments indicate the completeness of the orchestral organization as it existed in the early days, and several of them are mute testimony to the general advancement of the Lititz Community in music. Even to-day there is not a single performer on either the oboe or the bassoon in Lancaster county, so that when local musicians need these important reed

pieces for full orchestration they must be imported from the larger cities.

One of the members of the orchestra—a violinist—was Tobias Hirte, a unique character whom, strangely enough, Rudyard Kipling has introduced into two of his stories, "Brother Square-toes" and "A Priest in Spite of Himself," in his book "Rewards and Fairies." Hirte was a teacher of the boys' parochial school. There is frequent reference to this man in the archives which throws light on his adoption by Kipling and which make it quite clear that Hirte had an enterprising, if not irrepressible, spirit, which at flood tide called upon him the rebukes of the Aufseher Collegium—the board that supervised the secular movements of the village. One entry in the archives, germane to our general subject, is worthy of quotation as being a picture of the repressive Community law and on account of its reference to conditions as they existed in Lititz when the wounded from Brandywine were being cared for at the improvised hospitals in the Brethren's and Sisters' Houses. The translation reads:

"May 7 (1778) some of the young people—among them several of our musicians—are in the habit of indulging late into the night in merry-making at the big spring, where Tobias Hirte has laid out a special place for that purpose. Soldiers go there also. This has given the congregation and ourselves great offence! Yet what is to be done, seeing that Dr. Allison (an army physician) was there too and that this place was planned partly for his sake? Put Dr. Allison has respect for our congregation rules, and we may not hesitate to tell him why we are opposed to this rendezvous and ask him kind-

ly, for love of us, to absent himself from it. Tobias Hirte shall be summoned to appear before the brethren of the conference and told not to dare in the future to begin such a thing on our land—for he is given to sudden ideas of such a kind—especially not without permission; and secondly to leave the place of the spring as it now is and do nothing more to it.”

Hirte was thus the first to carry music to the spring, a “sudden idea” which, like his recognition of the sporting possibilities of his flintlock gun (elsewhere in the archives), smacked too strongly of worldliness to go entirely unchallenged in his day.

Coincident with the formation of the orchestra in 1765, there came to Lititz the organ builder Tannenberg (colloquially Tanneberger). He was one of the earliest in this line in America. He built pipe organs for Trinity Lutheran and St. Mary's Catholic churches in Lancaster, and many others that went to Philadelphia and other points throughout the State, and also to Albany, N. Y., Virginia, North Carolina, and elsewhere. Tanneberger was a good musician and he became a member of the orchestra.

It is probable that the Brethren's house orchestra of 1791 was then at its best, for it contained many of Grubé's well-trained players, and it was led by George Godfrey Mueller, a most capable musician and an excellent violinist. In that year, May 29, the Hon. John Randolph, ex-Governor of Virginia and Attorney General of the United States, on his way to Philadelphia, stopped to pay Lititz a visit, putting up at the Zum Anker inn, and expressed a desire to hear the Brethren's music. Brother Mueller was away in Lancaster at the time, but to disappoint so distinguished a

guest was unthinkable, so a messenger was sent post-haste for the conductor and the complimentary concert came off in the evening.

The Philharmonic Society, existing between 1815 and 1845, had in its ranks many good musicians. The recognition which the community received in the musical circles of the country, during this period, is shown by the fact that when the Creation was sung for the first time in Philadelphia, in the early part of the nineteenth century, three brethren from Lititz (as well as others from Bethlehem) were asked to assist in the orchestra. It is related that when the three from Lititz arrived at the hall in the city where the rehearsal was to be held, the conductor asked one of them what instrument he played, to which the modest reply came: "O, I fiddle a little!" But when the work began it was found that these three men read their parts easily at sight. It is rather remarkable that at that time Philadelphia could not raise enough good players for the purpose. The Lititz society subsequently gave the Creation, under the leadership of Rev. Charles F. Kluge, in 1836, and The Seasons at another concert, besides having now access to Haydn's Symphonies and various overtures by Mozart, Rossini and other superior composers. What a contrast between the sublimities of "The Heavens Are Telling" and the music prevailing at the time throughout the county, where the highest aim was "Fisher's Hornpipe" and "The Devil's Dream" on the bar room fiddle. When, in 1840, the society performed Haydn's Farewell Symphony, the last number on the programme, each player snuffed out his candle until finally the concertmeister (Wm. Rauch) played alone and so the concert ended. The Rauch

brothers, Rufus Greider, Jacob Miller, Henry and Ferdinand Levering were important members of the orchestra at that time.

The first village band was organized about 1810. In these latter days, when almost every town has its band, it is difficult to realize the rarity and importance of this first organization. The band as it existed at that time had all of the old-time instruments with the exception of a drum, which the church authorities positively forbade. This restriction was subsequently evaded by the enthusiastic young members, who contrived a substitute for the instrument they dared not purchase, in the shape of a long box of resonant wood, with sound holes over which strips of rawhide were strung. With this they marched away to the woods where they could enjoy it without hindrance.

The next band, after 1820, appears to have had considerable reputation away from home. So rare at that time were such organizations that Lancaster must engage the Lititz band when Lafayette visited that city in 1824, and it furnished the music for the formal opening of the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad, in 1834, accompanying the Governor and his party to Philadelphia. The band sat on top of one of the cars, and it is related that as the train passed along on its triumphal journey an unexpected low bridge knocked off the serpent player's high hat—and untoward accident that was promptly met by an accommodating conductor, who stopped the train long enough for the musician to regain his "stove pipe."

About the time of the organization of the band—to be exact, in 1811—the first recorded Fourth of July celebration was held at the Springs. That the affair did not meet with the entire

approval of a quiet loving and religiously restricted community is shown by an entry in the minutes of the Board of Overseers, of July 22 (1811). "By this opportunity came up the offensive conduct of many of our young people on the Fourth of July (Independence Day), who not only associated with the neighboring military company, which had paraded here during the day, but made merry with music at the Spring, and greatly disturbed the village late into the night, thereby giving cause for criticism from our outlying neighbors."

This was the beginning of what is practically an unbroken series of annual patriotic demonstrations, which in point of priority and long continued regularity can scarcely be equalled anywhere. It is probable that the famous springhead has witnessed a greater number of celebrations of the national birthday than has any other spot in America—a distinction that redounds to the credit of the Lititz community and more than atones for any division of attitude toward the cause of independence which, on account of a religious sense of duty to the English Crown, existed there for several years prior to and during the revolution. These patriotic demonstrations, largely attended as they always were by people from the countryside, must have been of considerable influence in a musical as well as a patriotic way in the county.

A strong contributing factor in the character of Lititz as an early musical center was the continued elevated plane of the church music. The Moravian congregation was equipped with a good pipe organ as early as 1765, and the music of special services was always augmented by orchestral

accompaniment. Beginning with Grubé, this activity was under the supervision of a line of men who were able not only to arrange parts for an elaborate instrumentation, but frequently to add to the musical library of the church by original compositions. Such men as George Godfrey Mueller, John Herbst, John C. Bechler, Charles F. Kluge, Christian Schropp, Peter Wolle and others were capable musicians who upheld good musical standards, and left behind them many compositions that are of real musical merit, as well as appropriateness for the religious occasions for which they were written.

One of the features of the Moravian music, and one which impressed visitors with its beauty from the earliest days, was the slide trombone quartette. This was used chiefly at the outdoor functions, such as the announcement of deaths and inauguration of special festival days from the church steeple, and burial and Easter morning services on the cemetery. The music of this choir was played on four slide instruments—soprano, alto, tenor and bass—the use of which in quartette combination seems to have been restricted—at least in America—to Moravian circles, for there is no record of the minute soprano trombone ever having been used elsewhere. The soft, blending tones which the slide action brought with it produced an effect of rare musical beauty for sacred ensemble which cannot be attained on the valve instruments that were later substituted.

The character of the Lititz community as an early musical center is but one of several features of its early life that tend to show the general culture of the place and the part it played during a long period of the coun-

ty's development. The quality of a people's music is, to a high degree a measure of their intelligence and culture, and by this token the humble village, by the big limestone spring in Warwick township, played an advanced role in the history of Lancaster county.

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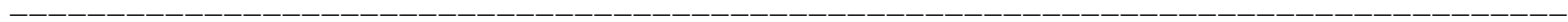
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