

A WITHERED TWIG

Dark Lantern Glimpses Into the Operation of Known Nothingism in Lancaster Sixty Years Ago.

The following article was prepared by the late W. U. Hensel, Esq., and read before the Society on February 5, 1915:

In these hysterical days, when emotionalism seems to be threatening, if not overturning, so many historical, political, social and religious establishments, there is comfort in the philosophical retrospect that it has been so, more or less, in nearly every period of our country's history. The time is ever "out of joint"; and there has been always many a one who cursed the spite that was was "born to set it right."

In politics, for example, between the demagogism of blind leaders and the shallow and fickle enthusiasm of blinder followers, some of us are apt to think Humbug and Delusion never before had such sway of misrule. But, within the easy memory of men still living, our local, State and National politics experienced convulsions such as are scarcely possible to-day. Among these phenomena two notable illustrations were the Anti-Masonic crusade and the Know Nothing movement. Both were national, but each had emphatic significance in our own community, and drew into it many citizens and voters who lived to regret their association and to be keenly sensitive to its reproach upon their good judgment.

More than sixty years have now elapsed since the rise and collapse of the Know Nothing movement, and few of its survivors will read or can be

affected by a brief tale of one "twig" of the order in Lancaster. Their descendants can afford to regard their attitude from an almost jocular point of view.

Chance opened to me the other day the locked and dust-covered minutes of "Lodge 42," of the Know Nothing or Native American Society of the old North East ward of Lancaster city, as it was organized and operated in 1854. The late Joshua W. Jack was a conspicuous figure; and many of the leading members were from the rural districts. With ostrich-like fatuity, many of the members subscribed their names and had their participation recorded in a simple cipher, which reversed the true spelling of them—a simple device that would have required no Poe, nor Sherlock Holmes, nor Burns' Detective Agency to fathom at first glance.

Another and almost as simple a device was the substitution of figures for letters, so that "R. A. Evans" was represented by "17-177 9.6.11.22.23"; and when Charles L. Frick acted as secretary pro tem. he signed the minutes "Sahc. L. Kcirf."

The movement as developed here in 1854 seems to have been especially strong in the rural districts, and many residents of the county outside of Lancaster city are carried on the rolls of membership. "Native American," as its friends called it—or "Know Nothingism," as it was derisively styled by its opponents—had its origin, it will be remembered, in the large cities, where a sudden congestion of foreign population was noted as startling to the native element. Socialism was becoming rampant; the State militia were largely alien born; newspapers in foreign tongues began to appear; Catholic bishops were emboldened to

preach the "Decline of Protestantism," and Protestant prelates retorted with abuse of Jesuitical methods. Converted monks and escaped nuns fired the masses from street corners, while Bendi, Nuncio of the Pope, preached defiance to the law of American States. Pierce, candidate for President, was assailed for favoring religious tests of citizenship, though four years earlier General Taylor, elected in 1848, was marked as a Native American. By 1854-5 the Whig party so far crumbled that the strongest opposition to the Democracy was the American party, with the slogan, "Americans must rule America." Its championship of Fillmore divided the opposition and effectively aided Buchanan's election.

Meantime the North East Ward Native American "twig"—as our Lancaster lodge was called—was blossoming and fruitful. The Hensels fell over each other to get in; John Wise, the aeronaut, was a star member; and on the rolls were borne such honorable names as Albright, Zahm, Foltz, Farier, Absalom (father-in-law of E. T. Fraim), J. Franklin Reigert, biographer of Robert Fulton; the Nixdorfs, Stormfeltzs, Rotes and McCullys, Elias Barr and A. N. Breneman, Solomon Sprecher, J. T. Springer, Theophilus Fehn, William Kirkpatrick, George B. Markley, David Killinger, Garret Evarts, Abraham W. Russell, J. M. W. Geist, Emanuel C. Reigart, James Black, William R. Wilson, Emilen Franklin and Samuel H. Price. Benjamin and Edward Champneys were admitted; Robert A. Evans saw that Thomas E. Franklin was duly "black balled," and afterwards elected.

One of the persistent seekers for admission was my father-in-law, the late Andrew C. Flinn, founder of the house of Flinn & Breneman. Twice

he was rejected; and, finally, admitted by transfer from a "twig" in Wilmington, Del., his former home, where he seems to have gone expressly to join the order. Finally he was expelled for failing to support some of the political candidates approved by the Lancaster Lodge.

Just what "bad eminence" he occupied does not appear of record—though the Know Nothing records were most distinguished for what they did not record. It seems that his father-in-law, the late Hon. Christian Kieffer, who had been already Mayor of Lancaster, 1852-54, was irregularly elected a member of the "twig." An investigation disclosed the fact that (Captain) William G. Kendrick, who aforetime lived on Walnut street, near Duke, and was a close friend and business associate of Mr. Flinn, had privately instructed ex-Mayor Kieffer "in the secrets and workings of our order at Colonel William S. Amweg's office. This was the justification for Mr. Kieffer's rejection, for the pronouncement of his election, as "illegal and a fraud," and for "Cap." Kendrick's expulsion. In 1855 Kieffer was succeeded by Albright, who was elected Mayor by the Know Nothings.

On August 24, 1854, a vote was taken here for the local choice of State candidates. James Pollock, for Governor, and Henry L. Mott, for Canal Commissioner were the favorite candidates and had the local support. Pollock, be it remembered, became Governor of Pennsylvania, by election as an American, just before the movement flickered and the great Republican organization moved into the leadership of political thought and power.

Edmund R. Kline, long time the fa-

cile editor of the "Examiner," was a member of the order, under suspicion of disloyalty to its candidates. A series of newspaper articles, signed "Q in a Corner," was ascribed to him: they were as keen and vitriolic as the "Junius" letters, and he was identified sufficiently to justify his ouster.

Zuriel Swope looms into view late in 1854, as one of the most active members of the local "twig." About this time a census of the Lancaster city membership shows:

Council 22	153
Council 34	380
Council 264	127
N. E. Council	226

In the southwestern part of the city the order was weakest; but the Shiffler Hose Company was a memorial to the "heroes" of native Americanism in the Philadelphia riots of 1844, and "to h——l with the Pope" was then shouted where it is now whispered.

John J. Cochran joined the association as late as 1855; by which time the usual dissensions that prevail in political offshoots began to disturb the society. A bombshell was thrown into its councils when George B. Markley accused Joshua W. Mack of complicity in the illegal Kieffer election, but he was acquitted. Then came the expulsion of Emanuel Reigart, Jr., and Adam Dellet, and drastic punishment of all offenders against the lodge's strict rules. F. S. Carpenter fell under the ban as an accomplice of "Q in a corner;" "Strick" Evarts was put out for voting the wrong way, supporting "the Kieffer ticket."

Robert A. Evans and Joshua W. Jack were rival candidates within the lodge for Select Council; while William Hensel beat A. W. Russel for

common; Samuel H. Price distanced Francis Shroder, and John L. Sampson had more votes than Elisha Geiger. Prosecutions of members for voting wrong and counter-defiances became more frequent; withdrawals from membership rapidly increased in number.

Some idea of the proscriptive character of the order may be obtained from this minute on the Evarts case:

"Brother Strickler R. Evarts admitted to your committee that he voted the whole Kieffer ticket from beginning to end, that he done all for that ticket he could, that he would do so again, and that he wont, and would not be bound to support any set of men for any office under such circumstances.

"Your committee, therefore, consider the charge fully sustained against said Strickler R. Everts, and think that he ought to be expelled.

"Your committee offer the following resolutions:

"Resolved, That the said Strickler R. Everts be, and, is hereby, expelled for having violated his obligation, in voting and working against the American ticket on the day of the last city election."

That the head of the snake was scotched appeared when such a resolution as this, offered by Brother Zuriel Swope, was voted down:

"Resolved that a committee be appointed, to ascertain if any brother belonging to this Council has violated his obligation, by voting for persons, not members of this order, when members in good standing were in nomination for office."

But that the tail wriggled was manifest from the following minute:

"Brother John Sherts, preferred the following charge against Brother

John Wise. I hereby charge Brother John Wise, with having violated his obligation, in voting for candidates for city offices (as a member of the Select Council) for men who are not members of our order, but violently opposed to the principles of the order. On motion a committee of five were appointed to investigate the charge and report to council. The chair appointed Brothers Wm. Frick, Leonard Snyder, Jacob R. Smeltz, Samuel Tucker and George Kleiss, said committee."

The upshot of it all was that Wise admitted he had voted for James Carpenter for City Surveyor, and nominated Dr. Henry Carpenter for President of Select Council; he was allowed to withdraw from membership.

The local council went on record as unanimously opposed to an "open organization" of the American party, thereby attesting confidence in the political tradition in the efficiency of mystery and secrecy as elements of party power.

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The minutes I have been reviewing come to a sudden and unexplained termination on September 9, 1855. That was, of course, not the end of Know Nothingism in Lancaster. In modified form it manifested itself in a local club which supported Bell and Everett as the Presidential ticket of 1860, and had its headquarters on the south side of East King street, this side of the Farmers' Trust Company, over the Slaymaker-Relgart liquor store, whose management long and bravely stuck to Native Americanism. Unlike them, many prominent people of Lancaster county who belonged to the Know Nothings, not only during their membership, but after the vogue of it—stoutly denied it, and continued to do so until the end of their lives, or,

at least, until all political aspirations were burned out. It certainly was not an asset after 1860.

The local membership roll, before me as I write, bears the names of many whose denials would make St. Peter's cock hoarse with vain repetition of his vociferous performances. I shall not draw the veil of disclosure. To me the movement was a comedy rather than a tragedy. But so much of politics is comedy that I recommend all young people to try it for a while—and then settle down to the serious aspect of statesmanship.

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