

The Reverend John C. Albertus Helffenstein was pastor of the Reformed Church of Lancaster from 1776 to 1779. **He was** born in the Palatinate, February 16, 1748, and died at Germantown, Pa., May 17, 1790. He was the son of the Rev. Peter Helffenstein, Superintendent of Churches at Sinsheim. In 1772 he came to America, accompanied by his half-brother, the Rev. John H. Helfrich, and the Rev. J. G. Gebhard. Helfrich settled in Lehigh county and his charge has ever since been occupied by one of his descendants. Gebhard became pastor at Claverack, N. Y., where he founded a literary institution. Helffenstein died comparatively young, but was a celebrated preacher, and several volumes of his sermons were published. Seven Reformed ministers were his descendants and bore his name.

While Helffenstein was pastor in Lancaster he was an earnest patriot. It frequently became his duty to preach to **the** Hessian prisoners who were kept here. On one occasion he preached on the text, Isaiah 52 : 3—"For thus saith the Lord, Ye have sold yourselves for nought and ye shall be redeemed without money." This sermon caused a good deal of excitement and offense among the captives. On another occasion he preached a discourse in the evening on these words : "If the son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed," when the excitement became so great that it was deemed necessary to accompany him home with a guard. Once he preached to the American soldiers on their departure for the scene of conflict *from the* words : "If God be for us who can be against

us?"

Some years ago it was my privilege to visit Sinsheim in the Palatinate, where I saw the old church in which the Helffensteins preached. About the same time I found, in this country, a number of letters written by the members of the family who remained in Europe to their brother in America. As early letters of this kind are extremely rare, it has occurred to me to translate several specimens, and I offer them to the Historical Society in the hope that though antiquated they will not be found uninteresting.

The first is a letter from the father to his son in America :

SINSHEIM, June 3, 1772.

MY DEAR Sox : Though it grieves me greatly to live separate from you, and that I can entertain no hope of ever visiting you in America, I yet rejoice in your fortunate change of circumstances. May God grant us all a new heart so that we may walk in his fear ! Beware of sectarians and remain faithful to the true doctrine to which thou hast sworn.

If the Lord sutlers me to live awhile longer you shall find in me a true and faithful father, who will not suffer you to want if it is in his power to prevent it. In the package you will find : 1. Du Bosc's sermons in 4 to ; 2. Stackhouse's "System of Doctrine," seventh volume. If you should receive the part in which one of the sheets is defective suffer it to remain unbound until I have **an** opportunity of supplying a complete copy. 3. Saurin's sermons in six volumes ; 4. Dunckel's " Funeral Sermons ;" 5. Gronau on the Twenty-fifth Psalm ; 6. " Theologia Pastoralis Practica," four volumes bound and one unbound ; 7. A package of underwear. In the sealed book I have placed a gold piece with which you *may pay* the freight. I would gladly have sent more, but the price of

grain is very low and I have had to send all I had for sale at great expense to Heidelberg, as it is now illegal to sell grain anywhere but at the grain market. If you can indicate a reliable means of conveyance I will send you a package of books every year ; and if you are in need of anything write to me promptly .....

I have written to Pastor Weyberg and he will send you my letter.

Your brother will not remain in the Palatinate, and if I can get a position elsewhere I shall also leave my fatherland. I release you from your promise to Louisa the more readily because I can see no way of coming to you. When you make up your mind to get married consider virtue first of all, but also give some consideration to property ; for a minister who does not secure some possessions by marriage is sure to suffer all his life.

If there is anything which you desire do not hesitate to write. I must now close—more another time. God be with you and with us all ! I remain

Your faithful Father,

P. HELFFENSTEIN.

The second letter of the series was written six years later by a brother who remained in the fatherland. In the translation I have considerably abridged it, but all that is of general interest has been preserved.

DEAREST, BEST, MOST-BELOVED BROTHER : Providence has at last afforded me an opportunity of writing to you to inform you that your excellent father, your sister and I are still in the land of the living. But what shall be the fate of this letter ? What distant lands, what nations will it have to visit ? Perhaps my prayers will pierce the clouds and ascend to Him who loves to hear them, when they are sincere, so that my letter may finally reach you. Are you

still alive, O dearest brother? Or has death gathered you with the thousands that have fallen before his sickle? How sad it is to live in such uncertainty concerning our dear ones ! O, would that you were still in your fatherland with me in our quiet, peaceful cottage—how joyously would the stream of time flow on !

How shall I begin and what shall I first tell you? I can relate but a few of the important events that have occurred since last I wrote to you and these but briefly. A year and a-half ago the worthy pastor at Wissloch, Sauerbrunn, passed away, and the Church Council called our father to be his successor ; the Court, however, interfered and granted the position to Inspector **Hasse**, of Lautern. The result was a law suit. Our father had an interview with the Prince Elector and it was finally determined that he was to receive 200 thalers annually from Wissloch (by way of compensation) in addition to his previous salary. Now we are comfortable in Sinzheim. Wirt has been called to Lantern, and Koch, rector of Bretton, has become the assistant pastor at this place.

Your correspondent has been for three months pastor at Hilsbach; but is required to pay to the superannuated minister Braun 500 thalers annually, to his wife, if she should survive him, 150, and after her death 50 to their daughter, who suffers from epilepsy. His engagement with Fraulein von Schmidt was broken at her request, and he is married to the daughter of Captain Bannegis, now a member of the Council of Administration, bearing the title of Government Councillor.

The winter of 1776-7 was for me very depressing. I suffered from a nervous disease which brought me near to death and did not leave me until spring. I am

again restored, but am very nervous and must be very abstemious, especially in labor. I must beware of everything that might prove exciting, and unless I am particularly well dare not venture to read a tragedy or an affecting story for fear of suffering the most painful consequences.

Our sister has been married, and to whom ? I am sure you cannot guess! It is our cousin Helffenstein. H3 is pastor at Schoenau, two miles from Heidelberg. He has already greatly improved in disposition. I hope our sister, who has much spirit and is fully able to control him, will be able to effect still further improvement. Our cousin Louise is also married. Her husband's name is Weidenhahn. He owns a linen factory and has the title of Commercial Councillor. She corresponds with me and, besides her sister, is my dearest friend.

In the Reformed Church of the Palatinate revolution follows revolution. A year ago the entire ministry agreed, on account of present conditions, to appoint **five** of their number deputies and to grant them a printed power of attorney to act in their name. These five men have not as yet accomplished a great deal, but order has been restored in the Council and no one is oppressed. Appointments are granted without the payment of money, and the administration of the church is more economically conducted. The Commission consists of Pfaltz, French pastor in Manheim; Herzogenrath, French pastor in Manheim ; Kling, inspector in Neustadt ; Kilian, Superintendent of Schools in Ladenburg, and our father. This commission is to be permanent and is to have entire control of the Reformed Churches of the Palatinate ; if any one of the members should die the survivors are to choose his successor.

In Germany a fire has been started ; it

is yet only glowing, but the blaze must come ; and then alas ! for us. Its cause is the recent death of the elector of Bavaria. The Queen of Austria and Bohemia has seized some territories to which our sovereign, as the nearest relative, is held to have a prior right, and this the other States will not suffer. The preparations for war between Austria and Prussia are terrible, and streams of blood must flow unless the angel of peace should extend the olive branch between the contestants, and clear up the heavens that are now pregnant with terror.

I **have** to inform you that we have become interested in a silver mine, only six miles distant from this place. Our prospects are pretty good, for after the present year we are promised from 25 to 30 reichsthaler monthly per share. Of course, we have had to pay assessments for two years, but the returns of a single month will reimburse our expenses. Father has two shares, and my sister and I each have one.

A truce to all this, which must remind you of the style of the newspapers, and which gives me so little satisfaction. Let me devote the present hour to something that is better. How are you prospering, my dearest brother? Friendship and love, I seem to hear you say, transform my days into an everlasting spring ; my faithful wife and the pledges of our love are a never failing fountain of the purest joy. When I return from the labors of my profession my wife's greeting and the innocent prattle of my children cause me to forget the troubles of the day. A knock at the door announces a visitor and Helfrich or my faithful Gebhard hastens to my embrace. O, that such bliss might long be yours ! May there be no dark days in your spring, no thunder clouds *in* your blessed summer.

Do you ask how I prosper? Dearest brother, I cannot speak of my own existence in such exalted terms. My path is not strewn with roses, but I am not often pricked by thorns and am contented. Solitary walks through the valley or across the smiling fields—some beautiful book—the care of my flowers and other rustic employments, these are my most pleasant recreations ; and thus my days pass quietly away. Sometimes, it is true, I feel greatly depressed, but religion, reason and the power of will soon restore my courage.

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January 2, 1777. During the past year I **have** suffered many trials, and I pray that you and yours may have been protected in the midst of danger ..... "O, mighty ruler of the universe, direct the sword to return to its scabbard. Grant peace to the countries which suffer from the scourge of war. Bless especially my brothers and my friend Gebbard ! If it is Thy will—if it is for their welfare—bring them back to their fatherland ; or at least suffer me to behold their face before I close my eyes in death." These are the prayers which I offer to Heaven at the beginning of another year.

\* \* \* \* \* [Here

follow four pages of extracts from the diary of the writer. They are beautiful and tender ; but as they are purely personal they may be omitted.] The writer concludes :

"Dear brother, when may I expect to receive a letter? Three years have passed since last we heard from you. Our dear father expects you to write often—do not disappoint him. He wants to know how many grandchildren he has, and sends his blessing to them all. Many friends desire to be remembered.

"Dear brother, tell us about your cir-



cumstances. We should also be glad to know your opinion of the war that is now raging in America. Perhaps it is not safe to write about such matters, but you will at least join us in our prayer for the speedy restoration of peace.

"Once more, farewell! Do not forget those who so often speak of you—who long to be with you—and who think of you daily. Especially remember him who will love you as long as there is a drip of blood in his veins. Do not forget

Your most faithful brother,

H ELFFENSTEIN."

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