

WILLIAM STOY.

The text of my present paper is an old letter which I have found among my half-forgotten collections. It was written to Judge Jasper Yeates, who was one of the most eminent men in the early history of our city. The letter has never been published, and, though its contents are not particularly important, it derives a certain interest from the personality of its writer, who was pastor of the First Reformed Church, on Orange street, from 1758 to 1763, and was certainly one of the most peculiar ministers that ever occupied a pulpit in Lancaster. The following is a copy of this very curious letter:

“Lebanon, Jan. 4, 1787.

“Sir: As to all present appearance, it will hardly be possible for me to attend the Lancaster Court, but it will be useless, too, as it will not be in my power to bring my evidences together. One of 'em, the best I have, lives within the hills of the Blue Mountains, where nobody at present is able to come to on account of the deep snow. A young man came to me to-day from over the Hills on account of his Brother, who got mad of the bite of a dog, who told me that he could not get farther than a mile on horseback, and was obliged to walk all the way on foot. In case I should not attend, you will be so good as to make the best of it and do what is necessary. However, if possible, I will come to Lancaster, though my health is mighty precarious all this winter. I am, sir,

“Your o. h. sert.,

“W. STOY.”

In order properly to understand this letter it may be desirable to relate certain facts in the history of its writer.

The Rev. Wm. Stoy (pronounced Sto-e) was born in Herborn, Nassau, Germany, March 4, 1726. In his native town there was a celebrated literary and theological institution, and here he was thoroughly educated. In those days knowledge of the Latin language was regarded as the chief mark of a scholar, and in this respect he was certainly far in advance of his associates. He grew up a young man of almost gigantic frame, and his physical strength was regarded as enormous. In 1749 he became a candidate of theology—or, as we should now say, a licentiate—but does not seem to have been called to a regular charge. In 1751, Michael Schlatter visited Europe, and in the following year Stoy, with five other young ministers, accompanied him on his return to America. They had all been duly commissioned by the deputies of the Synods of Holland to serve as pastors in Pennsylvania.

Concerning the earliest years of Stoy's activity in this country we have little information, except a few facts and dates. Immediately after his arrival he was assigned to the Tulpehocken charge, now in Lebanon county, where he preached from 1752 to 1755. Then he accepted a call to the Race street church, Philadelphia, where he also remained three years. Here, it was said, he might have done well enough, if it had not been for his marriage with Maria Elizabeth Maus, "the daughter of a stocking weaver." So far as we have been able to learn, there was nothing to be said against the girl's character, but in those days undue stress was laid on social position, and, greatly to their discredit, the members of the congregation—or more probably the ladies of the congregation—refused to recognize her as their pastor's wife. The result was a conflict, in which, we may be sure, Stoy was in no way backward to return the blows which he received. The minutes

of the Coetus (or Synod) contain the following item: "There were complaints concerning Stoy's marriage, but it was solemnized in his father-in-law's house, in the presence of the pastors Otterbein, Leydich and Du Bois." A marriage that was witnessed by three ministers certainly did not lack official sanction, and the Synod very properly ignored the complaints which had been presented.

Nevertheless, the position of Pastor Stoy in Philadelphia can hardly have been pleasant; and even before his marriage had been brought to the attention of Synod he had removed to Lancaster. Here he seems to have got along very well. In 1758 he reported that his congregation consisted of one hundred families; that he had baptized one hundred children during the year and confirmed forty, and that there were sixty scholars in the parochial school.

For several years Stoy served as clerk of the Coetus. As the authorities in Holland refused to receive German communications, and Stoy was not sufficiently familiar with Dutch, he wrote long letters in Latin. In these letters there was a manifest effort to employ a Ciceronian style, but the only result was that it became pompous and inflated. Even the "Fathers" in Holland complained that his Latin letters were too exalted for their purposes, and begged to be spared from similar inflictions.

In 1763 Stoy resigned his charge in Lancaster and went to Europe for the purpose of studying medicine. He was matriculated at Leyden, but pursued his studies chiefly under the direction of Prof. Hoffman, of Herborn.

On his return to America, in 1767, he settled in Lebanon for the practice of medicine. He also irregularly took charge of several county congregations. The statement that he was pastor of the First Reformed Church, of Lebanon, has been proved erroneous.

Greatly to his surprise the Coetus refused to recognize him as a member, and he began to oppose that organization. He wrote to Holland to secure the influence of "the Fathers," and these requested the Coetus to reinstate him, but that body declined to accede to the request. He remained independent, and was violent in his opposition to synods. As late as 1773 the Coetus said in its official letter to Holland: "Stoy cannot be received. Last year he published a satirical article against Coetus, and this year he sent us a threatening circular."

In the meantime, however, Stoy had gained a great reputation as a physician. His cure for hydrophobia—which was equally applicable to the bite of wild animals—was for many years accepted as a specific. "The remedy," according to Dr. J. H. Redsecker, "consisted of one ounce of the herb, red chickweeds, four ounces of theriac (or Venice treacle), and one quart of beer, all well digested, the dose being a wine glassful." Though physicians are now inclined to question the merit of this remedy, it is still occasionally prepared. It must be said, however, that several recipes for its preparation have been published which differ in minor particulars. The early celebrity of the remedy is sufficiently attested by the following extract from the account book of General Washington: "October 18, 1798. Gave my servant, Christopher, to bear his expenses to a person in Lebanon, in Pennsylvania, celebrated for curing persons bit by wild animals, \$25."

"Stoy's Drops" are also well remembered. In his contribution to the Lebanon County Historical Society, Dr. Redsecker gives the manner of their preparation. They are described as beneficial in nervous diseases.

That Dr. Stoy was a progressive physician is evident from the fact that he labored in the face of much opposition

for the introduction of inoculation against small-pox.

In 1784 Dr. Stoy was elected a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature. A long letter to Gen. Joseph Read, on "The present Mode of Taxation," was published by him in 1779. In it he advocates a single tax on land. Though the general idea appears strangely modern the details of his plan are plainly impracticable.

By this time Stoy had become pretty thoroughly secularized, but he continued to preach in country churches throughout Lebanon and Berks counties. That he was very eccentric is not to be doubted, though many of the stories which are related about him are possibly apocryphal. He is said to have worn a white coat, in order that he might not be mistaken for a "black-coat," i. e., a regular minister. "It is stated," says Dr. Redsecker, "that on one occasion he was to preach at Walmer's church on a week-day. On entering the church he stood his gun under the pulpit, hanging the powder-horn and shot-pouch by the gun. Ascending the pulpit he looked over the congregation, which was very small, and thus soliloquized: 'What, only a few old women! Why should I preach to a few women when the hunting is so excellent?' And, descending the pulpit stairway, he took up his gun and started out in quest of game."

Not less curious are the legends of Stoy's extraordinary physical strength. It is said that he was fond of showing his strength by lifting a bag of wheat with each hand, and then playfully inquiring whether there was chaff in the bags.

One of the best-known stories relates how Stoy served a prize fighter who rode all the way from Philadelphia to give him a beating. The man inquired for the Doctor at his house, but was told that he had attended a funeral in the country, but would soon return.

“Well,” said the fellow, “I will ride out to meet him.” When he met him on the road he recognized him by the description which he had received, and said: “Stoy, I have heard that you are the strongest man in Pennsylvania, and have come from Philadelphia to see which of us is the best man. I am going to give you a thorough whipping.”

“Oh, no,” said Stoy, “I am a man of peace, and will not fight.”

The stranger dismounted and made an effort to pull the Doctor from his horse. “Oh,” said he, “if it has come to that I will get down without pulling.” When he had alighted he did not wait for an attack, but suddenly seized his antagonist by the belt, and by main strength pitched him over the fence into an adjoining field. Lying on his back on the grass, and, between laughing and crying, the man said: “Stoy, throw my horse over the fence, too.”

Here the story ends, and we may believe it or not, just as we please. All these stories, however, have an element of similarity, and aid us in forming an idea of the character of the man. He was learned and strong, but eccentric in the highest degree. Having conceived the idea that he could secure wonderful results by training one of his sons to be a Nazarite, he put him under strict training—requiring him to abstain from certain kinds of food and drink, to let his hair grow, and do many unusual things; but the plan was not successful, and the boy never became as strong as his father. When, however, the editor of a Reading paper volunteered to play on Dr. Stoy's name and called him a “Stoic,” he gave him such a setting-down as must have made his ears tingle.

In later years, at least, Stoy bore the reputation of being contentious, and he certainly quarreled with a great many people. Dr. Egle, in 1883, published two of his letters, written in 1775, in

one of which he formally accused Gen. John Philip De Haas of being a Tory. As De Haas was soon afterwards commissioned by Congress a General in the Revolutionary Army, there may be some ground for Dr. Egle's suggestion that the trouble was with Stoy and not with De Haas.

Stoy was litigious and generally had several law suits on hand. One of these was with James Chesnale, who built a house for him in Lebanon, and this is probably the case to which our letter refers.

Stoy ended his somewhat stormy life at Lebanon, September 14, 1801, and was buried at the Host Church, in Berks county. That he was a strong man—mentally as well as physically—will not be doubted; but, from what we have said, it must be equally plain that he was a peculiar minister.

JOS. H. DUBBS.

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