

LANCASTER IN 1777—1780.

In the recently published paper by W. U. Hensel on Major John Andre's Residence in Lancaster, 1775-76, reference was made to the social life in Lancaster during the period of the American Revolution. It was pretty plainly intimated, and easily to be inferred, that during that rather gloomy period of our national history there were two very distinct elements in Lancaster society—the one pro-English, sympathizing rather with the British cause, and the other, less notable socially, in accord with the Revolutionary movement (scarcely then more than a rebellion). While it may have seemed to the other an ordinary affair to "trip it" "on the light fantastic toe," while momentous things were depending on "the wager of battle," a large portion, if not a majority, of the people of Lancaster had no heart in merry-making, when their fellow-countrymen were engaged in a deadly struggle with the armies of the "mother country." Thus it happened that in the fore part of 1778, when the cause of the Revolution hung in doubtful balance, some of the "upper ten," scarcely then numbering "Four Hundred," contemplating a ball in advance of Lent, wrote an invitation to most of the leading citizens of the town. This included the pastors of the (First) Reformed and (Trinity) Lutheran churches, and from them a joint answer was received. The original manuscript is in possession of D. McN. Stauffer, C. E., B. S., of New York, and by him we are permitted to publish this copy of it, which has great historic value, not only from the names appended to it, and from the

eminence of the one to whom it was addressed, but by reason of its subject matter. The reverend gentlemen wrote:

A Clerical Protest.

“Lancaster, the 8th Day of Feb’r. 1778.

“Sir:

“We are much obliged to you for the Honor you intended by inviting us to the Company of the Gentlemen within this Town, or to your Ball, but as we think it to be quite contrary to the Character of a Minister of Christ to appear at such Places, you will excuse our not Complying with your Desire. The Rest of our Reasons, for acting in this Manner, you will see in the Sentiments inclosed. And we can assure you with a great Deal of Certainty, that the most part of the Members of our Congregations are of the same mind with us, and you know, that they compose the greatest number of the Inhabitants of this Town. The English is not our Mother Tongue, you will find therefore many Faults in consisting with the Idiom of the same; but we know, you are too much of a Gentleman, than to exhaust your Wit about such Trifles. We mean no Insult to you, or any of the Gentlemen, it is the true Language of an undesigning and feeling Heart we speak, they are the Dictates of our Conscience. You are therefore at Liberty to let your Company see, hear or read the inclosed Lines. We hope you are no Enemy to the Word of God, Open then your Bible and read with a due Attention, what you find: James C. 4, V. 8. 9; Chap. 5. v. 1. 5. Ecclesiast. C. 2. v. 1. 2. Corinth. C. 10. v. 6. 7. 9. 11: Luc. 21. v. 34. 35; and be assured, that this is and will be the true Word of the most High, who will at his own Time more powerfully manifest it as such, to the unbelieving as well, as to his Believ-

ers. We have the Honor to subscribe ourselves

“Your humble and most obedient servants.

“Signed.

“HENRY HELMUTH,

“ALBERT HELPHENSTONE.”

The following paper accompanied the above letter:

“Very Unbecoming Behavior.”

“To any who it may concern:

“There is no need to make a long Detail of the great Misery of our present Times. The most bloody and most unnatural War rages in this Country. Both Armys have erected their Standards in our Neighborhood, and spread Death and Ruin around them. Many Thousands have lost their Lives already. And how many walk about Sickly, wounded and lame, who are held up as Mirrours of Misery before our Eyes. A most dangerous and infectious Sickness (the natural Consequence of War.) brings Death exceeding near to us. The relicts of some ruin'd Familys beg their Bread at our Doors. Others in the Power of the Enemy, groan under their Oppressions—and many die a lingering cruel death for Hunger and Cold in the most lothsome Places of a goal. It is one of the Prerogatives of Mankind by which they are distinguished from irrational Beings, to have a sense of Compassion at the Distress of their Fellow Creatures, the Sight, the knowledge of it, creates generally a sort of tender Uneasyness and Trouble, which render Sportfull Diversions distastefull and unpleasant to the Mind. How strange then it is for men, to play away in this Time of Distress whole Hours and Nights in Companys, where they feast perhaps to Excess, play and dance. How to account for such behaviour, we hardly know, for it is cer-

tain, Heathens would not act worse; and how more unbecoming is it for such, who call themselves Professors of the Religion of our tender and most compassionate Saviour. The thoughtless may place us on the wrong Side of the Question in making such a Work about their innocent Diversions, as they call them; but if we err, a very Venerable Body of our Legislative Power keeps us Company. It is well known, that Congress has resolved, that such Diversions should subside during the present Calamity. And if the Precepts of Christianity, human Compassion and Feeling have no weight with you, you at least should show so much Discretion, as to make others think you unfriendly to the Cause of your Country, by despising openly, what your Superiors so earnestly and wisely have recommended to you. Retire for a Moment from your Vanity! and we hope arguments of more Weight will be suggested within your own Breast against this very unbecoming Behaviour. That this may be the case is the ardent wish of

PHILANTHROPI.

“Adressed.

“Mr. Yeates Esq'r.

“Present.”

A Notable List of Names.

That neither this rebuff nor the military and political events of later years, put a damper on social life in the city appears from the records extant of the diversions of the townspeople in 1780. Christopher Marshall (who lived on East Orange street, where Miss Hurford now resides), whose “diary” is the most piquant memorial of men and things in Lancaster of that day, records on page 326 that on January 20, 1780, there was “a splendid Assembly” at the Court House. Among the papers of the late Chief Justice

Jasper Yeates, now in possession of Mr. Stauffer, is a "List of Subscribers and Ladies Invited to the Lancaster Assembly, Anno 1780." This list bears the following names:

Miss Conner.

Miss Betsy Conner.

Miss Hart.

Miss Hubley.

Miss Sabina Hubley.

Miss Wright.

Miss Bethel.

Miss Plunkett.

Edw'd Hand, Mrs. Ewing, Mrs. Hand.

J. Yeates, Mrs. Yeates.

Math's Slough, Mrs. Slough, Miss Barr.

Geo. Ross, Mrs. G. Ross.

Wm. Parr, Mrs. Parr, Miss Parr.

Jno. Wittmer, Mrs. Wittmer.

And'w Graff, Mrs. Graff.

Geo. Graff, Mrs. G. Graff.

Jacob Zeigler.

Jas. Ross, Mrs. Jas. Ross.

Fred'k Kuhn.

Paul Zantzinger, Mrs. Zantzinger.

Wm. Barton.

Jno. Hubley, Mrs. J. Hubley.

Jos. Hubley.

Christn' Wirtz, Mrs. Wirtz, Miss Wirtz.

Chas. Hamilton, Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Dickinson.

Henry Stuber, Mrs. Stuber.

Wm. Wirtz, Mrs. Wirtz.

Fred'k Hubley, Mrs. Fred'k Hubley.

Geo. Graeff, Mrs. G. Graeff.

Jacob Graeff, Mrs. J. Graeff.

Jacob Hubley.

Robt. Purdy, Mrs. Purdy.

Jno. Offner, Mrs. Offner.

Jacob Bailey, Mrs. Bailey, Miss Bailey.

Thos. Cuthbert, Mrs. Cuthbert, Miss Cuthbert.

Seb. Graff, Mrs. Seb. Graff.

Some of the other references in Marshall's "Diary" to "Assemblies"

and balls in Lancaster at that period are as follows:

"January 21, 1780. Learned that there was a splendid Assembly last night at the Court House, Lancaster; twenty-one ladies, double quantity of men, band of music, dancing, singing, gaming, drinking, carousing, &c., &c., It is said every subscriber is to pay Three Hundred Dollars, any interloper of assembly nights admitted upon paying Thirty Dollars, each night."

These goings-on were not confined to the closing period of the war. Under date of January 31, 1778, Marshall makes this entry in his diary: "Last night was a grand entertainment, kept at the house [of] William Ross, the tavern-keeper, which [it] is said was very brilliant, at which, it's said, were above one hundred men and women assembled, dressed in all their gaiety; cold collation, with wine, punch, sweet cakes, &c.; music, dancing, singing, &c., held till four this morning. Who were the principals in the promoting or in the expense I did not learn, but neither the President nor any of his family was there, but General Mifflin was."

On February 21, 1778, we are treated to another outbreak on the part of the pious and patriotic old Quaker. Here it is: "Last night was a grand ball, this being the third held in town lately, notwithstanding the grievous sufferings that this State lies under and labors with. Last night, I understand, there was in Lancaster what is called a brilliant ball, to which assembled a great number of fops, fools, &c., of both sexes, old and young. It was kept at the house of Major Wertz, formerly a tailor, who some time past, and many others there met, made a pretense to religion and to be the followers of a crucified Jesus, but are declaring now by their wanton be-

havior that they will not have him to reign."

Two weeks later, on March 4, he is again called on to lament the shortcomings of that generation of evil-doers. This is his brief, but pertinent, plaint: "Last Sixth Day another Ball or Assembly in Lancaster, where, it's said, cards were played at a hundred dollars a game. President there. O, poor Pennsylvania!" The President alluded to above was Thomas Wharton, President of the Council of Safety. He died two months after the above extract concerning him was penned, on May 22, 1778. Referring to the death and burial of Governor Wharton, Marshall makes the following entries in his diary on May 23: "Thomas Wharton, our President, died last night of an inflammation, it's said, in his head; been complaining for eight or ten days past." On the following day, May 24, he adds: "Preparations making, it's said, at [the] Court House for a grand interment of President Wharton this afternoon at the Lutheran Church. It's said the vestry of that church gave an invitation and permission to be buried there, which the vestry of the English Church [Episcopal] neglected, and the Friends were not applied unto for leave to be buried in their ground. . . . In the afternoon went to the burial of President Thomas Wharton, attended with military honors to the Lutheran Church."

One further brief extract must close our quotations from the captious old local chronicler. March 10, 1780. "It's said there have been two balls this week for youth here, one at Slough's, the other at Peter Hoffnager's, and one for the elders at the Court House [on] Fifth Day night."

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