CHAPTER

III.

SCHISMATIC REVERBERATIONS

And now we come to the story of the Great Schism, whose subterranean rumbles can be detected long before the later years of the 1880's when it erupted disastrously. Read some of the letters and conference records, consult some of the diaries and journals of the time, or talk to a few of our octogenarians who dimly remember the reverberations. Note the frequent emphasis at annual and general conferences upon the importance of the editors of the Evangelical literature even as early as the General Conference in 1836! And why not? Weren't their edited words more widely digested than those of any other persons, even of the bishops, in those pre-radio and pre-TV days?

Speaking of the "higher-ups" in our modern ecclesiastical world, we are reminded of King David of Biblical fame or of the great Greek warrior Achilles. Each had his vulnerable spot—his "Aristotelian flaw." All men, high or low, have at least one of the frailties that motivate Shakespeare's tragic heroes: pride, jealousy, lust, ambition, selfishness—sometimes with a dash of unctious piety!

At the Annual East Pennsylvania Conference of 1871, we have an example of an editor of the "Evangelical Messenger" who was practically forced to resign his editorship because of a controversy as to his attitude toward certain "Articles of Faith." Later on in that same year, when the General Conference met here in Naperville in the Zion Evangelical Church, this ex-editor presented a document asking for a repeal of the disciplinary actions taken against him in Pennsylvania. His appeal was refused, however, on the grounds that "he has resigned his office and has called to his aid the civil courts, whereby he has forfeited his right to appeal to the higher ecclesiastical courts of our church."

With this in the background, we are not surprised at the General Conference, meeting in Buffalo, New York, in 1887, to find an editor being tried and deposed from his position. Under a powerful leader, a large group of delegates, feeling that the trial was unjust, walked out in protest. This was the action that triggered the ominous division. According to one of our modern church historians, "Between 1887 and 1891 the Evangelical Association slowly and painfully disintegrated." Differences of opinion concerning episcopal power formed a

part of the background, though the incompatibility of leaders on the two sides seems to be the most powerful motivating force for the separation.

What a wonderful time for a spirit of magnanimity to manifest itself! Had some one of the leaders involved forgotten personal prejudices and in the true spirit of Christianity and peace endeavored to bring about reconciliation, what years of bitterness and vindictive reprisals might have been eliminated from the church history! Instead, when Dr. H. K. Carroll, editor of the "New York Independent," offered his services as arbiter, the determined belligerents peremptorily dismissed the suggestion. Such a fraternal strife, as in the Civil War, is particularly tragic because of separations brought about in families.

What a field day for tabloid newspapers! Lurid scenes of unjust trials as to who should inherit the church property, and of family quarrels bitter with animosities were published "with little sense of delicacy or propriety." In 1891, *two* "general conferences" met simultaneously in Indianapolis and in Philadelphia (the city of brotherly love!). In 1894, delegates convened in Naperville and organized "The United Evangelical Church," which even to its members must have seemed very similar to "The Evangelical Association." To an outsider, they were identical.

This schism had a disastrous effect upon the church, especially in the Pennsylvania and in the Illinois conferences, where the court trials concerning the church property were many indeed, with half of the members or more leaving some of the congregations. Here in Naperville the United Evangelical people had possession of the Old Brick Church for nearly two years in the early nineties, until the court awarded the building to the Evangelical Association. The Association people, who had been holding their services in the commercial room of the college (a privilege granted them by the trustees of North-Western), then returned to the Brick Church. The United Evangelical group established a new church home.

The split carried over of course into the English congregation, and so we find, for nearly a decade, four Evangelical churches in Naperville—and this at a time when many Evangelicals were joining other denominations! Zion Church (German-speaking) and College Chapel Church (English-speaking) were under the Evangelical Association; Grace Church (English-speaking, corner of Loomis and Benton) and Salem Church (German-speaking, corner of Washington and Benton) were under the United Evangelicals. Both the shortage of ministers and the shortage of money in this near-depression period made the struggle for existence of the church very difficult indeed. Without any particular organization among them, however, these pastors in addition to their work in Naperville served a circuit which ran far inland into neighboring counties.

In the records of the Illnois conference from 1886 to 1898, mention is frequently made of two lots owned by the College Chapel Church, which were constantly being put up for discussion. (These are lots 2 and 3 on the west side of Brainard, south from Benton.) They caused much legal difficulty during the first years of the schism. One of the church leaders from the Evangelical Association advised just

going in and taking the lots—"preempting," as it were. And that's exactly what happened. Some of the good brothers built a fence in front, laid down a walk, got the ground ready for cultivation, and rented the land to some of the parishioners—almost over night! Belonging to their faction, of course! Later, in 1898 ,the title to the lots was cleared legally for a fee of $75.00. According to the records, these lots were still a church possession for at least another decade.

Naturally, the division in the church had its effect upon the college. Even before the actual separation, the factions involved had helped to bring about the resignation of President Rassweiler in June of 1888. (There is actually good evidence for deducting that the same factions had been connected with President Smith's retirement in 1883.) Many students rallied to the support of President Rassweiler, and some left the college with him.

Attitude taken toward Sunday baseball back in 1889 as expressed by the editor of the "Evangelical Messenger": "This subtle evil has clandestinely seized upon the hearts of a fair portion of young America. While we admit that recreation is not only a privilege but a Christian duty, we firmly assert that the popular baseball of today is a heinous national crime . . . a swindle and a disgrace to our age."

At the Illinois Conference in 1890 an announcement was made that the bishop who was to have been the chairman at the conference was suspended as bishop and preacher until the meeting of the General Conference in 1891. Confusion and disturbances followed. Condemnation was voiced against the action of the trustees of North-Western College in expelling some members of the board, thus aligning the college with one side of the schism. What many of the delegates did not know was that the Board of Trustees planned to call a special session for adding new members without letting the other side catch on to what they were doing!

Back in 1893 the college had much difficulty in finding an agent to manage its finances. Of course he had to be a minister, and the conferences were unwilling to spare one of their own members. Besides it would not be easy under the circumstances to collect money either from the church or from the community, and the college badly needed money—money that was being used in lawsuits and in keeping up the expenses of several different churches! President Kiekhoefer wrote Brother Solomon Gamertsfelder that money was needed "for improvement of the teaching force," but suggested, "Keep this statement to yourself, please."

But there was another important unfavorable effect upon the college. Many of the students lost interest in the work of the church. And who can blame them with all the quarreling and bickering going

on noisily around them! By the close of the century, the Board of Trustees felt this so keenly that they passed the following resolution: "It is highly essential for the best interest of our school that perfect harmony and unanimity of feeling exist between the Chapel Congregation, the Faculty of the College, and the Board of Trustees of the College. Therefore it is the sense of this body that the Chapel Congregation with its pastor should do its utmost to conduct its affairs so as not to injure any of the interests of the college students." In an effort to offset the effect of the schism upon the young people, Zion and Chapel Churches held revival meetings at the camp grounds one mile east of Naperville, purchased in 1898 by the Evangelical Association.

Much was expected of the "noble student" of that time, as reported by one who herself participated in that nobility at a later time. Here is her Sunday Schedule:

8:00 A.M. - Student Volunteers
9:00 A.M. - Sunday School
10:30 A.M. - Church Services
4:00 P.M. - Vesper Services for Y.M. and Y.W.
6:30 P.M. - Y.P.A. (Young People's Alliance)
7:30 P.M. - Church Services

(We must remember there were no forms of recreation permissible on Sundays—even long walks were discouraged—and up to 1900 only one automobile had been seen on the streets of Naperville, and that one was en route from Chicago to Aurora!)

All of this contention was very upsetting to any kind of cooperation among the churches of Naperville, just as in the United Nations it is hard to get unanimity when two powerful factions fail to become reconciled. It was disturbing to all of the interdenominational activities. Some outsiders favored one side, some another. A few callous ones were smugly amused, but many deplored the cloud of community unpleasantness that permeated everywhere.

By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, however, there were evidences of a desire to forgive and forget. The minister of the Chapel Church from 1905 to 1910, Reverend George Manshardt, newly arrived from California, refused to distinguish among Evangelicals in choosing his friends. His family and that of Reverend Edwin Woodring, minister of Grace Church, had been friends back in Pennsylvania, and the two preachers often visited and conferred with each other. The chapel minister also chose as some of his "out-of-worktime buddies" two highly successful business men from the United Evangelical group—E.J.T. Moyer and Peter Kroehler. Also some of the young people's groups began informal types of cooperation. It was near the end of this first decade too that each of the Evangelical churches decided independently to support other denominations in Naperville in Union Evangelistic Services held in Central Park.