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**A Note on THE CHURCH IN THE HEART:**

The Schwenkfelders are a group of religionists who follow the thought of Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig, a Silesian knight of the sixteenth century, one of the guiding figures of the Protestant Reformation. The Schwenkfelder movement is still a living force in Pennsylvania where, at Pennsburg, its followers have built a library to preserve the records and documents of the sect. The following poems from **Local Lives** (in preparation) are drawn in part from contemporary oral sources and in part from Volume I of "The Journals and Papers of David Schultze," translated and edited by Andrew S. Berky and published by The Schwenkfelder Library in 1952.

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**THE CHURCH IN THE HEART**

**Squire Frank Benfield and the Old Days**

"When I was five or so,  
 I and my brother, Seneca —  
 my brother was two years older —  
 we were water boys

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for the Colebrookdale railroad, being built.  
In 1869 my father  
bought the farm and the old mill here,  
so we lived here from then on.  
How much all has changed from the old days!"  
His mind now goes back.  
It is living into former time:  
"Take the lights that we had then.  
In those days we had the 'Smutzomsel,'  
such a little oil lamp  
that stayed always in one place.  
Like a hand, the fat was in the palm  
and the wick came out the end.  
Even such a well-fastened lamp  
we were afraid of because of fire.  
To make fire, we had no matches,  
but rubbed stones or shot a fire schloss.  
Schloss, such a lock that snapped.  
When my mother, Lucinda, was a girl,  
when fire would be out in the morning —  
she told me this — she would be sent  
across the meadow to a neighbor's  
to fetch a little shovel of coals.  
Listen now how they lived then.  
She went barefoot and, when there was frost,  
across the length of that long meadow  
she walked back by the same track she had come,  
for there the frost was melted.  
We do not know now what it was,  
we do not know how our fathers lived.  
No, we have no idea of it."  
He leans on his hand. Below his eyelids  
his eyes are darkened with his thought.  
Yes, they are in shadow now.

### **The Last Families in the Cabins**

At a bend of the Bally-Dale road,  
an unused log cabin still stands,  
its timbers adzed even and weathered  
into black bars between the mortar,  
and some of the bottom logs thrust out  
pushed by emptiness and frost.  
"There are few cabins left in these hills,  
none lived in at the present time."  
Reverend Johnson tells of his young days  
when he worked his uncle's flour route:  
"There was four poor families on the route  
lived in cabins. I got orders,  
my first day with the wagon, to give them flour.  
When I would come to such and such a cabin,  
I was told, a woman would come out  
and would have with her a receptacle.  
She would say how much flour she needed.  
As I was told, so it happened.  
I came to a cabin, the woman came out.  
She reckoned, so many loaves of bread,  
and the children would like a taste of sweet,  
a cake, so she explained how much she needed.  
If I gave her more, she would refuse.  
'Only so much,' she would say.  
Then she'd say, 'I don't have money.'  
'It's no matter,' I'd say as I was ordered,  
and close the wagon up and drive away.  
Because people could not pay  
was no reason why they should not eat."

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## **Across the Wall**

(Dr. Elmer Ellsworth Schultz Johnson)

"I was born on Wednesday,  
June twenty-sixth, eighteen seventy-two,  
in the small brick house, called the 'bake house,'  
next to the larger brick house  
of our family farm in New Berlinville.  
My grandmother, Elizabeth, did some spinning,  
and would let me turn the reel for her.  
When I was four, she died.  
I sat outside the large house as she died,  
and I recall my father coming down  
with a basin — so the spinning  
passed on with her old hand.  
That same summer my mother bought me  
my first pair of boots, with bright leather tops.  
I wore them to my other grandparents' home,  
that of Amos and Elizabeth Schultz.  
My Aunt Elizabeth had recently married  
Josephus Gerhard, who was then working  
for my grandfather, and who was there.  
Before dinner Josephus sat down with me  
on a step of the rear staircase,  
he gently touched the new shoe top  
and said, 'Ei was schoene Stiwel.'  
He has been my well-beloved uncle  
for more than seventy years.

"My grandfather, Isaac,  
told us about our name, how Johnson  
was the English of Yansen, or Jansen,  
and that Johnsons were in Pennsylvania  
since sixteen eighty-four.  
My great-great-grandfather, Isaac's grandfather,

saw Washington at Germantown.

"Schooling has been much of my life,  
and the first experience was early.

It came about through another person.

Before I was born, my grandfather  
took into his home a boy to raise,  
Ferdinand Hoffman, son of a minister  
at Falconer Swamp. We grew close.

One day before I was five,  
Ferdinand took me for a day to school,  
or maybe it was a half day.

There I sat between two boys,

Ferdinand and another boy,

yes, I heard them spell,

so that world opened. At five,

by permission I went to school,

carrying my own green-covered primer,  
my ABC's.

My mother, Susannah, helped me much,  
much of my life as it is I owe to her.

Our family have long, in the struggle to live,  
rested upon a firm belief

in the preeminence of Christ,

the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount.

We believe in that and we believe

in taking the utmost scruple

to preserve individual liberty.

My mother told me the stories of our faith,

the story of Schwenckfeld and the church,

and so I had my first church history.

When I was eleven, my mother died,

she who had always said

she would see I got an education

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I lost hope then, yes, before long  
I left school and worked on my father's farm,  
then I helped three years at my uncle's mill.  
It was there I drove the flour route.  
One day after the many hours of work  
and after sweeping up the mill,  
I happened to open two books on the floor.  
I sensed somebody was looking at me.  
I looked up — my uncle was there,  
the one from an adjacent farm.  
I tried to hide the books under some bags,  
but he insisted on seeing them,  
and, so, they were school books,  
they were a geometry and a Latin.  
He said, 'Elmer, do you want to study?'  
I said I did.  
He said, 'I'm afraid we've neglected you.  
Your mother prayed you might go to school,  
and you are going to go.'  
He called my other uncle. Together  
they went to my grandfather. The next day  
my grandfather called me at one o'clock.  
He said he had heard of my work at the mill,  
he said the years of work were not wasted.  
I was mature, I knew what life was,  
and I would study so much the better.  
'Here behind the wall of the hills  
we are still provincial.  
We need now one to go out,  
and bring the world back to us.'  
He said I should have ten years' education,  
and as he would not live to see it through,  
he put the money in my hand.  
He told me where I was to go:

so many years in Perkiomen Seminary,  
 then Princeton was a good school  
 with good men to study under,  
 I should go there, he said.  
 And last he spoke of New England  
 and its different religious ideas.  
 'You go there, you'll be safe.  
 Go to the Hartford Theological Seminary.'  
 So he laid out the work.  
 Three years later he died.  
 I faithfully carried the work through."

Ten years of study, ten years more in Europe,  
 where he did Schwenkfelder research,  
 then home, back from beyond the hills.  
 At home he took a local pastorate,  
 the Reformed Mennonite Church in Bally,  
 there to serve the rest of his life.  
 He built a house in the valley  
 and lives there still.  
 Around him are Bibles, psalters, hymnals,  
 the personal family Bibles of the valley,  
 the valley that he knows and loves,  
 the people of his faith.  
 He went beyond the wall and returned.

### **Dr. Johnson in Germany**

"Some wonder that here in Bally  
 I have as a friend the local priest  
 and that I have the privilege  
 of going anywhere in the Catholic church,

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that shrine of Pennsylvania Catholics.

“When I first went to Germany  
to do research on Caspar Schwenckfeld  
and to help get Schwenckfeld’s writings published  
in a complete edition. —

all is published now, in fifteen volumes —  
I was most afraid of the Catholic hierarchy.  
I feared they would block my labors  
by closing to me the doors to documents,  
preventing me from finding needed facts.

“It was with this fear I went to Breslau,  
to Cardinal Bertram, then Archbishop, young,  
two years younger than I,  
a most learned Catholic scholar.

I said, ‘I’m a Schwenckfelder, from Pennsylvania,  
residing in Wolfenbuettel,’

and so I gave him my credentials.

Immediately he opened to me  
the Episcopal Archives with its documents,  
letting all know I was to use them.

The Privy Councillor, Canon Jungnitz,  
said, ‘Thrice welcome, thrice welcome,’

and there was assigned, to help me,

a priest named Griepenkerl,

a man of a beautiful character

who devoted himself to me.

So I remained three weeks

and it opened a world locked to me before.

The priest Griepenkerl is dead,

the Privy Councillor is dead,

and Cardinal Bertram is dead,

but the memory is not dead.

In the years following, a bond sprang up

between me and that Catholic,  
a fellowship in bond so thick  
that it lasts yet.  
He wrote once a line in a book for me:  
'Der Zweck all unsers Forschen  
muss die Wahrheit sein.'  
'The purpose of all our research  
must be to find the truth.'  
"Then I went to Bavaria,  
so full of Catholics, the place  
of Schwenckfeld's exile for thirty-nine years.  
From Ulm, one day I was to go to a certain village.  
I took a train at five-thirty to Erbach,  
then walked six hours westward  
on the north bank of the Danube, close to the river,  
and came to the little village of Oepfingen.  
When I reached it,  
it was empty, chickens and pigeons the only life,  
not a soul to be seen.  
I went toward the church which stood  
high above the Danube's sweep—  
and a woman and a boy appeared  
obviously on the way to the church  
to receive the priest's closing blessing.  
The woman said, 'Gesegnet sei Jesus Christus.'  
Just then the whole village dropped out of church,  
and I went aside, not to disturb them,  
then went to the parish house.  
A sister fetched the 'Father.'  
He stood in his cloak with folded arms.  
'What can I do for you?' he said.  
I said I was a Schwenckfelder from Pennsylvania  
and he said, 'Then I know what you want.'

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and took me to the church altar  
and said, 'Behind that altar —'  
'You would say, "Behind that altar stands Schwenckfeld,"  
I said, 'but it is not so.'  
I drew out then a pen sketch I had  
of a handsome black marble statue  
of Schwenckfeld's most eminent patron,  
Lutz von Freyberg. It was the statue.  
The Priest admitted the error,  
and so we began to talk.  
The priest invited me to dinner,  
but I said my time was limited  
and I must continue on my way.  
The priest then refused to leave me.  
He walked two hours in his gown.  
When I said his soup was getting cold,  
he said, 'My soup I can eat tomorrow.  
You I can only have now.'  
When at last we parted, he stood watching me  
with his hand raised in farewell,  
and as long as I was in sight,  
his hand was raised.

"Another priest, from the village of Justingen,  
took me to see the ruins  
of von Freyberg's castle which Wallenstein  
destroyed in sixteen twenty-six,  
at the same time, it may be,  
destroying Schwenckfeld's library.  
The ruins were on a rocky cliff  
in an immense park now a cow pasture.  
We could see fragments of wall,  
trees that were once ornamental trees,  
traces of roads and paths.

We sat on the ruins, among walls and arches,  
and watched the sun go down.  
Below in the tops of trees  
we could see the outline of the railroad  
on which I must return. Night came.  
We talked together till midnight  
of religion, church history, such things  
as would come to us on such a night,  
then the priest took my hand  
and led me by the light only of stars  
down the precipice to the meadow below,  
taking care that I should be safe. Then:  
'Here our ways part. Mine goes back up the mountain  
to my village and my people —  
yours goes toward the light and the railroad station  
and at last home to your Schwenkfelder people.  
It may be our ways will never again  
cross, but I am convinced  
we will meet in the life hereafter.'

"The Catholics sometimes said to me, about Schwenckfeld,  
'We can never make up for what we did to him.  
He condemned our errors, not our church.'

"In all religions is a common something —  
what it is exactly I do not know —  
but it is greater than the differences.  
Unless I believed that, I would believe nothing.  
Although for years I held a Mennonite pastorate,  
I never united in that church,  
but stayed, as before, a Schwenkfelder,  
believing it to be the right thing.  
What my mother and my people taught  
was in my heart, so I kept to it.  
Others keep to their own."