

THE GREAT PROGENITOR

By Abraham Thompson Secret

This is the story of a German schoolboy, who with a bundle of books under his arm, one fine morning in April, 1776, was on his way to the High School of Cassell, the small capital city of the Grand Duchy of Hesse, when he was kidnapped by two soldiers of the Grand Duke Friedrich II, to be sold to King George III of England for service in the rebellious colonies of America. He was quickly taken by the soldiers to their barracks and so closely was he held prisoner that he never again saw his parents nor brother and sister. Nor would they let him go to bid his family farewell before he was shipped out by way of England to America.

This seventeen year old schoolboy was George Nicholas Spaht, the elder son of Michael and Cunegunda Spaht. He had one brother, Mathias, and one sister, Charity. Why did not his parents protest against such tyranny? Autocracy is not a new development in Germany. History tells us that if a mother protested in a case like this she was thrown into prison; if the father protested, he was flogged. And they were not alone in their suffering. This same Grand Duke furnished 22,000 soldiers to the English King and many of them were obtained in the same way. The finances of the Grand Duchy were considerably augmented at the expense of the welfare and morality of the people, and the dissolute ruler kept up a splendid court on the proceeds of the pay.

"The Hessians were the victims of the tyranny of their rulers, who sold the lives and services of their subjects to the highest bidder. The English government was at that time the best customer. Large profits were realized by the petty princes who were willing to sell mercenaries for the war in the American colonies, as can be seen by examination of the contracts between the parties on either side, contracts which were not kept secret.-All told, the expense to England for the German mercenary troops was at least seven million pounds sterling, the equivalent at present of one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty million dollars. -The greatest of the German princes did not allow his subjects to be sold. Frederick the Great used his influence against the sale of recruits in other German states and refused to allow mercenaries who were intended for the American service to pass through his domains," says Prof. Faust in his great work, "The German Element in America."

Dr. Holmes very tritely observes that "There are but two biographers who can tell the story of a man's life-the person himself and the recording angel. The first cannot be trusted to tell the whole truth, and the second never lets his book go out of his own hands." Now since our great ancestor did not leave the story of his life, and I have not access .to the recording angel's book, it is our intention to set down here only a few glimpses, as it were, of the Great Progenitor.

We do not know how long he remained in England, nor how long the voyage lasted, but history tells us that on Christmas eve, 1776, the Hessians under Col. Rahl were keeping the vigil of the Nativity in their

customary manner at Trenton, N. J., when Gen. Washington with a handful of troops crossed the Delaware river amidst floating ice, surprised the hilarious Hessians, killed a few and captured more than a thousand and fled back to Philadelphia. Blessed, blessed Night (!) that gave a Redeemer to a sin-sick world! And if we had not been a temperance man for half a hundred years, we would add blessed be that booze that gave a thousand German prisoners to the Father of our Country!

That the American Colonists despised the German troops is not surprising and if the prison camps had been located among purely English settlers it is probable that at the first reverses the American troops suffered, all the prisoners would have been massacred, So with a wisdom almost divine the prison camps for the Germans were established in German settlements, the chief camps being at Germantown, near Philadelphia, and at Winchester, Va. Young Spaid was sent to the latter camp.

According to the records imprisonment in these camps was only nominal, at least after the first few months. Whether the community was held responsible for so many prisoners and was permitted to enforce prison rules to suit themselves, we cannot tell at this date. The German settlers living at both Winchester and Germantown were, for the most part, from the Palatine, a state adjoining Hesse, from whence these soldiers came, and are invariably considered to have been high class colonists, having fled from Germany during the religious wars. The best understanding between the Palatinate settlers and the Hessian soldiers would exist as a matter of course. They used the same language and most of them were of the same religion-Lutheran. Seeing their countrymen enjoying such liberty and comfort on the frontier of America, with a climate so salubrious as the Shenandoah valley, with the forests full of game and the streams full of fish, and where land might be had for the asking, the great wonder is that any of the Hessian soldiers elected to be exchanged and returned to the home land, unless they had left families there.

Well, George Spaid elected to stay in America. Thanks be to God! *The Hessian soldiers had been sent to these prison camps early in '77 and the war ended with the siege of Yorktown in October, 1781, so that the exchange of prisoners did not take place before the spring of '82, and in those five years the German soldiers had ample time to learn of the advantages and disadvantages of frontier life. We are led to think their imprisonment was only nominal because in 1782 George Spaid married Elizabeth Cale (Kale), the daughter of a pioneer German whose home was on the west bank of Capon river about thirty miles west of Winchester.

When and where these young people met cannot now be ascertained, and the date of their marriage is unknown. During the Civil war the Union soldiers destroyed all the records of Hampshire County. (We thought the county officer at Romney, the county seat of Hampshire county, took a malicious pleasure in telling us this when he learned we were from' Ohio.) Most of those of Frederick County (Winchester) were also destroyed, the marriage licenses there starting with the date 1789. The first entry in the Hebron Lutheran church record is also dated 1789, so there is little hope of ever having any definite date on this marriage. It is certain the Cales lived on Capon River before the outbreak of the Revolutionary war because many of the old gravestones bear dates of death so early as 1770, or even earlier, of the Cales buried there.

We may take it for granted that the first home of the young people was a log hut in the wilderness, but whether on what is now known as the Spaid farm, adjoining James Creswell's farm, we cannot now tell. Certain it is that he soon after marriage had a pretentious home here that was still standing in 1900 when the venerable Luther Spaid visited his relatives in Hampshire County and was taken to see the old home of his grandfather, a ten-room weather-boarded house --- part of it a log house weather-boarded, and then used for a sheep shed. Luther brought away a door-latch and part of a log as a relic of the first Spaid home in America.

It is not much of a guess to say that the Spaid's lived on this farm from their marriage in 1782 till their removal to Ohio in 1819, a period of thirty-seven years. Here then were born to them all their nine children, four daughters and five sons, in the order named: John, Frederick, Elizabeth, Mary, Michael, Christina, William, Nancy, Richard. The last named is a guess. Richard died a little boy about eleven years old, and doubtless is buried in the Cale cemetery-the Cale farm was only about two miles away on the same bank (the west bank) of Capon river. We could find no gravestone carved for him, but the cemetery has been thrown into a pasture field so long, and nearly all the stones are knocked down and broken into many pieces, for all were flag stones. We never did find any family Bible of George Spaid containing a record, but he and his wife and each of his eight children have gravestone with date of birth and death carved on it, and each of the eight children that lived to marry has left a family record in some branch of the descendants, and in every case but one the dates in the Bible record agree with the dates on the gravestone. Uncle John's Bible record is undoubtedly correct and the date on the gravestone incorrect. The Bible record was filled out by the careful Meredith Capper.

In some parts of the family the opinion prevails that George Nicholas was not overfond of work, but it is inconceivable that a robust young fellow could locate in the woods, hew out a farm and provide for a large family without doing some considerable work.

*The most celebrated person of Hessian descent in American history is General Custer (Kuster in German spelling) who was massacred with all his forces in the Indian war.