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Fear in Illinois: A Father's Grief

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Fear in Illinois: A Father's Grief

Abstract

Like a prose poem, the passage leaped off of the page of the Lutheran and Missionary as I scanned the newspaper's columns. Sitting in the reading room of the Abdel Ross Wentz Library at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, my heart raced. It's not often that you find new words penned by someone you've been studying for years. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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Interpreting the Civil War

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Fear in Illinois: A Father's Grief

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2012

THE LUTHERAN AND MISSIONARY.

Philadelphia, Thursday, Sept. 25, 1862.

Like a prose poem, the passage leaped off of the page of the *Lutheran and Missionary* as I scanned the newspaper's columns. Sitting in the reading room of the Abdel Ross Wentz Library at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, my heart raced. It's not often that you find new words penned by someone you've been studying for years.

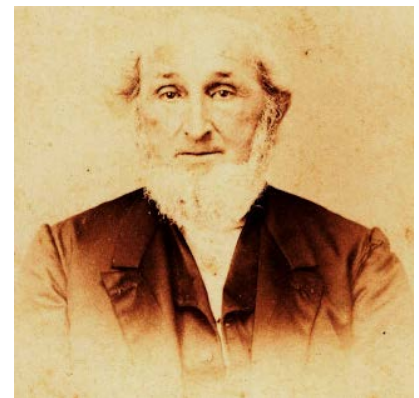
Under the headline, "Hospital Experience," in the September 25th, 1862 edition of the newspaper, a simple column of text speaks to a harrowing and sorrowful experience in a federal hospital. Just days after the bloodshed and destruction of the Battle of Sharpsburg, the caring hearts of Pennsylvanian Lutherans were yearning for some glimpse into the reality of war that had lapped at the shores of the Commonwealth and crashed in a devastating cascade along the mountains to the south.

The article is signed, "H. L. B.," almost certainly Pennsylvania College President Henry Louis Baugher. The last (that I've found) in a series of short articles about Baugher's experience in a Federal hospital in Quincy, Illinois, the article is the most touching of the lot.

Tragedy had drawn the Pennsylvania minister to the West. The President's son [Nesbitt Baugher](#), lawyer and newspaper editor, lay in grave condition in a hospital bed in Quincy in the spring of 1862, bloody and gored by bullet wound after bullet wound at the Battle of Shiloh. Nesbitt began his struggle full of vigor and headstrong from the success of the armies in the battle, [writing from his bed](#) to his father that he had, "news for you – great, glorious news for our country, but not quite so for me."

Baugher had been hit seven times in total by enemy bullets. His condition was grave. The young lieutenant's father wrote:

A young man, full of animal vigor, and animated by lofty patriotism, is wounded, it may be once, twice, or oftener. The pain of the wounds is not very great; he is carried to the hospital; under the influence of chloroform his system is prepared for a comparatively painless probing and dressing. He is able to write home to loved ones, that he was wounded and is doing well, and that his is not seriously ill. In a few days fever sets in, slow but certain. There is nothing to alarm. Symptoms encouraging; wounds healing; physicians say the patient



will get well. Still the slow fever continues. Unexpectedly there is a chill, then delirium; the soldier is once more in the battle field, and it is his last. Nature, enfeebled by disease, is no longer able to resist, and death approaches and obtains an easy victory. If you ask the physician what was the immediate cause of death, he will probably say that the puss discharged from the wounds thus vitiated and carried to the brain caused delirium and was unable longer to sustain life.

I've known for some time that President Baugher visited his son's bedside as he lay dying. When I give tours of the campus, I usually gave that aspect of the tale one solemn line: 'he made it to Illinois just in time to hold his son's hand and pray over him as he died.'

But it was so much more than that.

There is true pain in the words of a father who has lost his own. You can easily conjure forth the form of a father, bending by his son's bedside as he thrashes in a delirious haze, watching as, "death approaches and obtains an easy victory."

Our Country.

(For the Lutheran and Missionary.)

A VISIT TO THE HOSPITAL AT QUINCY, ILL.

Having been summoned to Quincy by the dangerous condition of a beloved son, made such by many wounds received in the battle of Pittsburg Landing, I propose to put on record a few facts which occurred by the way as matters of history and instruction. A new country, though desolate and uninhabited, possesses at least the interest of novelty; but the flourishing towns of Ohio and Illinois, the vigorous activity of their teeming population, the vast and fertile prairie, and the father of waters, soon for the first

Each of Baugher's three letters
are equally heartrending.

And you can hear a father's plaintive voice, asking the question of why his boy had to die, and the surgeon's coarse and clinical reply: "the puss discharged from the wounds thus vitiated and carried to the brain caused delirium and was unable longer to sustain life."

War becomes real. Painfully real.

A few beds down the ward, another soldier lies prone, his, "head has been opened by a fragment of a shell, and the brain forced itself out of the opening." Drifting in through the door are the excruciating screams from yet another man, "the piercing exclamation repeated again and again," Baugher calls it, of the words, "Oh! God, be merciful!"

You can see President Baugher's face, stained with briny streaks. "Kind nature," he mused, "opens the fountain of tears that the breaking heart may find relief through this opened channel."