

THANK GOD FOR GERMANTOWN

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The assignment given me to talk to you about Germantown has been too much for me. Three months has not been time enough, with what else I have had on hand, to simplify what I have a concern to say about Germantown into clarity and coherency. There is just no end to Germantown: what part it has played in the life of America; what it has preserved of the picturesqueness of the past; what place in contemporary life it occupies; and what part it will have in safeguarding the best there is in the world for another generation.

I have wobbled about as to just what phase of Germantown I should present. I began with this title, "Germantown, An Outpost of Yesterday." Then I shifted my title to "Germantown Folks," and finally I ended with "Thank God for Germantown!"

Why should we thank God for Germantown?

I. Because it preserves so much of that better yesterday. That yesterday was at its most secure and most comforting and enjoyable in the 80's of last century. Then Germantown was a veritable Arcadia. We'll all agree, will we not, that "Arcadia is where I was young."

II. Because Germantown is a town of workers, a town that believes that work is the greatest thing in the world.

III. Because it has so many historic sites and so many memorials of the various peoples that have made Pennsylvania. Here we have survivals of all our seven cultures:

1. Holland Dutch
2. Swedish, Finn and Lapp
3. British Quaker
4. Germans from the Rhine Valley and Switzerland
5. Scotch Irish
6. New Englanders
7. Virginians

All of these peoples save the Virginians have been with us since old time and each one of these six has contributed to the very rich and complex civilization that we have here in the valley of the Delaware, the richest civilization there is in America.

IV. Because Germantown is the home of an independent people who resist being flattened out by modernity, who refuse to be regimented, who cannot be poured into a mould.

V. Because Germantown being still a typical town of the old Pennsylvania, it looks at people and institutions with the tolerance that was preached by the founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn.

VI. Because the people of Germantown have always made a sympathetic audience for the best that is known and thought in the world.

VII. Because it is the threshold to more interesting places than is any other town in America.

Cheer up. I am not going to preach on all these items from firstly to seventhly. It was Walt Whitman who said that to have great poetry we must have a great audience. That truth, of course, can be extended to a statement that to have any art great we must have a great audience. I shall talk a little about Germantown people as an audience eager to listen to the best that is known and thought in the world.

When I had the honor to talk to the Science and Art Club ten years ago, I had labored hard to orient Germantown toward the new conditions of a changing world. I was told by your Secretary who came to ask me to speechify on this occasion that I just threw my notes down and talked informally and extemporaneously on what it was to be Germantown. The gentleman perhaps did not realize that with me there is no such thing as an extemporaneous speech. I can only get through any kind of a talk after the most careful preparation, after studying my lesson over and over and over again and by having things break right when I come to talk.

What did I mean by being Germantown? I meant that we were individual; our own crotchety selves; non-conformists; indifferent to what our neighbors, or what part of the world has heard of us think of us; prone to flock by ourselves; and given to idiosyncrasies. Now then, ten years later, I would go on from what I said then.

From my title it will be gathered that I am not purposing a debunking job. What I am going to point out is that not only we are not so bad as most of our neighbors but that it would be a better world if there were more Germantowns in it. I get about a bit in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and Delaware and Maryland and in New Hampshire talking before historical societies, women's clubs, colleges, librarians' conventions and the like, and I do not find many places with our cultivation. I have first hand and detailed knowledge of only these two sections of America, the Delaware and Susquehanna Valleys, and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. I have had, however, more than fifteen thousand students in my classes, students who come from all over the States. Through their themes written for my classes and through my talks with them, I have learned what is the cultivation of their home places, and I have discovered from them that there are few places where there is as much cultivation as there is in Germantown. Through them, and through visits of mine, I have come to know that Wiscasset in Maine is a place of cultivation and Newburyport in Massachusetts, and Rhinebeck on the Hudson in New York State, and Charlottesville in Virginia. There are, of course, cultivated circles in most of our great cities, Boston, New York, Baltimore, Washington, Charleston, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and, of course, in our suburb Philadelphia.

What is characteristic about Germantown is that it should have preserved from the beginning so much of cultivation. I have here in my hand a book on the Linnean system of botany. It was the property of Dr. Carl Bensell (Carolus Benselius), who lived at the northwest corner of Main Street and School Lane where the Germantown Bank is now. The book went from him to Jonathan Robeson and from Jonathan Robeson to Edwin C. Jellet. When his books were disposed of after his death, I came into possession of this book. I bring it as an object lesson. I am of the first crop of kindergarten taught in America and it was just diagonally across from the Bensell homestead in what was later the Young Women's

Christian Association Building at the northeast corner of Church Lane and Market Square that I was kindergartened.

There have been associations of amateurs interested in art or science or literature in many places. For instance, in North Sandwich in New Hampshire, where we have summered for a number of years, there was a North Sandwich Literary Society back in the days of the Civil War, the energizing force in which was one Jane Durgin, a Quaker preacher, who was not only eloquent on the high bench but who, accoutered in tights, could drive two horses, with one foot on either horse and jump through a paper ring like any lady of the circus.

There are few places in which a society interested in the arts and science has lasted for sixty years as this Germantown Science and Art Club has lasted. It was founded, of course, in days that we may look back upon as good old days. There are, of course, old times and old times, good old times and bad old times. Human nature has always been an asset and a liability in the living of life. There has been, perhaps, a slow growth in the principle of live and let live, of altruism, of kindliness. For the most part, what advances there have been made since Germantown was founded in 1682 have been advances in comforts, in the treatment of human ills, in quickness of transportation. We are no more forgiving, or tender-hearted, or unselfish, or honest, or cultivated than our ancestors who came here in the late seventeenth century or in the early eighteenth century. As to cultivation, our educational influences have not given us any more than the breakdown of tradition has taken away from us.

That we are more cultivated than most of our neighbors is due to the fact that we have more traditions than most of our neighbors. It was Walt Whitman, as I said above, who said that if America was to have great poetry it must have a great audience for poetry, and, as I said before, as it is with poetry so it is with all the arts, with all the departments of life. There must be about those who are interested in everything under the sun, who realize that, comfort and well-being established for all who deserve comfort and well-being, there are still other ends to be sought for. First and foremost of all these other ends is, we'll all agree, a better tomorrow for all of us. We'll some of us be interested in one phase of this tomorrow, some others of us in another phase. All of us who are of the elements one finds in this Science and Art Club are of the audience quick to receive and forward by our interest what is new in science and art. Germantowners are a part of the not too large audience there is in America for things worth while.

Where there are so many Friends—Quakers I mean—there are by that very fact many humanitarians. I need not, I think, talk of Germantown's concern with such matters. This is a science and art club and there will be a bias in my talk toward science and art. I happen to be deeply interested in one science, the science of ornithology, and in one art, the art of writing, and I must perforce speak of what I know. One large part of my life has been spent in the study of literature in English and another considerable part in the study of the American scene as that scene may be presented in writing. My study of ornithology has developed from a boy's hobby as has, too, this same concern just mentioned with the American scene, the American out-of-doors, especially of the parts birds played in that out-of-doors.

There has always been a response to the things most worth while in life in Germantown. That concern has been crystallized in this club for sixty years now. We are of the contingent one sees at the previews of exhibitions at the Academy of the Fine Arts; we make a part of the audience at lectures at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Academy of Natural Sciences; and at such memorable occasions as the book fair of the Germantown Friends School last fall. A Germantowner sees, too, many of his neighbors at the concerts of the Philadelphia Orchestra and at any presentation that is worth while in the theatre, the Hamlet, say, of Maurice Evans.

As symbolic of our culture, I wish to consider seven Germantowners, all now with God, and all in their time members of this Club. These seven are:

1. James Darrach
2. William T. Richards
3. Thomas Meehan
4. Joseph Wharton
5. Martin J. Brumbaugh
6. William H. Lambert
7. Witmer Stone

Of course, to a man of my years the mere mention of these names brings up known men to me. I realize, however, that there are those of you here who do not remember when James Darrach was one of the three doctors whose names began with D who were *the* doctors of Germantown. These three were Darrach, Downs and Dunton. James Darrach was much more than he who cured the ills of his patients fifty years ago in Germantown. He was a collector of paintings. He was the friend and confidant of Leidy with whom he made many trips around about Philadelphia. I never, for instance, see winterberry, that holly without leaves that has been so prevalent this Christmastide, that I do not think of Dr. Darrach. I had gathered some of this plant on our Wissahickon Hills and on Dr. Darrach's coming to the house I had asked him what it was. He had said winterberry. His identification of this berry was made for me, as I have said, more than fifty years ago. But I never see winterberry in Jersey or Pennsylvania or winterberry in New Hampshire where they call it black alder, that I do not think of James Darrach. He always had some anecdote on every visit that lightened one's heart. He always had some picturesque sight he had seen on his rounds, as a tree full of redpolls, tiny birds that visit us out of the north only at long intervals of very hard winter weather.

William T. Richards is a marine painter who shares with Winslow Homer, Frederick Judd Waugh, and Paul Dougherty a place of primacy among marine painters in America. You know I am of the older generation and have the courage to admire the work of William T. Richards as I have the courage, we will say, to admire the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Thomas Meehan was our nurseryman whose broad acres of shrubs extending back from Chew Street in Mount Airy contained the rarities that are now distributed all through our section. He is the author of a good deal of writing on botany, but he is best known as the man who disseminated the pink dogwood. It was a sport from the ordinary white

flowering dogwood. Where he found it, I do not now remember, but I remember a tree of a light but intense pink that stood at the end of Allen's Lane and Township Line west, now Wissahickon Avenue.

Joseph Wharton I well remember at the meeting of this Science and Art Club when he had a chemist from New England talking to us. That chemist talked so far over our heads we couldn't understand more than a third of what he said. After the chemist had talked forty minutes, Joseph Wharton made all that he had said clear in ten minutes.

Martin J. Brumbaugh talked to this Club before he was a member of it. I shall always remember his speaking at my father's on Upsal Street on Christopher Sauer, the Germantown printer. Brumbaugh was a picturesque survival of yesterday. He has told me himself that he got his first start in life with a hundred dollars given him for breaking a log jam on the Juniata at Huntingdon. You know him, of course, as a school superintendent, as Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Pennsylvania, as Governor of Pennsylvania, and as a neighbor in Germantown. He was the very incarnation of energy. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the making of Juniata College, the Dunkard college at Huntingdon, one of the institutions that counted in Pennsylvania. He assembled there, and there came to the college from his personal collections, a great mass of historical material of the first importance connected with the history of Pennsylvania. He was a huge, strong man. I very well remember that at the famous Cornell game in which Cornell scored eleven the first half and Pennsylvania twelve the second half he was so excited that he picked me up and threw me into the air, catching me as if I had been a baby. Perhaps I was not quite of the *avoirdupois* I am now, but still I was of sufficient weight to make even a strong man hesitate to take such liberties with me.

Colonel William H. Lambert was known to all of us as a collector of Thackerayana and Lincolniana. I haven't a doubt that many of us have memories of pilgrimages to his house on Johnson Street near the Pennsylvania Railroad and what wonders it contained. He has talked to this Club at least twice on Lincoln and once on Thackeray.

Witmer Stone I do not have to talk to you about. You all knew him as a member of this Club. Perhaps all of you did not know him as the man who was writing while he was a member of this Club, *Bird Studies at Old Cape May*, the best bird book that ever came out of America. If you do not believe that, just listen while I read a sample from it:

"The life and habits of these great silent scavengers of our winter sea coast offer a great field for study. Their very silence seems to increase their dignity and add to the impression of independence, self-reliance and contempt for their lesser associates which characterize the Herring Gulls. In spite of their presence here in summer, I always associate them with winter and picture them in my mind's eye as accompanied by the angry roar of the surf and the rush of waters on some wild beach by the harbor's mouth, as they gather together for the night. Many times I have seen them on a narrow bar at sunset where they stand out silvery white and gray against the deep blue black of the darkening ocean, while every moment a long line of snowy surf boils up behind them as if to wash them from their narrow strand. Farther out other lines of surf appear successively and are lost again in the flood of waters. Every moment the

pale yellow moon is growing brighter as the last rays of the sun die out in the west, and the night shadows creep closer and closer, while the great gulls stand there . . . silhouetted against the sky until they are slowly and gradually swallowed up in the night."

So much for typical Germantown people. What about Germantown the place? What landmarks hereabout do you show people who have never been to Germantown but who have heard of it and asked to be taken about Germantown for an afternoon and to be shown what is most representative of the place? In other words, what are the seven wonders of Germantown? Here are a seven:

1. The Crown of England over the Germantown Academy and the old school building under that crown.

2. The rhododendrons in that section of Fairmount Park above Walnut Lane and between Lincoln Drive and Wissahickon Avenue that in the days of my youth we used to call Thomas's. Those rhododendrons were planted as early as 1850 a good many of them, and some of them are fully twenty feet tall. They make a great show there early in June.

3. The Chew House, the central point of the Battle of Germantown. We all know the Chew House by sight and I hope we have all made a tour of its rooms. What we do not all of us know is the great collection of treasures that have come down during the long years one family has occupied this house. It is just full of old books, old papers, and memorabilia.

4. The site of the Pietist community up Hermit Lane on the Roxborough side of the Wissahickon that was called in old years, "The Woman in the Wilderness," and all the fabled valley of the Wissahickon Valley below it.

5. The site of the Christopher Sauer printing shop, where was printed the first Bible to be printed in America.

6. The site of the Gilbert Stuart studio down Germantown Road from the site of the Christopher Sauer printing shop, just below the Germantown Historical Society Building. Here was the house and studio in which Gilbert Stuart painted his picture of Washington.

7. And I need not, I think, more than mention the seventh wonder of Germantown, the Science and Art Club of Germantown.

They tell us there are two buildings in America other than the Germantown Academy surmounted by the golden Crown of England. I have seen but one of these, the crown above the Tennent Presbyterian Church out from Freehold in North Jersey. That crown, like ours above the Germantown Academy, is bullet riddled, but so are many other weather-vanes and decorative symbols above buildings here and there in the older parts of America.

You will notice I have been speaking in sevens. I hope that will not be associated in your minds only with the "come seven come eleven" of crap. Seven, of course, has always been a number to conjure with. I might, for instance, speak of seven famous old buildings in Germantown:

1. Stenton
2. Logan House above Wayne Junction
3. Grumblethorp
4. Wyck

5. Keyser House just above Tulpehocken Street
6. Johnson House above Johnson Street
7. Billmeyer House above Upsal Street.

If you would have Germantown represented in a collection of pictures of what was most representative in the America of yesterday, what subjects would you choose from our neighborhood? Here are a seven you might choose:

1. Poe on the Wissahickon. You know his favorite walk was out Ridge Road to Roxborough and down to the creek at what is now Kitchen's Lane on the Germantown side. From here he would walk down to Ridge Avenue and so back to town. It was here he saw the tulip poplar, his favorite tree.

2. Walt Whitman in Germantown. I can well remember him hobbling along on the sidewalk outside the Friends graveyard at the northeast corner of Greene and Coulter Streets, or sitting with his hat on in the Germantown Academy on the headmaster's platform tap, tap, tapping with his cane on the platform as we read our Homer or Virgil.

3. Sparrow Jack (John Bardsley), the man who introduced the English sparrows to Germantown. He had the eaves of his house turned into a nesting place for them with little holes for them to carry in their hay and feathers. I would like a picture of him standing at the tail of his painter's cart looking up at the gable of his house at his pets.

4. I would like Ned Miller driving his coach and four.

5. I would like a picture of fire engine No. 19 with its coach dogs running.

6. I would like a picture of Simeon Yerkes spreading the wings of a pet Dominique cockerel of his and descanting upon his points. He should be out of doors at the edge of his pear orchard on a day of early May when all those seckels and jargonelles and boscs were in full blow.

7. I would like a picture of a woman in scarlet rising in Friends meeting and talking as if possessed I will not say by what. I will always remember the way in which the Friend sitting at the head of the meeting met the situation. The woman was speaking from the floor of the meeting, a brilliant figure in scarlet among all the greys and browns and olives and mauves of the garments about, speaking from the women's side, of course. As it became evident that she was incoherent in what she said, the Friend at the head of the meeting said, "Let us all stand and recite in unison the Lord's Prayer." In the shuffling and the noise of the congregation getting to its feet, two men went down from one of the lower facing benches and led her gently out.

Well, there's some picturesqueness for you, and I haven't spoken of old Francis Jackson striding along in a snowstorm with a shawl around his shoulders and a scarf around his neck and a high shepherd's crook extending up beyond the peaked cap he always wore, and twenty other picturesquenesses now gone. I have spared the present audience. Once at the Evening Hour, one-time rival of the Science and Art Club of Germantown, I saw and heard Edward Drinker Cope take the exhibits of his talk, exhibits that showed the deleterious effects of environment and heredity, from the audience, from his own cousinage in fact.

Germantown is not only a good thing in itself but the threshold to

many other worlds as bright as its own world. A friend of mine, from Biddeford in Maine, the sort of New Englander who is only camped in sufferance in any other part of the world, said to me that nobody had ever told him about these seven other kinds of places and cultures there were within a few hours' auto run from Germantown. He listed them, after some piloting from me, as

- I. Jersey Coast
- II. Jersey Pines
- III. Delaware and Eastern Shore of Maryland
- IV. The Susquehanna Hills that Lloyd Mifflin described
- V. Pennsylvania Dutchland
- VI. The Painters' Bucks County
- VII. The Poconos

It is fortunate for Germantown to have the Wissahickon close by, an unspoiled glen, hemlocked here and there, and supporting quite a population of small game, rabbits and squirrels, raccoons and opossums, minks and weasels, foxes and pheasants, bobwhites and crows, carp and such trout as the carps' devouring of their spawn allows to perpetuate themselves.

Germantown is fortunate in its setting. It is fortunate in having Philadelphia close by, a place in which to make a living, to hear symphonies and opera, to see what few good plays are left on the stage, to see exhibitions of painting, to get rare books.

It is fortunate in having Jersey close by. There are yet ten miles of beach hills from below Seaside Park to Barnegat Inlet, and other shorter stretches on Long Beach and on south to Avalon.

It is fortunate in having "The Pines" this side of the coast islands, with its picturesque ruins of old paper mills, such as those at Harrisville; its old furnaces and forges for the handling of bog ore, such as those at Batsto; its survivals of glass houses, like the little glass house of the Clevengers at Clayton and of Larson at South Vineland; of pixie and sand myrtle and laurel, of water lilies and turkey's beard and pine gentian; of its plains east of Woodmansie, last home hereabouts of the heath hen; of log houses like that at Upper Mills or that at Remsterville. There are all sorts of treasure in "The Pines," old fiddlers like Elven Sweet at Magnolia and Harvey De Camp near Johnson Place, and of a ballad singer like Stacy Bozarth at Buddtown. There you may hear an old air like "Up the Road to Lancaster" or an old song like "The Cuckoo" which begins "She sings as she flies." There you may find old glass in amethyst that glows like a jewel or a tea caddy in cast and carved iron as curious as some treasure from Japan. It is fortunate in having down Salem way old houses of red brick with black and blue headers relieving the red, that are very citadels of warmth and heartiness when all the dyked meadows about are bleak with winter.

It is fortunate in having within three hours the great yellow dunes back of Cape Henlopen, those dunes down which the children roll colored eggs at Easter while the great bell buoy offshore in the Atlantic tolls "Shoal, ware Shoal, say I."

It is fortunate in having old potteries to visit down along the Maryland line, and white herons and nesting eagles and hosts of huge white swans down Susquehanna towards where the great river meets Chesapeake Bay.

It is fortunate in having orchards on the South Mountain, stretching up beyond log houses, clapboarded, with symbolized barns and red-tiled corncribs and smoke houses and ground cellars. Here one may find wall decorations in fractured or illuminated writing that is the direct descendant of the penwork and brushwork in medieval missals, in house blessings, and birth and baptismal and marriage certificates. The lettering of these with the decorations of tulips and pomegranates, doves and peacocks, thistlebirds and paroquets, in light reds and yellows, in soft blues and golds, is a department of American art not widely realized.

Germantown is fortunate in being less than an hour by car from Valley Forge and less than four hours from Gettysburg. These sites that mark crises in the War of the Revolution and in the Civil War are places of pilgrimage for folks from all over America. There is less of interest because of the obliteration of many houses and landmarks, at Valley Forge, than there used to be, but there are the Washington Headquarters, the low breastworks and the plantations of dogwood, and, above all, the memories of Baron Von Steuben's welding of spent militia into a trained army in that long winter of 1777-78, the creation of an army that was in the end to win us our freedom from England.

Gettysburg is much more as Gettysburg was in 1863 than Valley Forge is as it was in 1777-1778. The farmhouses and the fence rows have been left pretty much as they were, and one can revisualize the deployments of the northern and southern armies throughout the three days' battle as one looks out on the battlefield from this or that point of vantage. I was there with my uncle, James B. Thomas, who fought in the battle, on its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1888, and seventy-five years after the battle I again made pilgrimage there. It is a countryside typical of Pennsylvania, a countryside of valley farms, hillside orchards and wooded ranges of mountains.

It is fortunate that we have the Poconos little more than two hours away from us. There is real mountain air there, sugar maples that are a glory of red and gold in fall, trout streams of living water. Bear still haunt these berried mountainsides, deer bolt away from your car as you follow the twisting roads, rhododendron-thicketed, that reveal such a wealth of pinky white bloom as June wears on to July. There are beaver here, dam building, bobcats, and rumors every once and so often of those larger cats with so many names, panther, painter, cougar, mountain lion. On the way north to the Poconos, by roads up or near the Delaware Valley, we pass high cliffs of red sandstone roseroot mantled that safeguard the eyries of duckhawks. There are still a few covered wooden bridges by the way, at Portland, for one place, and the sites of old peach orchards Indian-planted. On Delaware Durham boats brought down iron ore and by Delaware ran a canal that brought anthracite to town. Slate quarries by the roadside reveal why it is so many houses and barns are slate-roofed. Cement mills and broad acres of limestone soil speak clearly of prosperous industry and prosperous farming.

We are hardly out of town on our way to the Poconos before we are running through the rich districts of lower Bucks that are still full of old houses dating back to the eighteenth century. Here in old times Edward Hicks painted his pictures of "The Peaceable Kingdom," almost always with a glimpse of the Delaware and its environing hills in the background, and here today paint Redfield and Garber, and a host of

others. This section of Pennsylvania has been made known to the world more fully than any other, as fully, indeed, as the Maine Coast; or Cape Cod, or the Hudson Valley, or the White Mountains, the pueblos of New Mexico or the Spanish Missions of California.

Another countryside easily accessible from Philadelphia is the bay-side of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Here, at Secretary, say, one may come on a little old house whose bricks, it is fabled, were brought as ship's ballast from England. Whether they were or not, the house has an old world charm, with wooden window and fireplace trim of the utmost refinement. Here, too, a mockingbird will sing whenever on a day of late winter a touch of spring is on the air. Here killdeers wheel and cry about the ruins of an early nineteenth century house, fire gutted, but with panelling of rosewood still defying all weathers.

I have but sampled the extraordinary rich lore of Germantown. If my talk has been rambling and somewhat gossipy, please forgive me. I simply hadn't the time to work it out with all the rest I had to do in the fall just past. There has been enough reference to what is worth while, I hope, to have justified my title which I repeat as whole-heartedly as I announced it at the beginning of the talk, thank God for Germantown!