

Julius Köbner and the German Baptists.

Um Die Gemeinde. Ausgewählte Schriften von Julius Köbner.
Auswahl und Einleitungen von Hermann Gieselbusch. Bund
der Freunde Christlicher Bücher. Berlin, 1927. lvii-213 pp.
3RM.

THIS little book is of considerable interest and importance. Dr. H. Gieselbusch, whose father was at one time Principal of the Hamburg Baptist Seminary, and who is married to a grand-daughter of Julius Köbner, has edited a selection of Köbner's writings, and prefixes to them a most suggestive essay of some thirty pages on "Julius Köbner and the German Baptist Movement." This introductory essay has been described in a German review, and not unfairly, as the first critical study of the modern Baptist movement in Germany.

J. G. Oncken, J. Köbner, and G. W. Lehmann formed the triumvirate, the "Kleeblatt," whose devoted work led to the founding of Baptist churches throughout Germany and in neighbouring countries during the middle part of the nineteenth century. Oncken as a boy spent some years in Scotland and England, and was converted in a Methodist chapel; it was years later, chiefly because of his loyalty to the New Testament, that he came to an acceptance of believers' baptism. 1834 saw him baptised in the Elbe by the American Professor Sears. Köbner was a Danish Jew, trained as an engraver, who settled in Germany in order the better to pursue his trade. From early years he busied himself with the study of early Christianity and its Founder, and in 1826 he joined the Reformed Church in Lübeck. His success in an essay competition on the employment of orphan children led to his moving to Hamburg, and there he came to know Oncken, and was by him baptised in 1836. Dr. Gieselbusch urges that there can be no doubt that his conversion from Judaism to Christianity marked the bigger change in his life: "His joining the young Baptist church was only the natural consequence of following the path on which he had set out." G. W. Lehmann, the third of the pioneers, had been influenced by the Mennonites before his friendship with Oncken. They formed an interesting trio, all of them men of decidedly more than average ability, and they met with extraordinary success,

although in the early years they had to encounter bitter persecution. At the first "Bundeskonferenz" in 1849, thirty-six churches were represented; by 1870 this number had risen to ninety-two, and there are now over 240 separate congregations. The rapid spread in the early years Dr. Gieselbusch traces to tendencies which go back to Reformation times; the repressed Anabaptist movement, Pietism and Mennonitism had prepared the soil. It is not accurate to charge the movement with being a foreign importation, out of accord with the German religious tradition.

Oncken was an organiser; that was both his strength and his weakness. It was not so much Baptist principles as Baptist churches which he wished to spread. His missionaries all made personal report to him, and in return received his instructions. Köbner was of a different type; he had varied and imaginative gifts, and was interested in history and theology. A most unfortunate and bitter controversy over organisation, in which the three leaders were involved and which led to mutual recriminations, developed towards the end of 1871 out of local differences in Hamburg. It is noteworthy, as Dr. Gieselbusch points out, that the north and east of Germany were in favour of a closer and more authoritative type of organisation, whereas the south and west clung to independency. "The development of the Reformation almost repeated itself on a small scale." Köbner's own view of what constitutes a church was clearly influenced by the older Baptist movement on the Continent, and also by Pietism; he asserted uncompromisingly the freedom of the individual, and the right to self-determination of the local congregation, which was to consist of believers only.

The promise of the early years has not been altogether fulfilled. The rate of progress has become very much slower. Köbner died in 1884, Oncken in the same year, and Lehmann two years earlier. Since about 1890, says Dr. Gieselbusch, the movement has lived spiritually from hand to mouth. Much devoted work has been done, but there has been little inquiry into principles, little practical freedom, small adjustment to changing conditions. Köbner's works, therefore, retain an importance quite independent of their literary merit.

The selection which we are offered consists of: (1) forty-eight of his "spiritual songs." Of these twenty-one are in *Glaubenstimme*, the German Baptist hymnbook, which contains in all nearly fifty of Köbner's hymns. Some few are worthy of comparison with the work of Zinzendorf and Tersteegen; all of them are of vigorous and obvious sincerity and piety. (2) *The Waldensians*, a poetical drama, published in 1861. Köbner was evidently drawn to a study of the Waldensians by the

belief that their kinship with the Early Church and with the later Baptists was close. He aimed at giving a true historical picture, and the works on which he relied followed Perrin's *Histoire des Vaudois* (Geneva, 1619). This would not now be accepted as at all an accurate account of the movement, but this does not detract from the interest of K bner's work, which is dominated by the conception that world-history is God's drama. The dramatic strength of the piece has been increased by some re-arrangement of scenes. (3) *Manifesto to the German People* (1848), which deals with the relations of Church and State, and was written at a time when public opinion was excited on the question of religious freedom. As would be expected, K bner rejects any idea of state connection or establishment; it leads, he urges, both within and without the church to the method of the Inquisition. (4) A pamphlet on *Sanctification*, issued in 1855, and inspired by the seventh chapter of Romans. It is clear from this that K bner had a much wider conception of Christian fellowship and Christian duty than might be suggested by his resolute independency.

Dr. Gieselbusch, in addition to brief introductions to each of these four parts of his book, adds some useful notes. He is at times, perhaps, a little too anxious to insist on K bner's ability and influence; but that is pardonable. It seems hardly fair to suggest, for example, that it was K bner's influence alone that caused the rebirth of the Baptist movement in Sweden; even if Andreas Wiberg's conversion to believers' baptism be credited to him, as N. J. Nordstr m holds (though it was, according to Dr. Rushbrooke, a pamphlet by Pengilly that finally convinced him), yet it was while Wiberg was in America that the first church in Stockholm was founded and work in other parts begun. In any case, however, K bner was obviously a striking and able man, with much about him that is "unbaptistisch" in the historical sense of the word, and therefore all the more worth studying. We are promised a biography by his daughter, Frau Baresal of Stuttgart. Meantime, we are grateful for this selection from his writings, and for the critical work of Dr. Gieselbusch.

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