

## Four Centuries of Pacifism.

THE Mennonites are a body of evangelical Germans and Dutch, numbering nearly 400,000, who five years ago celebrated the 400th anniversary of one of their great leaders on the Rhine. To-day they are found in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Paraguay; Russia, Germany, Holland, France and Switzerland.

Until 1888 there was very little information about them available in English, but one or two of their American groups then began to explain themselves. A fine study of their origins was published in 1897 by professor A. H. Newman, the Baptist historian of America. With 1915 one of their leaders in Holland contributed a capital account to Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Three years ago they began a *Quarterly Review* at Goshen, Indiana; and their Historical Society is now issuing most valuable work in both German and English. Our own Society is exchanging publications; and from the Mennonite sources we offer this introductory sketch.

First, we recognize the governing principle of the whole body, which has been emphatic ever since Menno organized in 1537. It is conformity to the New Testament ideal of life, positively in simplicity and love, negatively in non-resistance to force. A Mennonite can be recognized by plainness of attire and customs, by industry, by mutual help to an unusual degree; and in these days as ever by an uncompromising Pacifism. As the Quaker has been the typical Conscientious Objector in English-speaking lands, so the Mennonite has upheld the same ideal on three continents. A firm grasp of this principle is the clue to the extraordinary migrations of this persecuted people.

One of their earliest leaders was Balthasar Hubmaier, who in 1523 persuaded Zwingli for a short time "that children should not be baptized before they are instructed in the faith." It was a cardinal principle of all these men that "as the congregation of the Lord consists only of believing and regenerate children of the Lord, only those who are sufficiently advanced in years and experience, and, therefore, able to believe, can be admitted into the congregation." To that simple rule they have always adhered everywhere.

From Switzerland, where they were bitterly persecuted,

three streams flowed; one to Alsace and France, one to lower Germany and Holland, one to Tirol and Moravia. The westward branch was the least important; Alsace and Montbeliard were the chief districts; yet it has a special interest for Baptists. Many of the Mennonites in France have dropped the use of German, and speak French. This has cut them off from their co-religionists, and as they are too poor to educate their own ministers, young men are being sent, with much misgiving, to a Baptist Bible School in Paris. "There is the danger that they will slip away from us into the Baptist ranks, if they are really gifted."

The eastern branch is the least known till of late. It owed much to a mining engineer, Pilgram Marbeck, who after working at Strassburg, settled at Augsburg where he died about 1546. With him is to be coupled Jacob Hutter, who laboured throughout Tirol, and promoted an emigration to Moravia, which became a great refuge. In the course of the Thirty Years' War, the Hutterians were persecuted away to Hungary, where they had peace nearly 150 years. In another persecution, many gave way, but the faithful were reinforced by a strong contingent of new converts from western Austria, and all crossed the mountains to Rumania in 1767. Thence they were invited to south Russia, where they found peace for a century.

The main body has an even more migratory career. As early as 1530 the people were found all the way down the Rhine. To Strassburg there came a man, Melchior Hofmann, who for a short time exercised a most disastrous influence. Hofmann held two remarkable doctrines; that Jesus Christ did not take flesh from Mary; that Jesus Christ was due to return in 1533 A.D., and set up a visible kingdom. The former doctrine sank deeply into many hearts, and by a remarkable inversion, gave much ground for saying that Hofmannites tended to Unitarianism. The Second Adventism induced a few thousands to fix upon, first Strassburg, then Münster, as the place where the King would reign; and they flocked to the latter city, where by constitutional election the Hofmannites had obtained a majority on the town council. They were besieged, and massacred out of existence. But the fact that when attacked they defended themselves scandalized all Europe—Lutherans and Calvinists had not yet taken up arms—and for more than a century afterwards the cry of Münster! or Anabaptist! caused paroxysms of hatred.

After that crisis, emerged Menno Simons, a Frisian priest, whose brother had been in a party hunted down and slain near to him. In 1537 he accepted an invitation to lead the people, who had in a great congress utterly renounced the use of force. From that day they have been unreserved Pacifists; and before

his death in 1559, his influence was so great that the whole body has ever since been named Mennonites.

It may well be imagined how uneasy was their lot, when they refused under any circumstances to fight; and how in place after place they were plundered and massacred. No other church has such a record of martyrdoms. They have some 700 hymns, mostly describing their sorrows and deaths: a collection of these was published in 1564, of which a unique copy has just come to light.

Twice they came into contact with Englishmen. At Amsterdam one of their number hired out his great Bakehouse to John Smyth and a party of refugees from the Trent valley. The English and they compared carefully their opinions, as it was suggested they might unite. Half the English refused, partly on the ground that they could not accept Pacifism; these returned to England in 1612, the first Baptist church in the world. The other half stayed, and became gradually Dutchmen; in the next generation they were accepted as a sister church, and in the third generation they amalgamated entirely; thus on the walls of the great Mennonite meeting-house in Amsterdam may be seen the names of ministers and deacons from Lincolnshire.

In 1654 some English Quakers crossed, and visited many communities up the Rhine. When William Penn secured a refuge overseas, he invited all persecuted sects to come to America. A Mennonite emigration began in 1690, which continued until the outbreak of the revolutionary war in 1774 made Germantown and Pennsylvania generally a most undesirable home for conscientious objectors.

When the revolutionary French began to overrun Holland and Germany, the home-lands were equally uncomfortable. But the Tsarina Catharine had conquered south Russia from the Turks, and was anxious to populate the new territory. She offered to colonists a large measure of home-rule, including the use of their own language, their own schools, their own religion; and what the Mennonites prized most of all, freedom from military service. And so from 1790 there flowed into the Ukraine and south Russia, both Mennonites from the Rhine and Hutterites from Rumania; cousins long parted came at length together. The tide flowed for about fifty years, till Russia had the largest section—all speaking German.

But when America in 1812 settled down to peace, and the Holy Alliance in Europe began renewed persecution, a third current of emigration started from the Rhine, this time to Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Iowa. This continued till 1861, when the Civil War, which soon led to conscription, stopped the current from Europe.

About 1873, when the fear of Prussian militarism was great, the Tsar decided to try to Russianize the German Mennonites in his dominions. They feared that this would involve their liability to conscription, so they sent to explore conditions in Canada and the Dakotas. As a result, a fourth migration began, from Russia this time; and it was only checked when they were reassured in 1880 as to the maintenance of their privileges where they had dwelt for ninety years.

The World War, with its special effects in Russia, caused this removal from Russia to begin again on a large scale. Britons going through the Kiel canal in 1923 to the Stockholm Congress met a vessel laden with Mennonites on their way to Canada. And the newspapers recently have been telling how 20,000 at one time were first given leave to go—leaving all property behind—and then were being forcibly detained. Ten years ago, Russia had a hundred thousand; now they are all trying to leave, experimenting even in Mexico and Paraguay, against a background of Latin-Americans, with a predominantly Catholic religion.

Here is an experience that seems quite typical of this gentle people:—"Great-grandfather migrated with his family from Prussia to South Russia via the wheelbarrow method; great-grandfather lies buried in Russia. Grandfather with married sons and daughters came to Canada in 1873; grandfather lies buried in Manitoba. Now father, an old man, has brought his family to Mexico, where we are starting over again. 'Where next?' you ask. Mexico only as long as we can here live out the principles we deem vital and essential."

Menno issued about 1539 a *Fondamentboek*, also a treatise on baptism. We can thoroughly agree with his view on the meaning of baptism:—"For however diligently we may search day and night, we find but one baptism in the water which is acceptable to God, and expressed and contained in his word, namely the baptism on the confession of faith, commanded by Jesus Christ, taught and administered by the apostles." The Dutch original was not understood by Morgan Edwards, the Welsh-American Baptist minister, who unfortunately rendered the word "doopsel" as "dipping" instead of "baptism." Baptists in America naturally accepted his version, and have been mistaken from 1770 onwards as to the act, though they might surely have looked for themselves and have seen what their Mennonite neighbours actually did. Unfortunately it is easier to copy a book than to go and see for yourself. Thus the Mennonites have always practised Believers' Baptism, though until within living memory the act was always pouring water on the head. The custom has a little interest for Baptists, since

after careful enquiry the Mennonites in Amsterdam agreed that in this matter there was no difference between them and John Smyth.

And Menno when discussing the commands to love one's enemies, to crucify the flesh and its lusts, had written:—"I certainly think that these and similar commands are more painful and burdensome to perverted flesh, which is everywhere so prone to walk in its own way, than it is to receive a handful of water."

As the Mennonites in America are dropping their ancestral German and Dutch, so they may presently give up their quaint old dress. They will then perhaps bear even more effective witness to what is their fundamental principle—the literal obedience to Jesus Christ in all things, including what in another dialect is called the Outlawry of War.

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CHARTERHOUSE. The buildings once used by the Carthusian monks were utilized in 1613 by Sutton for a Hospital, wherein aged gentlemen and poor children were sheltered. The Rev. A. G. Matthews, of the Congregational Historical Society, has identified three boys educated there, who are of interest to Baptists. Roger Williams was admitted in 1621, sent to Cambridge with an exhibition 1624; but he forsook the university and discontinued his studies, so was suspended in 1629. John Gosnold was admitted 1635, sent to Cambridge at Pembroke College 1646: he afterwards founded the church in Paul's Alley, Barbican, and a careless description of him led to the hasty inference that he had been an officer of the Charterhouse. Hanserd Knollys induced Bulstrode Whitelock to give his son John a presentation; but in 1653 it was found he was blind, so three shillings weekly was allowed till he was cured.

MARY DELAUNE on 9 May 1634 gave a receipt for cash due from her late uncle, Peter Chamberlen, of Blackfriars, surgeon; the receipt may be seen at the Guildhall Library, MS. 1849. Her uncle was the father of the Peter Chamberlen whose career was sketched by Dr. Thirtle in our pages twenty years ago, the Seventh-Day Baptist. How Mary was related to Thomas Delaune the schoolmaster, author, and martyr, is not clear. But evidently these Baptists of Huguenot descent were in touch.