

Leonard Busher, Dutchman.

THE facts generally known about this early Anabaptist are, (1). That on 8 July, 1611, Matthew Saunders and Cuthbert Hotten, writing to Johnson's Ancient Church at Amsterdam, mention three kinds of English Anabaptists in that city, "Master Smith, an Anabaptist of one sort, and master Helwise of another, and master Busher of another." (2). That in 1614, he, a citizen of London, published with an address to King James and the parliament, "Religions Peace: or A Plea for Liberty of Conscience."

Many editors and historians have glanced at these facts, sought to tell more about the man, and then have passed by on the other side. Thus H[enry] B[urton] who republished the book in 1646 for the behoof of the Presbyterians, was content to call him "an honest and godly man," and then to reinforce his arguments. Mr. Hanbury knew only the book. Dr. Underhill elicited a little of the internal evidence, and verified that no other work by Busher was known in 1846. Dr. Dexter unearthed the allusion by Saunders and Hutten, while Barclay was favouring the false guess that he consorted with Helwys and Morton. Masson added to this the further embroidery that he worshipped in a dingy meeting-house on Newgate. President Whitsitt from the concluding paragraphs argued most inconclusively that he wrote in Holland. Here the enquiry seems to have ended, for Doctors Christian and Lofton were content to take him as a starting point or an axiom. The purpose of this paper is to examine more carefully the internal evidence of his book, and then to adduce fresh external evidence as to the identity of the author.

First, as to the indications to be gathered from his own text: the references are made to the pages in the edition by Dr. Underhill of Burton's reprint. He styles himself a subject of King James (26, 79), and refers to England as "our" land (16, 52, 78). He is poor, and unable to print two books he has written.

(72). He shows himself peculiarly interested in the Jews of his own time (24, 28, 30, 33, 38, 47, 51, 59, 63, 70, 71); and refers to the Syriac version, which was in his day known by the researches of Tremellius, a Jew, and his son-in-law Junius, who died at Leyden. With the Netherlands also he is well acquainted, not only with the Brownists there, including Robinson (51), and Johnson (73), but with Alva's persecutions of an earlier date (77), and with the general toleration obtaining there (41, 54); these particular allusions are reinforced also by more general ones to exile for conscience sake (31, 70).

This interest in Holland is explained at once by the fact that in 1611 he was in Amsterdam, a leader of some Anabaptists. But the extraordinary interest in the Jews deserves more enquiry, for it can hardly be attributed solely to the fact that Jews abounded in that city. Up to the present, no fact has come to light that explains it. It is tempting to conjecture some link with Junius, le Jon, a Walloon; but so far the link is missing.

Leonard Busher recounts an anecdote about Joan Bocher, the Anabaptist martyr from Kent. The names are sufficiently alike to invite a search for any link, but the facts about Joan, summarised lately by Dr. Gairdner, are these: She is first heard of at Colchester before 1539 as Joan Baron, pleading a pardon by proclamation for those who had been seduced by Anabaptists and Sacramentaries. She moved to Canterbury, where apparently she married a butcher, and so became known as Joan Baron or Bocher. In 1542 she was at Calais, where a jury acquitted her of heresy, but the council held her to answer another charge at Canterbury. Next year, after confessing her doctrine, she pleaded the pardon afresh. Ultimately, as is well known, she was burned in Smithfield by order of Edward VI. There seems no link between her and Leonard Busher in time or place; the coincidence of name appears a mere accident, for Gairdner quotes her real name as Baron, and Evans cites a manuscript calling her Kpell.

Evans refers us to Burns' history of the foreign refugees in England for Leonard Busher, and finds there a Domylic Busher who lent money to Elizabeth. Burns has preserved the names of three other refugees to Kent with somewhat similar names: James Bucer was minister of the Dutch Church at Sandwich in 1562; Jan Bauchery, also of Sandwich, subscribed a penny for the poor in 1571; Francis de Buisson came over to Rye in 1572, a minister. But nothing has been discovered to link any one of these four men to Leonard Busher, although Evans' conjecture may yet prove near the truth, for Leonard betrays no affinity with Kent.

Nor is any help forthcoming yet from the statement of Henry Burton that he was a citizen of London. The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed so many records that the Guildhall appears to contain nothing which would show to what City Company he belonged. Nevertheless it may be that in the archives of some ancient company he may have been enrolled, and those which survive may prove to contain his name and some data about him. Unhappily they are not readily available for research.

Meantime we turn away to Holland, to take up the other clue. He was an Anabaptist leader at Amsterdam in 1611.

Now, on the first Sunday after Easter in 1591, Judith Busscher married Jan Willink. They both died of the plague in 1636, and are buried in the church at Grol, to which they moved after living at Vreden, a town where in 1561 an Anabaptist had been imprisoned and executed. She had previously resided at Geesteren, near the town of Borkeloo, county of Zutphen, close to Bockholt, the scene of the great congress of 1536, attended by Anabaptists from Holland and England. The pedigree of Judith's descendants was traced with care in 1767 at Deventer, and a visit there and at the Hague laid open a most interesting genealogy. One granddaughter married at Bockholt, her daughter married at Amsterdam, and her daughter in turn married Jacob Smit. A great-grandson married also at Amsterdam, and his daughter married Jan Smit, to whom she bore six children, including two Jans and one Johanna.

These facts suggest two conjectures. First, that Leonard Busher was related to Judith Busscher, both being Anabaptists, and in the same district. Second, that her descendants intermarried with the descendants of John Smith, of Gainsborough, who died in Amsterdam 1615, but whose wife joined the Waterlander Church there, and had children.

Another curious fact may be mentioned about Judith Busscher, though it has no direct bearing on Leonard. In 1580 there came to Haarlem a lad of eighteen, called Thomas Tayler, from the West of England, where he was a cadet of a good family; his brothers vainly sought his return, but found him settled in his convictions and determined to express and enjoy them. He therefore settled down with several English companions, and became a good Netherlander; finding a Flemish girl also exiled for her faith, he married her and founded a family that became renowned in the district. To-day Haarlem is adorned by a museum and library bearing their name, and a short search in that city disclosed an elaborate pedigree, published at Amsterdam in 1728. From this it appears that the Taylers, who were Ana-

baptists, intermarried with the descendants of Judith Busscher. It is remarkable that Taylor in 1580 took refuge in Holland for his faith, and changed his nationality; while between 1611 and 1614 Leonard Busher left Holland for England, and was afterwards described as a citizen of London.

Thus far the probabilities seem that Leonard Busher was originally a Dutchman. These are now greatly strengthened by a letter from him, written on the eighth of December, 1642, from Delph, to Abram Derikson, of Amsterdam. The letter is in Dutch, and may be seen in the Mennonite archives at that city, where the assistant librarian, Heer Carel Ströer, was good enough to read it and translate it roughly with the present investigator.

"IN DELPH, THE 8 DECEMBER 1642."

"Unhappy (I would that I might say with truth, Happy) brother in Christ, Abram Derikson: Greeting.

"I have sent you various letters, but have received no reply. Nor have I heard from Thomas Cuyp since September, when he came from England. I have since sent a letter to him on the 18th of November, but no answer. I wish you would tell him so that I may know what is the matter with him. Also, be so kind as to give me a reply to my letters to you and the brethren with you. I am an old weak man, far into 71 years, and lie under overwhelming burdens; kindly bear this in mind, you and your brethren. God's will be done, whose command is to love one another as one's self, and to help him, so that he need not remain under his burden. You know my state well, both in the faith and in worldly affairs; yet in both you leave me under my burden, unhelped; think well over it, if God is not displeased.

"You must know also that I lie under error, yet you do not help me out; with this God is more displeased, for I have often asked help. Do not hate me, (for I love you all, and do not flatter you), as the Scribes and Pharisees hated Christ's disciples. You may think it strange that I call you all brothers, but such you are, unless you do not believe that Jesus is Messiah: [side-note: 1 John v. 1, 2.] because you believe that, then you believe also that you must be my brothers in Christ. If you must allege that I do not believe in that—but this you cannot do. Then because we all believe so, and as the apostle says that those who so believe are born of God, then we have a Father in heaven; thus it must necessarily follow that all His sons are brothers together, but our Brother Christ is the eldest. Now since that is true, I therefore wish that you will give testimony to me in both matters, even as Christ and His apostles enjoin.

" Hoping and trusting shortly to receive an answer, I commend you all with myself to the grace of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

Your desolate brother in Christ,

MARK LEONARD BUSER.

" In the alley between Pieterstraat and Brouwery, of the overturning world."

This letter, which has long been catalogued in the Mennonite archives, can hardly have escaped the attention of previous students; yet no one seems to have published anything about it. The inferences are manifold.

To begin with, there can be no reasonable doubt that this is the same Leonard Busher of 1611 and 1614; this writer is poor, has to do with Amsterdam, is in touch with Anabaptists there, as well as with England, yet to some extent differs from his correspondents in theology.

But he proves to have two Christian names. At this period Englishmen habitually bore only one, two names being a luxury seldom indulged in till about 1750. But in Holland cases occur before this time of longer names, e.g. Dirk Pieterse Smuel of Edam, burned at Amsterdam 1546-7, and Tieleman Jans van Braght, the Mennonite martyrologist of Dort; the suggestion is that Busher was Dutch. Moreover, his name Leonard is not common in England, whereas it was borne by several Dutchmen, such as Leonard Harman, a shoemaker in London about 1578; Leonard Bouwens, the Anabaptist evangelist of Friesland, who died at Hoorn in 1578, and Lenaert Plover, drowned at Antwerp for Anabaptism in 1560. As we know about Judith Busscher of Geesteren, who married in 1591, while Mark Leonard Busher was 71 years old in 1642, or was born in 1571, the cumulative evidence for his Dutch nationality is very strong. And the fact that this letter is in Dutch and deals entirely with Dutchmen, converts this almost to a certainty.

Of course Leonard Busher the author expressly and repeatedly avows himself a subject of King James, and claims England as his land; but this phenomenon is easy where a man has emigrated and naturalised. Nor is it unknown that in old age such a man returns to the land of his nativity; Henry Morton Stanley and Andrew Carnegie are recent examples of this. And we may remember that the Apostle Paul, being born of Hebrew parents at Tarsus, was also a Roman citizen. His letter to Rome leaves in the shade his descent, and at first he is at some pains to

dissociate himself from the Jews, of whom he writes in the third person:—"They were intrusted with the oracles of God. . . . Are we [Christians] better than they?" though the exigencies of his argument oblige him at last to disclose that according to the flesh he is an Israelite. Yet Paul, like Busher, left it to another man to record in writing his citizenship of the capital.

We conclude, therefore, that Mark Leonard Busher was of Dutch descent, and that while he was undoubtedly an English subject in 1614, yet he spent his middle age and his old age in the Netherlands.

His correspondent on this occasion was Abram Derikson. This man was teacher of the Fleming congregation of Doopsgezinden or Anabaptists, who worshipped in Amsterdam on the Achterburgwal (N.Z.), still a street of some importance. This office he held from 1617 till his death in 1645. There had been many splits among the Anabaptists, and in 1627 he was active in promoting a union on the basis of the Apostles and Prophets—i.e., the New Testament alone. Doubtless it was because of this liberal spirit that Busher appealed for recognition as a brother, while not concealing that there was difference of opinion.

There is some reason to hope that this appeal was successful; for in the list of deacons at the church, "by den Toren en het Lam"—a union Church in Amsterdam—figures Andries Busscher, serving two terms, 1679—1684 and 1689—1694. It is pleasant to hope that Leonard's son or grandson found this plea for brotherliness and tolerance heard and acted upon.

Here end for the present our facts and conjectures. But two inferences remain. The plea for liberty of conscience, as alone able to secure Religion's Peace, was put forth not by an Englishman, but by a Dutchman. Granted that he was an Anabaptist, and naturalised in England, yet he was not English. It is quite natural for a Dutchman to take up this position, for in the Netherlands there had been religious toleration since the days of William the Silent, the great Prince of Orange, whose memory was so fragrant at Delph. But hitherto we have complimented ourselves and have accepted compliments that the first clear enunciation of unqualified liberty of conscience ever made by an Englishman, was made by an English Anabaptist. We know of Jacob and Robinson, but saw grave limitations in their ideas, and it was pleasant to think that the precursors of the Baptists were the pioneers of religious freedom.

We must give up the name of Busher now, and rest our case on the work of another Anabaptist leader, John Murton, who in 1615 published "Obiections Answered by way of Dialogue, wherein

is proved By the Law of God: By the Law of our Land: And by his Maties many testimonies That no man ought to be persecuted for his religion, so he testife his allegiance by the Oath, appointed by Law." A word about this author may be welcome.

John Murton or Morton was a Gainsborough man who followed his pastor, John Smith to Amsterdam, and there on 23 August, 1608, married Jane Hodgkin, of Worksop, he being 25 years old and she 23, as the registers of the city show; Professor de Hoop Scheffer published relevant extracts in 1881. He was baptised by Smith, but declined to apply with him to the Dutch Anabaptist Church in Amsterdam, preferring to return with Helwys to London. Whether he continued to follow his Amsterdam craft as a furrier we cannot tell; he certainly became the General Baptist leader. No one can read this little book of his, which went to a second edition in 1620, and a third in 1662, without seeing that the classical English plea for toleration is indeed of Anabaptist origin, though not due to a citizen of London, but one of Gainsborough.

While Professor Masson was slightly wrong as to the English pioneer, he gave rein to his fancy as to the surroundings, in imagining a dingy meeting-house in Newgate. Not only had Busher nothing at all to do with Helwys and Murton, but these men settled in Spitalfields, according to the autograph of Helwys in his little book at the Bodleian. And that they were able to have a meeting-house is wildly improbable: conventicles then met in private houses.

Mark Leonard Busher must figure henceforth in our annals not as the pioneer English Anabaptist, but as one of the latest of those Dutch refugees for conscience sake, who found an asylum for awhile, but felt the call of home and returned to plead in his native land for real brotherliness between Christians.

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