

A Great Historical Monograph

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A GREAT HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH.

A REVIEW BY J. L. PICKARD, LL.D., IOWA CITY, IOWA.

HISTORY OF THE AMANA SOCIETY OR COMMUNITY OF TRUE INSPIRATION. By WILLIAM RUFUS PERKINS, A. M., Professor of History, and BARTHINIUS L. WICK, Fellow in History, of the State University of Iowa. Published by the University, 1891.

The past decade has witnessed a marked revival in the study of all sociological questions. Sociology, upon its industrial side, has awakened the most lively interest. Combinations in capital and in labor have led to unrest, sometimes to collision. The need of wisdom in guidance on the part of both parties has been recognized by the leaders in thought. Prominent Universities have discussed the signs of the times, have reorganized their curricula, have opened the way for a more thorough study of the science of sociology. The younger men, who have taken hold of the work with enthusiasm, have not rested content with the historic verdict of failure stamped upon ephemeral experiments. It is true that American soil has not in all cases proved favorable to the transplanting of European social communities. They have studied conditions of success or failure from both the European and the American side. They are bringing to the attention of their classes the results of philosophic and of scientific study. Failures are traced to their causes: successful attempts in combination are presented in their setting. The student of to-day, who in the near future is to be the leader in the activities of the industrial world, has learned of the possibilities of successful combination under conditions which obtain in the society he enters.

The monograph under review is a brief record of marked success in combination for agricultural and manufacturing pursuits.

The Amana Society "is viewed strictly from its historical standpoint, and not from the communistic. The latter phase

of it has received only such attention as became necessary from its historical importance." The value of the monograph as a contribution to history may be known from the fact that "the Trustees have kindly given the authors access to their records and publications—the latter being intended exclusively for the use of members and having no circulation beyond them." The further to insure accuracy, "the manuscript has been read by a number of the Trustees and the statements herein contained may be considered authoritative."

The Amana Society, or as they style themselves, "The Community of True Inspiration," "is what remains of that great revival movement which took place in Germany in the eighteenth century. The story of this honest, God-fearing people is a history of suffering, of hardships and of innumerable disappointments: their piety, their uprightness, and their endurance can not but command respect."

The authors trace the Society back to its roots in Mysticism and Pietism, which played a conspicuous part in the church history of Germany in the seventeenth century. The work treats briefly of the doctrines of the Mystics from Plato to Boehme, a poor Silesian shoemaker. Boehme and his followers, Arndt, Gerhard and Andrea, aroused the German people to protest against the "dry formalism and the sectarian strife of the times." They proclaimed the doctrine of "inward light" and of "inspiration." There arose in the church a body of men who organized "Collegia Pietatis," and hence were called "Pietists."

Philip Jacob Spener when a child read the works of the Mystic Arndt, and from his childhood devoted himself to the work of reform in the Lutheran Church. The tenets of his faith were:

I. "That the scholastic theology which reigned in the academies, and was composed of intricate and disputable doctrines and obscure and unusual forms of expression, should be totally abolished."

II. "That polemical divinity, which comprehended the controversies subsisting between Christians of different com-

munions, should be less eagerly studied, and less frequently treated, though not entirely neglected."

III. "That all mixture of philosophy and human science with divine wisdom was to be most carefully avoided; that is, that pagan philosophy and classical learning should be kept distinct from, and by no means should supersede Biblical theology."

IV. "That on the contrary all students who were intended for the ministry should be kept accustomed from their youth up to the perusal and study of the Holy Scriptures, and be taught a plain system of theology, drawn from these unerring sources of truth."

V. "That the whole course of their education should be so directed as to render them useful in life, by the practical power of their doctrine and the commanding influence of their example."

After Spener's death internal strife divided his followers. Few remained, and as outcasts from the church and exiles from their native land found consolation in the belief that "God in his mercy caused a wind to blow, soothed the troubled souls in their afflictions, and raised up in their midst persons who were inspired." A lady of noble rank, who spent much of her time in prayer, under inspiration prophesied the rising of a new sect. She was imprisoned, but communicated to a man who visited her in prison her views of inspiration. He traveled quite extensively, defending the doctrine that men of the present day may be inspired as were the prophets of old.

Three brothers from Halberstadt, in Saxony, together with a woman of high rank from Ronneburg, organized a little congregation to which the woman, Eva Catherina Wagnaria, ministered as preacher of the gospel.

One of the brothers, Johan Tobias Pott, hearing of the two men at Himbach who for seven years had devoted themselves to the study of the mysteries of religion and to private devotions, with a friend, Gottfried Neumann, visited them. Eberhard Ludwig Gruber and Johann Friederich Rock welcomed

Messrs. Pott and Neumann on the 16th of November, 1714, the day from which dates the existence of the AMANA SOCIETY or COMMUNITY OF TRUE INSPIRATION. "E. L. Gruber and his son J. A. Gruber, J. F. Rock, J. T. Pott, Johanna Melchier and G. Neumann were the first ones to join together in Christian fellowship for the organization of a new sect based not upon any code of external sanctity, but upon truth and a belief that God could now, as of old, inspire chosen prophets who should act as messengers to men."

Gruber and Rock visited every part of Germany, Switzerland and portions of France and Holland. They were successful with peasants, chiefly, but suffered persecution from authorities.

Unlike other communities of similar origin, they believed in the possibility of false inspiration. Frequent instances occur in the history of the Community of condemnation of false Inspirationists. In the Society a committee is always appointed to examine those who claim to speak by inspiration.

Violent opposition, showing itself in imprisonment, in the pillory, in public flagellation, failed to silence the faithful ministers.

In 1718 John A. Gruber came to America, but returned to Germany. A descendant was an active member of the Methodist Church about a hundred years later. Through friends who emigrated to America the attention of the Inspirationists was turned toward this country as "a promised land," though a century elapsed before permanent emigration set in this direction. The monograph gives a very interesting account of incidents connected with the life of the Society from its organization in 1714 to the first movement which established the Society upon American soil in 1844.

Justice can not be done by excerpts.

One point is touched which shows the spirit of the Society.

"In the wars of Frederick the Great, the Inspirationists wrote much against the evils of wars. The position which they took may be summed up as follows:

I. "The teachings of Christ forbid war.

II. "The precepts and the practice of the Apostles agree with the teachings of Christ.

III. "The early Christians were firm in their belief in the unjustness of war, and many suffered death in affirmation of that belief.

IV. "War is not a necessary evil; for if the people would not fight, ambitious rulers would either have to fight themselves, or dwell in peace and harmony.

V. "The general character of Christianity is wholly inconsistent with war, and its general duties are contrary to it."

With such sentiments they would choose naturally the peaceful life of agriculturists.

"After the death of Rock in 1749 Inspiration ceased" for a time. A remarkable revival occurred in 1817. As one of the fruits, an ignorant peasant girl, Barbara Heinemann, became inspired, and was held in honor by the Society, coming to America with the first emigrants, who settled near Buffalo, and with them to Iowa, dying at the ripe age of 88 in 1883.

The communistic element in the Society originated with Christian Metz, who, "far-sighted and thoughtful, came to the conclusion that the best method (to provide for the large number of exiles thrown upon the Society at Hessen) would be for the Society to lease some large estate, where the exiles could be put to work and make enough to supply their wants, the Society paying the rent. . . . They worked the land together, sold the products, and divided the proceeds equally. . . . A few of the members were artisans, and preferred to work at their old trades rather than upon the estate. Therefore the Society rented a few factories. . . . Soon their woollen goods became famous throughout the country. . . . They used the best material and used the greatest care in making them."

The decade of unrest in Europe 1830-1840 had reached the quiet societies, who desired greater religious freedom. In 1842 Christian Metz, G. A. Weber, Wilhelm Noe and Gottlieb Ackermann were sent to America with full power to secure a suitable place for the settlement of their Society. After thorough investigation they bought 5,000 acres of land near Buf-

falo and named it Ebenezer. It was part of the Seneca Reservation, and the Indians proved a constant source of trial. The purchase money was furnished by the founders of the Society, with an agreement that at any time they saw fit to withdraw they could take with them the exact amount contributed, but must leave with the Society all profits that had accrued. Heirs could act as their fathers could have done had they lived.

After coming to America the Society soon ceased from all communication with their old friends in Germany. The Community at Ebenezer prospered, 1, because its members "were of the sturdy peasant class"; 2, because "their leaders were neither agitators nor theorists, but sagacious, far-sighted men with much practical knowledge."

The Society became so prosperous in eleven years that they sought an opportunity for extension in some locality where cheap land could be obtained.

In 1855 C. M. Winzenried, John Beyer, Jacob Wittmer and Friederich Heinemann were sent west in search of a favorable locality. The only instruction given the committee was to go west of Chicago. Their wisdom in selecting a site can not be questioned. They found in Iowa County, Iowa, a rich soil, abundant water and a most attractive location. Their first purchase was of 18,000 acres (since increased to more than 23,000 acres). The township was named Amana, which signifies "remain true," a name the Society has never dishonored.

As the removal from Ebenezer progressed other townships were organized—West Amana and South Amana in 1856, High Amana in 1857, East Amana in 1860, Homestead in 1861, Middle Amana in 1862 and New South Amana in 1883.

No legal incorporation was attempted until the new Constitution of the State was framed. The Society feared opposition. But the provisions of the Constitution were favorable to incorporations and the Society was incorporated in 1859 under the name of "Amana Society." Their name as a religious body is "Society of True Inspiration."

The Constitution adopted consists of ten articles.

Article I states the foundation of the Society, which "is and

shall forever remain God, the Lord, and the faith which He worked in us according to His free grace and mercy," etc., a distinctively religious foundation.

Article II makes all land "a common estate and property," with "title vested in the Amana Society."

Article III provides for the means of sustenance in agriculture, manufactures and trades.

Article IV provides for the annual election of thirteen Trustees from the elders, who shall attend to all the business of the Society, with full power to act for the Society.

Article V requires the surrender of all real and personal property of members to the Trustees for the common fund.

Article VI provides for free board and dwelling, care in old age, sickness and infirmity, and for the quit-claim to the Society of all claims for wages or share in profits.

Article VII grants to heirs all the rights of their deceased parents, and provides for the payment of any debts of said parents. Members dying without heirs and intestate, their property reverts to the Society.

Article VIII provides for payment of their due claims to original investment without share in profits to members who may recede from the Society.

Articles IX and X provide for amendments and for the time in which the Constitution shall be of full force and effect.

The membership has increased from 572 in 1861 to 1,688 in 1891. Their assessment for taxation in 1890 was \$417,453, an average of \$250.57 per member, less by \$20.54 than the average in the county as a whole. This is supposed to represent the difference existing between communistic and uncommunistic labor profits. The authors, however, caution against hasty judgment from the returns of a single year.

RELIGIOUS DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES.

"They believe in the inspiration of the Bible, and that as God revealed hidden things through visions, dreams and revelations, in olden times, He can do so now." "They think the ministry of the gospel depends on Inspiration and is not lim-

ited by class or sex." "They believe in prayer as the spontaneous expression of the soul which should not be fettered by any fixed or prescribed formula." "They reverently believe in the Three conceived of as One." "They believe in the resurrection, in a reward for the good and punishment for the wicked." "They believe in the Lord's Supper and use the same not at any stated time or place, but after severe trials, or misfortunes, for the strengthening of the young members. Several days spent in prayer are necessary in order to participate in this rite."

"They believe war to be inconsistent with Christianity, and that oaths are inadmissible." "There are eighty elders who take turns in conducting worship Sundays and Wednesdays and prayer-meetings every evening." "They practice feet-washing." "They use salutations, but object to frivolous plays." "They have singing in worship, but without instrumental accompaniment."

"Their burial customs are simple and no costly monuments are permitted, but small slabs of wood, painted white, bearing an inscription of the name and age of the deceased."

EDUCATION.

They maintain their own schools. Education is compulsory and every child must attend school the entire year from seven to fourteen years of age, and during the winter months all from fourteen to twenty years of age. School hours are from 8 A. M. to noon. The afternoon is devoted to manual training. English is taught, though German is the chief language used. Teachers pass examination before the County Superintendent and are paid thirty dollars a month, which they turn over immediately to the Society.

INDUSTRIES.

Agriculture is the chief industry. Every village has its saw mill, machine shops and store. They have grist mills, calico print mills, woolen mills, soap factories, starch factories, hominy mills and book binderies. One chemist makes great quantities of pepsin. All products are of the very best. Six-

agents are employed in selling their goods from Maine to the Pacific. The stamp "Colony Goods" is a guarantee of their excellence.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

Each family has its own house. All houses are nearly of the same size, unpainted and uninsured. A garden spot is about each house and is the only spot which each family can call its own. Their food is simple and substantial. In each village there are several kitchens where food is prepared and served. Their dress is plain and after the fashions of Germany two centuries ago.

Each person has upon the books of the Society a credit each year, varying from \$25 to \$75 according to the Trustees' estimate of the value of their services. This fund is at their individual disposal, but the return of the same to the Society is considered a meritorious act.

Meals are served five times a day.

Tramps find food and shelter in a house provided for them, since their religion forbids their refusal of such favors when asked.

Communism is with them not democratic, but oligarchic rather.

The authors of this monograph deserve credit for their pains-taking investigations, and for their clear presentation of the results of their study. A thorough perusal of the work will reward any lover of historic accuracy and of good literary style in narration of facts.

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