THE PASSING OF THE HARMONITES.

A STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNISTIC VENTURE.

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"A day is past, and a step nearer the end. Our time runs away, but the joy of the kingdom will be our reward!" This was the cry of the night watchman that one might have heard a century ago echoing through the streets of the little village of Harmony, among the hills of Western Pennsylvania, where the German Brothers of Perpetual Separation had built for themselves an house in the wilderness. The very name "Harmony" would lead one to suppose that the town had been founded by old men who dreamed dreams or young men who saw visions. The story of the Harmonites is the story of a dream, but a dream in the light of which men lived and died for near a hundred years.

This dream, like many others of its kind, was made in Germany. To-day Germany is the home of imperialism and criticism, the personification of military prowess and commercial energy and enterprise. But the Germany of a century ago was not so. It was a bruised reed and a smoking flax among the nations, trampled and humiliated by the restless Corsican. But the wind of faith and meditation blew gently upon the bruised reed, and like the lyre of mythology it gave forth a pleasing sound. God gave the broken nation songs in the night of its distress, and thus it came about that Germany was the fostering mother of mystics and dreamers in religion. Out of Germany had come the Quietists, the Dunkers, the Mennonites, and now the Harmonites.

Although America has not been prolific in commun-
istic or religious theories, it has been the favorite field for the practical testing of these doctrines brought forth elsewhere. It has been estimated that between 1607, the Jamestown settlement, and 1894, there have been more than two hundred communistic experiments made in the United States. Brook Farm, Zoar, Icaria, Bethel, Aurora, the Perfectionists of Oneida, the Shakers,—these are only a few among those social and religious adventures which characterized American history. Of all these communities, the most successful, the most honorable, and perhaps the longest lived, was that founded by George Rapp at Harmony, Pennsylvania. To all who looked and wished for something new in society and religion, Pennsylvania was the land of promise. Thither had come the Quakers, the Dunkers, the Mennonites. It was natural, then, that the discontented families of Wurtenberg should have chosen Pennsylvania for a place of settlement.

George Rapp was born October 28, 1757, at Iptingen, Wurtenberg. He was a farmer and vine planter, but his best thoughts were for the Kingdom of God. The formalism and positive irreligion of the state church made him dissatisfied and unhappy. He gathered a few of his friends together for the study of the Bible and for the quickening of their religious life. Like the founders of Methodism, their hope was to reform the church from within. But non-conformity and strange ways invited persecution and abuse. When the King was petitioned to suppress them, he said, "Do they pay their taxes?" Upon being told that no subjects were more regular or prompt, the King answered, "Then let them believe as they please." But the people were foolish where the King was wise, and to escape from annoyance and abuse Rapp planned to take his followers to Pennsylvania. In 1803 he visited the United States and purchased five thousand acres from Dr. Delmar Basse, a wealthy German settler.
The land lay along the Connoquenessing Creek, in Butler County, and about thirty miles from Pittsburgh. The next summer three shiploads of the Harmonites arrived at Philadelphia and Baltimore. One of these bands settled in the eastern part of the state, but the rest made their way over the mountains to their new home in the western wilderness. The first winter was a season of hardship and want; but when the harvests of wheat, rye, and hemp were garnered and the hills planted with the vine, the community was secure against want. They were thrifty, hard-working peasants and well suited to battle with the soil and the elements.

Neither communism nor celibacy, the two experiments which made the Harmonites known in all the world, had been adopted by them when they came from Germany. Their communism was a natural outgrowth of the struggle they had to build their homes and maintain themselves. One had to help the other, or all would have perished. Unavowed communism had worked with them so successfully that they resolved to make it the practice of their community. By vesting title to all property in the Society they established a practical communism, successful where so many similar devices had quickly and completely collapsed. The Society was thus organized in February, 1805, and so well satisfied were all the members that, in 1818, the books which showed the property and holdings of each family at the time of the first settlement were publicly burned.

In keeping with communal life the members adopted a simple and uniform costume. The departments of labor were organized with labor for all but drudgery for none; and with efficient management and common zeal and industry the settlement flourished beyond expectations. They had churches, tanneries, brick-yards, distilleries and vineyards.
The Passing of the Harmonites.

In 1807, the members of the Society were shaken with a religious revival and under the inspiration of the hour Rapp began to teach the superior merit of sexual abstinence. In this respect the Harmonites are one with the Shakers. With common voice Rapp and his followers abjured marriage and adopted celibacy as the rule of their life. Those already married did not separate, but continued to occupy the same home, no longer man and wife, but “Brother and Sister in Christ.” There was little protest against the new order and no rigorous means of enforcing the practice and separating the sexes. It was the glory of the Harmonites that they upheld this custom without complaint and without compulsion. The adoption of celibacy was ultimately the death of the community, for their could be no natural increase and the rule hindered increase by proselytising; but at the same time, the long and vigorous existence of the Society, when so many other kindred schemes had been cut down like the grass, is in part attributable to the pure life and unblemished morality of the members.

The lode-star of Rapp’s religious faith was the second advent of Jesus Christ. Chiliasm has cast its spell over Christian disciples in all the ages of the Church; but in contrast with the Thessalonians, who neglected their daily work in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, the Harmonites made the coming of Christ as Saviour and Judge a reason for greater care and fidelity in the affairs of this world. Their belief in the near coming of Christ undoubtedly played some part in their adoption of celibacy. As the day was at hand when they must present their bodies unto Christ, let none defile them with carnal pleasures. Having chosen this rule of life, it was easy for them to defend the custom from Scripture. Rapp preached of the one hundred and forty four thousand of the Apocalypse who were not defiled with women. Jesus had defined
The Kingdom of Heaven as a state where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, and since that Kingdom was quickly to be ushered in, the followers of Rapp desired to be conformed to the order of that Kingdom. This was the practical basis of their celibacy. Philosophically and theologically it was based on the literal interpretation of Genesis 1:27 "male and female created he them." Made in the image of God, man was dual in his nature, combining the male and the female elements, and there would have been some sinless propagation of the race. But Adam, seeing the beasts in pairs, conceived a like desire, and God separated the female element from him. This was the real fall of man, when unholy passion arose. Christ was the "second Adam" and hence the regenerate life, here and hereafter, must be celibate.

How celibacy made the Harmonites famous throughout the world is shown by a verse in Byron's "Don Juan:"

"When Rapp the Harmonist embargoed marriage
In his harmonious settlement (which flourishes
Strangely enough as yet without miscarriage,
Because it breeds no more mouths than it nourishes,
Without those sad expenses which disparage
What nature naturally most encourages),
Why call'd he "Harmony" a state sans wedlock?
Now here I've got the preacher at a deadlock.

Because he either meant to sneer at harmony
Or marriage, by divorcing them thus oddly;
But whether reverend Rapp learn'd this in Germany
Or not, — — —
My objection's to his title, not his ritual,
Although I wonder how it grew habitual."

Many religious and economic schemes have gone to the other extreme and made a "fair show" of the flesh
after the manner of the Mormons and the Mohammedans, and in this country the success of the celibate Harmonites furnishes a marked contrast to the dismal failures of other communistic experiences which would destroy marriage. A study of the many communistic experiments in the United States will show how those with a religious foundation or charter have invariably had better success and longer life than those of a purely economic nature.

In 1814, finding that the Pennsylvania hills were not adapted for vine growing, and feeling their remoteness from navigation, the Harmonites sold their plantation and removed to New Harmony, on the banks of the Wabash, in Indiana. Here they were plagued with malaria. For this reason they sold New Harmony to Robert Dale Owen, the dreamer of New Lanark, for $150,000 and settled once more in Pennsylvania, this time on the banks of the Ohio River, in Beaver County. Here they built the town of Economy, long a model of prosperity, neatness and morality. The Pittsburgh industrial district was just then in the beginning of its great development. The Harmonites gave substantial aid to the opening up of the country by railroads and canals. At Economy they manufactured the first silk made in the United States. A unique feature of their industrial enterprise was the importation of five hundred Chinese coolies to work in the cutlery mills at Beaver Falls. The Harmonites were the liberal patrons, not only of trade and agriculture, but of education and the fine arts, the grounds on which Geneva College now stands, being a donation from the Society. Everything which they touched flourished, but the practice of Celibacy made the extinction of the Society only a question of time. The numbers dwindled and dwindled, until of all those who took the vows of perpetual separation in 1807, not one was left. In 1903, a Pittsburgh syndicate purchased the Economite lands
for $4,000,000. Such was the end of the most remarkable and most successful communistic venture that the world had ever seen.

To-day the visitor at Harmony will find still standing some of the buildings erected by these rugged, godly folk a century ago. Although they abjured tobacco, they loved strong drink. The hillsides show the Rhine-like terraces for the vine, and the cellars have vaults of solid masonry. All that they built, from church to wine cellar, was large, ample and substantial. One showery summer's day we passed through the quiet streets and read the quaint legends which they had carved in the stones over the doorways. As we looked we thought of the hearts that must have broken within these walls, when husband and wife, in the strange infatuation of religious musing, had separated one from the other and forever sealed the fountain of the heart. A by-path led us to the summit of a steep hill and then down its face until we came to a cave or grotto, the shadow of great rock in a weary land. It was the favorite seat and resting place of Father Rapp. There he would sit with the Bible open on his knees, his eyes looking off beyond the river to the peaceful and well-watered valley where he had led his people. But he looked too at the things which were not seen. "Until He Come" was the motto of his life and the subject of his dreams. There is a compelling pathos in his faithful waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom. "If I did not know," he once said, "that the dear Lord meant I should present you all to Him, I should think my last moments come."

From the vantage point of the cool retreat we could see on a neighboring hill a clump of pines which seemed to be enclosed with a wall of granite. It was the place where they had laid their dead, and it speaks more eloquently of the hope and heart-break of human life than the great piles of Egypt or the subterranean
passages of the early Christian Rome. Four walls of stone guard the sleep of those who died in the faith, not having received the promise. Through one of the walls entrance was had by a gate such as we had never seen. It was a massive monolith, a great stone rolled to the door of the sepulchre, yet so swung in the center that an infant's hand could push it aside. But within was the mystery. We looked in vain for "storied urn or animated bust," and for "their name, their years, spelt by th' unlettered Muse." In life they had "all things in common" and even in death they are not divided. There, beneath the blue heaven and in the shelter of the pines, they lie unmarked and indistinguishable in the vast democracy and pale communism of death, until the day-break and the shadows flee away.