WHENCE came the Amish Americans, those sturdy tillers of fertile soil, those patriarchs of simple garb? Why are they not mingled with the other peoples of our land, but live scattered across the country in communities of their own—sober, unassuming, and taking little part in the public affairs of the nation?

The answer, I think, can be found in their European history and in their religion. Both had their inception in Switzerland over four hundred years ago when highly educated men like Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz broke away from the then compulsory Roman Catholic church and became part of the great Reformation struggle for the revival of Christianity. The particular movement started by these men was given the name “Wiedertaüfer” or “Anabaptist” because it propounded freedom of the will and conscious knowledge of sin, followed by adult baptism. Later public usage caused these peace-loving folk to share the name “Anabaptist” with the violent Munsterites, though diametrically opposed to the latter in everything but baptism.

The name Mennonite was not given the new group until a dynamic young leader, Menno Simons, was ordained in Holland in 1536 and became active in the church; while the Amish branch, with which this article largely concerns itself, did not break from the main body of the Mennonites until after the turn of the century. Jacob Amman, a Swiss, was the leader of the new faction, and differed from his mother church only in observing the “ban” or “shunning” and in a more strict interpretation of the scriptures and a greater severity of dress and habits of life.

1 For historical background in preparing this account of an Amish community in southwestern Pennsylvania, Miss Schrock has drawn upon the following works: C. Henry Smith, Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania (Norristown Press, Norristown, Pa., 1929); Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Ind., Mennonite Book Concern, 1941); Sanford Yoder, For Conscience Sake (Scottdale, Pa., Mennonite Publishing House, 1940); John Horst, Mennonites in Europe (Scottdale, Pa., Mennonite Publishing House, 1942).—Ed.

2 The practice of avoiding close relationships—even that of eating—with those in disfavor with the church.
The Mennonites from the beginning advocated a complete separation of church and state, a departure which was hitherto unknown, and thus brought an unprecedented flood of persecution, both from the established Catholic church and from the new churches just arising. Their fatalities outnumbered those of all the other Reformation churches, and many thousands were put to death in the course of the centuries.

In 1529 the Diet of Speyer placed the ban of outlawry on this whole group and drove them like cattle from their homes in Cantons Bern and Zurich in Switzerland. This was followed, in 1677, by a new wave of persecution that lasted until 1709 and drove five or six hundred of these people across the border into the Palatinate. These latest outlaws were the parents and grandparents of most of the eighteenth-century immigrants to Pennsylvania, with the exception of those coming to Germantown. To insure complete banishment, "Mennonite Hunters" were appointed in Bern in 1693, with the power to give bounties for any Mennonites captured.

But those who had fled to the Palatinate did not long remain in peace. Here, too, there arose a wave of persecution which lasted through the eighteenth century. Here they were again driven from their homes, forbidden all trades, life in villages, the rights of marriage and proper burial, the right to worship in public, the right to own or inherit land—in short, they had the religious and social status of the heathen and the economic status of the serf, because they were "of an accursed and damnable faith." This condition became the direct cause of the mass migration to America.

Later the Mennonite groups suffered in France, in Austria, in Bavaria, in the Netherlands, in Russia. Through four centuries they were made to rot in prison, broken on the rack, burned at the stake, thrown into rivers and lakes, buried alive. The Rhine Valley ran red with their blood. Even within the last few decades more than 50,000 people have been forced to migrate from Europe in flight from persecution, 25,000 going to Canada, and 25,000 to Mexico and South America. It has been truly said that they have no abiding country.

The Swiss Brethren (Mennonites) went from Bern, Basel, and Zurich to Jura, to Baden, to Hesse, to the Waldeck, to Alsace and Lorraine, to Holland, to Galicia, to Volhynia, to Pennsylvania. The Dutch Men-
nonites struggled to Crefeld, to Hamburg, to Danzig; to the Vistula Delta, to East Prussia, to South Russia; to Turkestan and the banks of the Amur in Siberia; to Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota; to Manitoba; to Mexico; to Brazil and Paraguay. The Hutterites, another Mennonite group, in their search for freedom from persecution, wandered from the Tyrol and Austria to Moravia; to Hungary; to Transylvania; to Wallachia; to Russia; and finally to Dakota and Alberta.

There were lessons learned from these hardships and certain characteristics developed. Self-reliance, endurance, industry, toil, the will to cooperate and build out of nothing have grown from their sufferings; and so have reticence, timidity, modesty, highly developed group consciousness, suspicion of town life, the feeling that they are a peculiar people and must expect suffering. Perhaps the absence of church houses in many of their groups today dates back to their enforced seclusion.

Their modesty is evidenced by the fact that there are almost no townships named after them, even in the sections where they were the earliest American settlers; and likewise by their tendency to remain in groups and often at the rear of the immigrant line when filing past the ship's clerk for registration. There was even a noticeable absence of burial markers among the early colonists of this faith; my own great-great-grandfather's grave is marked only by a rude slab of sandstone on which two initials and a date are carved.

Other dominant qualities of the group have arisen largely from their religion: their law-abiding and peaceful nature, their honesty, their frugality, their hospitality, and their charity in suffering.

With their coming to America both Mennonite groups provided pioneers in the westward march through the country, frequently settling among the Indians before the lands were open to the white man. The year 1643 is the first probable date given for the appearance of Mennonites in America, followed by an attempt at founding a colony in Delaware in 1663. Although this attempt miscarried, the founding of Germantown in 1683 did not, and so the Holland Mennonites who established this colony became the first settlers of German descent in all America. From this time on throughout the century most of the immigration was from the Palatinate.

In 1736 the Amish branch established its first permanent colony, after
having come in scattered groups for a good many years previous to this. (One of my lineal Amish ancestors, eleven generations ago, arrived in America in 1727.) By 1742 this permanent colony, which was started near a gap in the Blue Mountains in a corner of what is now Berks County, Pennsylvania, was large enough to petition the Provincial Assembly for the rights of citizenship; and by 1752 it had increased sufficiently so that it was thought necessary to establish the County of Berks. In 1766 Richard and Thomas Penn donated these settlers twenty acres of land for church, school, and graveyard purposes.

Among the early settlers of the colony were numerous names still common among the Amish of Pennsylvania and westward. One Jacob Hochstedler, a direct ancestor of mine, arrived on September 1, 1736, on the ship "Harle" from Rotterdam, presumably hailing from the Palatinate region along the Rhine. Investigation seems to indicate that he was a descendant of Ulrich Hochstedler, born in 1390 at Augsburg in Bavaria, a merchant and manufacturer. About the time of the Reformation the family appeared among the wealthy and was no doubt corrupted with the vices of its time and class. When the change to Mennonitism was made, no one knows.

Soon after the settling of the colony in Berks County came the Indian raids of 1757 during which many Amish families were massacred or driven from their homes. In the course of these raids the Hochstedler family was attacked and Jacob's wife and two children massacred, and himself and two other sons captured and carried off by the Indians. When the attacking mob was spied in the moonlight that lit the yard outside, the boys seized their guns to defend the family; but Jacob commanded them to hold their peace. They begged him in vain; he said it was not right to take the life of another even to save one's own. As the father and sons were separated to be carried away by the Indians, he gave them parting advice in his Swiss dialect: "If you be taken so far away and be kept so long that you forget your German language, do not forget the Lord's prayer."

Some time after his capture the father managed to escape from the Indians and found his way home, starting near what is now Erie, Pennsylvania. He worked his way on a crude raft, following the rivers with great difficulty and almost at the expense of his life. But the sons, Joseph
and Christian, were both adopted by the Indians and retained for at least seven years. On their return they told thrilling tales of their life with the redskins.

It is said that while the captured Hochstedlers were passing through a clearing near a gap in the Blue Mountains, John Miller, another ancestor of mine, was outdoors chopping wood. The Indians shot at Miller and hit his hand, whereupon he fled but was not pursued. He was thought to have been the son of John Adam Miller, massacred the year before by the Indians.

Gradually these raids died down and the community at the foot of the Blue Mountains began to prosper, in time covering the northeastern corner of Lancaster, the northwestern corner of Chester, and the southwestern tip of Berks counties. Today there are about seven thousand members in this section, mostly Old Order Amish, and numerous daughter colonies that have spread westward.

Many of the "Plain People" later wandered from Berks and Lancaster counties into what is now the beautiful Kishacoquillas Valley in Mifflin County, a colorful section today occupied almost exclusively by the Amish of practically every type known to America. It was also about this time that Joseph Schantz, a well-known Amishman, founded Johnstown.

In 1767 there spread westward from the early Berks colony a movement which resulted in a new settlement in Somerset County (my present home) near the highest point in Pennsylvania. Among the pioneers that settled here were many of my ancestors, some coming before the Indians had vacated the quiet valleys along the Casselman. There was Jacob Miller, son of the John injured by the Indians; Christian Gnaegi and his wife, who came from Switzerland between 1750 and 1760; Casper Schrag, who emigrated from Switzerland in 1766; the two Bitsches, Peter the father and Peter the son, who came from Switzerland in 1767; there was Susan Petersheim Kemp whose grandfather, Daniel Miller, came over in 1750, while another one of her ancestors arrived in 1727. These were followed later on by others who married into the family lines: in 1825 there came Catherine Brenneman from Hesse Darmstadt in Germany. She later married Joel Miller, my artistic

1 More recently spelled Johns, Jahns, or Yahns.
great-great-grandfather. There were Christ Swartzentruber and his wife Barbara Bender, who in 1833 came from Wengeringhausen in Waldeck, Germany, where Chris's father was a weaver by trade.

Somerset County also figured largely in the settling of Sugarcreek, Tuscarawas County, Ohio. The same Jacob Miller who originally came from Berks County, moved to this section of Ohio in 1808 or 1809, taking with him several sons and the next year returning for his wife. His was the first white family in that place, and Jacob as bishop of the Amish Church preached what was probably the first sermon in Holmes County. This section together with adjoining Tuscarawas County comprises today one of the largest and most compactly settled communities of Amish in all America. My Miller cousins there are now many in number.

Jacob's niece, Elizabeth, was the first Amish girl to be married in the community; while her young brother, killed by a falling tree, was the first white person to be buried there. His crude coffin was handhewn and joined with wooden pegs, for in 1815 there were few conveniences in this Indian country. Another brother, Yost, was well educated for his time and did much business as executor, administrator, and guardian, in both Pennsylvania and Ohio. The first township meeting was held at his house for the election of officers, and Yost was a member of the first board of school examiners of Holmes County.

In other ways the Millers proved pioneers here. Jacob's son, John, who joined his father in 1811, built the first grist mill in the vicinity in 1816. John's son, Adam, became a writer and missionary in Baltimore, New York, West Virginia, Indiana, and Ohio, after having left the Amish church and joined the Methodists.

In 1840 Preacher Joe Miller, presumably a nephew of the pioneering Jacob, traveled west with a group of Somerset Countians with whom he made the first settlement of white people around Goshen, Indiana. They had visited Iowa in search of a favorable place to alight, then walked back most of the way through Indiana, deciding finally on Elkhart County.

After the Civil War more Somerset Countians started the Douglas and Moultrie congregations in Illinois. Johnson County, Iowa, was colonized by Pennsylvania Amish in 1846, and in the last decades they have carried their axes and their Bibles into Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas, Oregon, Colorado, Oklahoma, the Dakotas, Montana, Idaho, Mississippi.
My Uncle Simon Miller, remote descendant of the pioneering Jacob, was one of the first Amishmen to remove to Mississippi. At the present time there are also small congregations in New York, Delaware, and Maryland, in several of which I have near relatives. Amazingly enough, it is estimated that in the eighteenth century no more than 500 Amishmen came from Europe to America.

Between the years 1820 and 1860 there was another flood of Mennonites from Europe, the largest group of which was the Amish. During this period about 1,500 of this faith came over, largely from the Alsace and Lorraine region in France with a few from Rhenish Bavaria. Those from the regions of the Saar, Montbeliard, and Belfort were in the van of representatives, particularly a Brother Augsburger from Strassburg. These settled at Trenton, Ohio, in 1818. In 1824 the Canadian Amish Church was organized by these people, and in 1847 Lee County, Iowa. Today there are nine Amish congregations in Canada, with a membership of more than 4,000; while in Illinois there are 6,000 descendants of these churches, and several groups no longer Amish in character or name.

All these European immigrants spoke some form of German—the early Pennsylvanians spoke a Palatinate-Swiss-German (Pennsylvania "Dutch"), while the later French group spoke the Alsatian patois. Both are remarkably well preserved today.

In their pioneering through the raw forest and prairie, these people were very largely self-sustaining—religiously, socially, and economically. Some made their own wooden shoes, dug their sod shanties out of the prairie, grew and spun their own flax and wool for clothes, made their own straw hats, sometimes walking fifteen miles for a postage stamp or living one hundred miles from the nearest market. And always there were churches established wherever the Plain People went, with meetings often held in log huts or barns before places of worship could be erected.

Wherever they went they changed the waste places and forests into productive fields and carved substantial homes out of the wilderness. The Mennonite group has ever been doing this. In Prussia they transformed the marshes and swampy places of the Vistula, the off-fallings of the land, into a garden spot. In Russia they gradually changed the bleak
steppes into the most productive grain fields of that vast empire. In South America they have taken over the jungle, forest, and pampas under great difficulty and with results that are amazing. There they live in places inaccessible save by long travel in ox carts or by climbing steep walls of rock to the mountaintops. In Mexico they have created a large farming community where lately was a great grazing waste. In Canada they took over large tracts of wild forest land. And in all these places graves marked their trails as they came seeking religious freedom.

Only in our United States, where they came on the scene early, have these excellent farmers been able to choose the best of a fertile land. They are represented by large communities in the three counties in the United States rated by the government as the richest and most productive in the land. And they arrived here and in other fertile areas not by chance, but by knowledge of good soil. Often they took over land from Scotch-Irish hunters who did not care to till the soil but preferred the trout stream and the deer woods of the wilder sections. It was in this manner that the Amish came by the fertile Kishacoquillas Valley.

If perchance these people found themselves on poor land, they remained there only until better territory could be opened up. It is perhaps significant that land prices are among the highest in Amish and Mennonite communities to the present day; and most of these farmers when questioned will say that their soil is more productive now than when they took it over. This is mute testimony to the farming methods they employ. Would it be too much to say that good farmers in possession of good land constitute one of the most real safeguards of our priceless natural resources? A stroll through the Lancaster County markets makes this statement more meaningful.

In stock-raising, too, they are at the front of excellence, the 1935 blue ribbon for raising the champion steer exhibited at the International Fat Stock Show in Chicago having gone to an Old Order Amish boy from Johnson County, Iowa. The steer afterwards sold for $3,200 at auction. The charge that the Amish remain 200 years behind the times can surely not be applied to their farming methods. In fact, some of the most progressive farm machinery I have seen has been among my Amish neighbors. On the other hand, there has been the simplest and most straightforward living among these folks, with little indulgence in lux-
Perhaps that is why there was money with which to buy that useful machinery.

Even today the Amish farms largely raise what the family needs for the table. The porkers, the beef, the milk, butter, and cream, the vegetables—all are produced from the broad fields and the gardens, as practically every Amishman, no matter what else his trade, is also a farmer. The bread too is home-baked; though flour is most frequently bought at the store due to the absence of grist mills today. In furnishing the home, carpets and rugs are woven by someone in the community, and bureaus, chests, cupboards, and desks are often made by a local woodworker of their own faith. Yard goods, however, are most often purchased at the store, to be made at home into suits and dresses, with the exception of everyday shirts and dresses, which are often made of bleached grain sacks dyed some rich shade which becomes pastel with washing. In short, these people are probably the most self-sustaining of any in the country today.

There are now some 15,000 Amish people scattered throughout the United States, about 12,000 of whom are of the Old Order group—the one least changed since the founding of the church—and about 3,000 of whom belong to the more progressive group, largely known today as the Conservative Amish. It was in my great-grandfather’s time that the break in the Amish church occurred locally, the Old Order section retaining the required beard for all men, the buggy and spring-wagon for travel, the absence of the telephone in the home, as well as electricity, the shawl instead of the coat for women, and often the absence of church houses. This latter custom leads to the making of sliding doors when a home is built, in order to accommodate the large crowds that gather on Sundays. Among this faction church government is purely congregational, and regulations are not printed but kept in manuscript form in the care of the church leaders and copied from generation to generation.

The song-books used in the Mifflin and Lancaster county congregations to this day are probably the oldest in use in the world, and have been printed throughout the centuries as they were written by the martyrs in prison and sung from 1537 on. The archaic language and the misspelled words of this famous AUSBUND (here commonly called “das dicke buch” because of its great thickness and small size) have been pre-
served intact. The book is sacred to them and cannot be tampered with. As there are no notes in the book, the tunes have also been handed down, changing much from their original source as popular tunes of the sixteenth century and gradually taking on a slow, slurring, and sonorous tone peculiarly suited to the mournful character of many of the hymns.

In my community in Somerset County both branches have changed, within the memory of my mother, to a newer song-book, called the LIEDER SAMMLUNG. This, however, contains numerous hymns of the old AUSBUND, and I remember well singing them before my parents left the Amish church when I was eight. As a whole the groups are good singers and it is inspiring to hear the slow swing of these substantial tunes. Both sects also have Sunday night singing for the young folks, but in the Conservative Amish group four-part harmony is used, while the Old Order young folks use a single tune.

Church services are lengthy, and my mother remembers going to communion in the morning carrying lanterns, and returning after dark at night. Of course in such cases a lunch must be taken along. Much of the length of these services is occasioned by the fact that numerous ministers bear witness (Zeugniss) after the main body of the sermon, each one really preaching a little sermon of his own.

Because of the length of time spent at the meetings, Amish mothers have formed the habit of taking for their small children little cookies or crackers, to be eaten always with special care that the immaculate white aprons should not become soiled nor the scrubbed pine-board floor spattered with crumbs. I myself have a memory of these crumbly delights. The after-meeting hum of cordial greetings, visitings, and invitations to Sunday dinners are also part of my memory, as is the sound of the familiar Pennsylvania German tongue used in preaching and the more difficult "hoch Deutsch" read from the scriptures during the opening of church.

The sturdy honesty of the Mennonites as a whole is testified to by the attitude taken toward them by the Canadian Railway and Steamship Company at the time of the Russian immigration to Canada two decades ago. The company was glad to take them on because they had proved good developers of the land and "had never failed to make good their promises," to quote an officer of the company. Soon this organization had
spent more than a million dollars in transporting and settling these people, on the ground of nothing more than a promise to pay. Since 1923 the contracts have not even been written!

The education of the Amish group as a whole is limited, although in my youth I knew quite a few young folks of the Conservative Amish branch who were school teachers, having attended all the years of Normal School at that time required of teachers. Since requirements for teaching have become more strict, most of them have only an eighth grade education. That does not mean, however, that numerous individuals do not become quite well educated by private reading; I know quite a few cases of this sort.

This lack of education is offset by other points in their favor, such as the almost complete absence of a crime record among their members, even among those who have left the church. This is no doubt due partly to the stability and industry occasioned by living on the farm and by distance from town, but no doubt it is also partly attendant upon the seriousness and realism with which they regard the Scriptures.

Amish exclusiveness and peculiarity have been topics of much discussion among people who are but slightly acquainted with them. These, I feel, have been much over-played for purposes of making of these folk an oddity, a peculiar people. Some of my widely traveled city friends find them more approachable than most people, and also find their simplicity refreshing after the complications of a cosmopolitan world.

In all cases I believe they have fulfilled a definite part in the communities in which they live, both as farmers and woodworkers or similar artisans, and as philanthropic neighbors, ready in any emergency to stand in the breach and help. One of my Amish neighbors, when recently approached by a solicitor for the Red Cross, immediately wrote a check for $35.00. In the case of a fire in the community, they are always among those who donate toward the founding of a new home, whether the unfortunate family is Amish or not. When a new barn goes up in the community, they are among the first at the barn-raising, and similarly when roads are opened in heavy winter seasons. Today these people are joining others in sewing for relief, and during the Mennonite immigration from Europe to South America gave generously to that cause. Of their own number, no one is ever really needy, for they help each other in times of stress.
At the present time a prominent activity of the Amish concerns itself with helping maintain Civilian Public Service Camps in which their own and Mennonite boys form forty per cent of the population, non-resistance having been one of the cardinal doctrines of the church since its founding in 1525. When the movement for civilian public service camps was started, with the sanction of the government, the Amish were among the first and heaviest givers.

Such are the peoples that populate the quiet, productive corners of our land, asking for nothing but the right to till their soil in their own way and freedom to build the fabric of their society on family life and the worship of a just but kindly God.