MR. DUSS REPLIES TO HIS CRITIC

Karl J. R. Arndt's review of my book, *The Harmonists*, in the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* for September–December, 1943, is in reality a vicious attack not only on the veracity and character in general of the author of the book but on the character of noble men and women who are asleep in their graves and unable to refute the slanderous charges.

He carps at *The Harmonists* that it should contain a fuller account of my trusteeship. He conveniently forgets that the foreword states that the story is a severe abridgment of "My Memoirs," which he read, and of which he said that they should be published as they were—that they could not be satisfactorily condensed.

In order to throw doubt over my entire story he attacks my version of the suicide of Peter Weber (last potter of the Harmony Society). His position is that as a two-year-old I could not know about the suicide which happened a year previous to my arrival at Economy. He well knows that in my original story I write of the *talk of the suicide*, and that Mrs. Schumacher, my senior by fourteen years, explained to me the reason why the talk impressed me. As a matter of fact, there was still talk of that suicide in the 1880's, as living witnesses can testify; also down through the years, viewing the handiwork of potter Weber has kept me in mind of his suicide.

Mr. Arndt's attempt at discrediting my statement as to brother Eckensperger being the school teacher at Economy, simply because travelers write of him as the hotel keeper, is worse than foolish. My book clearly shows that Harmonists, myself included, occupied various positions. Also be it noted that a great number of Harmonists with whom I came in contact had "gone to school" to Eckensperger—hence the daily by-word, "as Eckensperger used to say." The ridicule he heaps upon me via his story of "the wonderchild Schelmuffsky" is unworthy of the pen of any reputable writer and has nothing in common with the author of the book.

He states that chronological confusion and error are found on pages 16, 69–70, 75–77, 86, 90, 104 and 121. There is no confusion or error to the ordinary reader. Abridgment from the original, yes, but nothing
confusing. What he states as to page 86 shows his ignorance of the science of accountancy, since he does not see that on the face of it the factory table for the year 1831 proves exactly my contention, that it was gotten up for the purpose of fooling “some one not conversant with proper accounting.” Mr. Arndt says that Frederick Rapp, if he were alive, would sue me and convict me of slander. Well, let us turn to the case of Nachtrieb vs. Baker and Henrici, November Term, 1849, United States Circuit Court, Western District of Pennsylvania. The testimony of Jacob Wagner discloses:

“In the fall of 1831, when all hands at the factory were going out harvesting, Frederick Rapp came to the wool house where I was attending, very much displeased with the management of George Rapp; that it was foolish or bragging idea of him to be carrying on farming so largely ... that just by stopping the factory one week, they lost on the factory what will just balance the whole crop of wheat and oats and rye ... even if the crop of wheat should amount to six thousand bushels ...”

Another, even more competent witness, Philip Bentel, who had been a clerk and bookkeeper at the Society’s store, testified:

“One time, after we had made out the factory accounts, they seemed pretty large—Frederick Rapp made the remark that if he would show old George Rapp such balance, the old man would want to know where the money was—that we should make the balance appear rather smaller ... that this was in 1830 or 1831.”

One must also take into consideration that at this period the two Rapps were not at all in harmonious accord—a matter that Mr. Arndt frequently discussed with me and that we both deplored.

He states that some of my quotations are inaccurate and distorted and cites pages 68–69 and 55, 56. There is no inaccuracy or distortion. Abridgment, yes, but not distortion. The quotations from a long letter of Frederick Rapp to Mr. Worcester are correct and pertinent to my subject; omissions neither add to nor detract from it, as anyone can read in the Bole book or by perusing the original copy of the letter which should be on file in the Duss Memorial Exhibit.

He attacks not only my veracity but that of Mrs. Duss via correspondence which he construes in a way to disprove my statement in reference
to Henrici’s welcome at my arrival from Nebraska in 1888. Henrici said: “Well, now you are here and everything will be all right.” At a later date Henrici told Mrs. Duss that my coming was in answer to his prayer as had been his coming in answer to prayer by Father Rapp.

As proof that I am wrong, Mr. Arndt queries: “Why did not Henrici make him (Duss) instead of Woelfel second trustee?” Here again he conveniently ignores the fact that it was the Board of Elders that elected the trustees—the trustees had no such power. As to what Henrici said to me, my recollection is perfect, and as to what Mrs. Duss told me of Henrici’s talk to her, I can candidly state that in all of the sixty-two years of our married life I have never found Mrs. Duss to be wrong in the repetition of anything she heard or that she indulged in deliberate falsehood. Hence, I can readily decide who it is that is guilty of such indulgence.

Highly significant is the fact that out of the voluminous testimony in the case of Schwarz vs. Duss (in which case we were thoroughly investigated and in which my integrity and management received high commendation from the Master, from the Court, and from the Circuit Court of Appeals; also the approval of the United States Supreme Court), Mr. Arndt selects one little line derogatory to me from the testimony of Henry Feucht, whom he calls a “genuine Harmonist descendant,” but of whom the Master stated and the Court approved:

“Henry Feucht all through his testimony shows bitter animosity to J. S. Duss. In his testimony he was disposed to exaggerate. He considered what he had heard from others as personal knowledge and constantly testified to it as such even after his attention had been called to it.”

The Master might have added that witnesses in number testified that “Feucht’s reputation for truth and veracity was bad.”

When Mr. Arndt states that on page 25 I build up something to defame Henrici he goes far afield from the truth. There is no defamation whatever—the story reflects not on Henrici but on the Board of Elders. Indeed, as to that outstanding patriarch, I feel certain that no one has ever spoken or written in more glowing terms than those accredited to me.

The reviewer’s attempt to put the halo of “bonus” around the settlement between my mother and the Society is stupid misrepresentation.
The amount of $2,216.58 was the accumulation of her wages and her pension, and in accordance with the wage scale as I have it. Self-evidently a bonus would be in round figures not in odd dollars and cents; besides, the Society was not in the habit of handing out such beneficences to people in order that they might indulge in trips to Europe or to any other place.

His turning and twisting of facts regarding Mr. Brooks and his aid in my efforts to save the Society from utter financial ruin is a vicious attack on the character of said Brooks. That Mr. Arndt cannot conceive the nobility that I accord to that good friend of mine, and of the Society, is proof of a callous heart and ignorance of human character. His statement that I paid my attorneys in astronomical figures betrays his woeful ignorance of the difference between a bond and actual cash. There being no funds whatever at the time, I agreed to give Mr. Brooks one-fourth of whatsoever we might be able to save out of the impending wreckage. Later this was changed to one hundred thousand dollar Liberty Land Company bonds (value $33,333).

At that, Mr. Brooks, at a time when the Society again needed help, generously handed back to Mrs. Duss forty-five of those $1,000 bonds. It seems that after Mr. Brooks’ death someone having to do with the Brooks estate jumped at the conclusion that I might be entitled to a part of this donation, hence wanted Mrs. Duss to guarantee that I would not bring suit.

As to suits at law (of which there is an endless amount of testimony and findings of the courts) aside from the single line of the discredited witness Feucht, Mr. Arndt contents himself with the misstatement that “Mr. Duss defended his title to the Harmony Society millions firmly.” This in spite of the findings by the Court in Schwarz vs. Duss, which clearly show that at the time I became active as trustee, the Society—aside from small amounts of borrowed money—not only had no funds whatsoever, but had used depositors’ money in the Economy Savings Institution to the extent of a million dollars and was indebted otherwise to the extent of almost a half million.

Mr. Arndt makes a great “to-do” about the “testimony of Dr. Smith,” sought for by our opposing counsel in the Everitt-Tryon case, in which two committees appointed by the Court failed to find said testimony. He proudly tells of finding the testimony and of photographing it.
I am glad that he has found it, and could only wish that he had been on the first committee—thus would we have been spared one half of the trouble and expense involved in the search. But he contends that I could not have had anything to do with the granting of permission to Dr. Bole to examine our papers (for the purpose of writing a thesis, publication of which caused all the trouble involved), because the permission was in the writing of Henry Hice at the behest of Mrs. Duss; and, because at the time I was "in New York and entirely too interested in the Duss Incomparable Band." The testimony in said cases discloses that Dr. Bole came to Economy, examined our papers, made notes, etc., and that his replies to questions on the mooted point were as follows:

Q. "Did the authorities ... give you help and permission?"
A. "They gave me permission."
Q. "Was Mr. Duss one of the authorities?"
A. "Yes, Mr. Duss was the chief trustee."

Mr. Arndt speaks highly of Dr. Bole's book—to this I cheerfully subscribe. Relations 'twixt Mr. Bole and me were at all times pleasant. Instead of making the "to-do" about the note, Mr. Arndt might have quoted from Dr. Bole as follows: "Mr. Duss found the Society burdened with a load of debt for which he was not responsible. He devoted himself to the task of rescuing the Society from its perilous position, and he succeeded .... The orchestra directed by him at Madison Square Garden was the chief musical attraction in New York City during the summer of 1903."

The climax of absurdity and falsification shines forth in his contention that I list, as a fellow member of the Board of Elders, "Joseph Schwarz who was not even a member of the society." Just prior to my election to said board, Joseph Schwarz at the time of his death in 1889 was a member of said board. His signature appears in the Articles of 1836 and 1847; he is No. 453 in my burial register of the Economy cemetery; and his brother Christian, in Schwarz vs. Duss, testified that his parents, four sisters and brothers Joseph and Joel (the latter born in Economy) all joined the Society.

Mr. Arndt states that on the next page I confuse matters more by giving the wrong count of members during the time I was a member of the board. The count is correct as anyone can see.

He misconstrues and misapplies my statement that in religion the
members ranged from superpietist to infidel. This statement has particular reference to February 15, 1805, the day of the organization of the Society when there could not have been the “probationary period” the reviewer mentions, and when for the purpose of building houses and factories useful mechanics were admitted regardless of belief or lack of it.

Furthermore this is proven by the very Frederick Rapp letter which Mr. Arndt cites in disproof. He states that the Society was a “congregation of saints admitted only after a long period of residence” (nonsense as to February, 1805).

It was just three years later (February, 1808) that Frederick Rapp wrote to Jacob Neff, “and so the Harmonie will quickly cast out all filth in order that the body may be cleansed and purified . . . If the people of your region would know who those are who have come from the Harmonie . . . they would probably drive them out of the region before the wrath of God breaks out over them.” Thus does Frederick dispose of some of the Arndt saints; but George Rapp on July 30, 1835, in a letter to R. L. Baker, also disposes of others. He writes: “Should we not soon be able to separate midnight from morning dawn . . . Zacher Dürr is entirely possessed of Satan and has already infected several others.” And I, in my day, also knew some members who were not saints.

In Nachtrieb v. Baker there is testimony under oath in reference to this subject. This the reviewer treats with silent contempt. Mr. Arndt attempts to discredit our ownership of the Harmony Society relics which at great trouble to Mrs. Duss (and at our joint expense) were preserved and donated to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A Harrisburg authority appraised the collection as worth upwards of $100,000. The agreement ‘twixt the Dusses and the Pennsylvania Historical Commission specifies that the collection shall be known as the Duss Memorial Exhibit. Mr. Arndt states, “Legally that claim has basis but its proof rests on a foundation of quicksand.”

As to this we have the decision of Judge Orr in Everitt v. Tryon, to wit: “The remaining members were jointly owners of all of the community property. What they jointly owned they could divide in severalty.”

Thus the relics came to Mrs. Duss and to Franz Gillman. But in
succeeding suits at law I was invariably counted in as de facto trustee. Being thus counted in on the trouble and expense, Mrs. Duss in all fairness counted me in on the ownership.

In Schwarz vs. Duss the Master found my testimony and memory correct and my management of the Harmony Society affairs not only able and proper but accomplished under great difficulties; also that I rescued the Society from impending disaster. The Court, the Court of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court approved of said Master's findings.

The reviewer concludes with the warning that "as to history of the Harmony Society this [my] volume is absolutely unreliable." To which I reply that I had not only the same records he has examined but the great advantage of their interpretation acquired through a thirty-year contact with the members. Also the advantage that came to me through the various suits at law which made it necessary to go through Harmony Society history "with a fine tooth comb."

My story should come in three volumes, but as Mr. Dodd of Dodd, Mead & Company, after reading it, stated: "This is the kind of matter the public ought to read, but how are you going to get them to read it? We are in the publishing business for the purpose of revenue." Similar verdicts were given me by a number of other publishers.

Finally Mr. H. A. Alderfer, manager of the Pennsylvania Book Service of Harrisburg, became interested, sending his son Mr. E. Gordon Alderfer to see me. The result was the cutting down of my story to its present size.

To me the abridgment was a massacre. But the splendid reception of the book by the public in general and by the reviewers (aside from the Arndt diatribe not one has offered any criticism) proves that Mr. Alderfer made a wise selection of material from my memoirs.

Like former Harmonists, I dislike writing for publication, and I wrote my memoirs only after years of bombardment by friends of the Society who well know that no one else can ever know its inside history as I know it.

Old Economy, Pennsylvania

John S. Duss