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THE MENNONITE WAY OF LIFE

There are some things which need to be preserved and some things which need to be propagated. The Mennonite way of life is of such a nature that it needs to be preserved, but it also needs to be propagated in order to be preserved. Its propagation, it seems to the writer, could best be done through the medium of a publication which has the setting forth of the Mennonite way of life as its sole purpose. There is a vacancy in the literature of the Mennonite church which such a publication could fill.

The Mennonite people in the United States and Canada have been noted for their simplicity of life, their frugality, and their integrity of character. They have been notable in their endeavor to maintain a way of life that is consistent with their profession of faith and with the teachings of the Word of God. The same thing can be said concerning their ancestors in Europe, for the principles of Mennonite people and their unique characteristics, have had their origin in the Anabaptist groups of Europe. Mennonite faith and life is not national or racial in its character, for our ancestors came from different parts of the country and social customs and practices differed among them. The determining influence and power of the characteristic life of the Mennonite people comes from their adherence to the teachings of the Word, and their practical application of the Word of God to all departments of their life. Their manner of life has been the means of their success and of the prosperity which is commonly recognized as one of their qualities.

It was not alone the rich limestone soil which made Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the so-called Garden Spot of the United States.

It was not merely location which gave Waterloo County, Ontario, its remarkable reputation as a prosperous farming community. It was neither soil nor location which made the line of demarcation so distinct between the fields of a Mennonite and those of his more worldly neighbor. It was not mere blood and breed which made so great a difference in the livestock, and it was not the quality of material which distinguished the equipment of the Mennonites from that of those who sojourned near them. These differences were accounted for by something more than blood and materials. Some studies by the United States Department of Agriculture made in various communities proved definitely that differences in the culture of a people often result in differences in the quality of agriculture, even where the soil and natural environment have been the same. The Christian faith and principles of living of the Mennonite settlers had their expression in the very character of their daily labors and gained, under the blessing of the God whom they served, the success which has been so characteristic of them.

Present and future generations of Mennonites are in danger of losing sight of the principles which governed their worthy ancestry, and they may lose some of the most practical ideas and methods which have been foundational in the coveted successes of our honored forebears. Our present generation is strongly influenced by modern ideas of life and by scientific methods and processes, which while often desirable, are ^{times} ~~some~~ associated with the discarding of sacred principles of Christian living and consistent religious and social standards. Such a breakdown of Christian principles threatens to undermine and destroy the cherished virtues of our heritage.

Many of our people have recognized these conditions and lament the drift of the present generation of Mennonites from the noble and valued qualities which in earlier generations so fully expressed the ideals and standards of Christian living. For not only have the high ideals of life, of social habits and customs in labor and business been slipping, but our traditional success in life has also begun to fail. Instead of home owners and business proprietors, there are more renters and servants. Instead of augmenting resources, there are accruing deficits. While there is no disgrace in an honest debt, there is satisfaction in honest gainings. One cannot build a structure of success without the principles and methods which are the material of success.

Much of the modern literature concerning Mennonite people would suggest that our ancestors were hopelessly bound to traditions and customs. This literature, especially when it is written by outsiders, who have an eye open only for the picturesque, has very frequently been biased and prejudiced. It was written only to secure reader interest and often has ridiculed ~~which has been~~ the worthy characteristics of these Christian men and women. We have ourselves produced very little literature concerning the ways of living among the Mennonite people. With the exception of a few life stories, there has been nothing in our literature which has done justice to a successful way of life subject to Christian standards. Our Christian publications deal with principles of faith and worship, but they do not deal with the secular side of our life. Farming and fruit growing, cattle raising and manufacturing, are just as vital a part of our living as is our worship on the Lord's day. Living the Gospel in the house and barn and field is just as essential as is the exposition of its scripture-based principles.

It is not too late to preserve, even to revive, some of the practical methods by which, as a people, we lived in the years gone by. It is possible to understand and to apply the successful folk principles of former years and to make them serve us today. We need the character of our former happy homes, and the methods of the successful home-makers whose children rose up and called them blessed. We can know and use again the co-operative spirit of the community life which lends itself to the interests and welfare and success of the community as a whole.

Six years ago the writer urged the necessity of having a publication devoted to the interests of our practical living. Some did not grasp the distinctive purposes of such a publication, but considerable interest has developed and many would welcome a paper devoted to the interests of community, home, and economic life. If our Mennonite ideals and practices are of value to us, they should be stimulated and perpetuated. This can be done only by those who believe in them and who are making present practical use of them. Our present publications have sufficient scope to cover as they treat of our religious, doctrinal, and church life. The field is wide open for a periodical which will both record and cultivate the way of life which is distinctive of us as a people.