

THE ANABAPTISTS OF EUROPE.

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The Anabaptist movement constitutes one of the six general directions taken by the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The relation of this party to the pre-Reformation sects of the later Middle Ages is not clear. On the ground of the undoubted similarity in doctrines and life it is claimed that the Anabaptists are a continuation of these mediaeval evangelical sects. This may be true, but it cannot be proven and several facts militate against this conclusion. Some of these are, (1) The movement rose among the followers of Luther and Zwingli in close connection with Wittenberg and Zürich, the two earliest centers of reformatory activity. (2) All the leaders of the Anabaptist movement so far as their personal history can be traced, came out of the Catholic church, and not out of any of the sects. (3) It arose and flourished in its earlier stages on soil which had been very little if at all affected by the earlier sects. (4) The Anabaptists were not conscious of any connection with earlier sects, but distinctly declared that they were setting up anew the truth of God that had long been obscured. (5) They never united with or entered into communion with any of the sects that still existed at the time. These considerations render it improbable that the Anabaptists had any direct connection with these earlier sects. They thought they were drawing their views fresh from a renewed study of the Scriptures, and this conclusion seems to be the most probable one.

The Anabaptists made a profound impression upon the sixteenth century. They were condemned at the Diet of the Empire in 1529; their views are mentioned and rejected in all the principal Protestant creeds down to that of Westminster; all the leading reformers, such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox and many others battled against them; most of the governments of western Europe decreed their extermination. Only a very brief

sketch of their history can be given here.

They arose almost simultaneously and with apparent independence in central Germany and in Northern Switzerland. In central Germany the most influential man among them was Thomas Münzer. He was a man of education and ability, a friend of Luther. At the outbreak of the Reformation he was pastor at Zwickau. Associated with him was one Nicholas Storch, who held radical views and was said to be in communication with the Bohemian Brethren across the border. Münzer encouraged Storch to set up a church embodying his views, and on Dec. 16, 1521, he was arraigned before the municipal authorities on the charge of repudiating infant baptism. This was the beginning of the movement in Germany. Along with the repudiation of infant baptism went other radical views such as the rejection of oaths, magistracy and war and the insistence on community of goods.

In company with Marcus Stubner, Storch set out for Wittenberg, in the hope of winning the university for his views.

His faith was rewarded by the conversion of Carlstadt, the rector of the university, and Cellarius, a learned Hebrew and Aramaic scholar. Melancthon was deeply affected. Luther was then in hiding at the Wartburg, having been put under the ban of the Empire at the Diet of Worms in May. Hearing of the radical utterances and doings at Wittenberg, he risked his life to return and put things in order. He appeared suddenly in the city, preached eight sermons, on eight successive days and completely overthrew the "new prophets." This scattered the party. The leaders, especially Münzer and Pfeifer, became more and more radical. They began to preach the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth and soon took the final step of attempting to set it up. The result was the Peasants' war of 1525, when the whole movement was quenched in blood and 100,000 peasants perished. Münzer was among the number.

It is impossible to tell how far the Anabaptists were involved in this movement. Münzer can hardly be properly called an Anabaptist. He was opposed to infant baptism, but was never himself, so far as known, rebaptized nor did he administer believer's baptism to others. But

the Peasants' war brought the Anabaptists into an ill-repute from which they never recovered in central Germany.

The next center to be noted is Zürich, in Switzerland. Here Zwingli began to preach reformatory doctrines from about 1519 on. He was cool, cautious, conservative. Around him gathered a party of young men, priests and laymen, who were much more radical than himself. Serious differences began to be manifest about 1523. This body of radicals insisted upon setting up a church of the regenerate, and of proceeding to the act at once without waiting for the action of the city council as Zwingli wished to do. The leaders in this group were Conrad Grebel, son of one of the leading men of the city and a fine Greek scholar; Felix Manz, an excellent Hebrew scholar, who preached from his Hebrew Bible; William Reublin, a priest; Ludwig Hätzer, a learned priest and George Blaurock, a runaway monk, and others. The fundamental difference between them and Zwingli was the conception of the church. They held that it should be composed of believers only. Zwingli denied both the practicability and Scripturalness of their position. Their views naturally involved the repudiation of infant baptism and this subject came under discussion in the spring of 1524. At first Zwingli hesitated, but finally decided to retain infant baptism. Late in 1524 or early in 1525 they took the final step and instituted believer's baptism by Grebel's baptizing Blaurock, who then baptized Grebel and others. This was, apparently, by sprinkling or pouring.

The movement spread with marvellous rapidity despite bitter persecution, which broke out at once. We soon find a strong colony in the canton of St. Gall. Wolfgang Ulimann, their leader was baptized by immersion in the Rhine, and it is probable that others practiced this mode. They were numerous also in the cantons of Berne, Basel, Schaffhausen and others; in fact, in all the cantons where the Reformation had entered they were found.

In close connection with Switzerland a very interesting case occurred in Waldshut, a small town in the Austrian lands just outside Switzerland to the North. Here Balthaser Hubmaier was priest. He was a remarkable man. Born near Augsburg about 1480, he was educated at the

University of Friburg, where he enjoyed the instruction and friendship of the famous John Eck. He followed this man to Ingolstadt, where he became preacher to the University and professor in that institution. Soon afterwards he became cathedral preacher in the old cathedral town of Regensburg, where he preached with great acceptance. Here he undertook a Jewish persecution, destroyed a synagogue and on the site built a chapel of which he became pastor. Pretended miracles brought crowds of pilgrims. These he, at first, encouraged, but afterwards opposed and was compelled to leave. He became pastor at Waldshut. Here he gradually adopted evangelical views. He then went on to Anabaptist views and in the spring of 1525 was baptized upon a profession of his faith. Henceforth, he is the chief literary representative of the Anabaptists. No man, even in modern times, has more fully understood the Baptist position as to the subjects of baptism or more clearly and forcibly stated that position. In the next two years he wrote many tracts on a great variety of subjects, and his clearness and vigor were always equal to his diligence.

Swiss persecution now became very determined. Hubmaier was driven into Austria, Grebel died of the pest in 1526, Manz was executed by drowning at Zürich, in 1527, Blaurock was burned in Tyrol, in 1529. The authorities in the various Swiss cantons, largely at the instigation of Zwingli, drove the Anabaptists out as far as possible. Several were executed. By 1529 only a few were left, hidden away in the nooks and corners of the mountainous districts. These have maintained themselves, especially in the canton of Berne, amid much suffering and persecution, down to the present time. They now practice both sprinkling and immersion and are not in fellowship with the Swiss Baptists.

Driven from Switzerland, the Anabaptists sought refuge in the free cities of South Germany, such as Strassburg, Augsburg and Ulm, and in the Austrian lands. The leading men in South Germany were Ludwig Hätzer and Hans Denck. Both were highly educated and were men of literary ability. Both were masters of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Denck was rector of the famous

St. Sebaldus school at Nuremberg at the time of his conversion to Anabaptist views. He was a profound thinker, a mystic, a man of the deepest piety. These two together made the first translation of the prophets from the Hebrew into German. Their work ran through several editions before Luther's translation of the prophets appeared. The authorities in these South German cities had practically exterminated the Anabaptists by 1530. Those who had fled from Switzerland into the Austrian lands gradually gathered in Moravia, which was a "goodly land" for all the persecuted at that time. The freedom from persecution was due to the weakness of the government and the strength of the anti-Catholic views which had come down from the Hussite reform. The Anabaptists gathered chiefly at Nikolsburg and from this point Hubmaier sent out most of his writings. His prominence made him an easy mark for the government. He was seized in July, 1527, and in March, 1528, was burned at the stake. Three days later his wife was drowned. The Anabaptists of Moravia practiced community of goods for the most part. They were industrious and frugal, and soon became valued citizens. But their lords could not protect them. They were gradually exterminated, the last of them disappearing about 1762. A few families moved to Southern Russia, where they remained until 1874, when they removed to South Dakota. There they still preserve their communal life.

Returning to the West, we have to follow the movement along the Rhine and in the Low Countries. We have already seen that Strassburg, being a free city of the Empire, was for a long time an asylum for the Anabaptists. Among them the most important man for the later history was Melchior Hofmann, a furrier from Swabia. He had accepted reformed views, knew the letter of the Scripture almost perfectly and was deeply interested in prophecy applying it to his own day. From 1523 on, he was a zealous lay preacher, going as far as Sweden and Denmark in his missionary journeys. About 1520 he united with the Anabaptists at Strassburg. He had already determined that the kingdom of God was to be set up on earth in 1533 and that Strassburg was to be the center. With these chiliastic notions, he now went forth

to prepare for the appearance of the Lord. His preaching on both sides of the lower Rhine had marvellous effect, both in the Netherlands and in Westphalia. Great numbers were converted and the whole country was fired with his chiliastic expectations. Holland was almost completely won for the Anabaptists. In 1533 he quietly returned to Strassburg to await the appearance of the Lord. He was seized and thrown into prison where he died several years later.

He had won to his views a fanatical baker of Haarlem named Jan Matthys. This man was consumed with hatred of the upper classes and his imagination fired with the expected vengeance of the Lord. Hofmann had in 1531 suspended baptism for two years, intimating that at the end of that time the Lord would appear. Matthys had a vision instructing him that baptism should recommence and that he himself was the expected prophet Enoch. Thousands were baptized in a short time. The episcopal city of Münster in Westphalia had recently accepted the Reformation and then Anabaptist views had quickly taken strong root there. It was now revealed to Jan Matthys that Münster and not Strassburg was to be the New Jerusalem. Thousands of fanatical Anabaptists were gathered into the city, a theocracy was set up and in the name of God and religion such enormities were perpetrated as the world has scarcely seen elsewhere. For more than a year this orgy of vice and crime continued, until it was finally quenched in blood by the forces of the bishop in 1535. This frightful episode brought such shame upon the Anabaptist name that the Baptists of the continent still suffer from it to-day.

The fragments of the movement that were still amenable to reason, the so-called quiet Anabaptists, were gathered up by Menno Simon, a Dutch priest of West Friesland, who openly joined the movement in 1537. He was a man of energy and ability and earnestly convinced of the truth of his views. Under his direction the quiet Anabaptists over all the lands on the lower Rhine were organized. They denied all connection with the Münster fanatics and took the name of their leader, and hence are known to us as Mennonites. Through much persecution by the state church and much internal division and

strife among themselves, they have maintained their existence down to the present. They now form a respectable body in the Netherlands and are found in other lands, notably in continental Europe and in America.

The exigencies of trade and the pressure of persecution in the Netherlands drove a good many Dutch Anabaptists to England, where they settled chiefly along the eastern coast. They are found there from about 1530 on, but they do not seem to have affected the native English very deeply or widely. It is not known that any Anabaptist congregations were formed. Some of the Baptist churches of England which claim to date back to the 16th century may have come out of Anabaptist congregations. But these claims are not satisfactorily attested by contemporary documentary evidence. As a matter of fact, the English Baptists differed widely from the start from the Anabaptists in both practices and beliefs—so widely as almost to preclude the belief that the English Baptists are a historical continuation of the Anabaptists as a denomination. They differed from the start as widely as do the Baptists and Mennonites today and in some respects more widely.

Turning now from this brief and imperfect survey of their history, let us glance at the doctrines and practices of the Anabaptists. There were many parties among them and scarcely any general statement can be applied to all of them. They agreed only in their opposition to infant baptism and their insistence upon a converted church membership. Their views may be divided into three general classes, religious, political and sociological, though all rested upon a religious basis.

I. Their religious views. 1. The organizing idea of the party, the doctrine which gave the movement its unity and strength was the conception of the church as a community of believers. This position they held against both Catholics and Protestants. From this doctrine flowed necessarily two others, viz., baptism of believers only and the exercise of strict discipline in complete independence of the state. On these doctrines they were entirely united—they baptized only believers, exercised the most rigid discipline and insisted on complete separation of the church from the state. They regarded infant baptism as

that invention of the devil which was most injurious to Christianity. Church discipline was to be exercised by the congregation, not by the state and not by any officer or officers in the church.

2. The great majority held to the ordinary conception of the Trinity, and the person and work of Christ. But some, notably Hans Denck and the Polish Anabaptists, held Socinian views of Christ; while others, as Melchior Hofmann, and Menno Simon and many of their followers denied the reality of his human nature.

3. As to the plan of salvation, they were Anti-Augustinian, the only party of the reformers who held this position. They laid great emphasis upon life rather than doctrine. Other reformers, they said, were trying to amend doctrines; they were trying to renew lives. They carried on a sharp criticism on the morals of the reformers. They laid great emphasis upon following Jesus, putting in work as one of the elements in the plan of salvation. They emphasized the freedom of the will and moral responsibility.

4. Some of them, at least, believed that exclusion from the church closed the gate of heaven against the excluded member. The ban of the church must be removed before salvation was possible.

5. They were opposed to paying the ministry a stated sum, but believed that the ministers should be supported by the free-will offerings of the churches as the people felt moved to give.

6. Their conception of the ordinances was that they are symbolic only. Baptism was usually administered by affusion, though immersion was practiced also, notably in Poland, where it was the only mode. There was no discussion between them and the reformers on the "mode," but only the subject of baptism.

7. They held the New Testament in higher esteem than the Old, and laid special emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount, a view that was then very radical. They were literalists in interpretation.

8. They believed in a divine call to the ministry and laid little emphasis upon ordination. The movement was a great outburst of lay preaching. Preachers were not stationed pastors, but travelled two by two, preaching

wherever opportunity offered. In general they insisted strongly upon the inner testimony of the Spirit. They were chosen in the congregation by the use of the lot after prayer. At first those at Zürich opposed singing, but later the Anabaptists generally were noted for their singing and wrote a great many songs. Many of them were sung to popular tunes already in circulation, and thereby gained in popularity and influence.

9. Their organization seems to have been at first purely congregational. All ecclesiastical action was taken by the entire membership. Later among the Mennonites a larger organization was developed.

10. They were opposed to persecution for religious opinion. Hubmaier wrote a tract in which he expresses the conviction, very remarkable for that time, that not even a Turk should be persecuted because of his religion. It was easy, of course, for them to hold this view, since they were always in the minority and suffering persecution. Even Lutherans and Calvinists cried out against persecution under such circumstances. What the Anabaptists would have done had they been in a majority, it is impossible to say, but opposition to persecution would seem to flow naturally from their intense individualism in religious affairs.

II. Their political views. Their attitude towards politics and the state was purely a negative one. They regarded the state as a necessary evil, ordained of God, but too corrupt for the participation of Christian men.

1. No Christian could hold civil office, because the position involved his intimate association with wicked men and required him to bear the sword in punishment of crime. Most of them were opposed to capital punishment. Hubmaier, however, taught that Christians might rightfully hold office.

2. They were opposed to war in any form and refused absolutely to bear arms. Most of them, however, were willing to pay wartaxes and render such service in the army as did not require them to bear arms or fight.

3. The function of the state was to punish the bad and protect the good. It had no religious duties. This was in direct contradiction to the almost universal thought of that time. It was the duty of the individual to obey the

state in all requirements which did not conflict with his religious convictions and duties. Where the conscience of the individual began the power of the state ceased.

4. They refused absolutely to take an oath except under duress, because Jesus said, "Swear not at all." At that time the oath was regarded as the foundation of civil government, and their refusal to swear aroused the suspicion that they were opposed to all government. When they were sometimes forced to swear to save their lives, they did not regard the oath as binding, and thus often laid themselves open to the charge of perjury.

III. Sociological views. 1. The great majority of them were socialistic, or communistic, believing in a community of goods. This was based on the example of the early Christians. This doctrine was one of the chief causes of persecution by the property holders. In Moravia they actually realized their ideal in great communal buildings where vast amounts of manufacturing and trade were carried on.

2. They were opposed to the payment of tithes and other rents for the support of the church.

3. They were opposed to the payment of interest on borrowed money or other articles.

It will be seen from this summary that their sociological and political views were as revolutionary as those on religion. They were undoubtedly equally fruitful in bringing on persecution. It will also be seen that many views, regarded as of fundamental importance by them, have never been advocated by our own denomination. In some of their peculiarities, the Quakers are much more their successors than are the Baptists. Glancing back over their doctrines, it will be seen that in many points they were far ahead of their generation, the modern men of their time.