

**STORM  
AND  
TRIUMPH**

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and  
Triumph**

THE MENNONITE  
KLEINE GEMEINDE  
(1850-1875)

## **Acknowledgements**

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D. Plett

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## Storm and Triumph The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1850-1875

Foreword by <i>Dr. John Friesen</i> .....	4
 <i>Part One: Kleine Gemeinde Lifestyles</i>	
Chapter 1 Daily Life .....	5
Chapter 2 Travel and Visitation .....	25
Chapter 3 Correspondence and Poetry .....	39
Chapter 4 Faith and Practice .....	59
Chapter 5 Social Views and Morals .....	91
 <i>Part Two: Conflict on the Molotschna</i>	
Chapter 6 A Quest for Power .....	103
Chapter 7 The Religious Wars .....	113
Chapter 8 The Landless Struggle .....	127
 <i>Part Three: Expansion and Fall of the Kleine Gemeinde, 1850-1871</i>	
Chapter 9 Book Two, 1850-1866 .....	145
Chapter 10 The 1866 Division .....	163
Chapter 11 Physical Expansion .....	185
Chapter 12 Issues and Events, 1866-1871 .....	201
 <i>Part Four: Conscription and Crisis</i>	
Chapter 13 Nonresistance, Millennialism and Nationalism .....	227
Chapter 14 The Emigration Movement .....	247
 <i>Part Five: The Exodus, 1871-1875</i>	
Chapter 15 Faith Under Fire .....	267
Chapter 16 The Outward View .....	283
Chapter 17 A Delegate's Journey .....	293
Chapter 18 The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ. A Publication Story .....	307
Chapter 19 Farewell to Russia .....	323
 Index .....	 337

## Foreword

In this volume of the history of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, Delbert Plett continues the story of the development and maturation of this reform church. Even though the volume includes a relatively short period of time, a quarter of a century, significant changes occur during this era. The Kleine Gemeinde has to face inner conflict, competing factions, division, and emigration to North America. Through these experiences the Kleine Gemeinde becomes a more mature movement, at times weakened, but despite all adversities still carrying on the original vision of reform.

In volume one, entitled **The Golden Years**, the Kleine Gemeinde appeared as the reformer calling both the cultural and the pietist Mennonites to the vision of the peaceful Anabaptists. The Kleine Gemeinde was challenging those Mennonites caught in maintaining cultural forms to revitalize their religious life by rediscovering peace, forgiveness, and the humble life. Other Mennonites who were turning to pietism were being challenged to seek the resources for reform within their own heritage.

In this volume the Kleine Gemeinde energy is largely consumed with internal issues. The most important of these is the division of 1866, which results in two factions, one led by Johan Friesen and the other by Heinrich Enns. This division is a serious blow to the Kleine Gemeinde's self-image and role because in its early years it was the reconciler when conflicts arose, and now it proves unable to resolve dissension within its own ranks.

Despite these problems, the church does not disintegrate. It continues in two factions, both promoting the earlier vision of Klaas Reimer and his friends who began the movement. Both groups move to North America in the 1870s, the Friesen group to Nebraska, and the Enns group to Manitoba under the leadership of Peter Toews.

In this volume Plett continues to provide extensive quotations in translation from a variety of letters and other documents from the Russian era which have not been published before. This is a significant contribution to Russian Mennonite scholarship. It is, however, Plett's interpretation of the Kleine Gemeinde and the role which it played in the Russian Mennonite community which will make the greatest impact.

It is evident that interpreters of Russian Mennonite religious history will need to come to terms with Plett's division of Russian Mennonites into three orientations, cultural, pietist and Anabaptist. This interpretation not only places the Kleine Gemeinde into a different role from the one assigned to it by traditional Mennonite scholarship, it also provides a new interpretation of the other Mennonite groups. This interpretation of Russian Mennonitism will certainly receive vigorous discussion.

Plett is to be commended for the creative contribution he has made to the understanding of Russian Mennonite history.

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# *Part One:* *Kleine Gemeinde Lifestyles*

## **Chapter One:** **Daily Life**

### **1.00 Introduction**

This book constitutes the third volume in the history of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde*. The historical and theological origins of this denomination were considered in the previous volume entitled **The Golden Years. The Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* in Russia, 1812-1849.**<sup>1</sup> **History and Events**<sup>2</sup>, published in 1981, dealt with the period 1866-1876 through the exposition of two historical writings pertaining to that era and also contained a collection of 20 maps of relevance to the *Kleine Gemeinde* story. The present work assumes the reader is already familiar with the aforementioned writings. As indicated by the title, this volume will deal with the final quarter century of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* sojourn in Russia, i.e. 1850-1875.

Part two of **The Golden Years** dealt with the founding and establishment of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony with a general emphasis on the pioneer settlement, agriculture, colonial administration and education. The first part of this book will consider the lifestyle of the *Kleine Gemeinde*. In particular, this review will consist of the following chapter topics, namely, daily life, travel and visitation, letter correspondence and poetry, faith and practice, and social views and morals.

### **1.01 The Literature of the *Kleine Gemeinde***

It would have been impossible to document the *Kleine Gemeinde* story without the substantial mass of source material which has survived over the past century. In fact, one of the most significant aspects of the lifestyle of the *Kleine Gemeinde* within the context of Russian Mennonite society, is that the members of this group were highly literate and articulate individuals. It seems that this was a normative feature of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement at its best. It is helpful to note in this regard, the inspirational and theological writings of the faith which flourished in the first bloom of the movement and therefore it is only natural that a community which sought to emulate the faith and practice of the same would demonstrate some of these characteristics. Each follower was to know his doctrine and be prepared to give an account of the reason for the hope within him or her. In addition, the very orientation of the Anabaptist Mennonite faith to a discipleship unto death made it natural that more writings, such as diaries, memoirs, etc., would be composed as the attitude and mind-set of the follower was constantly cognizant of the brevity of life. This resulted in a need to record and memorialize.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite looked back into history to the golden and classical age of the apostolic church for his authority and inspiration. The thread of faithfulness was manifest through the span of the centuries during which heroic leaders such as Peter Waldo, Menno Simons, Peter J. Twisck and countless others, had led their embattled *Gemeinden* against the wiles of the evil one. Through scripture authority the Anabaptist-Mennonite eagerly read and studied the battles of the faith in order to inspire his own. With dismay, and yet with total submission to biblical authority, he noticed that the lights of biblical Christianity were shining less and less brightly with the passing of the centuries.

By comparison the separatist pietist placed great emphasis on his present emotions, through a requirement of assurance of salvation and a constant enjoyment thereof, and focused his outlook on eschatological predictions. This resulted in an almost exclusively forward looking mentality. As a result only little emphasis was placed on history and the writing which was done tended to concentrate on the emotional experiences of individuals and their expectations for the "end times". In addition it appears that each succeeding generation believed itself to have achieved the total revelation of truth which frequently negated that of preceding generations. It seems that the separatist pietist believed that truth would be most clearly manifest immediately prior to the final unfolding of his eschatological expectations. Therefore the separatist pietist regarded himself as a superior link to final

truth, as he believed that he had personally experienced and tasted the same. Consequently he had less regard for his forebears who in his view had not possessed the full truths of the gospel in any event. The foregoing indicates that the philosophy of history of the separatist pietist and the Anabaptist-Mennonite were very different resulting in differing attitudes and levels of literacy and articulation.

The literacy of the Kleine Gemeinde evidenced itself in a rich legacy of writings such as sermons, Familienbuecher, letters, diaries, genealogies, poetry, historical and theological works, etc. Through this rich source material the story of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia has survived the passage of time so that this heritage of biblical faithfulness can be passed on to all the adherents of full gospel faith.

It is remarkable that even a small fraction of this Kleine Gemeinde literature has survived the passage of a century or more. This is especially so when one considers that this was a time when the suggestion of literacy among the Anabaptist-Mennonites was grounds for disbelief. This attitude became especially pronounced among the many Mennonite groups in Canada and the United States which succumbed to the false hopes and aspirations of American fundamentalism during the 1920s and 1930s. Even today one hears of documents which went the way of the fire because the knowledge of the past had fallen so low that no appreciation or even sympathy existed for the "old" evangelical truths of the Anabaptist-Mennonites.

In addition numerous collections have been lost because of natural disasters. e.g. The house of delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908) in Gruenfeld, Manitoba, was destroyed by fire with all contents in 1876. The considerable writings of the delegate apparently vanished in the flames.<sup>3</sup> The extensive writings and library of Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-1899), the pioneer school teacher in Blumenort, Manitoba, apparently disappeared when the house of his son Klaas, where these papers were located, burned to the ground. Other papers were simply misplaced. Considerable quantities of documents no doubt stayed in Russia at the time of the emigration in 1874. Other collections were divided among children and then thrown away because when the children died their children in turn no longer realized the significance of the documents. Even if they had been interested they had lost the literary ability of their forebearers and could no longer read German.

Even so, a substantial mass of Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde writings has survived the passage of time. There seems to have been a dogged determination among many youths at the time of the emigration in 1874 to ensure their story should not be lost. In fact, some of these historically conscious individuals made handwritten copies of writings which they felt were of particular value for each of their children. David L. Plett, for example, compiled a set of historical writings for each of his thirteen children. This practise of transcribing and circulating various writings through the production of handwritten copies was common in Russia. Other writings were preserved by dedicated and knowledgeable historians such as Abram Vogt of Steinbach, who made his own handwritten copies of various records and writings, the originals of which have subsequently been lost. The reader today is the beneficiary of all these *ad hoc* and unorganized archival efforts. Without the preservation of the sizeable collection of writings which now exists, the Kleine Gemeinde story would have been lost, much to the detriment of Russian Mennonite historiography and evangelical Christianity as a whole.

## 1.02 The Diaries of Abraham R. Friesen and Diedrich S. Friesen

Through this rich Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite literature the reader is provided with a view of various aspects of the every-day life of the group. Fortunately there are two extant diaries which are very helpful in illustrating various aspects of Kleine Gemeinde life in Russia. Both documents were written by Kleine Gemeinde school teachers, namely Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884), and Diedrich S. Friesen (1849-1901), both of whom have already been mentioned in **The Golden Years**.

Abraham R. Friesen was the grandson of Klaas Friesen, a pioneer in the village of Lindenau in 1804 and one of the early members of the Kleine Gemeinde. His father was Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1896), a member of the Kleine Gemeinde, who became a school teacher in the 1830s. The extant diaries of Abraham R. Friesen consist of two volumes of 167 and 243 pages respectively. Book One covers the period from October 12, 1870 to December 16, 1875. The second volume covers the period from February 18, 1876 to May 28, 1884.<sup>4</sup>

By comparison the extant diary of Diedrich S. Friesen is far less extensive covering only the period October 20, 1872 to the time that this family left for America in June of 1874. This valuable source has been preserved through the concern and archival work of historian Abram A. Vogt of Steinbach, Manitoba, who made a handwritten copy of the diary for his records.<sup>5</sup> Russian-Mennonite historiography has been well served by such men who believed that the documents of every group

were well worth preserving. Diedrich S. Friesen was the son of Jakob K. Friesen (1822-1875), a nephew of Abraham Friesen, the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

The diary of Diedrich S. Friesen makes a valuable complement to that of Abraham R. Friesen in several important ways. In the first place the two men were brothers-in-law since the wife of Diedrich S. Friesen was a sister to Abraham R. Friesen. Both men therefore had a link with a pedagogical tradition in the Kleine Gemeinde through the veteran teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892). Secondly, Abraham R. Friesen taught in the Molotschna and was a member of the Molotschna Kleine Gemeinde until his emigration to America in 1875. Diedrich S. Friesen on the other hand was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde congregation at Borosenko during the period covered by his diary. He lived and taught in the village of Rosenfeld. Therefore the two diaries can be used to illustrate and compare the same aspects of daily life in these two congregations.

### 1.03 The Daily Life of a Kleine Gemeinde School Teacher

Some of the entries in the diary of Abraham R. Friesen illustrate the life and activities of a Kleine Gemeinde school teacher in the Molotschna.

"October 31, 1870. Drove to Gnadenfeld to Rempel and bought Christmas covers for the children. Wednesday, November 4th. Made three lists for the Schulz. November 27. I visited the school of Harder in Blumstein. Saturday, December 12. There was a conference here to which the teachers from Altona, Muensterberg, Lindenau, and Schoenau, came. Instruction was given in accordance with the Wednesday forenoon time table. February 5th, 1871. Was engaged to teach for another year at a salary of 150 rubles, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  tschetwert of grain and 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  desiatines of plowed land.

March 1, 1871, the school councillor (inspector) Franz Dueck visited the school. May 1, 1871. School examinations were held at Fischau in the forenoon, and in Lindenau in the afternoon. I attended as well. Next Monday, that is May 3, there will be examinations (Pruefung) here (in Lichtenau) and in Blumstein in the afternoon. The following teachers were present at the examinations in Fischau and Lindenau: H. Friesen, Tiege; N. Holzrichter, Rosenort; Warkentin, Lindenau, and myself and the ministers: D. Penner, Rosenort; G. Enns, Fischau; W. Berg, Lindenau. There were only a few other visitors, especially in Fischau.

Monday, May 4th. Examinations were held here today. There were 27 visitors. There were five school teachers from Muntau to Lindenau, and G. Enns from Fischau. The others were from the village. In the afternoon examinations were held in Blumstein. September 1, 1871. There was a conference in Ruckenu, and I plan to drive to Muntau tomorrow, Friday, to examine (pruefen) a church history which is to be printed.

December 10, 1871. Was in Orloff at the auction sale, and on the 11th I was at the Conference in Schoenau. The subjects were (from the) Tuesday afternoon (timetable), namely, blackboard arithmetic and the Russian language. Friesen, Fischau; Warkentin, Lindenau; Siemens, Muensterberg, and myself were there. December 27th. Father-in-law, was here and bought a choral book. They voted for Schulz today and we are getting a new one, namely Heinrich Nickel.

January 8th. At the conference in Fischau. Teachers present were: Fast from Tiegenhagen; Isaac, Schoenau; Warkentin, Lindenau; Harder, from Blumstein; Siemens, from Muensterberg, and myself. The subjects were from the Wednesday forenoon timetable. January 12th, 1872. Again employed for a year, i.e. from April 1st, 1872 to April 1st, 1873, and shall receive the following remuneration: 190 rubles cash money, five tschetwert rye, five tschetwert wheat, seven tschetwert barley, and three desiatines of cultivated land to be seeded and the hayland which is designated for the school. Present were F. Kroeker No. 5, F. Kroeker No. 11, Abr. Mentler No. 1, Isaac Berg No. 17, Abr. Enns and Kornelius Kornelsen. February 12. There was a conference in Lindenau. Teachers present were Siemens, Muensterberg, and myself. My wife visited at D. Penners.

February 28th. We were at the father-in-law (Gerhard S. Kornelsen) in the evening. Also E. Ballans, and Died. Warkentin, Lindenau, was here towards evening today and told me that I would be able to obtain the "translators" (Russian/German dictionaries?) which I had ordered. March 3rd. Brother-in-law Giesbrecht and I went to Lindenau to pick up the "translators," 13 of them. We were at D. Penners for lunch. March 11th. There was a conference here. Siemens, Muensterberg; Warkentin, Lindenau; Friesen, Fischau, were present. The weather was quite nice. Father-in-law was also here and we were at his place in the evening.

March 13th. I was at B. Harder in Blumstein and on the 16th he was here for a little while. March 19th. On Saturday we went to Blumstein to painter Fast, and at the elder Joh. Isaacs for Vesper. Very nice, some wind. Received three contracts from the Schulz for final transcription. March 22nd. The weather looks changeable as if it will rain. Yesterday, I and the pupils, went for an outing. I have now copied 21 contracts on stamp paper. One sheet at 13 and two sheets at 10 rubles. April 21. The school inspector Franz Dueck was here in school today. Siemens, Muensterberg, visited here in the afternoon.

May 10, 1872. Examinations were held here and went very well as far as we were concerned. Visitors were teachers: Siemens, Muensterberg; Diedrich Warkentin, Lindenau; Joh. Warkentin, Neuhut-terthal; and brother-in-law Died. S. Friesen, from Rosenfeld (Borosenko). Visitors from here were:



Abr. Warkentin, Kor. Warkentin, H. Warkentin, both mayors, H. Nickel, father-in-law, G. Giesbrecht, Kor. Kornelsen, Joh. Bolt, Abr. Nikkel, Mrs. Isaac Berg, Mrs. Wiebe, and Mrs. Bellan. June 1, 1872. There were examinations in the society school in Orloff. Kor. Kornelsen and I were there. August 12th. There was a conference in Fischau. Only Balzer, Isaac, and I were in attendance.”

The foregoing extracts from the diary of Abraham R. Friesen vividly demonstrate the operation of the Molotschna School system.<sup>2</sup> It can be seen that the teacher, in addition to his busy daily schedule of classroom instruction, also attended numerous teachers conferences and meetings to keep up and improve his teaching skills. In addition his classroom was examined by an inspector who made sure that proper standards were maintained. Experienced and veteran teachers such as Gerhard S. Kornelsen were apparently called upon to contribute their knowledge. It is also evident that mutual sharing and maintenance of standards took place by teachers visiting the classroom of their colleagues, particularly during examinations. Through these avenues a wide range of experience and depth of knowledge was made available to each teacher.

It is also noted that Diedrich S. Friesen attended the classroom of his brother-in-law on May 10, 1872, indicating that active communication was maintained. A reference to the diary of Diedrich S. Friesen will illustrate the life of a Kleine Gemeinder teacher in the more remote Borosenko settlement.

“November 6, 1872. It was decided that a conference was to be held here on Saturday. A conference was held here in the afternoon. November 16th. Oberschulz and Beisitzer elected in Blumenhof. November 18th. We were in Blumenhof for a conference at Peter Duecks. Corn Fast was here. December 9th. Drove to Gruenfeld for a conference. December 16. Today I drove to feed the cattle. In the afternoon I was in Steinbach for a conference.

February 19, 1873. Mr. and Mrs. Peter Dueck, Blumenhof, Mr. and Mrs. Franz Wiens, and my father were here. February 23. Drove to Gruenfeld with Peter Toews. February 24. Drove to H. Wiebes and to Heuboden for examinations. Monday, February 26. Drove to Blumenhof for examinations (Pruefung). February 27. Examinations were held here. March 3. Drove to Neuanlage for examinations together with A. Fast. March 6. Drove to Steinbach for examinations.

April 12, 1873. Thursday. Wife very sick in the afternoon. The scarlet fever came out. June 22, 1873. Joh. gathered school money for me. September 3rd. School commenced. Peter Dueck from Blumenhof and Harms from Paulsheim were here. September 4. After school we drove to Anafeld.”

The foregoing demonstrates that the resourceful Kleine Gemeinde had established their own school system in Borosenko in a manner which duplicated that used in the Molotschna.

It is interesting here to stray briefly from the topic to consider the school system which the Kleine Gemeinde instituted upon their arrival in Manitoba. Here a school was established in each village, or group of villages, where a school was warranted, immediately upon the arrival of the immigrants in Manitoba in the fall of 1874.

These schools were staffed by the cadre of veteran teachers which the Kleine Gemeinde were blessed with. By 1876 a school regulation was adopted by the Gemeinde which was patterned after the Molotschnaer school regulations. These regulations were drafted and composed by Gerhard S. Kornelsen, the veteran school teacher from Lichtnau, Molotschna. One difference was that the school system was placed under the jurisdiction of the Gemeinde Vorstand (church leadership) instead of an Agricultural society as had been the case in the Molotschna. The church authority headed by Aeltester Peter Toews was dedicated and progressive. The teacher conferences which had been instituted voluntarily by the experienced teachers were encouraged and made compulsory.<sup>7</sup> This is verified by the following entries in the Abraham R. Friesen diary.

Saturday, November 11, 1875. I attended a conference in Gruenfeld. Followed the Monday forenoon. Teachers present were from Blumenort, Steinreich and myself. Saturday, March 4th. Conference here in Blumenort. Peter Dueck and I were the subjects (being examined). Thursday, April 13. School examinations were held (Blumenhof, Manitoba). Guests were Aeltester Peter Toews, Rev. Abr. Loewen, Gruenfeld, Kornelius Friesen, Blumenort, and Heinrich Reimer, minister. Peter Unger, Johan Janzen, Isaac Warkentin, Joh. Warkentin, the elder Corn. Plett, and my father from Blumenort. Monday, the 24th of April, in the afternoon school examinations (Prüfung) were held in Blumenort. School examinations were held in Steinbach and I also attended.

Saturday, January 16, 1876. Conference in Blumenort. We teachers were all present . . . January 27. Conference in Steinbach. We teachers were all the subjects. March 31. School examinations in Blumenhof.”

The security of the teachers' tenure was encouraged and no tuition was charged for the education of indigent children. The teachers were examined by a committee of three made up of William Hespeller, Jakob Friesen, of Tanenau, and Abraham Isaac, of Schoenau. The latter was the Kleine Gemeinde representative who had formerly served as a teacher in the village of Gruenfeld near the

Borosenko settlement.

It is apparent that the Kleine Gemeinde established what must have been one of the most progressive school systems in the province at the time. This gives rise to many intriguing questions. In view of this visionary spirit, why did the Manitoba government in 1891 appoint as inspector of Mennonite schools a Pietist Mennonite who would have been philosophically opposed to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith of his constituents? Had the Manitoba government intended to create bad feelings and mistrust among the Mennonites in the province, they could have made no better choice. However, the answer to these and other similar questions will have to be dealt with elsewhere.

#### 1.04 The Kleine Gemeinde Neighborhood

The social activities of the Kleine Gemeinde will now be considered. It must be remembered that none of the modern day time-consumers such as television, telephone and theatre existed at the time. The diaries of Abram R. Friesen and Diedrich S., Friesen reveal that the Russian Mennonites did not suffer on account of this deficiency. The rich social discourse of such a pastoral society was manifested in a myriad of activities such as the pig slaughtering bees which were a form of mutual assistance as well as a social activity. Other common neighbourly activities were auction sales, funerals, and weddings. We meet them all in the diary of Abram R. Friesen.

“October 12 and 13th, 1870. The following persons died here this month. Klaas Friesen, Rosenort; Widow Unrau, Kleefeld; Mrs. Peter Dueck, Friedensfeld, and Jakob Thiessen. October 22nd. Peter Rahn died today of a lung ailment. Last Friday the 16th, we slaughtered two pigs, in the way we usually do. They were real good. Saturday, 24th. Were at Blumstein at the auction sale of the big Jakob Friesen. October 26. Slaughtered pigs at the place of my parents. We also helped P. Baerchs, Joh. Andresen, Heinrich Warkentin and Baerchens, Jacob. A real good pig slaughtering. Heinrich Enns and Johann Rogalskis were here in the evening.

November 2nd. We were invited to Abr. Wiebes for spare ribs. There were a number of other visitors as well. November 12th. Were at Heinrich Warkentins at the funeral of their daughter Maria. She had died on the 10th after being sick for four days. November 18th. There was an auction sale here of the estate of the late Jakob Thiessen. Johan Esaus, Fischau; Gerhard Giesbrecht, and the parents were here in the evening. November 22nd. A funeral at Abr. Mantlers. Their daughter Katherina was buried. November 30th. The “Hessche” died here. She had been sick for four weeks. In the evening we were at D. Martens in Lindenau. December 4th. Mrs. Heese was buried.

February 4th, 1871. A visit at the place of the widow Joh. Wiens. Her daughter Agatha was married to Kornelius, the son of Jakob Heidebrechts, her cousin. February 27th. Celebrated an engagement. February 28th. We were at H. Warkentins. In the evening the engaged couple was here. February 23rd. The maid at Wiebes died on Tuesday. She was sick for two days. She was buried on Thursday the 25th. March 2nd. We drove to Eidsen, in Fischau, with the engaged couple in the afternoon. March 3rd. Our daughter Maria suddenly became very ill, so that we thought she would die suddenly within a quarter of an hour. Towards evening it happened again. The parents, Ballans, and the engaged couple were here in the evening. Mother stayed overnight. March 4th. Mother dropped in for a while. March 13th. Maria has diarrhea. March 22nd. Mother took sick. She died at 2:00 o'clock in the morning on the 31st. She was buried on the 2nd of April. We are rushing towards eternity and coming to our end, etc..

April 5th. H. W., my cousin, wanted to be married to Maria Plett. Nothing came of it. He was chased away. April 23rd. The funeral of Margaretha, daughter of F. Esaus at Altona. August 30th. A house burned down in Schardau. Johan Toews, Tiege, was buried on September 1. August 14th. Kor Kornelsen took very sick and on the 15th I got Mrs. Warkentin from Blumstein for him. August 18th, he got up and is well again. October 20th. Slaughtered pigs at F.B. and K.K. October 26th. Slaughtered our pig which we had bought seven weeks ago for 19 rubles. It was pretty good. H.W., father and Mrs. Bellan assisted. October 29th. We slaughtered pigs at H. Warkentin. Joh. Esaus, H. Ensz, John Fr., Ab Eidse, Fischau, assisted. Also father-in-law and G. Giesbrecht. Three of them. Slaughtered pigs at Ephraim Ballans. Two of them.

January 22nd, 1872. An engagement was celebrated at Joh. Penners. Anna with Julius Wiens of Blumstein. On the 24th there was a funeral at Jakob Rogalski. Their daughter Sara was buried. February 19th. We were in Fischau at the auction sale of John Esaus (mild spring weather). We had driven along with H. Warkentin. In the evening we were at the father-in-law's and visited the Schulz with respect to the marker for the sheep. June 14th. P. Toews, C. Toews, father-in-law and G. Giesbrecht were here and in the afternoon we were in Fischau picking gooseberries at the place of Ohm Enns.

July 27th. Richard, the son of H. Neufeld died on Thursday. He was sick for only 24 hours. July 31st. His son Jakob became sick and was brought to Lichtenau and died after being sick for only 36 hours. We hear that many are dying of this sickness (cholera) all around us, especially among the Russians. Jakob Neufeld was buried today after Vesper. He died yesterday evening. August 4th. Johan Madtler took sick on cholera and died at half past two in the afternoon on the 5th. People all over are experiencing abdominal pain, almost everybody is complaining about it. But now as I am writing this on the 5th, it is somewhat better. August 10th. From August 1868 until now, 26 deaths have occurred in Lichtenau. Twelve adults and 14 children.

The foregoing provides a glimpse into the neighbourly activities of the Kleine Gemeinde. A busy schedule of auction sales, hog slaughtering bees, and other social activities orientated towards mutual self help are routine. On the other side of the range of human interaction were numerous gatherings in the case of sickness. The diarist shows himself to be a warm-natured and loving friend of people through the number of deaths that he refers to. His acquaintances extend throughout the Molotschna and are found in all Mennonite groups. His references to the deaths of the Russians show that his concern for human misery was not restricted to his own particular social group.

Although it does not contain anywhere near the detail of the Abraham R. Friesen diary, the daily record of Diedrich S. Friesen provides a view of the mutual aid social activities of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in Borosenko.

“October 21, 1872. In the evening Gerh. Rempels were here. Slaughtered pigs at Jakob Friesen, Anafeld. We helped Schellenbergs slaughter. I sent the petition along with H. Friesen to Nikopol. October 30th. Ungers were slaughtering pigs. In the evening we were at Ungers. October 31. Peter Brandts and Isaacs were slaughtering. November 2nd. Penners slaughtering hogs. In the evening Cor. Fasts were here. October 4th. Ungers and Gerh. Rempels were here. Ungers brought us rye. We were in Anafeld where the parents were slaughtering a cow. November 6th. The widow Bartel died and was buried on the 8th. November 21. The crusher for chopping feed and the female manikin went to Penners. November 24. Father from Nikopol came here with fish. November 30th. Drove to the funeral at Rev. Friesen in Anafeld. Their daughter had died. In the evening Fasts were here. December 30th. Today Peter Wiens came to cut straw. January 11th. I rode to Blumenhof regarding the harrows for my parents. February 15th. In the evening we *mangled* at Penners. March 8th. Corn. Janzen died. Steinbach. Funeral in Gruenfeld.

April 2nd. Cornelius Toewes were here. Also Peter Penners. I bought a fish for 3 1/2 Kopeken. April 20th. Mother in Anafeld has been very sick. April 21. News from Anafeld that mother still very sick. April 22nd. Sunday. We were in Anafeld (Mother) was somewhat better. John rode home on horseback. Twenty-one brethren. April 28th. During the night Trienche became sick with scarlet fever. April 29th Mrs. Penner and Mrs. Wiens are here. Trienche is still very sick. April 30th. Trienche was at her last (Termin) three times during the night. The Anafelder parents were here. Trienche died at five o'clock in the morning. May 1. Drove to Nikolaithal. Franz Wiens is here. Today was the funeral. Fast in Steinbach has died. May 4th. We drove to Steinbach for the funeral. We brought Lena and Sara along for ourselves. May 28th. Heinrich Brandt died. June 1. We drove to the funeral in Steinbach.”

It is evident that neighbourly activities of a social nature at the Kleine Gemeinde Borosenko settlement closely parallel those in the Molotschna. One major difference is that the social contact of the Borosenko people is limited more to members of the Kleine Gemeinde. In contrast the Abraham R. Friesen diary reveals that the family maintained a close contact with a rich diversity of acquaintances and friends. Naturally this aspect was more restricted in the more remote Borosenko settlement.

## 1.05 Visiting and Socializing

No aspect of the community life of the Kleine Gemeinde is as amazing as the busy pace of visiting and socializing of this period. One wonders how people had the energy left to be involved in almost daily socialization and the receipt of visits from a host of family and friends. How could they endure a schedule which would exhaust even the modern man of leisure, especially when one considers that these people basically earned their livelihood by the sweat of their brow as busy farmers and craftsmen? Let us look at some typical diary entries of teacher Abraham R. Friesen.

Monday, August 7th. We were in Lindenau. Tuesday, August 8th. Was in the garden in the forenoon. Wednesday the 9th. We were in Tiege. Thursday the 10th. The new merchandise arrived at Wiebes and we were in Fischau for a little while. My chest feels better. Sunday, August 13th. There were church services here and H. Friesen of the Crimea was here. Saturday the 12th. There was a conference in Fischau. Only Balzer, Isaac, and myself were present. Tuesday the 15th. We drove to Alexanderwohl and from there to Landskrone for the night. I was in Hirschau for a little while. Wednesday the 16th. We drove to Margenau for dinner and to Nikolaidorf for *Vesper* and to Pordenau for the night and on Thursday the 17th to Steinfeld for dinner and dropped in at Elisabeththal, and to Tiegerweide for *vesper*, and from there we went home. We arrived home safely on the 17th of August.

Sunday the 19th. We were in Fischau, and M. Fasts were at our place for a little while. August 17th. Received letters from our parents and from Klaas Friesens and Diedrich Friesen. August 19th. Sent letters to our parents and to D. Friesens. Monday, August 21st. Ohm Enns, Cornelius Fasts, Gerh. Giesbrechts, Mrs. H. Warkentin, and father-in-law were here for *Vesper*. Wednesday the 22nd. We were in Lindenau at D. Penners and on Friday the 24th we were in Tiege for a little while. Sunday the 26th. H. Warkentin and G. Giesbrecht, and father-in-

law visited here. Monday the 27th, Segregated the sheep. Wednesday the 29th. I attended the conference in Ruckenau and on the 4th of September school commenced with 46 children. David Wiens, Elisabethal died this month and was buried on the 23rd of August.

The diary of Diedrich S. Friesen indicates that the same pattern prevails in Borosenko. A constant stream of visitors is either coming or going.

"June 3rd, 1873. Sunday. We drove to worship services together with Johan Friesens. We visited at Pletts in Blumenhof and in the evening we were at Penners. June 4th. In the evening we were at Barkmans. There was a heavy downpour. August 5th. Penners left for the Molotschna. Anna Barkman died at the age of 9 years, 6 months, 15 days. June 6th. We drove to Nikolaithal (Borosenko). June 7th. Funeral was held at Barkmans. June 8th. We returned from Nikolaithal. On the way we stopped in at Isaacs in Gruenfeld. June 9th. Mrs. Peter Reimer died. June 10th. We drove to our parents in Anafeld. June 11. H. Friesens from the Crimea were here. June 12. We were at Schellenbergs. The Krimmer Friesens departed. June 13th. We drove to Gruenfeld. Penners returned from the Molotschna. June 14th. We were in Steinbach at J. Reimers. June 15th. Drove to Nikolaithal together with Franz Wienses for the Schellenberg funeral.

June 16th. Returned from Nikolaithal and were at Corn. Toewses in Gruenfeld. June 17th. Sunday. We went to worship services together with Johan Friesen. June 18th. The Americans have written. June 19th. We drove to Anafeld. June 20th. Cor. Fast is here. We transcribed letters. We wrote the letter of Cor. Toews. June 21. Abr. Friesen, Steinbach is here. June 22. Joh. gathered the school money for me. June 23rd. M. Penner's funeral. The elder Isaac Loewen is buried in Heuboden. In Steinbach a child has died. June 24. Sunday. The children from Nikolaithal are here. Peter Penner and Peter Barkman are here. June 25th. The children drove back home. We drove to Anafeld and brought H. Fast along from Steinbach. June 26th. Made a trade with mares. June 27th. Drove to the field and got a load of barley. June 28th. Father from Nikolaithal is here."

The foregoing clearly illustrates the hectic pace of socializing carried on. Naturally these activities are interrupted to an extent by the busy harvesting and seeding periods, although even these activities frequently had a social character. Of course a good Kleine Gemeinder always had time to receive a visitor, relative or friend.

## 1.06 The Molotschna Climate

Undoubtedly one of the factors allowing such a relaxed and rich pace of life was the mild climate enjoyed by the Mennonites in Southern Russia. For example in the entry for June 29th, 1873, Diedrich S. Friesen records that "mowed barley, father is helping." Some other typical entries referring to the weather and the more favourable seasons are as follows:

"July 3rd. Started to mow oats. Cor. was binding. October 9th. Heavy rain. November 6th. Frost. November 8th. Frost. November 14th. Snow fell in the evening. February 10th. Thaw weather. February 27th and 28th. Very nice weather. March 18. In the morning much snow fell. But the temperature was so mild that it was melting and the people were plowing."

Similar entries are to be found in the diary of Kleine Gemeinde teacher Abraham R. Friesen, e.g. He notes in apparent wonderment in his diary entry for January 23, 1871, that the temperature was "19 degrees below zero." He goes on to note that on January 23, 1870, the temperatures had been "26 degrees below zero." Some other typical entries from the Abraham R. Friesen diary are:

"January 30th, 1871. Saturday. It was raining already in the evening. Our parents were here. There is still a lot of snow. There were (worship) services held here on the 7th of February. Mild weather during the day, but towards evening there was frost. March 8th. Very nice weather. 9 degrees warm. There was quite a bit of water in the Molotschna (river). In the evening G. Giesbrechts were here for the first time. March 18 and 19th. Rained in the evening. Mother was here. April 4th. A nice rain. May 1. A heavy rain with thunder and lightning. So far the fruit and the grass look very good. Monday, May 4th. We have had a lot of rain this spring and the crops look very promising. May 10th. It looks as though we will get a good crop this year since there is a good stand of grain. Never in my lifetime have I seen such a uniformly good stand of grain all over. October 18th. We have had a very dry fall this year, no rain, so that probably no rye will be sown. September 26th. There was a heavy frost. About 9 degrees."

Of course weather conditions were not always balmy and favourable. Abraham R. Friesen has noted that on occasion the southern Russian climate could converge in a storm of titanic proportions. On February 12th, 1871, he recorded that a blizzard struck the Molotschna area with the result that "quite a number of people became lost and perished." He goes on to note that of "our people whom we know, that is Germans" a Richert of Waldheim, and a Janze from the country, froze to death. A. R. Friesen also reports that Mrs. Janze has not yet been found. Another couple is supposed to have drowned in the Lupp river as they were traveling from Ekatherinoslaw to the Old Colony. In other instances Friesen has reported cases where lightning struck buildings and grain stacks caus-

ing fires and other natural calamities.

### 1.07 The School Teacher as Farmer

The foregoing indicates that the diarist was not only an accomplished teacher but also a keen observer of the elements and of the crop conditions in the Molotschna. Perhaps nothing would better illustrate the mild climate of southern Russia than the diary entries pertaining to the work of the farmer in planting and harvesting his crop. These will also demonstrate the extent of the farm operation of a small farmer perhaps equivalent to a more prosperous Anwohner. This was an activity that still seems to be part and parcel of the life of the Russian Mennonite school teacher in the 1870s. The diary of Abraham R. Friesen reveals that he was granted the use of 3½ desiatines of cultivated (plowed) land as part of his remuneration as teacher for the village of Lichtenau. His diary reveals valuable detail regarding the operation of his small farm:

March 3, the cattle were brought to the bull. Sold 2½ tschetwert of wheat to Ab. Wiebe at 10 rubles a tschetwert. June 11, Peter Penners were here until the 13th. Commenced making hay and finished taking it home on the 23rd. I had made 11 small loads. June 30th. Commenced mowing barley in the forenoon. Also it rained and it looks as though we may get a lot more rain. The barley looks pretty good. We may get 12 tschetwert per desiatine, time will tell. The wheat looks just as good, we will bind it with straw. I have 4½ less (?). Tomorrow the mowers receive one ruble per day. Last year they received 50 kopeks per day in the barley harvest. They will probably be more expensive this year. In the wheat crop they were paid 4 rubles. It is costing me eight rubles and 50 kopeks for 1½ desiatines to bring the (sheaves) from the land. I have mowed barley and one desiatine of wheat. The yield was 20 shocks of wheat, the barley has not yet been tied, five shocks of oats. On the 15th of June we completed moving. Very nice dry weather. Up to 26 degrees warm and caught 16 fish, myself and the Schulz. F. Wr. got five. Rather meagre. July 30th. Measured the barley. Received eight tschetwert. They brought the oats to me on the 31st. The wheat is still in the field. It looks like rain. Father was here. Ephraim Ballan has returned the barley and has transported the chaff, three loads at 15 kopeks each, total 45 kopeks. Fished on Monday and the 18th and got seven. It looks like rain.

February 14th. In the morning Jakob Friesen and Wilhelm Bergen were here. Also Joh. Esau who brought oats to sell to Schmits for three (?) rubles per tschetwert. February 16th and 17th. Isaacs' cow calved. The sheep have commenced lambing. We have three lambs already and three more will lamb soon. One of the pair is dead. February 20th. We were at E. Ballans in the evening. A lot of water has come into the hollow. Have taken the cattle to the bull on February 16th. March 1, 1872. Rain and spring like weather on the 2nd and 3rd of March. Started working in the meadow land. March 9th. Ditto. Rainy and wind. Sold 200 eggs for 120 kopeks. March 17th. Very nice spring like weather. March 20th. They cultivated land today. Two desiatines wheat and one desiatine barley. Very nice weather, but always a little frost overnight. March 28th. Planted potatoes and again on the 29th. Altogether we have planted almost three 'mirk' (a liquid measure). Fetched grandfather from Fischau today. March 30th. Drove grandfather to Tiede, for which I loaned the stallion from G. Heidebrecht. Very nice weather. It looks like rain, but it has been very dry throughout seeding time, and until now April 4th. Segregated the sheep, found only 10 of mine, and hired the shepherd boy to tend them. We, J. L., G. H., Joh. H. and H. Warke. at 20 kopeks per day, with his own board. He started tending them right after dinner. April 26th. I, father, and brother-in-law Giesbrecht drove to the fields to look at the grain. Very dry and windy. The grain does not look very good. Sunday, May 6th. It rained heavily so that we were surrounded with water. Father-in-law, Giesbrechts and Heinrich Warkentins were here. It also rained heavily in Muensterberg and Blumstein. Saturday, May 13th. Bought a gelding from Jakob Schmitt for a 100 rubles silver. Six years old. Was at Lindenau at David Penners. The grain on the Lichtenau fields looks very good. In many places it looks poor because rain has fallen only in a very few places. May 17th. Was at Halbstadt and at the doctor in Muntau. The gelding broke the wagon pole and I bought a new one from Ab. Thiessen, Halbstadt. June 14th. Hay harvest is commencing. Wednesday, June 21. My headache quit and gathered in the hay. Also hired two Russians to harvest the barley. Finished cutting the barley on June 23. The barley was pretty good. There was a lot of rain but we now have nice weather. The mowers are getting 40 kopeks per day. June 26th. Rained quite a bit. Nice weather again on Monday. There will be a good potato crop this year. June 27th. Brought the hay home. Went for three loads on Tuesday. It looks like rain. . . . It will probably yield about 14 tschetwert barley per desiatine. If the wheat ripens gradually, it can yield 16 tschetwert from two desiatines. Well, time will tell. June 30th. Loaned 6¾ pounds of meat from father-in-law from the backbone hind quarter."

It is evident that teacher Abraham R. Friesen had an avid interest in his farm operations even though this was merely a sideline. It appears that his farming is somewhat diversified; raising grain, selling some eggs. He also had a fairly substantial sheep operation. His fascinating record of farm operation in the Molotschna continues as follows:

July 8th. Finished mowing the wheat, 25 shocks and some loose material. The cost of mowing and binding for the same, 8 rubles and 15 kopeks. July 9th. Commenced threshing (*Ausfahren*) the barley. It looks like rain. Finished by Vesper on Wednesday. Brought 12½

tshetwert upstairs (to the attic for storage). Johan Bellan helped with the threshing. July 14th. Slaughtered one sheep and sold 12 pounds of meat to \_\_\_\_\_ at seven kopeks per pound. July 17th. At the same time brought home four loads of wheat. I brought home the balance of three loads on Wednesday, the 19th. Total seven loads. Today there were an exceptionally large number of mosquitoes indoors. July 20th. Began threshing (ausfahren) the wheat. Threshed 10 layers. Threshed eight layers on the 21st, and then it began to rain, with a lot of wind so that many loads were overturned. Saturday, the 22nd of July. Very nice weather and also very warm, up to 30 degrees. Widow Rahn as well as Ballans Johan helped us thresh the wheat. Threshed another eight layers on the 24th thus finishing the wheat, total 26 layers. It (the weather) looks changeable so that we will not be able to clean the wheat. July 25th. Cleaned the wheat, got 10 tshetwert. July 31. Got 15 watermelons from the garden, August 27th. Segregated the sheep."

The foregoing extracts from the diary of Abraham R. Friesen provide glimpses of day to day life in the Molotschna. The diary of Kleine Gemeinde teacher, Diedrich S. Friesen, provides a comparative view of life on the relatively new Kleine Gemeinde settlement at Borosenko.

"November 20th. Borrowed 25 rubles from J. Brandt. November 25th. The worker left. December 6th. It rained during the night and froze in the morning. December 16th, today I drove to feed the cattle. December 23rd. In the morning I drove to the mill. January 4th, 1873. I picked up barley flour at the mill. March 2nd. Grain was brought together. March 7th. The plowing was commenced. March 11th. It froze during the night so that no plowing was done. March 12th. The young cow became fresh milk. March 21. Seeded our three desiatines of wheat. During the night I became somewhat sick. I drove along to the field to seed oats. March 24. Two desiatines of barley were seeded. Peter Franz of Nikolaithal came here. March 26th. We planted potatoes. March 27th. Seeded one desiatines of wheat. March 29th. Harrowed the wheat. March 3rd I cultivated (with a weeder) the potatoes. June 27th. We drove to the field to pick up barley (likely in stooks). June 29th and 30th. We mowed barley.

July 3rd. I started to mow oats. I had corn for the binding. July 4th, we got the oats off. July 5th. Drove to Stallach for the mowers. July 6th. Released the mowers as the wheat is not yet ripe. I hauled the oats home. July 7th. Threshed oats together with my wife. July 8th. Drove to Stallach. I brought someone to bind (the sheaves). July 9th. Started to mow the wheat. I released (terminated the employment of) the maid. My wife came along to the field. July 10th. We mowed wheat by ourselves. July 11th. I hired a mower for one ruble. July 12th. Finished mowing the wheat. July 14th. We hauled wheat (the stooks). July 16th. We carried the chaff to the floor from the oats we had cleaned. I borrowed a horse. July 18th. Started to thresh barley. July 19th. Cleaned barley. It had yielded 7½ tshetwert from two desiatines. July 21st. Hauled wheat. July 26th. We got the rest of the wheat out."

The above illustrates the beautiful climate enjoyed by the Mennonites in southern Russia. Here a school teacher could finish his harvesting by the end of July and the rest of his field work by the end of August and be ready to commence teaching his school classes in early September. It is apparent that the farming operations of Diedrich S. Friesen basically follow the same pattern as that of his brother-in-law Abraham R. Friesen in the Molotschna. Both cases illustrate that farming in southern Russia was relatively easy compared to what these Kleine Gemeinde teachers would experience a few short years later after they had moved to Manitoba.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.08 Cornelius Loewen, Farmer and Merchant

There is presently no diary available of one of the larger Kleine Gemeinde farmers from the 1860s and 1870s. However, there are excerpts extant of the diary of Cornelius Loewen (1827-1893), who was the son of Kleine Gemeinde deacon Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) to whom reference has already been made. The family of Cornelius Loewen (1827-1893) later became prominent in the Kleine Gemeinde village of Steinbach, Manitoba. The reader is again indebted to Russian-Mennonite historian Abram Vogt for taking the time to make a transcription of this diary as otherwise it would not have been available now.<sup>5</sup> Loewen owned a full village farm (and perhaps additional land as well) in the Kleine Gemeinde village of Gruenfeld north of Nikopol where he settled in 1867. The activities recorded in the diary of Cornelius Loewen (1827-1893) provide an interesting contrast to the life styles recorded by our two Kleine Gemeinde teachers. Whatever the size of the farming operation of Loewen his commercial activities are amazingly extensive. First a look at some of the money transactions in which Loewen is involved:

"November 24th, 1858, I borrowed 61 rubles and 55 kopeks silver from David Loewen in Lindenau. 1859. I paid the interest. January 5, 1859. Borrowed 22 rubles, 35 kopeks silver from Johan Warkentin at six per cent. On January 4th, 1862, the interest from three years was compounded. On July 24th, I borrowed another 80 rubles from him. On July 24th, 1861, I paid the interest. On May 15, 1862, I paid the debt. On November 15th, 1861 borrowed 50 rubles from Johan Braun in Blumenort. Repaid the principal and interest in 1866. October

1, 1864. I borrowed money from the Vorsitzer, 50 rubles. 1868 repaid the loan in full. 75 rubles and interest to Peter Schmidt. October 1, 1866. Borrowed 25 rubles from Abraham Block. Repaid it all on September 16th, 1866. December 12th, 1866. Borrowed a sum of money from Wilhelm Berg, Lindenau, 400 rubles at five per cent. On May 7th I repaid everything to the man including interest."

In his diary Loewen also provides particulars of the sale of his Wirtschaft in the Molotschna. Regrettably he does not note the name of the village in which he is farming. "On February 28th, 1867, I sold the Wirtschaft to Cornelius Funk from Sparrau for 3400 rubles. He immediately paid 1500 rubles silver, with a further 1000 rubles payable in May and the remaining 900 rubles in October." Cornelius Loewen (1827- 1893) goes on to indicate that he immediately reinvested these funds in property apparently in the village of Gruenfeld founded by the Kleine Gemeinde in 1867. "On March 5th I gave Johan Warkentin 1500 rubles for the purpose of purchasing land. On May 21 I took 600 rubles silver along and gave them to Abraham Loewen."

It appears that in addition to his Wirtschaft Loewen was already involved in transactions of a commercial nature as he repeatedly reports that he has purchased wares or received them on consignment. He seems to be constantly making various deals with his Kleine Gemeinde neighbours and with various other Mennonites and non-Mennonites.

September 26th, 1867. Borrowed oats from Johan Barkman. February 3rd. Paid the 'soul' money, four rubles, May 24th. Purchased wares in Nikopol, four rubles and 13 kopeks. In November I purchased rye from Johan Warkentin, Blumenhof, for seeding, three mirke. January 19th, 1868. I owe Abraham Loewen: a band for cap six kopeks; a bottle of wine - 78 kopeks; eight . . . wool material 3 rubles, 20 kopeks; paid for a basket for Susanna - 45 kopeks. May 1868. David Loewen purchased wheat: six tschetwert - 10 rubles, 50 kopeks; in total 52 rubles and 50 kopeks. December 31, 1869, I borrowed wares at Sowarow, four rubles, 20 kopeks. January 13th, 1870. Owes me one ruble, 40 kopeks for 2½ arschin. Peter Loewen, Hochfeld, owes me 12 rubles, 40 kopeks, for sheep to be repaid when the wool is sold, January 15th. I lent the soldier 10 rubles and he gave me his horse from now until the seeding time is over. January 19th. I purchase paper and a pointer for the school, 65 kopeks. April 4th. I borrowed wares from Johan Husof, 11 rubles and 26 kopeks.

August 26th. I brought wares to Stefan Husin, 21 rubles and 76 kopeks. August 19th. I brought wares to Sowarons. October 8th. I sold sheep to Johan Warkentin, Blumenhof, 12 at two rubles, 35 kopeks each. Total 28 rubles and 20 kopeks. On November 1, 1872, settled accounts with Johan Warkentin, Hochfeld, I still owe him 140 rubles and 35 kopeks. On December 11th I rented land from Isaac Loewen, Rosenfeld, 7½ desiatines for four rubles and 50 kopeks. April, 1872. Sold wheat 40 pud (one pud equals 36 english pounds) and eight pounds. In October I lent money to Heinrich Reimer and he has also repaid together with interest as agreed. October 28. Borrowed 50 rubles in silver from Franz Kroeker, Steinbach. In November I borrowed a further 50 rubles from him. I have repaid in full. November 28th. I borrowed 50 rubles from Johan Loewen, Blumenhof, until April 1873. In September I borrowed 200 rubles from Franz Kroeker. In September Gerhard Wiebe bought a cow for 25 rubles. 1874. Our land which we have purchased cost \$1,316.90, or 52.67 3/5 rubles per desiatine."

The foregoing diary excerpts reveal considerable commercial interaction with fellow Kleine Gemeinde, other Mennonites, German colonists and Russians alike. It is interesting to note that until Loewen moved to Borosenko in 1867 he seemed to finance a good part of his operation through Peter Schmidt, the rich estate owner and one time chairman of the Agricultural Society. Thus it can be seen that the connections established between the Kleine Gemeinde and the Agricultural Society were not completely terminated by the death of Johan Cornies. Cornelius Loewen appeared to be operating a small retail business perhaps selling various wares on consignment for some of the merchants in Nikopol or other nearby towns.

One of the interesting aspects of Russian Mennonite life is the great reliance on hired help. By the 1860s the Russian Mennonite 'Vollwirt' and larger farmers including those among the Kleine Gemeinde, hired Russian labourers literally by wagon loads. Although the diary of Cornelius Loewen does not include details of the Russian manpower that he hired to do his farm work, he has provided us with information about the maids that were hired to help in the Loewen household.

"1867. November 21. We engaged a cook maid for one year for 30 rubles silver. On April 2nd, she left us and went home. On April 22nd we engaged Mariana for one or two rubles and clothes. May 26. Engaged Marre until October 1 for 25 rubles. 1869, October 21. We engaged a cook maid by the name of Poraska for one year for 35 rubles. February 26. Gave the cook maid one ruble for "Howein". 1871. January 27, engaged Zwirith for a whole year for 43 rubles. May 9th. We engaged Anna until New Year for 20 rubles. May 12th. We engaged Mariana for one year for 8 rubles. 1872. January 7th. We engaged Mischa who shall receive 30 rubles as her remuneration for the year. On March 6th, we engaged Jedosche for the year.

Her remuneration is 33 rubles. 1873. March 11th. I engaged Jedosche again for the year. Her remuneration is 43 rubles. On April 9th I again engaged Mischia. If it goes well she will receive 40 rubles and if things go poorly then only 35 rubles. In June I engaged Mariana until Martin (the church holiday) for seven rubles."

Loewen has also employed Mennonite men in his farm operations which would indicate that he was operating at least on the scale of a "Vollwirt" and perhaps also as a larger farmer, since a small operation would have no need for the more expensive Mennonite labourers. Thus Loewen indicates that two recent immigrants were employed with him for various periods, e.g. Heinrich Wohlgenuth who had come from the Polish Mennonites, and Johan Broeski who had come from Prussia. It is interesting to note that both men later married Kleine Gemeinde girls indicating that the Kleine Gemeinde was quite open to accept new members into its ranks.

It appears that the Kleine Gemeinde people in Borosenko also hired a number of people from the old Colony or Chortitz Colony. For example, Peter Isaac, the author of the *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* married for the second time to Katherina Friesen who was employed by the Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876) family in Blumenhof, Borosenko. She was from an Old Colony family. It seems that competent maids were able to command a good wage from the residents in the Kleine Gemeinde settlement. Perhaps this indicates a scarcity of trustworthy and competent people. This would also explain why Cornelius Loewen made such a point of recording the hiring of the family maids.

### 1.09 Occupations of the Kleine Gemeinde

Considerable diversity of occupation existed within the Kleine Gemeinde. The ministry of course was the most highly regarded occupational choice although difficult for those who were not at least moderately well-to-do. Many Kleine Gemeinde youth pursued their interest in education and learning by entering the teaching profession. Others were engaged in various trades such as carpentry, and blacksmithing. Others such as Cornelius Loewen (1827-1893) expanded their interests by becoming involved in commercial enterprise even if only as a sideline.

Gerhard S. Kornelsen, who was one of the senior school teachers of the Kleine Gemeinde, pursued another interesting career. From the diary entries of his son-in-law Abraham R. Friesen it appears that Gerhard S. Kornelsen was also an official of the Molotschna Mennonite Brandordnung, or Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company. This is of special interest because Gerhard S. Kornelsen was one of the first Aeltesten of the Kleine Gemeinde Brandordnung in Manitoba. It is not known precisely what position Kornelsen held in the Molotschna Brandordnung. According to the descriptions in the Abraham R. Friesen diary it appears that his role was similar to what would today be known as an adjuster, i.e. one who represents the insurance company in assessing damage and making a settlement with the property owner. In any event the various diary entries by Abraham R. Friesen provide the reader with a fascinating glimpse of life in the Molotschna.

"1871, March 18. Father-in-law left for Waldheim to calculate fire damage and for Saturday he was summoned to Prischib. June 3. Lightning struck in Muntau and in Rosenort, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, and both places burned down. Lightning also struck and a detached building burned down. In Muntau a girl was injured by lightning, H. Weinz. June 10th. Lightning struck at Philip Isaacs in Tiege. The barn and shed were destroyed by fire. In Waldheim lightning also struck and a separate building was destroyed by fire. August 15th. And yesterday evening, that is to say August 14th, there was also a fire in Hoffngsthal. It is said that the Old Russians are setting the fires. On the 17th three houses burned down in Friedrichstaedt, two in Alt Nassau, one in Neumonthal, and one in Kleine Nassau . . . There was a fire this week again at Neumonthal. The others, one in Hoffenthal, in Blumenthal, and a number in Weinau. There was fire in many other places, but now it has pretty well quieted down. August 30th. A home burned down in Schar dau. February 14th. In the evening we were at the home of father-in-law, who had to drive to Waldheim to settle fire insurance damage. July 17th. I made a list for the fire insurance officials."

The foregoing reveals that Friesen was already aware of the impending danger from the Russian populace at this time. The economic success of the Mennonites undoubtedly was a cause of jealousy and suspicion on the part of the peasants living nearby. However, it does not appear that this tension in any way contributed to the 1870s emigration movement.

The milling business was another common occupational choice for the Kleine Gemeinde. Flour milling and feed supply was a necessity in a well developed agrarian society and was popular as it was closely intertwined with farming. In his *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern*, Peter Isaac relates the story of how his father, Johan Isaac (1809-1864), started his enterprise as a young Anwohner and eventually came to own a *Wirtschaft* and feed mill in the village of Schoenau.

My father, Johann Isaac, was born on June 13, 1809, in Tiege, Russia. Nearly all of our



Isaac ancestors were born in the village of Tiege, that is, great-uncles, great-aunts and grandparents. Father was married to Anna Plett, (my mother) in the summer of 1831, in Russia. My mother was born in Prussia on November 24, 1813. My father was not the eldest of his brothers and sisters. A son, Johann, was born before him on January 4, 1808. After the first year of their marriage, my parents lived for eight years in Atonau, Russia, on a rented place because they had only scant means to begin by themselves. In the year 1840, father bought a house in the village of Blumstein, without land, a sign that he had already made some headway. The parents, nevertheless, had a "hard row to hoe" in their early years in Altonau, for in the year 1832 they harvested little, in 1833 nothing, and in the following year only a little again. Many had to receive support from the Russian government. At that time the Mennonites were more respected by the Russian government than they are now, in that war-torn country.

Father got along without taking government support but soon had to build a new house in Blumstein. Soon after he married, father learned carpentry and later also the art of wagon construction. He also rented some land from the Russians. Because he was not afraid of work, was saving, with mother also contributing her share of the work without stint, they soon came to a better financial condition. They had saved a pretty sum of money. In 1852 he bought a farm in Schoenau for several thousand rubles banco by using his savings and making a small loan. (Banco is a Hungarian word, name of an earldom or a community near Kaschan, Hungary.) In February, 1852, my parents occupied this place in Schoenau. I was five years old at that time and I remember many things of that time especially when the Schoenau people came to get us with bag and baggage. I had made up my mind to ride with one of the big loads but father would not permit me to do so, but instead I had to go with my parents on a one-horse rig. It made me angry because I could not have my own way. Soon after that, in 1854, the Crimean war broke out which boosted farm prices considerably and my parents had a series of good years, (except in 1855, when large Egyptian locusts ate everything) so that the debts they incurred could be paid up in a few years. In the following years up to 1861, the crops were good, too. My parents lived for 12 years on this place (as they also had at Blumstein where I was born) till 1864, when father died on February 8, at the age of 54 years."

Peter Isaac goes on to relate of an incident when the Johan Isaac premises were destroyed by fire:

"I will now relate a notable happening before the death of my father. In September, 1862, our home burned, but the mill-house, which had a fireproof roof, remained standing, as did the masonry walls of the house. The grain that was stored in the upstairs of the house, and the year's supply of flour, was burned so badly that the pigs would not even eat it. The furniture was nearly all saved, but nothing that was in the cellar. I saved the horses and pigs. It happened as follows: I was working as a miller in the mill at the time and went to look out of the door on the north side which was toward our yard. Then I saw my brother Johann and Bernhard Dueck, (the latter was a brother to John, Jacob, Abraham and Peter Dueck, of Gruenfeld, Manitoba, long since deceased) standing in the street.

Suddenly, they looked rather bewildered towards the north which directed my attention that way. The next moment Johann came running calling, "fire! fire!" B. Dueck ran to his home, fearing that it would catch fire too because it had started to burn just east of his house. When I looked that way, I saw the heavy black smoke going up behind our house. I quickly shut off the mill, closed the door tightly, and ran across the yard to the barn, untied the horses, and drove them out. Then I ran to the pigs. It took a greater effort to get these out, because they are so reluctant to be driven but I succeeded in getting them out due to their fear of fire. In the meantime my brother Johann and Franz and sister Maria, who were all at home (brother Franz was on his own already) with the help of mother had put forth every effort to remove the furniture from the burning building. The fire had broken out in the fourth house north of us and a light north wind had driven it to our house. Father was not at home at the time. He had gone to Hierschau to get white bricks, to build an oven. While coming home he had seen the black smoke and suspected that it must be in Schoenau. He speeded up his horses fearing that our house might also catch fire. He came home before it had burned completely. I can well remember the feeling of compassion which came over me, seeing him lose many of his material possessions in that fire.

In the spring of 1863, the burned-out walls were pulled down, and everything built up anew with bricks from bottom up. (Bricks were considerably cheaper than here in America.) The walls of the house were made two feet thick and those of the barn one and one-half feet thick. No storm could shake walls like that. After the fire and during the time of rebuilding we lived in the mill house, the west end of which we arranged to live in. In the same summer of 1863, father sold the milling machinery but kept the building. In the fall of 1863, the new buildings were completed and occupied. Father had only a short time to live in them because during the next winter he took sick and after being bedridden for six weeks, he died on February 8, 1864, and went to his rest as the Apostle says: "He that has come to his rest, rests from his labors."

Jacob Wiebe (1827-1901) was another Kleine Gemeinde member who was involved in the milling business. Jacob Wiebe grew up in Schoenau, across the street from Johan Isaac, his future father-in-law. In 1857, Wiebe bought a treadmill and house in Prangenu, where they lived until 1863, when

they moved to the pioneer Kleine Gemeinde settlement in Markuslandt (Andreasfeld). Here they continued to own and operate a treadmill until they moved to the Borosenko settlement several years later.<sup>13</sup> Wiebe later was a successful farmer and threshing machine operator in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba.<sup>14</sup>

Other Kleine Gemeinde people known to have been involved in the milling business included Johan Wiebe, who owned a large treadmill in the village of Blumenhof, Borosenko. This mill consisted of a large inclined disk (belt) on which many horses were walking. This mill was approximately 25 to 30 feet in height. Apparently Johan Wiebe later was one of the pioneer settlers in the village of Steinbach, in Manitoba.<sup>15</sup>

John K. Friesen (1812-1884), the nephew of Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was another mill operator, who started by teaching school in several Molotschnaer villages. After some time he purchased his father-in-law's farm in Marienthal where he had difficulties because of his debts. In 1864 the family moved to Gushofka in the Crimea, where a number of Kleine Gemeinde families were settling at this time. Here there was a shortage of flour and so Friesen set up a roller mill, which he later expanded.<sup>16</sup> Jacob Braun, formerly of Schardau, was another member of the Kleine Gemeinde who was a mill owner and operator.<sup>17</sup>

Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917) combined an interest in milling with his gifts as a builder and became a reputed builder of windmills in Russia. In 1877 he also constructed the new windmill in Steinbach, Manitoba, for businessman and farmer, Abraham S. Friesen.<sup>18</sup> The Barkman family seemingly had a longstanding interest in the operation and construction of windmills.<sup>19</sup>

Peter Fast (1831-1916), the son of one-time Kleine Gemeinde minister Bernhard Fast, had purchased the Wirtschaft of his father-in-law, Martin J. Barkman in Rueckenau, Molotschnau.<sup>20</sup> Son M. B. Fast relates that his parents had a treadmill on their yard and that across the street they had a windmill, where rye and barley were milled. This mill had large steps about 15 feet high, leading up to the bottom floor where the stocks of grain were piled. A winch was used to raise and lower the bags from the wagon below.<sup>21</sup> In 1877, the Kleine Gemeinde in Janzen, Nebraska, helped the Peter Fast family to become established in a new land.<sup>22</sup>

## 1.10 Glimpses of Village Life

One of the important features of daily life was the prominent role of the village. This can be illustrated by focusing on one Kleine Gemeinde farmer, Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), who became an important figure in the Molotschna village of Kleefeld. Cornelius S. Plett had come to Russia with his parents as an eight year old lad in 1828. His father, Johan Plett (1765-1833) had broken with his father, Johan Plett (born circa 1730), a prosperous farmer in the Prussian village of Furstenwerder, over his impending marriage to Elisabeth Baer, a Lutheran widow. Consequently, Johan Plett Jr., had left the Mennonite faith, serving for a time in the Prussia Hussars and generally living a life of poverty. The family eventually settled in the city of Danzig, where it experienced the hunger and devastation caused when the city was held under siege during the Napoleonic wars.

By 1820 the family had decided to move to Russia but was unable to do so until eight years later because of delays in obtaining the necessary emigration papers. In Russia, the family settled in the village of Blumstein, Molotschna, where a daughter Elizabeth and her husband Johan Harder, had settled in 1804. Johan Plett died in the village of Blumstein in 1833 from a cold which he contracted while he was building a new house of unkilned bricks for himself and his family. He had lived a life of spiritual indifference. His children were all baptised as infants and in other ways too, "his walk of life was not all praiseworthy". But in his last years he became concerned and repentant so that he and his family rejoined the Mennonite church. This probably was the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde as all five children of Johan Plett and his third wife, Esther nee Smit, became very staunch members of this group.

Son Cornelius S. Plett spent the remaining years of his childhood in Blumstein where he grew up to become an earnest and obedient young lad. At the age of twenty he made a lifelong commitment to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and in the same year he married Sarah Loewen (1822-1903) the daughter of Kleine Gemeinde deacon Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), a prominent farmer in the village of Lindenau. Cornelius S. Plett and his young bride now became Anwohner in Lindenau where Plett pursued his trade, as a blacksmith and manufacturer of wagon wheels. From all reports this business was quite successful as by 1854 Cornelius S. Plett had sufficient resources to purchase a full farm in the village of Kleefeld which was established in that year. Farming agreed with Plett and his Vollwirtschafft quickly grew. Son Cornelius L. Plett has described the premises of his parents in Kleefeld as

a residence and barn under one roof peak with the coveted "Querscheune" built at the rear of this structure. The large hay shed built diagonally across the end of the barn meant that a separate threshing barn was available in fall, a luxury which only a few of the larger farmers could afford.

The entire structure was constructed of kilned bricks except for the fence along the road which was made of boards. Cornelius S. Plett had planned to build a large new hayshed and brick fence and had purchased all the bricks for this purpose. However, a fire destroyed many buildings in the neighbouring village of Lichtfelde so that the bricks also found a useful application there, with the result that the board fence had to continue to be adequate. Nevertheless in 1862, Cornelius S. Plett did construct the new hayshed which he wanted as is shown by a circular letter which he wrote to his neighbours in Kleefeld requesting their assistance at a barn raising bee. This document was preserved by John E. Friesen who had married a granddaughter of C. S. Plett. This circular letter reads as follows:

"Precious friends:

You and your beloved wife are hereby wholeheartedly invited to be present here with us on Monday the 14th day of May, at the first hour of the day, in order to provide us with the help necessary to erect our hay shed. We ask this of you in the best expectations. Your friend who is always ready to help you."

"Cornelius Plett." Kleefeld, May 11, 1862.

"Our friends are asked to forward this invitation to the following farm owners: Peter Reimer, Peter Bekker, Martens, Abraham Maties, Michael Plett, Diedrich Janzen, Abraham Thiessen, Peter Reimer, Peter Reimer, Jacob Reimer, Peter Richert, Benjamien Schmit, Jacob Friesen, Cornelius Abrahams, Peter Hiebert, Heinrich Schroeder, Johann Martens, Franz Bahnman, Jacob Harms, Gerhard Neufeld, Jacob Quiring, Jacob Solhkiman, Heinrich Bekker, Peter Rogalski, Andreas Flaming, Franz Kroeker, Daniel Konradt, Ohm Abraham Wiens, Johan Loewen, Johan Willems, Peter Jansen, and Arend Thiessen."

Plett enjoyed the life of a Vollwirt and continued to expand his operation. In 1871 he leased a considerable parcel of crown land so that Cornelius L. Plett, his recently married son, moved back to Kleefeld from Fischau in order to work for his father. Cornelius L. Plett has reported that as his wages he received ten per cent of the wheat crop consisting of 270 acres. In addition to wheat the Vollwirt would also raise feed grain and hay to provide for the draught animals required for such an enterprise. Plett was fortunate that he had six sons at home, ranging from 26 year old Cornelius to the six year old Jakob, to help him with this enterprise. Naturally he also had other employees such as nephew Abraham P. Isaac who worked for him at this time. Later in Borosenko his employees included a young Polish Mennonite by the name of Heinrich Wohlgenuth who eventually became his son-in-law. However, most of the labourers for such an operation came from among the Russian people. Son Abraham L. Plett (1859-1934) later recalled that the Russians were hired literally by the wagon full. In the morning before going to work they were assembled on the yard and treated to a glass of whiskey. Then the Russian workers climbed into the wagons which took them to the field where they were to work that day. Abraham L. Plett never forgot the beautiful singing of these workers as they were driven to the fields.<sup>23</sup>

Cornelius S. Plett was a warm-hearted and neighbourly man who was well-liked by his neighbours. In fact he was elected to serve as the Schulz for the village of Kleefeld. In this position he had to provide leadership in all the concerns of the village such as hiring a school teacher, setting pasture rates, mediating disputes, etc. He also had to represent the village assembly at the Gebietsamt in Halbstadt. The office of Schulz required a great deal of writing and daughter Maria L. Plett (Mrs. Peter R. Reimer), who was an excellent calligrapher, later recalled that she had often helped her father with this aspect of his work.

The younger children of the Plett family were born and raised in Kleefeld and attended school there as well. The pastoral village life was idyllic and serene. In his booklet *Eine Lebensreise* Johan F. Harms reminisces fondly about his childhood in the village of Kleefeld. These recollections also serve to illustrate the village life of the Kleine Gemeinde families living there. Johan F. Harms was born in Kleefeld in 1855 one year after his parents had settled there. He recalled that he had received a Fibel as a young lad which he knew by memory by the time he started school. A number of children's diseases prevented regular attendance in school for several years, but this did not hold back his studies as his mother gave him considerable assistance. The family had a maid from Blumstein, who was also of great assistance as she had received an excellent education from teacher Peter Wall.

Johan Harms recalls the effect which the struggle of the landless had on village life during the 1860s. "It was in the year 1863 that the animosity and persecution of the Bruedergemeinde, newly formed in 1860, reached its peak. Kleefeld also had a number of landless families who were either members of the group or who were sympathetic to its cause, namely, the family Isaac Graew, Johann

Graew, Johan Hooge, Heinrich Petker, Heinrich Neufeld, and a number of other families in the nearby village of Alexanderkron. The meetings of these people in their residence were quite an aggravation to the other inhabitants, including my parents. Unfortunately, for I was sympathetic to them, but I did not receive permission to attend these meetings although my school friends in my age group, Johann Hooge and David Graew, earnestly invited me. They were excited to tell me about their fine Sunday School, which was completely unknown to me, as well as the Bible verses and songs of "glad tidings" which they learned to sing by memory. All the children of the secessionists evidenced a good demeanour and interest in learning, and consequently they were my best friends. But all contact with them outside of school was strictly forbidden. The orthodox spirit in my parental home did not provide me with the necessary nourishment." Harms recalls that the book seller Isaac Fast in Gnadenfeld was a fatherly friend to him and helped him to overcome these needs. His father also availed himself of the book seller to purchase such books as Hofackers Sermons, Barter's **Ewige Ruhe, Kleines Märtyrer Buch, Wandelnde Seele**, and others.

Johan F. Harms remembered other dramatic occurrences such as when the dam across the nearby river Jushanlee burst and the villagers in Kleefeld were summoned to make the necessary repairs. "A large dam was located about one mile from Kleefeld near the public house "Three Roses." This dam, as well as the bridge which crossed the narrows of the river Jushanlee, had been breached and torn apart by high waters, which was a great inconvenience to the Tschumaken or teamsters. Consequently the Gebietsamts required that the village Gemeinde of Kleefeld repair the entire damage. Each Vollwirt now had to contribute, a team of horses, plow and scraper and one able bodied worker. My father was in charge of the labourers as well as the entire repair, i.e. Road boss in America. My assignment was to ride on the horse on the left side and to make sure that the plow or scraper remained in motion". Harms goes on to relate that during a break he got the childish idea to run home to get some cool melons. Needless to say his absence caused a great deal of worry to his father and was not appreciated.

Another village episode of note occurred in 1865 when the Russian government changed the system for the imprisonment of those who were awaiting trial after their arrest. Prior to this the prisoners who were waiting for trial were treated as actual convicts and were marched around by foot, with their hands chained together, under strict guard. The establishment of Friedensrichter, Peace-Mediator (or magistrate) was supposed to make the system more humane. "The prisoners were now to be guarded in the homes of nearby farmers, which was to be the responsibility of the Molokaener village of Astrachankan, and the Mennonite villages of Kleefeld and Fuerstenwerder. The government regarded this as police service without arms, but it seemed to be somewhat questionable to us. Especially the members of the Kleine Gemeinde rather moved away, to rented land, where they were spared from this sort of thing. The other farmers said that one must be obedient to the authorities, and that we should attempt to carry it out.

"The duty commenced with Wirtschaft number one and two, and had gone quite well until it came to us, numbers 14 and 15. One day towards evening we received our first prisoner and gave him supper and prepared a place for him to sleep near the outside door, for he appeared to be tired and wanted to rest. My father and neighbour Klassen wanted to guard him for the night. They tried to initiate a conversation with the aged grief stricken Russian, but he said little. Finally he did say that "they have taken my children away and now they want to send me to Siberia." He then knelt down in his night quarters and prayed silently with tears running down his face. As a ten year old I had understood what was said and it aroused my sympathy. Neighbour Klassen then went home as my father said, "he won't run away, I will look after him." I laid down to sleep but my mind was on the children who had been taken away from the Russian. Somewhat later the prisoner asked my father to accompany him outside in order that he could look after his personal needs. Father did so and soon they came back inside where the man quickly appeared to fall asleep. Father also dozed off in his arm chair. Around midnight Mother came from the corner room because she thought she had heard someone going through the front door.

Our prisoner was gone. The alarm was sounded and I sprang from my bed. Klassen was called and everyone looked for the Russian, in the garden, behind the mulberry hedge, all to no avail. Everyone was upset, but I was glad and cried, "That is good, that is good, he will go to find the children which have been taken from him." That same night Father and Klassen reported the incident to the village officials where Father took all the blame. Father and Klassen later had to drive to Tockmak where they found understanding among the officials. Through this experience I found heartfelt sympathy not only for the persecuted "Stundists" but also for the Armenians, Jews and some co-confessionists,

who died a terrible death in banishment, far away from wife and children.

Johan F. Harms had fond memories of his school years in Kleefeld. "The good teacher Peter Doerksen, from Franzthal, was a member of the Rudnerweide Gemeinde, together with a number of other families in Kleefeld. The greatest part of the villagers, including my parents belonged to the Margenauer Gemeinde. Likewise, my grandparents who lived in Margenau, where the large church built of timber stood, surrounded by giant trees. Approximately five Vollwirten in Kleefeld belonged to the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde, and two to the Neukircher-Orloff Gemeinde. Five Vollwirten belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde, whose daughters distinguished themselves in school with their apparel, by wearing a very simple black bonnet. There was otherwise no difference to be noted among the students. The large student body which in many years numbered over one hundred, was divided into two groups for catechism, namely, Margenauer and Rudnerweidnaer. The teacher generally gave the responsibility for this instruction to the students in the highest class (or highest bench). It was an honour for them to instruct the catechism and to be helpful to the teacher in other respects. But in the absence of the teacher they were under the supervision of the senior students who knew their responsibilities without further instructions, namely, "to keep order and to appoint instructors for each bench from among the senior class. This was a good arrangement as the senior students felt responsible to be an example and encouragement to the younger children."

Johan F. Harms also described the disciplinary system which was employed at the time. "Teacher Doerksen had the full confidence of the village Gemeinde throughout his 20 years of service in the village, even though he had harshly disciplined many students. The means of discipline were as follows: 1) To stand up until the teacher again gave permission to sit. 2) To stand in the corner. 3) To sit alone by the window in front near the teacher. 4) A number of blows on the palm of the hand with the ruler or stick. 5) A number of blows upon the rear, for which the student had to prostrate himself upon the bench. This occasioned much pleading and begging with crying, "I won't do it anymore." But the answer was, "And you are not to do it anymore, but now you must bend over." Such scenes were often repeated for if the teacher believed in thoroughness in his instruction he followed the same in his punishment. The girls frequently had tears of sympathy in their eyes from hearing and witnessing these events. Such a strict regimentation was also the rule in many homes at the time."

Johan F. Harms also recalled that "the Vollwirten in Kleefeld each had a herd of 50-100 sheep which were driven to pasture every spring where they had to be herded by a shepherd every day. This was usually done by the young boys and sometimes also by the girls. Each of the 40 Vollwirten had his own herd and therefore it was necessary for each to have his lambs marked with his own brand, either on the right ear or left ear. A hole was pierced through the ear with a sharp rod made for that purpose, which marked the lamb with the brand of the owner. Another kind of mark was made by cutting off an inch long tip of the ear, either the right or the left, as required by the particular brand, or a "V", "M", or curve was imprinted. All the brands were registered with the office of the village Schulz, so that it was evident whose brand belonged to whom. The small operation required resulted in a little blood, but the wound was covered with a stinking grease because of the flies, after which it quickly healed. This ear mark identified the sheep for as long as they lived. The sheep were also branded with a specially prepared iron which implanted the farm yard number of the Vollwirt on the sheep with black paint. Our number was 15. (Note the yard number of Cornelius S. Plett was 38). Through these means the sheep from two different herds which had intermixed during the day, could quickly be divided in the sheep pens in the evening. The shepherd attempted to avoid such experiences but because of the spirited charges this required great watchfulness, so that the herds did not come too close to each other. In addition there were also shepherds, including myself, who provisioned themselves with a good book from home, and who consequently found a deserted corner of the steppe, where pasture was to be found and where the shepherd could read undisturbed."

Johan F. Harms also remembered incidents involving the Russian workers of the Vollwirten. "In the year 1860 my father hired a Russian servant who had a friend who was employed by my aunt, the Gerhard Friesens, in Kleefeld. Both of them surrendered their passes as was required. After about a week our servant took our best horse during the night and rode away. We immediately assumed that the servant at Gerhard Friesens would have done likewise and the tracks also led in that direction. But that very night the uncle had gone to the barn several times to get a pail of water, and also the light in the house was burning all night as the aunt was sick. This had prevented their fellow from joining his friend in riding away together. The passes revealed themselves to be forgeries, which was quickly discovered by the learned uncle Kroeker in Alexanderkron. We never saw our expensive horse again, but this incident opened the door for me to pursue my further education. Indeed, as my father

emphasized that I could learn the Russian language, in order that one might properly read the Russian passes.”

Johan F. Harms had fond memories of some of the Russian workers. “This service (shepherding) was performed for us by an aged Russian who could neither read nor write. When the pasture season was over he made himself useful at our place by hacking brush or guarding the fruit garden. But what made the beloved lame, old one, unforgettable to me was his deep piety. He frequently came to me in the summer room (Sommerstube) which served as my sleeping and study quarters, and implored me to read something to him from the Testament, which I also did out of love for him. How reverently he listened, and tears came to his eyes whenever there were moving episodes. Every time he extended his heartfelt thanks for my service of love. Unfortunately I did not pray with him and for him at the time as I had become too lukewarm. This beloved old man who was seeking salvation became an encouragement for me, to love and treasure the Russians.”

Johan F. Harms also recalled that it was customary for the sons of the Vollwirten to be apprenticed to master craftsmen in order to learn a trade. “It was wise of my father, to encourage me to learn a trade in addition to my studies. Through reading I knew that the Czar and kings were taught a trade in their youth, whereby they were gainfully employed. Father had more the outlook that it was very convenient for a true farmer to be familiar with woodworking. I was agreeable to this and was apprenticed with uncle Gerhard Friesen, Kleefeld, where I also ate my dinner. Friesens lived in a Kleinwirtschaft (small farm) about a mile away in the long village. The beloved uncle was an accomplished cabinet maker and through many artful ways he sought to make a cabinet maker out of me as well. Soon the summer room, which served as my study and sleeping quarters, also became a fine carpentry shop, filled with a lathe, and any other expensive carpentry tools which I could wish for.

I progressed to the point that I could fabricate farm equipment, such as wooden forks, etc., which pleased my father very much. In fact, I also fashioned a fine double door for the entrance from the street and a number of smaller doors for additional entrances into the garden. All of these were painted by me, so that our entire yard acquired a very pleasing appearance. In summer I helped with the field work but we had two Russian servants who looked after the barn work year around, for father was a large farmer and had rented additional land. During the harvest and threshing season many day labourers and monthly employees were hired, usually until October 1.” Harms also noted that the “Three Roses” public house had its attractions for the inhabitant of Kleefeld and that a good number of farmers in that village were known drunkards.<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing recollections provide vivid detail regarding the workings of a typical Molotschna village as well as the daily experiences of a Kleine Gemeinde family. It is noteworthy that groups of Kleine Gemeinde families would often settle in the same village e.g. Johan F. Harms reports that the village of Kleefeld included five Kleine Gemeinde Vollwirten. Frequently these groups of families were also inter-related. For example the Kleefeld Kleine Gemeinde group included Johan Loewen (1823-1881) and Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) who were brother-in-laws; and Franz Kroecker who was a son-in-law of Cornelius S. Plett; and Abraham M. Friesen, who was married to Margaretha Isaac, a niece of C.S. Plett. The Johan Loewen and Cornelius Plett families moved to the Borosenko village of Blumenhof in 1872 where they farmed until 1875 when they emigrated to Manitoba. Other families apparently moved away from Kleefeld sooner, presumably during the mid 1860s, as Johan F. Harms reports that Kleine Gemeinde families left Kleefeld, and the Molotschna, in response to the implementation of guard duty over criminals which took effect in 1865. Harms also reports that these families moved to “Pachtlandt” which would date the earlier departures in 1864, the year that the Markuslandt property near Alexandrowsk was leased and settled by the Kleine Gemeinde.

### 1.11 Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), From Anwohner to Vollwirt

One of the important features of daily life among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was the application of the full gospel teaching of community of sharing. (cf. Chapter 18 of **The Golden Years**.) The practice of this evangelical doctrine can be illustrated by focusing on the life of Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) who was able to rise from the lowly status of *Anwohner* to the much sought for rank of *Vollwirt* through the assistance of his Kleine Gemeinde brethren. It is noted that Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) was the son of Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1892) who in turn was a son of Klaas E. Reimer (1770-1837) the founding Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Abraham F. Reimer did not live up to the spiritual and material success of his father and instead had a real interest in many areas in which many others were uninformed.<sup>25</sup> Consequently Abraham F. Reimer received considerable support from the treasury of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for a period of some 40 years. This

was in sharp contrast to the financial acumen of Klaas F. Reimer (1812-1874), the other son of Aeltester Klaas E. Reimer (1770-1877), who prospered in material matters.

As a result of his father's lack of financial progress it was necessary for Klaas R. Reimer to be engaged as a servant for others at quite an early age. In his memoirs<sup>26</sup> he later recalled that he had only been at home for the first 12 years of his life after which he was engaged or apprenticed to work for other farmers. First, for one year at Peter Friesens' in Tiege and then for one year at Jakob Tiesens in Rosenort where he worked for his clothes and could attend school. After this, young Klaas worked for two years at Abraham Friesens in Lindenu, and then at Johan Toews' in Blumenort, after which he was engaged for three years with Jakob Berg in Rosenort as an apprentice blacksmith. In 1857 Klaas Reimer was baptized on confession of his faith by Aeltester Warkentin of Petershagen in the Lichtenauer Gemeinde. In the fall of the same year he was married to his first wife Katherina Willms. The young couple continued in the Lichtenauer Gemeinde for seven years.

Klaas R. Reimer goes on to explain how he became impoverished financially and discouraged spiritually so that he did not know where to turn. Finally in desperation he returned to the Kleine Gemeinde where he found peace for his soul and help for his financial woes.

"After I had married in 1857 to my first wife, Katherina nee Willms, I purchased an *Anwohnerstelle* in the village of Kleefeld for 100 rubles. Immediately after my *Verlobung* (engagement) I started to build. By the time of our wedding day, we were already building on our blacksmith shop which we also designed to serve as our dwelling house. After two months we moved into this building where we then lived for 3 years. Then I sold this enterprise to my brother, Abraham Reimer for 400 rubles and I bought myself an *Anwohnerhaus* together with a "morgen" of land for which I paid 600 rubles. Here I built another blacksmith shop which cost 200 rubles in which I then lived for 3 years from 1860-1864.

"We now had several very bad crop years during which I had rented expensive land and bought the seed for cash which almost completely impoverished me. At the same time the earnings from the blacksmith shop were also diminishing. Consequently my debts became greater and greater until I was completely discouraged and came to the idea that God's blessing was no longer with me, not in the material realm or in the spiritual realm, so that I commenced to direct myself more and more to God and prayed for his help. My debts rose to 1,400. rubles, which was more than my entire property was worth. At this point I came upon the idea that I wanted to immigrate to Markuslandt. It was in 1864 when the renters, the aged Isaac Harms and Heinrich Nikkel, had moved to Markuslandt where they had rented two properties on which two villages were established. One was called Andreasdorf and the other Friedrichstahl. We moved to Friedrichstahl together with my parents and siblings but all of us were very poor and in addition my wife was very sick. But God granted us good courage and blessing at the Markuslandt settlement, so that our endeavors were blessed with good fortune.

"In the year 1863 we went over to the Kleine Gemeinde and to Ohm Johan Friesen. He had apparently thought that I only wanted to come to the Kleine Gemeinde because we were so poor and I suppose this was also the reason which originally inspired us to make this decision. But the physical impoverishment also drew attention to our spiritual poverty so that we transferred to the Kleine Gemeinde in order to bring this matter to a culmination. Ohm Johan was very interested to know how much debt I had for he was afraid that it might cause trouble for the Gemeinde, and he was right. But I did not want to give him the amount for I was scared that then they would not accept me into the Gemeinde. Consequently, I only told them that I had many debts and that this had occurred because of the meager years during which I had rented and seeded so much land. I also said that I thought that if only I could believe that everything was dependent on the blessing of God then I would once again be able to feed my family.

"This is also how it happened. God made provision so that my creditors would release me whereby I was enabled to move to the *Pachtland* or rented land. And how blessed I felt within myself after I belonged to the Gemeinde and lived at Pachtland. What good fortune and love I felt. I realized that I was obligated to be thankful for every blessing which I received. I gave the Lord credit for every one of my good customers who were very well pleased. After we had lived on Pachtland for four years, with the help of God, I was able to return to the annual fair in the colony with 3 wagons. I was also able to sell my *Anwohnerstelle* for 800 rubles and at the same time I received the money for the wagons. I also received an advance of 100 rubles for the manufacture of "Shrengpliege" (Literally a diagonal plow).

"I was now able to make the rounds among my creditors, and in so doing I gave much thanks to our Almighty God. This occurred around Christmas time and it was very muddy but this was such a blessed time for my courage and soul that God had advanced me to the point that I was able to go around and to pay all my debts. It was almost as great an encouragement as if I had been able to go around and pay for all my sins. For my debts had always weighed so heavily upon my mind, that if I would not have been able to pay my debts and other people would have lost their money because of me, I would have felt as if I was a thief and a thief will not enter into heaven. The entire matter convicted me so earnestly that I was frequently speechless during the journey in the mud, even though I frequently had to clean the wheels in order that I was able to make my way onward with

the empty wagon.

"Throughout all of this I was frequently mindful of a man such as the aged Isaac Harms and how he had frequently put his entire property at stake for us poorer brethren. But with the help of God he was able to persevere together with us poorer brethren but only after much trouble. And in Markus, at Friedrichstahl, which was the name of the village, we had much good fortune and temporal blessing. Even though I had a daily cross to carry regarding my wife we still experienced many blessed hours for which I frequently long even today. For it appears that without a cross to carry there will be no true peace for the soul. Where there are many burdens to carry in a household there will also be many prayers and after many entreaties and much supplication blessed hours are also granted to be experienced by us.

"We lived there on Markus for 5 years and the second year was a very meager harvest but nevertheless we always were able to earn some income in the blacksmith shop so that we were able to make our living for the first two years. We also had good hopes for the future. We lived in a *semlein* and the blacksmith shop was also dug half into the earth. My brother, Abraham Reimer, was my neighbor and he brought his blacksmith shop along from Kleefeld. Here he re-erected his premises so that both the blacksmith shop and the barn were dug half into the earth. The parents also lived at Reimer's in a *semlein* which we were able to build very cheaply. The *semleins* were very warm in the winter and cool in the summer but when a heavy rain occurred one had to stand outside most of the time with a spade in order to make sure that the water did not run into the room.

"Through all of this we were very thankful that we were able to live on our own land and that we were able to pasture our cattle. Formerly we had to drive up to 13 *werst* and more to get to our fields to do our plowing and here we had only one *werst* and even less to drive to our fields. When I was travelling to the fields it often occurred to me to thank God. Even though I was unable to pay off anything of my 1,400 ruble debt during the first two years, I nevertheless always had the best hope that through the grace of God we would be able to do so. There is a lot of truth in the proverb which says that he who ventures and hopes will not come to shame, and this is how it was with us.

"In the third year, that is in 1866, we again received a good harvest. In 1864, we had only moved to Markusland in time for the hay harvest because there was still so much work which I had promised to do in Kleefeld that we had to remain there until it was all completed. I again want to speak about the third year during which we had a great deal of good fortune. We had quite a few sheep which we had bought the second year already. My brother, A. Reimer and myself purchased old sheep for two rubles a piece but because the pasture on our steppe was very good for sheep we had a great deal of good luck with them. As a result I was able to build a new dwelling house and also improve and strengthen the blacksmith shop. I also hired 2 workers for there was a great demand for the 3 and 4 bottom ploughs at that time. I had learnt to make a very good plow and as a result many master blacksmiths came to my shop in order that I show them how simple it was to construct the ploughs so that each bottom would plough correctly.

"The fourth year we again had a very good harvest and was a year for which I was very, very thankful. When I sold my grain in 1868 I drove to the Molotschna to the *Jahrmart* or annual fair, just before Christmas with the three wagons I had built in order to sell them there. I received 100 rubles apiece and also had the good fortune that I was able to sell my *Anwohnerstelle* together with buildings and blacksmith shop to Henry Poetker for 800 rubles. I also had the very great fortune that he immediately paid me out in cash. I now had 1,200 rubles in my money bag and was able to pay all my debts except for 200 rubles for which I remained indebted to the friends in Tiede, namely, uncle Klass (F) Reimer and uncle Peter (W) Friesen. This was the best and most joyous journey which I have ever experienced in my entire life. At the same time I was so blessed and thankful that our beloved God had helped me to progress to the point that I was able to come out of my great poverty and that I was able to repay each and everyone what I was indebted.

"In 1869 land was again being purchased because the lease was only for six years. I sold my workshop on Markusland to a Johan Warkentin for 200 rubles and also bought land from the company, Jacob Klassen and Gerhard Siemens, on the Bosselok River. Here I bought 60 desiatines of land for 20 rubles per desiatine and moved there with my family in 1869, after having lived on Markusland for five years. During the best years in Markusland we raised a lot of grain, 140 tshetwert wheat and sold the same for 8 rubles per tshetwert, and also much barley and oats. I was very fortunate to be able to free myself of all my debts. In addition I had about 300 sheep by the time we moved to Steinbach (Borosenko) of which I sold 100 to Martizan for 4 rubles apiece and I sold 50 sheep to Gerhard Siemens for 3.50 rubles each, with which I paid for the land which I had bought.

"In this manner, our beloved God has led us from one place to another. There was a tremendous difference between the first settlement on Markuslandt to the one here. There I built my first *semlein* with the proceeds of a ham which we sold in spite of the fact that it was needed for our own nourishment. With the proceeds we purchased wood which was used to build our *semlein*. Each and every one can imagine what kind of a dwelling this provided and at the same time this also served as our blacksmith shop and barn. But on the land which we purchased in Steinbach, I built myself an additional building nearby as I had sufficient money in order to build myself a good dwelling house and in the second year I also built a blacksmith shop which was 40 feet long and 20 feet wide. Then I also constructed a living quarters for our parents in the blacksmith shop and two *fireplaces* (or two hearths)."



## 1.12 Conclusion

The foregoing glimpses of village and community life as well as the diaries of Abraham R. Friesen, Diedrich S. Friesen and Cornelius Loewen, have illustrated various aspects of lifestyle among the Russian Mennonites. It is evident that the Russian Mennonite society which the Kleine Gemeinde knew was still very much orientated towards agriculture. Through their diligence and mutual self-help the Kleine Gemeinde were able to ensure that their members were able to take up the occupation of farming or some other calling.<sup>27</sup> This was an enviable accomplishment when one considers that during the 19th century the greatest majority of the population of class conscious Europe was still occupied in a semi-feudal agricultural system or employed as exploited labour in the rising industrial system.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER ONE. DAILY LIFE.

1. D. Plett, **The Golden Years**, (D.F.P. Publications, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1985), 356 pp.
2. D. Plett, **History and Events**, (D.F.P. Farms Ltd., Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981), 165 pp.
3. Interview with Mr. Cornelius L. Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba 1981.
4. The extracts from the Abraham R. Friesen diary referred to in this volume have been translated by Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba, a grandson of Abraham R. Friesen. See **Mennonite Historian**, Volume V, No. 2, June, 1979, 1-2.
5. Courtesy of Mennonite Genealogy Inc., Winnipeg, Manitoba. For a picture of Diedrich S. Friesen see; John C. Reimer, editor **75 Jahre Gedenkfeier** (Festkomitee der Ostreserve, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1949), 77.
6. **The Golden Years**, op. cit., Chapter Nine.
7. **John C. Reimer**, op. cit., 74.
8. See John W. Dueck, "History and Events" op. cit. 93-105 for a description of the daily life of Peter L. Dueck another Kleine Gemeinde School teacher in Russia.
9. Courtesy Mennonite Genealogy Inc., Winnipeg, Manitoba.
10. Peter P. Isaac, **Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern** (Prairie View Press, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1979) 26.
11. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
12. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
13. *Ibid.*, 18.
14. See Roy Loewen, **Blumenort a Mennonite Community in Transition** (Blumenort Historical Society, Blumenort, Manitoba 1983).
15. **History and Events**., op. cit., 99.
16. Abe E. Friesen, **Friesen 1874-1974 Centennial**, (Self published, Uniontown, Kansas, 1974) 8-14. It is noted that this family must have left the Kleine Gemeinde as they later settled in Harvey County, Kansas, in 1874.
17. Abraham Thiessen, **Ein Brief** (Odessa, 1872) 7. Here it is mentioned that a complaint was made to Johan Friesen the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde because Jacob Braun's miller had been milling on a Sunday.
18. Marie Doerksen, editor, **Genealogy of Peter K. Barkman**, (Self published. Blumenort, Manitoba, 1977), 1.
19. Peter T. Barkman, "Festival Address" in K.J.B. Reimer, editor, **Das 60 Jaehrige Jubilaeum**, (Warte-Verlag, Steinbach, Manitoba 1935), 33-34.
20. M.B. Fast, **Mitteilungen** (Self-published, Reedley, California, 1935), 58.
21. *Ibid.*, 62.
22. *Ibid.*, 72.
23. Plett Picture Book, op. cit.; See also Peter P. Isaac, op. cit.
24. John F. Harms, **Eine Lebensreise** (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1943), 1-9. Courtesy Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.
25. See **The Golden Years**, *ibid.*, 344.
26. Klaas R. Reimer, "A Book for the recording of deaths, births and marriages and so on and so forth." Unpublished manuscript, courtesy of John C. Reimer and Peter J. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba. In his memoirs Klaas R. Reimer also mentions that he was born in the village of Rosenort, Molotschna. This is interesting as this was also the place of residence of some other Kleine Gemeinde families. e.g. Rev. Klaas Friesen (1793-1870) who was the uncle of Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1892).
27. This statement is amply illustrated by someone like Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906). In a letter of February 2, 1895, to Isaac Tiessen in Russia, Klaas Reimer referred briefly to his financial situation and to the fact that they (the family) owned a flour mill, that his son Abraham owned a saw mill about 20 miles from Steinbach, and that another two sons owned three cheese factories within a radius of 10 miles and that these factories produce \$15,000. worth of cheese in a five month period, and that in addition they were still farming and owned 30 cows, 15 yearlings, and 7 horses. (See Klaas R. Reimer, *ibid.*, 105). This statement is also illustrated by the case of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) who was farming as much as 800 acres in the village of Blumenhoff five miles north of Steinbach in 1883. At the same time four of his married sons and one son-in-law (Henry Wohlgemuth) farmed an addition 1120 acres of land in the same village. In addition one son-in-law in Blumenort (Peter R. Reimer) and one son-in-law (Franz M. Kroecker) and daughter-in-law Mrs. Isaac L. Plett in Steinbach, farmed an additional 1080 acres of land. Accordingly the extended Cornelius S. Plett family was farming a total of some 3,000 acres in 1883.

# Chapter Two

## Travel and Visitation

### 2.01 Introduction

A somewhat striking aspect of Kleine Gemeinde life in Russia was the traveling and visitation done by members of this church. In actual fact such movement was quite typical of the Russian Mennonites in general, or at least among those who belonged to the landowning group. Traveling among the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia could mean a jaunt to neighbouring villages to visit relatives and friends or to pick up a load of grain. It also included longer business trips of several days to such commercial centres as Berdjansk or Nikopol as well as a rare journey of several months to visit cherished relatives in the old homeland in Prussia.

It might be noted here that the social interaction made possible through written correspondence and travel was undoubtedly one of the most important components of the rich and vibrant lifestyle of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The term "rich" is not used here to suggest great wealth or affluence but rather in the deeper sense of pure and fulfilling human interaction. Of course, visiting and letter writing (discussed in chapter three), in this sense, are only symptoms of underlying forces such as the familial and brotherly love which existed among Anabaptist Mennonite groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde. This is not to say that such forces did not exist among other Christian confessions. However as the Anabaptist Mennonite groups aspired to the evangelical ideal of the Gemeinde as being also a socio-economic entity it is reasonable to believe that a greater volume of travel (visitation) and correspondence would occur.

Prior to the extensive Kleine Gemeinde expansion out of the Molotschna during the 1860s the greatest enriching factor in the lifestyle of the members of this Gemeinde was undoubtedly the repeated daily interaction with their non Kleine Gemeinde neighbours. As a minority group, never exceeding 3 or 4 per cent of the Molotschna population, the members of the Kleine Gemeinde had to remain alert at all times, in their daily life of piety as well as in the knowledge of their faith, if they were to survive at all. This interaction has already been demonstrated by the excerpts from the diary of teacher Abraham R. Friesen as well as otherwise.

### 2.02 Interaction with the Prussian Mennonites

The Kleine Gemeinde was also tremendously enriched by various interactions with the old Prussian homeland. Although it was a great rarity for anyone from the Russian Mennonites to travel to Prussia, and vice versa, such visits were made and such journeys took place. The accounts of such journeys and the news brought by such visits were items of great social interest for neighbours and friends in Russia as well as in Prussia. The Kleine Gemeinde was directly enriched through this Prussian connection by the number of families who decided to join their ranks after arriving in Russia. The addition from time to time of members who had a different upbringing and background undoubtedly contributed to the outward openness of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia.<sup>1</sup> The perils of travel between Prussia to Russia during the first decades of the 19th Century have already been referred to in Chapter 6 of **The Golden Years**<sup>2</sup>.

The Kleine Gemeinde in Russia also received inspiration from a number of prominent Mennonite leaders in Prussia. The foremost of these was the beloved Aeltester Peter Epp of the Danzig Mennoniten Gemeinde. His vision of the demise of the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Prussia and active role in the initial emigration to the Chortitz colony in the 1770s captured and inspired his son-in-law Aeltester Klaas Reimer and other early Kleine Gemeinde leaders.

Of great importance to the Kleine Gemeinde was the Prussian connection maintained through the prominent Friesen/von Riesen family. When the prosperous Prussian Mennonite farmer Abraham Friesen (von Riesen) together with his family moved to Russia in 1804 one of his sons remained behind in Prussia. This was the eldest son Peter (1779-1847) who always retained the name von Riesen even though all his brothers later shortened their names to Friesen. Like his siblings, Peter von Riesen was a gifted and devoted man. In the words of his grandson Peter Jansen, later a member of the Nebraska state senate, he was a "merchant, magistrate, and rather prominent citizen of the old historic city of Danzig"<sup>3</sup>. Although Peter von Riesen became quite prosperous he did not turn away from the precepts of evangelical faith as did many of the Prussian Mennonites who turned more and more to a Pietist-cultural Mennonitism as their wealth increased. Gustav E. Reimer and G.R. Gaedert,

the authors of the book **Exiled by the Czar** explain this connection as follows.

“Peter von Riesen belonged to the Mennonite congregation at Danzig but in some ways differed from his brethren. At that time many of the Mennonite merchants in the city of Danzig grew prosperous with the result that more and more broke away from the original restriction of nonconformity to the world. Though Peter von Riesen had become a well-to-do citizen he tried to observe simplicity and nonconformity as much as possible. These same principles were stressed by the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, and considering the close ties which linked him to this conservative congregation, one might ask why he was the only member of his family to remain in West Prussia, especially since he wanted his children to emigrate to South Russia. Whatever his reasons were, he tried to promote the same spirit in Prussia and also tried to help his brethren in Russia.”<sup>4</sup>

It is evident that Peter von Riesen shared the faith and promoted the beliefs of his family and brethren in Russia. There is no question but that this bond was cemented by the strong familial affection which existed within the family of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810). This love and devotion is very well illustrated in an incident related in the book **Exiled by the Czar**, namely that after the death of Peter von Riesen in 1847 his children thought highly enough of their beloved uncle Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, Molotschna, to give him their fathers' fur coat “Stadtpepz” as a gift.<sup>5</sup>

In fact it was the bond to the Kleine Gemeinde Friesen relatives in Russia which was the deciding factor when Consul Cornelius Jansen made the decision to move to Russia in 1848. It is recorded that when Helena, the daughter of Peter von Riesen, married Cornelius Jansen, she “made it a condition that sooner or later they would go to South Russia and make their home there as all her father's brothers and sisters had gone there previously”.<sup>6</sup> The family now settled in Berdjansk where Cornelius Jansen became a grain merchant and entrepreneur of considerable stature. His business included purchasing grain from the Mennonites in the nearby Molotschna colony so that ample opportunity existed for interaction between the Jansen family and the Kleine Gemeinde relatives there. During the Crimean war the Jansen family returned to Prussia where they stayed until the end of the war in 1856.

In his **Memoirs** Senator Peter Jansen recalls some aspects of the fortnight long journey back to Berdjansk, South Russia, which the Jansen family undertook in that year.

“My first personal recollections begin with the preparation for the return journey to Russia during the summer of 1856. This was again undertaken by carriage and relays of post horses. A lot of cooked and preserved provisions were taken along to help out the rather meager and dirty fare of the roadside inns generally kept by Jews in connection with the post service. One of our carriages was a large, closed one, occupied by the ladies and children of the party and drawn by four horses. The second one was lighter and only half covered and carried baggage and bedding, besides a man-servant Father was taking along; also a German hunting dog, a big pointer called “Hector,” who generally sat on the front seat with the postilion or driver. Hector was my special friend and playfellow.

The journey lasted several weeks, but we finally arrived safely at Berdjansk, where we found our home more or less dilapidated and showing the ravages of the war period.”<sup>7</sup>

Even though there was always a coming and going of visitors between the Mennonite settlements in Prussia and South Russia the above recollection illustrates that the journey was an arduous one even in the 1850s. Undoubtedly the close bond between the members of the Friesen/von Riesen family and the resulting interaction, was a very important aspect in the development of the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>8</sup> For example when Cornelius Jansen took two Quaker Ministers on an extensive tour of the Molotschna Colony they also visited the Neukirch Gemeinde as the Kleine Gemeinde was frequently called at the time. Such an influence would ensure that their philosophical horizons remained far beyond the Molotschna Mennonite Colony in South Russia. In turn the influence of the Kleine Gemeinde through consul Cornelius Jansen was a crucial factor in making the 1870s Mennonite emigration from Russia the large scale undertaking that it was.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.03 The Prussian Emigrants

The Prussian connection was also important for less prominent Mennonite families who had decided that they wanted to leave Prussia and cast their lot with the Mennonites in Southern Russia. It appears that the very decision to emigrate was sometimes made because the family had some familial connection with the Molotschna Mennonites. Such a bond ensured that the immigrating family had a destination and hope for rapid absorption into Molotschna Mennonite life. A case in point would be the Johan Plett (1765-1833) family who decided to move to Russia in 1820 although they were only able to obtain their emigration passes eight years later. The oldest daughter of the family, Elisabeth, had emigrated to Russia by herself in 1804 where she married Johan Harder. This family lived in the village of Blumstein where they owned Wirtschaft number 16. In 1829 the Johan Plett family

settled in the same village where no doubt they were assured of a warm reception and assistance in becoming established.<sup>10</sup>

It also happened that someone from the Molotschna Mennonites might make the long journey back to Prussia to visit parents, siblings, and friends. In his *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* Peter P. Isaac describes one such a journey which was made by his great uncle Peter Isaac, who was the father of minister and historian Franz Isaac. Such a journey must have been a sensational undertaking at the time. Here follows the account of this journey:

“Anna Isaac, who was a sister to my grandfather, was born on November 18, 1777, in Prussia. She was married in Prussia to Henry Plett. He was a brother to my grandfather, Johan Plett, from mother’s side, and has passed away many years ago. The above mentioned great-aunt, Anna Plett, did not come to Russia. She is said to have lived several years after the death of her husband, as a widow. She was well to do and died childless shortly after 1846.

The following is an account of the journey of my great-uncle, Peter Isaac, to visit his sister, my great-aunt, Anna Plett: “The love for my sister, whom I had not seen for 43 years, urged me to visit her in Prussia once more. I had the opportunity of a free trip with a man by the name of Konrad of Tiegenhagen who travelled with team and wagon. When we had travelled about half that distance, my companion took sick and died. (He may have been a father to the Konrad whom I had known in my youth in Tiegenhagen, Russia.) After this sad interruption of the journey, I decided to continue to travel, although alone. When I arrived in Prussia, I had someone to drive me to Vierzehnhuben where my sister lived. On entering her house, I asked her if the widow Anna Plett lived here. She said ‘yes’ but paid no further attention to the stranger who was standing in front of her rather shabby from the trip and with a half-grown beard and went on with her housework. Then I asked her for a drink of water which she coldly handed me but paid no further attention to me. I asked her then if she really was the widow Anna Plett. ‘Yes’, she answered roughly but nothing else, and possibly fostered the thought in her mind that: ‘Would this person find it convenient to leave my house!’

“I now thought that I must try to bring her into a better mood, so I told her that I had some deliveries and greetings to bring her from her Russian friends. Then she asked in a more serious tone of voice than ever: ‘Who are you?’ Now I could not resist it any longer, went to her, fell on her neck, weeping, and said: ‘I am your brother, Peter, from Russia’. Although she was not at all the emotional type, she was deeply moved and we wept together. Several times she repentently confessed for having been so loveless to me. I tried to console her and set her at ease, telling her that she could not have acted differently to a stranger.” Thus far the account of great-uncle, Peter Isaac. This occurred in the summer of 1846, a few months before I was born.”<sup>11</sup>

The foregoing illustrates that travel between the Mennonite settlements did occur. This included the journeys of those who were emigrating to Russia as well as those who undertook the trip for business and social reasons. It might be noted here that until the 1850s and 1860s the senior members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde would still have had personal recollections of their former homeland in West Prussia. Naturally these connections to Prussia by travel and the reports of such journeys were very precious to them. After the 1860s and 1870s the knowledge of the former homeland in Prussia of even the older members was based almost completely on verbal and written reports. However the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba had at least one member who had been a part of the original 1804 emigration of the Molotschna pioneers, namely, Heinrich Reimer (1792-1884). Others such as Jakob J. Barkman (1794-1875) had emigrated to the Molotschna Colony from Prussia in 1818.

## 2.04 The Crimean War

Another event which very much affected the Mennonites in Russia was the Crimean war which took place between 1853 and 1856. The war was fought by the allied powers of England, France, and Turkey who attempted to repulse what they saw as the southerly expansion of Russia. The battles of the war centered around the Crimean peninsula which the allied Powers wanted to seize and occupy. The Mennonites whose colonies lay within 150 miles of the war zone were affected in a number of ways. Firstly, they agreed to take on a certain responsibility in looking after the sick and wounded soldiers many of whom were sent to the Mennonite colonies for care and treatment. Besides that the typhus epidemic which raged in the aftermath of the war caused a great many deaths in the Molotschna including a number in the Kleine Gemeinde. Among these were: Isaac Loewen (1815-1856) and his wife. Loewen was the son of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) frequently referred to in this book. Other victims included Jacob Wiebe (1799-1856) and his wife. Both of these families were from Schoenau. No doubt there were others.

In addition the war affected the Mennonites since they were required to provide transportation services in support of the war. This service consisted mainly of the hauling of materials and food

for the Russian armies encamped in the Crimea and was referred to as *podvoden*. A number of Kleine Gemeinde men also took part in this endeavour including Diedrich Isaac (1827-1902). His grandson Jakob I. Bartel (1891-1982) later recalled that his grandfather had been wounded during the course of his duties when a grenade exploded, fragmenting the top of his skull. Even though the wound healed to an extent the top of the skull of Diedrich Isaac remained sensitive so that he always wore a cap.<sup>12</sup>

In his history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that he felt that the involvement of the Russian Mennonites in the Crimean war, and particularly that of the Kleine Gemeinde, had gone too far in contravention of their faith.<sup>13</sup> In any event the matter of the Crimean War is included here under the somewhat inappropriate title of “travel” in order to illustrate that for the young people of the Mennonite colonies at the time, this was a major event in forming their world view<sup>14</sup>. For example the thinking of the leadership of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the 1870s was very much affected by the interactions and exposure to various aspects of Russian life thrust upon them by the *podvoden* of the Crimean War. To some extent this experience represented to the later generation what the experience of the original emigration to the Molotschna Mennonite Colony had represented to the early pioneers.

## 2.05 Commercial Travel and Transportation

The Russian Mennonites, and particularly the Kleine Gemeinde, frequently travelled to the nearby commercial centres such as Berdjansk, *Ekatherinoslav*, Nikopol, Tokmak etc. The purpose of such a journey would be to deliver farm products and other wares to market. During the early years of the Molotschna colony the greatest danger came from the nomadic Nogaier who often stole the horses and goods of the Mennonite settlers. This danger was no illusion as in 1811 the Nogaier robbed and murdered four men from the village of Rosenort in the Molotschna as they were returning home from a trip to a nearby town. The following poem, recorded by Blumenort area farmer and threshing machine operator Jakob L. Plett (1864-1931) provides some insight into this tragedy and the affect which it had on the Molotschna Mennonites:

### Ein Gedicht von die Vier Rosenorter

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Gott ist der das Kreuz hilft tragen,<br/>Der in Truebsal will versagen,<br/>Er kann uns mit leid umhuelen,<br/>Aber auch mit freid erfuellen,<br/>Was wir Menschen thun und Dichten,<br/>Wird der Heiland selber richten.</p> <p>2. Vier die wurden aus erwachlet,<br/>Wie die Nachtricht uns erzahlet,<br/>Kein Schreiber es beschreiben kann,<br/>Was endlich ist mit ihn getan,<br/>Niemand von unsern hats gedacht,<br/>Wie es mit ihn ist gemacht.</p> <p>3. Aus dem Doerflein Rosenort,<br/>Fuhren sie mit Freuden fort,<br/>Weil ein Weg fuer die Gemeinde<br/>Aus gemessen sollte sein,<br/>Sie tahten dieses Werk mit Lusz,<br/>Ihr letztes End ist unbewusst,</p> <p>4. Als sie das Werk hatten volbracht,<br/>Ueberfiel ihn die Dritte Nacht,<br/>Der Mann den andern bald rif zu,<br/>Ich will heut bei mein Weib noch ruhn,<br/>Sie fuhren fort wie sichts gehoert,<br/>Doch keiner wuzt wies werden wird.</p> | <p>5. Ach hoert was jammer und Elend,<br/>Sie fielen unter Maerder Haend,<br/>Als es nun kam zur Mitternacht,<br/>Wurden sie jaemerlich umgebracht,<br/>Ich hof Gott nahm sie in Gnaden an,<br/>Weil niemand die Seel Toedten kan,</p> <p>6. Da traf der Spruch ganz voellig ein,<br/>Soll diese Nacht die letzte sein,<br/>So reiz uns Herr aus dieser Qual,<br/>Und nim mich in dein Freudensall,<br/>Mein letztes Stuendlein ist nun hier,<br/>Mein Leib und Seel befehl ich dir.</p> <p>7. Bald thaet der jamer sich auf hoeren,<br/>Ihr leid hat sich in freud verkehren,<br/>Sie starben hin in kurzer zeit,<br/>Wir hoffen sie Leben in ewiger Freud,<br/>Gott wohl uns allesamt begaben,<br/>Das wir ein Selig Nacht fort haben.</p> <p>8. Drum lieber Mensch bekehre dich,<br/>Wie bald kan es doch endern sich,<br/>Wir wissen nicht durch Gottes kraft,<br/>Wie bald wir werden hingeraht,<br/>Uns wird noch immer sehr gedroht,<br/>Das viele sterben den schnellen Todt.</p> |
|---|---|

9. Auch hat die nachricht uns erzaecht,  
Das damals an Lehrer fehlt,  
So dachten sie den Zweiten Maei,  
Zwei Lehrer zuerwaehlen neu,  
Balb kam zu ihn der grosze schall,  
Von dem Traurigen Todes fall.
10. Ein jeder reiszt so schnell nach Haus,  
Das Lehrer waehlen war da aus,  
Sie sprachen alle unerquecht,  
Ach weh was ist uns zugeschickt,  
So manche Traehnen ward geweint,  
Was jetzt bei viel vergessen scheint.
11. Als die Nachtricht weiter geschah,  
Ach wieviel jamer hoert man da,  
Seine Frau fiel nie den ihren Sinn,  
Sammt allen ihren Kinder hin,  
Ach weh wie ist mein herz verwund,  
Lies sie stets hoeren aus ihren Mund.
12. Die Kinder gaben siech verloren,  
Ach Gott warum sind wir geboren,  
So weinten sie von grosz bis klein,  
Jetzt werden wir verloren sein,  
Gott aber trat bald miten ein,  
Sprach ich will euer Vormundt sein.
13. Drum trau auf ihn O fromer Christ,  
Weil er der rechte Vater ist,  
Er sorgt fuer uns als fuer sein Kind,  
Wenn wir ihn nur Gehorsam sind,  
Niemals ein Mensch verloren ist,  
Der fest vertraut auf Jesus Christ,
14. Das Daniel Gott nicht vergasz,  
Als er unter den Loewen szas,  
Ein Engel Gottes kam ihm zur Ruh,  
Und hielt den Loewen den Rachen zu,  
Drum lieber traue ihn fest an,  
Er ist der dich erhalten kann.
15. Der Mann ward noch nich alt an Jahren,  
Drei die noch ganz unmuendig wahren,  
Die wurden ganz unschuldig art,  
Durch Boeser Menschen hand ermordt,  
Wie Man sie hoert im Blut sich wimmern,  
Eltern halb zu todt sich kuemmern.
16. Brueder und Schwestern wie es geschah,  
Weinte so manche Traehnen da,  
Da half kein Trauern und keine Klagen,  
Sie wurden bald ins Grab getragen,  
Wie auch des Sirach Ausspruch ist.
17. Gleich wie der Thuem zu Solofuehl,  
Also dint uns dies zum Beispiel,  
Denkt nicht sie waren unschuldig dran,  
Sonst waer uns dieses nicht getan,  
Denn so wir hier nich bald aufstehn,  
So wirts noch aerger mit uns gehn. Ende.”<sup>15</sup>

This poem is of considerable interest as it provides valuable insight into the interpretation which the Kleine Gemeinde accorded to such an event. In their view such a calamity underlined the brevity of life and was a divine message that everyone should heed. It might also be noted that partially because of the deaths of the four men from Rosenort, the Russian government disarmed the Nogaier so that this particular danger abated somewhat<sup>16</sup>.

The transportation of grain and other products to markets in the nearby Russian towns and cities eventually became a standard feature of Russian Mennonite life. For the first two decades or so the economy of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony was orientated primarily towards self-sufficiency. By the 1820s this was changing in favour of a commercial type of farming enterprise where the farm products had to be sold on the world market. One of the most important factors in this regard was the opening of the seaport of Berdjansk on the Black Sea in 1830. This became the window on the world through which the grain from the Mennonite colonies in Southern Russia flowed to its markets in western Europe.

Commerce in southern Russia eventually developed to the point that the farmer could sell his grain from his very yard to a host of grain buyers. Nevertheless it was still quite common for the grain to be hauled directly to Berdjansk by the farmer himself. Berdjansk was some 80 miles away from the Molotschna Colony and so this represented a trip of several days which was originally undertaken with oxen and later with horses. We find a brief description of a such a journey in the *Memoirs* of Peter Jansen.

“The transporting of this grain to the seaboard was done mostly by ox teams travelling in long caravans, making about ten miles a day. Three or four wagons would be in charge of one man, the oxen being tied to the wagon in front. These men would pasture their cattle along the wide highway and sleep wherever night overtook them.

Arriving at the seaport, the grain was weighed on scales of the most primitive kind. Cast iron weights were placed on one platform and the grain in sacks on the other, these platforms being suspended by ropes or chains from the iron beam overhead. The sacks of grain were then carried on the backs of men to the various bins in the warehouse, and when a vessel was chartered, would be loaded into it in the same primitive manner.

I also remember seeing long caravans of wooden wagons drawn by dromedaries, a species of two-hump camels. These were owned by the remnants of tribes of Mohammedans or Tartars left over from the wars with Turkey. In a few years they all moved away to live under the half-moon and crescent.”<sup>17</sup>

Naturally such a journey was not without its temptations. The young men of the Kleine Gemeinde were not immune to the attractions of the world which they experienced or saw on such an extensive journey away from home and it also happened that someone succumbed to temptation. Peter L. Dueck, a young teacher at the time, found it worthwhile to make a record of a Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood meeting held in Neukirch on January 24th, 1866, where Peter Toews<sup>18</sup> confessed and asked for forgiveness for what was referred to as “playing checkers in the public house while driving to Berdjansk”<sup>19</sup>.

Such a trip had its physical dangers as well. Travel conditions at the time were rather primitive. Probably the safest and quickest means of transportation was by way of coach drawn by post horses which were replaced at intervals along the route. The American equivalent of this mode of transportation would have been the stage coach. The bulk of traveling by a typical Mennonite would have been by horse team and wagon hauling a load of grain or produce to market.

In his book *Das Wachsame Auge Gottes* Johan Toews (1793-1873), the father to Aeltester Peter Toews, writes about a journey which he undertook together with his father-in-law Johan Harder, of Blumstein. This Johann Harder was the grandfather of Aeltester Johan Harder (1811-1876), and poet and evangelist Bernhard Harder (1832-1884), both of whom are frequently referred to in this book. The purpose of the journey to which Johan Toews refers was to drive to Melitopol to purchase pigs. Melitopol was located about 100 miles south-east of the Molotschna towards the Crimea. Here follows the account of their journey:

“In the fall of 1827, I went in company with my father-in-law, Johan Harder, to Melitopol, to buy hogs. Since he was very fond of horses, he thought he must occupy the driver’s seat, and have control of the lines. A man by the name of Willms accompanied us, and we two sat in the spring seat. The same arrangements were made after we had bought the required number of hogs, and we had started on our return trip. We were quite happy and full of pranks, after downing a quart of wine, which Mr. Willms donated in compensation for his fare. We were curiously listening to interesting stories of experiences, while yet in Prussia, when all at once our hogs began to squeal. My horse, one of the two we were driving, was easily frightened, and darted away suddenly, hearing this noise, pulling his mate with him. Before my father-in-law was able to subdue this impetuous sudden run, we had reached the steep descent in the road near Zorakow. The hill was descended in full gallop, which made our hair stand up straight. Very little I saw or heard of whatever was going on; but I could discern a very steep incline on our road ahead of us, and knew, that something was going to happen. I remember now, that one side of the wagon went up, -- and then I lost control of my senses. When after a while I came to, I seemed to awaken from a lengthy spell of unconsciousness, but could not determine the time of day.

Just remember now, dear children, the situation I was in. I cannot to this day, understand, how I got mixed up in this affair, and how I was spared from any mishap whatsoever. I cannot get a clear picture of the whole procedure, except by this quotation: “With God, nothing is impossible.” The horses were standing motionless beside the wagon-tongue, but mixed up in the harness. I was lying on my back on the ground, beside the rear wheel, with my foot between the spokes, and somehow wrapped up in the leash. As soon as I had worked myself free, I became concerned about my associates. Looking about me, I saw the wagon-box approximately one-hundred yards towards the hill; on approaching, I also spied the hogs and my fellow-sufferers. Upon calling their names they both answered. I felt considerably better after I found they were alive; now I began contemplating, how to rearrange this disorderly occurrence, so we would proceed on our homeward journey. I was unhurt, and with the help of God, I managed to get things in order, well enough for us to proceed. Mr. Willms suffered several bone fractures, which were being looked after by a chiropractor.

You may well realize, dear children, what affect this accident had on your grandfather. This occurrence was the cause of his death, after several days of severe suffering. Again the Lord had foreseen to safeguard me through this accident, although seemingly, I had been dragged along the ground about one-hundred yards, with my foot between the spokes of one wheel.”<sup>20</sup>

The account of this journey illustrates the serious consequences of even a slight mishap on such a journey and the divine leading which someone like Johan Toews (1793-1873) perceived in this tragic incident.

## 2.06 Tragedy and Adventure

Tragedy came upon the Russian Mennonite traveller in manifold ways. In his *Stammbuch Meiner*

**Voreltern**, Peter P. Isaac relates the story of a young mother from the Old Colony who was travelling to the Molotschna to visit her parents, Johan Warkentins in Blumenort, Molotschna.

“**Great-Aunt Katharina Warkentin**, the only daughter of their first marriage, was married to **Johann Brandt**. They lived in the Old Colony in Russia. She died a pitiful death by drowning in the river Molotschna on a trip, with her two small girls, to visit her parents in the Molotschna colony, a distance of about 75 miles. I still feel a deep pity when I think of it. It happened in this wise: Her husband hooked up the light wagon, a quite tame and as a rule trustworthy horse for the trip. She was nearly to her destination when she stopped at the bank of the Molotschna River and went down to the water to have a wash. The horse apparently was thirsty and wanted to get a drink so it started down the steep bank and tumbled into the river. The youngest girl was on the wagon with it. The mother immediately rushed to the scene of the accident to save the little girl but together with her she drowned in the heroic attempt. The older girl stood helpless, looking on, weepily bitterly. She was soon discovered by Dukhobors who lived on the other side of the river. They came over to the girl but could not understand anything of what she said because she could not speak Russian.

The Dukhobors took her to Lindenau where she, sobbing bitterly, told the people that they had been on the way to the grandparents in Blumenort and how the accident had happened. The people of Lindenau went to the place of the accident and found the drowned mother, little girl, and horse and took them to Lindenau. Apparently, the little Molotschna River stood at high water at the time. Sixty-five to 70 years later at the time of my youth, a horse could easily walk through without swimming when it was low. I cannot definitely state the place where this mother and daughter were buried. I think it was in Blumenort. If I could have asked the aged grandfather, Isaac Loewen, long ago deceased in Russia, who was still a youth at the time of the accident and lived with his parents in Lindenau, he would have given me a more detailed account of the accident that overtook this great-aunt Katharina. Later, I found out from my parents that this accident happened only a few years after the settlement had been accomplished in the year 1804. My second degree uncle Cornelius Fast told me that on one occasion when he had worked along the Molotschna River and had come close to the place of the accident an old man had told him: “Here is the place where a woman, her daughter, and a horse were drowned.”<sup>21</sup>

Necessity sometimes dictated that the Russian traveller had to risk life and limb in order to cross a frozen river or spring pond in order to reach his destination. Johan Toews (1793-1873) describes one such incident in his autobiography **Das Wachsame Auge Gottes**:

“If I remember correctly, it must have been in 1819, soon after my first marriage, that the idea struck me, to don my skates and glide over the smooth ice to the village Blumstein, to visit my wife's parents. The lay of the land between our place and Blumstein, was in the form of a depression, and this lowland was filled with water in the spring. A heavy frost had formed a very smooth surface of ice, and to a young man, this looked very tempting. Not realizing in the least, that danger was lurking, and I, depending on my own skill in the art of skating, I ventured out on the course. To my surprise I found myself in difficulty all of a sudden, when the sun's reflection on the ice blinded my eyes, and I had run on to a weak spot, where it gave way to my weight, and I plunged headlong on all fours, touching bottom beneath the surface of the water. I remained quite calm and consciously I removed my cap, which had fallen forward over my face. I managed to get on my feet, and found the water to reach up to my chest; but how could I get out on solid ice again? It was so weak and gave way every time I made an attempt to raise myself up on it. A new thought commenced to torment me, that by breaking the edge of the ice, I might reach deep water, and that could be the last of me. An agonizing grip took hold of me as I realized the danger I was in. If the holy and righteous judge had ended my life at that time, what would have been my lot in eternity? But the watchful eye of God hovered over me, even in extreme danger, and He helped me. At last I came to a spot where the ice held my weight, and I could get out. I was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from home, the weather being very cold, and my clothing soaked; it is very difficult in cold weather, when you clothes are wet, to run or skate; this short distance homeward was not a pleasant experience, but I was indeed very glad to arrive safely, where it was warm. I was unable to render due thanks to God, who saved me in time of great danger; He also kept me from a further attack of cold.”<sup>22</sup>

A considerable amount of travelling was done by horseback. Peter Jansen recalled that his father, Consul Cornelius Jansen, had originally travelled by horseback from Prussia to Russia to look over and inspect the Black Sea region. David Klassen (1813-1900), later one of the two Kleine Gemeinde delegates to America in 1873, enjoyed relating to his children how he had emigrated from his home in West Prussia in 1833. Delegate Klassen, accompanied by a certain Rempel as a guide, accomplished the arduous journey by riding horseback each on a stallion.<sup>23</sup>

Those who travelled alone or in small groups such as these were the most vulnerable to the dangers which beset the Russian traveller of the day. Although the Nogaier had been disarmed they continued to pose a danger to the unaccompanied traveller. It is recorded that on several occasions when the



ambitious young Johan Cornies was travelling on horseback on a business trip to the nearby cities or elsewhere, he was pursued by hostile bands of Nogaier only managing to escape by his quick wits and trusty steed.<sup>24</sup>

In addition the Russian traveller faced constant danger from a host of robbers, highwaymen, and brigands, who would not hesitate for a moment to murder such a traveller if they could gain a few kopeks. In his *Memoirs* Senator Peter Jansen writes about his experience while travelling alone with a sum of money realized from the sale of a herd of cattle:

“When I was about fourteen, Father leased a large tract of land about thirty miles from Berdjansk, and we started a ranch or “Chutor” as it was called in Russian. We had a very faithful Russian as overseer, who remained with us until we left for America. Our residence remained at Berdjansk. We built a comfortable house on this land, in which I had a room for myself, and during the busy seasons of the year I spent most of my time on this farm, riding home horseback Saturday night. In fact, I almost lived on my saddle horses, of which I generally had two or three good ones.

Racing was a great amusement amongst the Russians, and speed was very essential in a saddle horse. I had a little chestnut horse with white mane and tail, which hardly ever took anybody’s dust and won for me several prizes. Only the other day I gave a silver cup which I had won forty-five years ago, to my youngest daughter, Margaret.

This little horse probably saved my life on one occasion. My father had sent me with a bunch of steers to be sold at a market about forty miles away. I made a quick sale and put the cash in my pocket, checks and drafts being unknown at that time in our part of Russia.

The foreman, Luke Petrovitch, and the men who had driven the cattle were to return to the ranch, and the former warned me not to undertake the trip alone by night. However, it was the full of the moon and beautiful fall weather. The transaction involved several thousand rubles, which, as stated before, I had on my person. The would-be robbers undoubtedly knew of this and also of my intention of making the night ride. I started out after supper and covered the first ten miles at an easy gait, following the wide post road, which was beaten hard as a pavement. Along this road were post stations and taverns, the latter called “Koback” in Russian, where the national drink of vodka was sold. In passing one of these places, I noticed a fellow standing in the open door, apparently watching. I paid no attention to him, but proceeded at an easy gait. After travelling probably a verst (three-fourths of a mile), I heard hoofbeats behind me. My little horse, being used to racing, started to fidget and wanted to go, but I held him back until I heard a voice behind me calling “stoy,” which means halt. I looked back and could clearly see three men coming on full speed. I then gave my pony the rein, and soon made a rapid gain on my pursuers. Two of them stayed way behind, but one had a horse nearly as speedy as mine and kept up pretty close. The race continued for several miles, and my horse commenced to show signs of distress when I overtook a “powoska,” peasant’s wagon, going in my direction with three or four men in it. I pulled up and began talking to them, and my pursuers gave up and turned back.

These brigands hardly ever carried firearms, but their weapon was a kind of sling shot consisting of three tons of rawhide fastened together. At the end of each was attached a heavy ball of lead. In swinging it over their head they would give it impetus and at a distance of a hundred feet would let it fly loose, tangling up man or horse and bringing them down.

When I reached home towards morning my mother had been watching for me and let me in. She saw at once that something had happened. In fact, I had been badly scared, but begged her not to tell Father anything about my adventure, as I was afraid he would prevent any more night rides.<sup>25</sup>

Others experienced danger in less dramatic ways. Johan Toews (1793-1873) relates of one incident which occurred in about 1824 which almost ended in tragedy.

“One day in early spring, about five years later, I was riding horseback beside a deep ditch, filled with slushy snow, since the effect of spring weather was beginning to tell. All of a sudden my horse slipped and fell; unfortunately, it rolled sideways into the ditch. Again I felt the love of God near at hand, since He does not want the death of a sinner, but that he may be saved. It would have been easy enough for me, to have fallen right under the horse, had not the watchful eye of God found another way for me. By the grace of God I was able to reach the other side of the ditch with one foot, when the horse fell, thereby escaping the danger of being destroyed. At this moment it seemed, my life was suspended in midair on a very fine thread. I realized now, since I found myself on solid ground, but the horse nevertheless in a predicament, that the Lord had again, wonderfully helped me. His goodness and wisdom be praised for evermore! My horse was lying with its legs uppermost, and had sunk down into the soft snow considerably; I had to call for help to free it from this dangerous position.”<sup>26</sup>

A similar incident was experienced by delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908) a son of the above Johan Toews. In his memoirs Johan F. Toews (1858-1931) explains that the Cornelius P. Toews family had moved to Markuslandt when that settlement was opened up by the Kleine Gemeinde in

1863. Markus lay to the left of the picturesque banks of the beautiful Dneiper River where the Old Colony village of Einlage was located. Toews explained that on a certain occasion his father and a number of companions had ridden to Einlage on horseback. As they were crossing the ice on their return journey the hooves of the horses started to break through the ice so that Toews was only able to escape with greatest difficulty.<sup>27</sup>

Peter W. Toews (1866-1935), the son of Johan Toews (1829-1875), relates of an incident which illustrates another danger which the Mennonite traveller in Russia might face, namely, snakes. In his *Erinnerungen* he describes one occasion when his parents were returning home to Gruenfeld, near Borosenko from a trip to the Molotschna. Suddenly they were greeted by a snake in the middle of the road so that the father had to stop the carriage, get off, and kill the snake. The story has a somewhat humorous ending as in his excitement the young Peter W. Toews took a flask of brandy from its container in the covered carriage mistakenly believing the same to be water. Toews who was about two or three years of age at the time, later recalled how terribly the brandy had burned in his body. At this time it was apparently customary for the Mennonite travellers to carry a flask of brandy with them on a long journey where it was essential in the case of medical emergencies, etc. Toews also mentions that in the aftermath of his excited swallow he had to be helped from the carriage by the maid after the family arrived at home.<sup>28</sup>.

## 2:07 A trip to Nikopol

Not every journey involved such a dangerous episode. Frequently the Mennonite farmer or trader enjoyed a pleasant journey which was a real highlight in his life. One can imagine the steady clapping of horses hooves as the farmer with his loaded wagon or chain of wagons moved slowly through the quiet picturesque countryside. The families living in the Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Borosenko were fortunate in that they were within 30 werst or about 20 miles of their nearest commercial city which was Nikopol. The trip there and back could be made in a long day and therefore it also happened that the young lads and perhaps other members of the family were occasionally favoured with the chance of seeing the big city. In his book *History and Events of Earlier Times* Johan W. Dueck mentions such opportunities and the impressions they made on him as a young lad of 7 or 8 years:

“Sometimes father together with other neighbors drove out with a large net to catch fish or crabs. Quite some distance behind this river a high mountain could be seen from the village. We always had to drive over this mountain when we went to the city of Nikopol. Nikopol was also our Post Office. I believe the city was approximately twenty-eight werst or a little over twenty miles away. If we left early in the morning we were able to make the trip there and back in one day. I was sometimes able to go along with father which was a great joy for me. This was especially the case if it was the annual market day, for then one saw the streets filled with street walkers and other vendors who offered all sorts of articles for sale. Among other things, apples, grapes and other fruit, fish, crabs, pastry and all sorts of sweets. And oh, how cheap the fruit was! For a pair of *kopeken* one could have a whole cluster of grapes at least enough to satisfy one’s appetite. If one then added a pair of Russian “Kringel” to the grapes one had a glorious repast. Men with large stone crocks on their shoulders walked around on the streets calling out loudly “*Zachameniras*”. This was something cool and somewhat similar to ice cream here.

We usually fed our horses by a large driveway to a yard, the owner of which was a Low German colonist, by the name of Koslofsky. Here they served a wonderful Russian *borscht*, the taste of which I can still savor even today. This driveway “*Auffahrt*” was near to the bank of the large and very wide Dneiper River. The river lay deep below, as there was at this spot a very high and steep bank. For this reason a long path had been built, down which one led the horses in order to water them. The water was pulled up with a large pail with the help of a winch.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.08 A Journey to the Crimea

The difficulties of travelling in Russia at this time are not to be understated. The vast expanse of the country combined with a primitive transportation system could make any journey an arduous ordeal. A trip which looked like a pleasant two day drive when starting was changed into a nightmare by a heavy rain which would turn the roads into a quagmire. The difficulties of such a journey are amply illustrated in a letter dated April 28, 1868, written by Cornelius Enns, then a member of the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde, to Peter Toews (later Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde) of Blumenhof, Borosenko, near Nikopol.

“Ahnfeld, April 28th, 1868

As our guests, namely, our beloved brothers and sisters, have already gone home, and as it is

already evening and as brother Wiebe intends to send you a letter by post in the morning, I have seated myself in order to prepare for you a report of our return journey home.

Yes, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, I must confess together with the poet that "no journey is without its discomforts". For it was almost 7 o'clock by the time we left Rahatsch, which is 25 werst distant from Kamička. Therefore we were unable to arrive in Zirhos, which is 32 werst from Rahatsch. Instead we overnighted on the steppe and had our breakfast in Zirhos on Thursday. Before we left from there it again started to rain, and we did not travel very far before the mare of J. Friesen was completely tired out. We unloaded some items from the large (großen) wagon and hitched a gelding to that team continuing on our way with only one gelding hitched in front of my covered (verdeckt) wagon. Those of us who were able, walked, so that we finally reached Ewanovka somewhat before Vesper, which was only 22 werst from Zirhos.

But what was to be done now? The feed was expensive there and the mare by now could hardly walk along by itself. My gelding had also had too much as in the morning its forelegs were still quivering. So we thought that if we had only the one wagon, together with the harrows, with our three horses, we would be able to slowly continue on our way. But what was the use for we were in the middle of a journey where little else could be done. We then found someone who was prepared to drive (the großen wagon) to Wastepol for 2 rubles and 18 kopek which was only 22 werst from Ewanovka.

We then hitched our three horses in front of our wagon and two in front of Harmses wagon with which the Russian was to drive. It was getting to be dusk by the time we arrived in Wastepol. But when the new day broke we were again in need of horses. Even though the mare hungrily ate her oats being basically a sound horse, she was still not fit and had no power. She first had to gather her strength on the way. As I have already mentioned the gelding was still recuperating from the previous day when it alone was in front of the covered wagon.

Then I again engaged someone (to drive) from Wastepol to Gereschik for three ruble. By 11 o'clock we arrived in Karrekam which was 11 werst from Wastepol and by three o'clock we arrived in Gereschik which is about 20 werst from Karrekam. From here we slowly continued on our way with only our own horses, and by evening we arrived in Shingar which is 20 werst from Gereschik. But before we had unhitched our horses it again started to rain. Around midnight it cleared somewhat and so we hitched up again and drove as we dearly wanted to be home by Saturday. But soon it again started to rain, and rained until we reached Kirk which is 15 werst. By this time the mare was again tired and so we had breakfast. It still looked like more rain so we continued on our way. Harms was to stop whenever the horses were tired to feed them a little.

As the road was familiar here I went on ahead with the understanding that if more rain fell I would send someone to meet him on Sunday. But it did not rain. By midday we reached "Blinden" which is 16 werst from Kirk. But Harms did not come and so we again got on our way and arrived at our homes safe and sound at 6:30. This was 27 werst from Blinden. Harms also arrived Sunday morning.

How glad we were that we had again arrived safely and in good health and could also sing with the poet, "Bis hierer hat Gott uns gebracht". But what did we have to be told about our former brother Esau. Oh God! Hear our lament. How this affected my spirits you can only imagine. I said that I need already say nothing of our tiresome journey to the brethren. God be merciful unto him. Yes and to us all. A brother. "Corn Enns",<sup>30</sup>

The foregoing letter demonstrates the difficulties involved in even basic transportation at the time. Nevertheless such a journey was a never to be forgotten experience for any young lad who had the privilege to go on such a long expedition. Johan F. Toews (1858-1930) always remembered the thrill of one such journey in 1869 when he was about 12 years old. At this time he had the privilege of accompanying his uncle Peter Toews on a trip to the Crimea. In his memoirs he notes that his uncle, who was an Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, was called upon to visit the Crimea in that year in order to help the congregation there overcome the difficulties caused by false teachings such as the negation of the validity of the afusion mode of baptism, etc.

Young Johan was to serve as the babysitter for the Peter Toews children during the trip. He vividly recalled the large memorials located at Otschapaw just before entering the Crimea. These monuments had been erected in honour of the Russian soldiers who had fallen during the Crimean war against England and France. Young Toews was also especially interested in the deep wells in the Crimea and how water was drawn from the same with large leather hoses utilizing camel power. He remembered the journey as a fascinating adventure although he notes that the trip must have been painful for his uncle Peter Toews<sup>31</sup>.

## 2.10 Traveling and Visitation

Other sources illustrate more routine journeys to neighbouring villages and also the trips which the members of the Kleine Gemeinde made to visit their relatives and friends in distant congregations. The diary of Kleine Gemeinde school teacher Abraham R. Friesen reveals that it was a common occurrence to drive out of the Molotschna Colony for various reasons.

“September 13th, 1871. We drove to the annual market (fair) in Tokmak, and to Schoensee for the night and returned on Monday the 14th and then again to the market where we met Abraham Loewens of Gruenfeld, and received five letters from Borosenko. On Wednesday the 22nd. Ehpraim and Joh Belland were at the market in Prischib (district capital) December 23rd. For a week now we have had good sleigh roads. Yesterday, brother-in-law Giesbrecht and I were in Halbstadt (Vollst capital) . . . January 14th 1872. Joh Esau brought oats for selling to Schmittens (probably on the Chutor Steinbach). June 12th. Drove to Prischib at the annual market and visited at Arn Warkentins, Tiegenhagen. August 3rd D. Quiring and I were in Halbstadt today . . .”

It appears that teacher Friesen frequently drove to the annual market in Prischib and in Tokmak, and also had frequent business in Halbstadt where the district offices of the Molotschna Mennonite Vollst were located. The diary of teacher Diedrich S. Friesen reveals similar activities in the more isolated Kleine Gemeinde Borosenko settlement.

“November 17th, 1872. Drove to the mill for feed. December 20th. Today I drove to Anafeld in order to go with father to Salzfelf. December 21, today I returned from Nikopol. December 23rd. Today I drove to the mill. January 4th. We picked up barley flour at the mill. January 7th. We came from Nikopol. January 30th. In the evening I drove to Felsenbach. February 1, 1873. The Secretary of the Gebietsamt was here. July 2nd. Drove to Stalloch (a Russian village north of Gruenfeld) for reapers. July 17th. Drove to Nikopol and returned. August 28th. We drove to Nikopol with 55 pud and 4 pounds of wheat. Received 1 ruble and 18 kopeks per pound. August 29th. Returned from Nikopol. August 30th. Drove to the mill in Ebenfeld. September 7th. We were at Johan Friesens. I rode to Schoendorf on horseback.”

It is evident that Diedrich S. Friesen had frequent business in various neighbouring villages and in Nikopol. He mentions for example the three neighbouring villages of Schoendorf, Ebenfeld, and Felsenbach which were apparently settled by Mennonites from the Chortitz or Old Colony as there is no record that members of the Kleine Gemeinde lived in these villages. Presumably such short visits were common place and were not always entered in the diary.

Even more interesting, is the frequency of travel between the various Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde congregations in the Molotschna, Borosenko, Markuslandt, and the Crimea. Notes on a two month period in the diary of Abraham R. Friesen indicate that it was not an unusual experience to have family from one of the Kleine Gemeinde settlements visiting in another district and vice versa.

“Friday, November 6th, 1870. Pet. Bergens and Martin Friesens of the Crimea dropped in on us when they left, and a number of people from Fischau were here, also grandfather and Ohm Eidge, which latter two I drove home to Lindenau, because they came on foot. November 19th. Jakob Wiebe from the Crimea was here . . . May 10th. We left for Borosenko taking father with us. We arrived there on the 11th at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and found everything the way it had been. Those that are among the living were in good health. We departed again on the 18th and arrived home on the 20th at 8:30 o'clock in the morning, and everyone was in good health. It looks as though we will get a good crop this year, for I have never before in my lifetime seen such a uniformly good stand of grain spread all over. June 11. Peter Penners, Rosenfeld, were here until the 13th. September 19th. Abraham Loewens of Gruenfeld were here. Also Johan Friesens of Fischau, because there were services here.

October 13th, brother-in-law Unger was a visitor at our place on Wednesday and left on Friday. Brought along letters from the parents and D. Friesens. October 18th. G. Giesbrecht came home from Borosenko. They were gone 12 days and travelled in one vehicle together with Esaus. October 21. C. Konradt returned home from Prussia, having been gone for eight weeks. October 31. There were worship services here (included visitors from Borosenko Peter Duecks etc.). December 23rd Friesens' Henry, and father, Heinrich Warkentin, and Heinrich Friesen from the Crimea were here. For a week now we have had good sleigh roads”.

February 8th, 1872. Martin Penners (Borosenko) came here and they drove to Tiede on the 7th. Sunday, February 13th. Worship services were held here at H. Warkentins. Plett and Dueck were here for dinner. April 1, Wohlgemuths, F. Enns came from Borosenko on Thursday, April 23rd. Kornelius Kornelsens from the Crimea were here and in the evening Johan Reimers from Borosenko were here also. May 1. H. Friesen of the Crimea arrived. They came to visit us. D. Friesen, Rosenfeld, came to our place also and brought sister Maria and brother Kornelius along. May 12th D. Friesens drove away and Kor. Goossens were here. June 2nd. The parents from Annafeld came to visit us. Martin, Helena, and Susanna came along. June 16th. P. Penners came to us and stayed until the 18th and drove to Tiede, and we also went there in the afternoon.”

It seems that the favorite time for travelling was in fall, early spring, and middle summer. This seems logical since these are usually times of the year when the worst inclement weather and the busy seeding, haying and threshing seasons could be avoided. A similar pattern emerges from the diary of Diedrich S. Friesen:

December 1, 1872. Crimean Wiebe was here. May 3rd. 1873. Esaus from the Molotschna came here. May 5th. We were at Penners who related that Abraham Friesens from Lichtenau

had arrived here. May 15. Abraham Friesens left for home. We accompanied them as far as Nikopol. May 16th. The Nikothaithaler parents left for the Molotschna today. We arrived home at noon. June 6th. Penners left for the Molotschna. June 11th. Crimea H. Friesen was here. August 15th. We agreed that we would travel to the Molotschna. August 16th. We left for the Molotschna. August 17th. We drove up to Mochailwska. August 18th. We drove to Lichtenau. August 19th. We were in Tiege. August 20th. We drove as far as Lichtfelde and from there to Marienthal. August 21. We were in Marienthal. August 22nd. We drove as far as Alexanderwohl, and from there back to Lichtenau. August 23rd. We departed and travelled as far as Pristan, together with M. Rempels. August 24th. We drove up to Nikolaithal for night. August 25th. We arrived home together with mother.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing illustrates that the undertaking of these journeys of a week or longer duration was quite common. It also seems as if the teacher Diedrich S. Friesen is either less conscious of recording the visits of people from the Molotschna and Crimea than Abraham R. Friesen or, that he is less well connected. On the other hand the frequency of visits to or by the Diedrich S. Friesen family within the Borosenko settlement and surrounding area exceeds the frequency of visits to or by the Abraham R. Friesen family within the Molotschna area. This is probably more indicative of differences in the individual preferences of the two diarists than that there was any appreciable differences in life style between the congregations in the two districts. In any event the foregoing extracts do demonstrate the prevalence of this type of traveling in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde at the time. This is further illustrated by Kleine Gemeinde farmer Cornelius S. Plett who is known to have made the journey between the Molotschna and the Borosenko district at least 12 times between 1870 and 1873.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.11 Conclusion

The diaries of Abraham R. Friesen and Diedrich S. Friesen also reveal the interesting custom of “noespatzere” which was intimately connected with the type of travelling and visiting referred to above. When a family went visiting at such a distance they could not hope to visit all their relatives and friends even if they had a week or two. They would make the rounds of their nearest relatives and dearest friends or else the places where they were most due for a visit. Other friends and relatives would remain informed as to their whereabouts and make sure that they managed to visit at least one of the homes on the itinerary of the traveling family in order to socialize with them. It was quite usual for the home which was hosting the traveling family for that day, or part of a day (dinner, vesper, or evening, etc.), to have a houseful of other guests besides. Usually the traveling family would have a family of close relatives or friends where they would more or less make their home base for the duration of their visit in that district or village. The hosts in this home would also frequently accompany them on their visits through the neighbourhood in order to introduce the visiting couple where necessary, provide transportation, or simply generally make sure that the traveling family was well-received.

It is evident that the practice of travelling and visiting was common place in a group such as the Kleine Gemeinde. The practice was one of the most important forms of socializing and also a vital format for mutual devotional inspiration among the Kleine Gemeinde families in the various congregations. The practice of traveling was also very important as the mode of exposure of the Russian Mennonites to the larger world around them. It was largely through traveling that the members of the Kleine Gemeinde formed their view of the Russian peasant and the Russian society in which they lived.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER TWO. TRAVEL AND VISITATION.

1. See Section 10.08 of *The Golden Years* for a listing of some of the families who immigrated to Russia after 1817 and joined the Kleine Gemeinde.
2. See Section 6.01 of *The Golden Years*.
3. Peter Jansen, *Memoirs* (Self-published, Beatrice, Nebraska, 1921), 14.
4. G. E. Reimer and G. R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar* (Mennonite Publications Office, Newton, Kansas, 1965), 3-4.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. P. Jansen, *op. cit.*, 19.
8. G. E. Reimer, *op. cit.*, 7.
9. *Ibid.*, 35.
10. D. Plett, *Plett Picture Book* (Steinbach, Manitoba 1981), 7
11. Peter Isaac, *op. cit.*, 6-7
12. Interview with Jakob I. Bartel, Steinbach in 1980.

13. Peter Toews, **Sammlung zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten an der Molotschna** (Blumenhof, South Russian, 1874), 324.
14. It appears that many of the Pietist Mennonites were influenced by the Crimean War to believe that the United Kingdom and France represented the Anti-christ and that Russia was the final fortress of the Christian Church. This of course was in line with the eschatology of the millennialism in vogue there at the time. See Section 9.16 **The Golden Years**.
15. Jakob L. Plett, "Poetry Book Unpublished Ledger," 14-16. Courtesy of Mrs. Helena Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.
16. Franz Isaac, **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten** (H. J. Braun, Halbstadt, Taurien, 1908), 12; See also H. Goertz, **Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung** (Echo-Verlag Steinbach, Manitoba, 1945), 15.
17. Peter Jansen, *op. cit.*, 24-25.
18. Probably Peter W. Toews (1830-1922) of Morganau.
19. Peter L. Dueck Church Calendar, 1865-1866, *op. cit.*
20. Johan Toews, **Das Wachsame Auge Gottes** (Peter Toews, Kleefeld, Manitoba, 1908) 16-20. As translated by great-grandson Cornelius L. Toews (1891-1982) school teacher and lifelong devotee of the history of his people.
21. P. Isaac, *op. cit.*, 20.
22. Johan Toews, *op. cit.*, 10-14.
23. Abraham W. Klassen, "Lebens Erfahrung", Unpublished memoirs, 43. Courtesy of D. B. Eidse/Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
24. David H. Epp, **Johann Cornies** (Echo-Verlag, Steinbach, Manitoba 1946) 12-14.
25. Peter Jansen, *op. cit.*, 26-27.
26. Johan Toews, *op. cit.*, 14-15.
27. Johan F. Toews, Unpublished memoirs, Contained in the Cornelius P. Janzen papers, 1-2. Courtesy of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.
28. Peter W. Toews "Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben" Steinbach Post, September 6, 1944. I am indebted to Margaret Kroecker, Mennonite Genealogy Inc., for referring me to this series of articles.
29. John W. Toews, "History and Events", *op. cit.*, 100-101.
30. Aeltester Peter Toews, **Letter Collection 1866-1868**. Courtesy Milton and Margaret Toews, Neilberg, Saskatchewan. Corn. Enns the author of this particular letter must be the same one who later denounced the full gospel faith of the Kleine Gemeinde and became a founding member of the separatist-Pietist Krimmer Mennonite Brethren church.
31. Johan F. Toews, *op. cit.*, 2-3.
32. **Plett Picture Book**, *op. cit.*, 19-20.



# Chapter Three

## Correspondence And Poetry

### 3.00 Introduction

Correspondence and poetry was a vital means of communication and exchange within the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, quite equal in importance to traveling and visitation. By traveling the individual formed his impressions of the surrounding world and received new ideas and vision. Through letter writing and visiting these impressions were developed and exchanged. Various aspects of this topic will be considered: Firstly, the writing and literacy of the Russian Mennonites generally; secondly, letter writing within the Kleine Gemeinde, thirdly, some representative letters and lastly, poetry in the Kleine Gemeinde.

### 3.01 The Correspondence of the Pioneers

Letter writing played a crucial role for the Mennonites from the very first day of their settlement in Russia. In *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* David H. Epp has referred to letters written between the Chortitza settlement and the old Prussian homeland during the pioneer period of the Old Colony which unfortunately was accompanied by considerable disputation and strife<sup>1</sup>. In fact during the very first year of settlement the Danzig mother congregations appointed 12 ministerial candidates among the Chortitza pioneers by letter. In 1790 the minister Behrendt Penner was installed as Aeltester of the Chortitza Flemish Gemeinde by a letter from the Gemeinden in Prussia<sup>2</sup>.

Correspondence was similarly important during the pioneer years in the Molotschna colony serving as a regular medium of communications with the Gemeinden in Prussia<sup>3</sup> and also the Old Colony some 100 werst away. In his memoirs Aeltester Klaas Reimer has referred to several instances where letters provided the infant Kleine Gemeinde with a vital communication link. It was a letter from the Frisian Gemeinde in Chortitza in 1812 which gave the founding members of the new group the courage to stand for their faith. In 1815 the leaders of the new Gemeinde managed to forward a letter to Prussia in spite of an effort by the forces of Grosze Gemeinde Aeltester Jakob Ens to prohibit all communication. In this letter the Kleine Gemeinde sought the advice of church leaders in Prussia as a result of which they decided to wait one more year in order to obtain ordination for their Aeltester<sup>4</sup>. Klaas Reimer also refers to various matters in which the Molotschna and Chortitza leaders communicated with each other through letters.

No doubt letter correspondence between friends and relatives in the Mennonite settlements in Prussia, Chortitza and Molotschna was an even more common occurrence. Certainly friends and relatives in Prussia were eagerly waiting word about their recently departed loved ones. What were conditions like in the new settlement? Should they emigrate as well? These and other similar questions were on the minds of those who remained in the old homeland. On the other hand, the new immigrants eagerly awaited news from parents, siblings, and other dear ones in Prussia. In these letters the correspondents poured out their hearts, their fears and joys. The numerous letters included in *The Golden Years* abundantly illustrate the foregoing. Correspondence was an important aspect of Russian Mennonite life.

### 3.02 Literacy Among the Russian Mennonites

Some historians have held a rather low view of the literacy of the Mennonites in Russia during the first half of the 19th century<sup>5</sup>. It seems that an extreme pendanticism had developed among some later Russian-Mennonite pedagogues so that they considered anyone who wrote in the Goethe era German used by the first Mennonite immigrants from Prussia to be illiterate and unlearned. An example of this type of view is to be found in the work of historian Peter M. Friesen who refers to a German which was not equal to his "standards" as, "a kind of German that can be put alongside the heavily ridiculed American "Pennsylvania-Dutch" which is certainly worse than the amusing German of the "uncle" and "aunt" letters in the Mennonite Rundschau"<sup>6</sup>. This statement also proves that with a little effort something derogatory can be said about any Mennonite group. Without question the language vocabulary used in the letter correspondence referred to in this chapter would have come under the same harsh judgement.

It is the view of others that the letters and correspondence of each era must be considered within their own time period and by the standards of that time. It is very inappropriate to judge any language by the standards of that language a century later. One might as well judge the language by the stan-



dard of an entirely foreign language. If Friesen failed to appreciate the 18th century Prussian era German because many of the old words were not in his vocabulary or because the style of punctuation was not completely in line with what he had learnt as the correct one, the loss was completely his and not that of the Mennonite people as a whole.

In fact the would be “learned” folk who despised not only their native low German but also the older forms of high German were not restricted to the Mennonite colonies in Russia. Professor Paul Schach of the University of Nebraska refers to the would-be “gelaernte Lait” of the villages among the German colonists in Russia and laments the contemptuous disapproval for the dialect found among these “intellectuals” and explains that this was often indicative of an ignorance of linguistic history. Professor Schach refers to another cause of the condescending attitude of some lower level educators and intellectuals as being a misinterpretation of certain technical terms. “Plattddeutsch” is mistranslated as “low” German and then misunderstood as inferior German. In fact the term Plattdeutsch refers to the flatness of the terrain in Northern Holland and Germany where the language was spoken<sup>7</sup>.

It has been pointed out that the Goethe era vocabulary used by the Russian Mennonites during the greater part of the 19th century and preserved until a few decades ago by some of the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Manitoba had a special beauty and poetic quality which was lacking in the “Reichs Deutsch” which became popular among the Russian-Mennonites in the late 19th century. Certainly one should not consider a particular group of people to be illiterate or dumb simply because they were happy to continue expressing themselves in the language which they loved and which they had learned from their forefathers. One wonders, what great damage did this cause? Was the fact that a people expressed its deepest soul precisely and definitively not more important than their syntax and grammar?

### 3.03 Correspondence in the Kleine Gemeinde

The actual letter correspondence among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia will now be examined. It is helpful to refer to the diary of Kleine Gemeinde teacher Abraham R. Friesen who resided in the Molotschna village of Lichtenau. The following are some typical entries in his diary pertaining to letter correspondence:

“Friday, November 6th, 1871. In the evening Anna was here. I want to write a letter to my parents in Borosenko. December 3rd. Received a letter from Ungers (brother-in-law from Borosenko) today. December 16th. H. Enns, Fischau, we and H. Warkentins were at our parents place in the evening. Ohm Enns read the letter which he had written to J. Wiebe in the Crimea. December 24th, Thursday. Peter Goossen, Lindenau, and Kornelius Goosen, Annafeld, were here and they brought letters along from D. Friesen and from our parents. March 3rd. In the evening we received letters from Annafeld and Rosenfeld. March 15th. Wrote a letter to the parents at Borosenko and brought it to Tiege as K. Reimers are moving there (Borosenko), as well, and they can take it along. September 3. (after a busy and active day) Wrote a letter at Ab. Enns to Ab. Krause, Steinfeld. September 13th Met Abraham Loewens of Gruenfeld, (at the market) and received 5 letters from Borosenko. October 13th. Brother-in-law Unger was a visitor at our place and left on Friday. He brought along letters from the parents and D. Friesens. December 23rd. Received letters through Franz Kroeker, Kleefeld, from the parents in which they urge us to move there, but — January 27th, 1872, I wrote out 5 wedding invitation letters for Joh. Penners. August 17th. Received letters from our parents and from Klaas Friesens and from Dietrich Friesens. August 19th. Sent letters to our parents and to D. Friesens.”

From the foregoing it can be seen that it was not uncommon for Abraham R. Friesen to receive and write up to a dozen letters in a month. The correspondence naturally tapers off during the busy seasons in the summer. A look at the diary of Diedrich S. Friesen, living in the Borosenko village of Rosenfeld reveals that he was considerably less active in his correspondence or at least in recording his correspondence. It would only be normal that the interest in letter writing would vary from one individual to another. Still others might strictly refuse to write anything at all.

Another indication of the prevalence of letter writing among the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia are the letters preserved in the collections of Aeltester Peter Toews. These cover the period from 1866 to 1875 and include several hundred letters from leaders in the Gemeinde as well as some laypeople. In addition the letter books maintained by Aeltester Toews show that his own correspondence was of similar proportions. The following are some typical entries in this letter book:

“Letter to Heinrich Enns, Fischau, November 28th, 1870. Letter to the Gemeinde, December 1870. Letter to Rev. Baerg, Crimea, February 9th, 1871. Letter to Abraham Klassen, January, 1871. Letter to Joh. Dueck, January 29th, 1871. Letter to Ohm Enns, Fischau, February 15th, 1871. Letter to Brother Klassen, February 22nd, 1871. Letter to Berdjansk

regarding the Menno Simons book, March 4th, 1871. Letter to Molotschna Gemeinde, March 1870. Letter to Abraham Friesen, March 11, 1871. Letter to Brother in the Molotschna, March 11, 1871. Letter to Peter Bearg, Annenfeld, March 18th, 1871. Pastoral letter March 22nd, 1871. Note to Rev. Klassen, Molotschna, March 31, 1871. Letter to a sister, May 8th, 1871. Letter May 19th, 1871. June 22nd, a letter to A. Friesen in Kleefeld, regarding the M. Simons book in Berdjansk. A letter to the Gemeinde in the Molotschna, July 26th, 1871. A letter to the Gemeinde in the Crimea, August 12th. A letter to Johan Hiebert, Alexanderwohl, August 13th. A letter to a sister in Kronsthal, August 24th. A certificate for Heinrich Wohlgemuth, in the Russian Language, September 6th. A letter to the Gemeinde in the Molotschna. September 2nd. A letter to Abram Friesen, September 9th. Pastoral letter, September 19th. A Petition to the Governor of the Jekatherienslavschen Province, in the Russian language. A letter to the brethren in the Crimea, October 23rd, 1871. Pastoral letter, November 11th, 1871. A letter to the Crimean Gemeinde, December 18th, 1871.”

The foregoing indicates that Aeltester Peter Toews wrote some 30 letters in one year which were related to the functioning of his Gemeinde and which he felt were worthy of preserving or noting in his letter book. In addition he undoubtedly had less important correspondence which he did not bother to record. A further look at his letter book also indicates the volume of the correspondence by Aeltester Toews increases dramatically as the matters pertaining to the 1874-1875 emigration become more pressing.

In any event, one notes that a considerable quantity of written materials must have been created by this activity as there were 200 families in the Kleine Gemeinde by the 1860s. e.g. Someone like teacher Peter L. Dueck is said to have had 32 letter books<sup>9</sup>. If even a small number were as prolific as Aeltester Peter Toews and teacher Abraham R. Friesen, and even if only a fraction of this correspondence had been preserved, it would be impossible to review in any detail the material which is still extant. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an exposition of a number of letters written in the Gemeinde which are felt to be typical of the mass of this correspondence. These letters will be selected to indicate the general concerns of the rank and file Kleine Gemeinder. Some of the authors of the letters selected are individuals who are significant to the Kleine Gemeinde story but who are otherwise not directly featured in this book<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.04 Isaac Loewen (1787-1873)

The first correspondent to be considered is the venerable and beloved forefather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) whose descendants are listed by his great-grandson Dr. Solomon Loewen in the genealogical work **Isaac Loewen and his descendants**. Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) had been elected as a deacon in the Kleine Gemeinde in 1837, but was removed from his office in 1848. Nevertheless he remained a true and loyal member of his church and was held in the highest respect by his peers as well as the leadership of the Gemeinde. He was representative of a group of esteemed elders in his denomination who were to die in the last several years before the emigration to America. These Ohms included men such as Rev. Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Johan Toews (1793-1873), Jakob Toews (1805-1873), and Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872).

A number of the writings of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) are still extant. It has already been mentioned that his writings reveal a keen intelligence and a high degree of articulation and literacy. The letter written by Loewen chosen for this book was written in 1865 and is addressed to Peter Toews, later Aeltester, who was living on the Markuslandt settlement at the time. This epistle is an excellent example of the high form of letter writing which was achieved among the Kleine Gemeinde.

“Beloved son-in-law Peter Toews, together with your beloved wife. Yes, my beloved children in the Lord. It is my heartfelt wish that these humble and simple lines directed to you might be received into your hands in the best of physical and spiritual well being. Praise be to the Lord, I am presently again more or less well.

“On the 25th of this month November, I received your worthy writing from your father, who together with your mother and the two small boys came from Prangenu and arrived at Franz Kroekers in Kleefeld where your letter was personally handed to me. They had also been in Mariawohl as Mrs. Jakob Friesen was bedridden with illness.

Now, my beloved in-law. Indeed, all of you my precious children. You have reminded me that I have not kept my promise to visit you during the summer. I do not recollect having said this myself, and yet, it is not that the desire to do so was lacking. Perhaps it was said by me on the occasion when both of you beloved, were travelling from your home in Andreasfeld to visit your parents in Blumstein, and stopped in where I was residing and took me along to your parents, my children. From this I perceived in you, that you had a childlike love for me, as I also love you, and have a good confidence in you, which I have also had for all my grandchildren until now.

My coming there this summer has not occurred and as I am to be truthful, I must admit that

this omission may find its cause in my indolence and in the chilling of love. I sometimes reflect on what Paul reminds us of and says that we are to “call to remembrance the former days” at which time the Lord made manifest the truth to me, as well as to many others, through the Holy Ghost of love and compassion. Indeed, I am mindful of the love of God and His holy word and the brethren which motivated us at the time, so that neither miserable roads nor inclement weather was able to keep us from attending the worship services and visiting the brethren.

I would further legitimize my exoneration regarding not coming there, by adding that many friends visited you this summer, so that from what one heard, it seemed as if guests were visiting at your place almost every day, so that I frequently thought to myself that it might also be too difficult for you for me to visit you at the present time. With the plentiful work in your settlement and your own demands on your time, it might be very inconvenient, and if I had driven along with friends who wanted to remain in your area for a good length of time, in order to be of some help to you there, then I would only have been a burden and difficulty for you. For I have no energy left to be of any assistance to you, even though such work might be most essential to you.

Yes, I must confess anew, that if only I was immersed in all the gifts of pure love which are of God and which surpass all the wonderful virtues in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13. For then I would have given little heed to these matters with which I have excused myself, as stated above, since love makes every burden easy and thinks no evil.

Now my beloved children, I will relate to you how an opportunity for a journey to the Crimea overtook me by surprise. I had never once thought of traveling to the Crimea, even though there is always much talk of the Crimean brothers and friends, and even though I have personally read many letters from which their good-heartedness was manifest. Shortly before our departure Ohm Johan Friesen related to me in Mariawohl at Jakob Friesens that Aron Schellenberg wanted to be wedded with the daughter of Abram Wall, and that they had summoned him (Ohm Johan Friesen) to marry them. They had also invited a number of people for the wedding and as these guests had made plans to visit there as well there was no exclusion. But I still had no thoughts of a journey to the Crimea.

The following Sunday, worship service was in Tiege, and as I arrived there Ohm Abram Friesen inquired of me as to whether Cornelius Enns had been to see me, for the previous day they had discussed between themselves that Enns was to come to me to summon me for the trip to the Crimea, as they needed one more traveling partner, and he was to see whether I would even want to come along. But Enns had not been to see me because of other circumstances. Abram Friesen and his wife planned to go and also Cornelius Enns, but now they very much wanted to have one more traveling companion.

Up to this point I still had no idea that I would travel to the Crimea. However both Abram Friesen and Cornelius Enns talked to me after the worship service and I decided on the spot that we would plan to depart in the early morning of the following Wednesday. This is also what occurred and thus it came to pass that I visited the friends in the Crimea, without me having considered it beforehand or having had previous intentions in that regard.

Thursday evening at around 10 o'clock we arrived in Annenfeld. Saturday the pair, Aron Schellenberg and Anna, the daughter of Abram Wall, held their engagement celebration (Verlobnis) and Sunday we had worship service there. After dinner we, Abram Friesen and Jakob Wiebe with their wives and myself, drove to Krasbosar which was situated some 4 werst from Annenfeld from where we returned on Monday. On Tuesday the above mentioned bridal couple was married. There were three families present from a village called Schwesterthal which lay some 17 werst distant from Annenfeld, among whom the minister Peter Bearg was also found and by whom Ohm Abram Friesen was now summoned to come to preach. The following day, Wednesday, we drove to Schwesterthal for worship services where there was a considerable assembly. On Thursday, Franz Janszen, the son-in-law of Abram Wall, and his daughter, the wife of Janszen, were received into the Gemeinde in the presence of a small group, consisting of our people and a few others from the villages.

Accordingly, we had sojourned in Annenfeld for seven days. On Thursday after vesper at around 5 o'clock, we departed from there and on Sunday at 2:30 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived in Blumstein at Cornelius Ennses. Thus our Crimean expedition had taken up 11 days. Two days to drive there, two days return, and we were there for seven days. We always had beautiful weather and I enjoyed good health. Cold and rainy fall weather set in the moment we came home. Now I have briefly related of the manner in which I came to a journey to the Crimea.

I will not deny that the love which I have perceived in the good-minded letters which the Crimean brothers and sisters have written to the brethren and Gemeinde here, will also have contributed somewhat to my inspiration to visit them. Without reflecting adversely in any way on any of my children, I must say that I find myself so empty and unskilled for piety, yes, full of misdeeds and udderboils from the soles of my feet to the top of my head, so that nothing good is to be found in me. I would have to cast down my eyes with the tax collector, and say, “Lord, be merciful unto me poor sinner”.

Oh, I must confess that I feel so insignificant compared to the Crimean brethren and sisters who are in their fresh zeal, which they evidence to us brothers and the Gemeinde through the moving of the heavenly power which they have received in their hearts, and through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit the truth has been revealed to them. As stated I must admit that in this the Crimean Brethren serve me as a remembrance and inspiration to think of that for which Peter also admonishes us, to

think of the day on which the Lord through the holy ghost revealed his holy truth to me, and gave me knowledge and the love of God, the beloved brethren and his Gemeinde.

On the contrary, when I think back, I find that I was so completely passive and indifferent in love, and so completely incapable of any piety, that I must join with the words of lament of the well-known poet from song number 484 (Gesangbuch): 'Ich musz ob Tragheit klagen, wo ich sie laenger wird' alhier noch muessen tragen, so drueckt sie mich zur Erd. Ich mein', es soll sich legen, doch bleib ich, wie ich bin, ganz los in Tugenwegen, noch leider immerhin'.

You also mentioned beloved in-law, if I understand you correctly you mean it in general, that with great concern you long for the trust misused by you, instead of meaning that you had seen it reinstated. You say this doubtfully, but that it could still occur. Through what the continued misused trust has arisen by you, and what grounds the same had, remains unfamiliar to me.

Your 'Small' Gemeinde there, as you call it, is only a small part of our so-called Kleine Gemeinde (small flock). But it did in fact constitute your election. However, the impurity which has arisen in some among your brethren there, had also come to germinate and take root with us here, and after a time it has come to bloom in one and the other among you there, and finally it has produced fruit in several. But before it came to be completely ripe it has been crushed, so that it did not pour out its seeds, through the watchfulness of the true and concerned Gardener, who has been commissioned for that purpose, e.g. by the Lord of the vineyard.

Oh, beloved children. I bid you from my heart that you do not completely throw away the faith, and yet beloved in-law, as I understand your letter, you still have a positive anticipation of winning more confidence in the future, which I would also expect for you and wish for you, for love thinks no evil, and is rather overflowing with a hope of eternal life, and believes all of the promises of God. Beloved in-law, you also write that I am to forgive you if you were to err. Oh, only too gladly would I forgive you, for I experience grace in humility to strive to capture the impulses in me.

Now let us praise the Lord for His goodness, and that we have not yet completely expired, and that His compassion continues without limit. From which we can perceive that the Lord still reigns over us with His hand of grace, and that the good and faithful head of the house who knows everything in our hearts will have heard all our prayers, and that He will have inspired and sent faithful men after His own heart, as true workers in the vineyard of the Lord, His Gemeinde, for which you so much yearn from the heart, for the building up of His small flock, to lead and to pasture with teaching and living, also to set a good example for us with good conduct. The one who is called to His service to preach the Holy Word which has been entrusted to him by the Spirit of Truth, should not overlook the gifts which have been entrusted to him by the Lord and should invest the pound with interest with all earnestness and zeal, by admonishing, threatening, and by punishing, with all patience and teachings. For which purpose the compassionate Father wishes to endow him with power, wisdom and the gifts of the spirit, and to stand by his side with all might and comfort, so that he can carry out the requirements of his office in truth and in love with a joyful and undaunted courage (note - a line is missing and a substitute has been inserted by supposition, translator).

I need to be much more thankful inwardly, for these your remembrances, from which I perceive that the both of you, so beloved, do think of me, and which I believe is done by you out of love. Ah, when I think how precious the treasure of love, I frequently become anxious, for without love all the outwardly evident piety is nothing. How will I come by the same? Yes, love is so exceptionally priceless in value that even the most wonderful deeds of virtue are as nothing without love. 1 Corinthians 13.

Peter Peters says: "God himself must pour out love through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, who know themselves in their nothingness and poverty. For He considers it to be and says, that there is no greater harm which mankind can incur than conceit, self-righteousness, self-praise, ostentatiousness, which could well be called the sequestered door, or the dividing wall, through which the love of God is done away with, so that the same will have no place within us nor obtain entry. The love of God is not perishable and will endure unto eternal life."

Yes, my beloved, do remember me in your prayers, for I would gladly be free and rid of the above-mentioned evils, which continue to cling to me and make me slothful. After all, love is free of vices and evil thoughts, malice, gossip, and backbiting. Love is also free of all guile and falsehoods, and whatever else is contrary to the Holy Will of God. Which is why I entreat my God, through our Lord Jesus Christ that He might grant me strength through the grace of the Lord for the salvation of the souls which have been entrusted to me.

In addition to the foregoing, it is my wish and the prayer of the Lord for His servants, that through the grace of the Savior and through His help, His servants might lead fearlessly, in truth and full of love, for the glory of the Lord and His honour, in eternal bliss, and that all the souls entrusted in your care might give heed to you as you have presented the word of God to them. Also that you might do it with joy and not with groaning.

I do not know of much to report to you of our temporal circumstances, except that since the brotherhood meeting I am still staying with my children, and have myself transported from one to the other. I have also frequently stayed with the widow of Heinrich Loewen, and have on occasion resided with her for one, two, and also three weeks after the other, sometimes also longer. She is still unable to make a decision from among all her suitors who have proposed to her in marriage, to select one of them. According to what she says, she still frequently dreams of her husband. She

is dearly fond of her little daughter called Maria, who very much resembles her father, which also helps to remind her of her former husband.

In conclusion I bid you, my beloved children, to receive and accept this inferior, simple and imperfect writing in love, just as I have also written it in love. Not so as to weaken love, but rather to strengthen and encourage even though it is done in weakness.

Yes my beloved. I ask that you do pardon and forgive me everything in which I might have been too insensitive to you. Be it in this writing or in something else in which I might have caused you sorrow, for my failings are manifold. Although I know that the beloved Apostle says that all things are to be done in love, something might still have unintentionally occurred without my having become aware of it. Good intentions I have in abundance, but to do what is good I do not find in myself.

Now beloved children, receive a heartfelt greeting from me. I wish you health physically as well as spiritually, and a thriving well-being. I am currently quite well, to the Lord be praise and thanks. Do please also greet in-law Corn. Toews together with his beloved wife, and wish them both a peace-loving nature and a heartfelt love between each other, also an undaunted courage to carry the cross which the Lord has laid upon them, and a heart full of trust, patience, and comfort; that the Lord will not impose in excess of their capability, nor leave or forsake them. Do also greet in-law Cornelius Goossen and his wife from me. I also wish them a definite prosperity from the heart. It has been related to me that in-law Goossen is to have been at Peter Goossens this fall.

Do also greet your beloved parents from me. Your aged father, my bosom friend, with whom I have stood in loving harmony, although in weakness, since the time of our youth. I am always reminded of him when I walk by his former property in Fischau. I also give thanks for the greeting to me, from your father, which I read in his letter to in-law Plett, and from which I could perceive that he still thought of me. . . . I suppose that our friendship will soon come to an end, as we are both fragile, old and aged. We need not place much expectation that either of us will be here much longer. But the day and the hour is not revealed to us, as this is known to the Lord alone.

Do also greet the aged in-law Jakob Toews and his beloved wife, from me. I suppose that I need no longer expect a visit from him. Do also greet his two sons-in-law together with their wives from me. Might the Lord stand at the side of both of these beloved men in their difficult service with comfort, power and strength and impart to them as much aid and support as they shall find necessary for the duration of their lives. So that they would not become faint-hearted nor weary for so long as they live.

Do also greet from me the aged and elderly Isaac Harms together with his beloved wife. I am indeed sorry that I was not home when they were here to visit me. He is almost the only one who still visits me a little, from among those who have moved there from here.

Now precious children, yes, beloved friends in the Lord. I add in closing that as far as I am concerned our correspondence one to the other, as we live so far distant from each other, shall serve only and alone for the purpose of building love and to grow and increase in love, and to strengthen ourselves to grow in faith, although in great weakness. And to continually become more immersed in love which is also your intention. Oh, that we might maintain a good courage and have repentance of our sins and sanctify our time in the exercise of prayer. Oh, that God would grant us the spirit of prayer, that our prayers might be fervent, and a firm faith in Christ. Then we shall avoid and have victory over the vain emptiness of the world, and will come to possess the piety of love in us. Might the Lord of compassion through his only Son help us for this. And now, together with a greeting, I bid you to remember me in prayer." "Is. Loewen".

### 3.05 Rev. Jacob A. Wiebe (1837-1921)

The next letter correspondent noted here is Jakob A. Wiebe (1837-1921) who had moved to the Crimea in the 1850s when settlement opportunities there became available shortly after the end of the Crimean War. Here Wiebe was converted to God and became a member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Crimea. He rose quickly as an influential leader being elected as a minister of the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde in 1867. Only two years later Wiebe's stature in the Kleine Gemeinde had risen to the point that he was elected as Aeltester of the Crimean Gemeinde thus surpassing his co-minister Peter Bearg who was considerably senior to him. Later in 1869 Wiebe, together with the majority of his Crimean Kleine Gemeinde seceded and formed what they called the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. The letter chosen for this collection is written in 1866 and clearly indicates that at this time Wiebe was a true believer in the gospel and an influential member of the Kleine Gemeinde.

"Annenfeld, December 6th, 1866

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

A great love compels me so that I cannot omit to write something to you. Firstly, I wish you the words of Peter when he says. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". 1 Peter 1, 3. So my beloved Goossen, how are things or how is everything going? Have you also been able to grasp a little more courage? It is better to seize new courage and be comforted and carry on afresh for the Lord will be with you and has already been with you for

a long time. As one of the most lowly fellow pilgrims, I will also be helpful to you to the full extent of my capabilities. Over all to help set the inwardly in the light, and to call right what is right, and to leave in darkness what is dark. For the spirit of God gives witness of our spirit that we are the children of God. Yes, the spirit leads us in all truth, according to John 1,13.

Therefore my beloved Ohm Goossen, do not be too discouraged, for the Lord is near to those who are of a contrite heart. Indeed, I vividly recall how crushed your spirit was at the time that the Lord summoned you out from among the people and said, "Do you love me? Then pasture my lambs." This was certainly a most difficult commission, but these lambs are tame and do not bite. Rather they gladly hear the voice of the shepherd and without investigation follow wherever the leader goeth. I believe that you can comfort yourself hereby. For as far as I know these are all true-hearted and honest brethren whom the Lord has assembled together in these last times. Therefore consider carefully the words in Timothy 3, 13 - "For the servants who have used their office will purchase to themselves a good degree, and a great joy in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Also comfort yourself further with the words of the poet, number 278 (Gesangbuch), and do not be discouraged.

I am writing exactly the way I feel. Do believe me, beloved Ohm Goossen, that I have had great difficulties regarding you. I frequently recall your tears when you were so distressed and looked at me so downheartedly. This very much strengthened me in my weakness, and therefore I would advise that you blow the trumpet loud so that those will awake who are sleeping. For everyone must awaken and arise from the dead, otherwise Christ cannot enlighten them. Oh how great is the grace and compassion which the Lord has again permitted to continue over us miserable sinners. Yes, we must rightly say, "Lord, I am not worthy of all the compassion which you have allowed to continue for me poor sinner." As if united we walked the broad road and followed our evil flesh which we now, however, want to crucify together with all our lusts and desires, as we are admonished to do by the beloved apostle.

My beloved brothers and sisters, should I have erred towards you in some way, I do beg you to forgive me in everything. I am still glad from the heart that we did visit you, for it did help very much in the well-being of my soul. Now my beloved Ohm Goossen, I had in mind to write you at far greater length but as the opportunity crept up so quickly I have had to discount my good intentions. I bid that you accept this in love from me.

Yesterday, that is the 7th, we received the letters from Ohm Enns and Ohm Toews, as well as from Isaac Loewen, Lindenau. We have read the same with many tears, especially the aged Ohm Isaac has sent us such a fine memorial, for which I certainly return many thanks. My beloved Ohm Isaac, although in great weakness, I will definitely attempt to emulate that towards which you have admonished us.

You my beloved Ohm Peter Toews; you have given us such joy and encouragement by your writing. I thank you many times for your love. Please accept this letter unto yourself as if I had written it to you. Also please forgive me, as you have requested a writing from me which I promised you, and which is also my intention to write you at much greater length, but it will not be possible on this occasion. Therefore comfort yourself with everything which returns to you. Greetings to your beloved wife and parents and John, together with all the brethren and friends. Also you Ohm Enns receive a heartfelt greeting from myself and my beloved wife. Also you beloved Hiebert, A.K., J. Pe., H. Fr., P. D. Yes, all my beloved brothers and sisters. In closing I wish you all Isaiah 40, 11.

"Jakob and Justina Wiebe"

Please write us as soon as possible. Would anyone be coming here shortly? I bid that you also greet Kornelsen, and the beloved Ohm Eidse and his children. The news from Ohm Johan Friesen always makes us more certain. Therefore do not be discouraged. Ohm Martin Friesen. Your trust in God is built on solid rock, and please receive greetings from us.

### 3.06 Peter Bearg

Peter Bearg (1817-1901) was a minister of the Molotschna Grosze Flemish Gemeinde who had moved to the village of Schwesterthal in the Crimea. Here he joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and became the leading minister of the congregation in the Crimea. Bearg was especially important because he became the leading minister of the East Reserve Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1882. The present letter indicates that in 1867 his views on edification were similar to the views of others in the Kleine Gemeinde at the time. The letter itself is written to Aeltester Peter Toews, in Blumenhof, Borosenko, shortly after his election as a minister in 1866. In the letter Bearg encourages and admonishes Toews in the performance on his new office. It might be noted that towards the end of the letter Rev. Bearg refers to those disguised as the "angel of light" which is an unmistakable reference to the separatist pietists who were proselytizing among the Mennonites in Russia at the time. Here follows the letter by Rev. Peter Bearg:

Please do deliver this to Peter Toews in Borosenko. May the grace, compassion, and peace from God the Father multiply in you and in all believers in Jesus Christ. Yes, he wishes to strengthen and lead us in all truth, so that we may live out our once accepted faith in our deeds and good works, and that we might be able to continue in our faith until the end of our days. This we wish to you and all of us from the bottom of our hearts. Amen.

To the beloved Ohm Peter Toews in Borosenko, and also to the entire Gemeinde, yes, to all

the beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. You have probably been hoping for a writing for some time already, which you have not received until now. I must fault myself for being so barren and my conscience frequently convicts me in that regard. Because of the love which I have towards you I cannot do otherwise but to write and to share some spiritual gifts with you, and to strengthen you so that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me, Romans 1: 11-12, namely, when we seek to admonish and comfort ourselves through writing. For as you have noted, our coming together may not come to pass.

Oh beloved, if we consider the comforting words which our beloved Savior speaks in John 14: 16-17, "And I pray of the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you eternally. The Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive". Oh, we have such a gracious advocate whom the father has given for us so that we would not go lost if we keep his commandments and that his commandments are not grievous, 1 John 5: 3. So then, the Lord Jesus has not imposed anything hard on us, as he says, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light".

Behold, the Lord Jesus has made the burden so easy for us mortals. We may eat and drink whatever we wish, for the Saviour says, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth man", Matthew 15:11. We are also allowed to live out our faith so that we enjoy much freedom especially in these last afflicted times as no constraints have so far been imposed upon our conscience. The holy apostle Paul admonishes us so sincerely when he says, "But you beloved Brethren, ye have been called into liberty; only see to it, that ye do not use liberty to give room to the flesh, rather in love serve one another", Galatians 5:13. O indeed, we have much to see to that we do not give liberty to the flesh, for the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that we would, verses 17-22, but the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

Yes, beloved, I wish that in truth and in deed you might seek to emulate the referenced verses which the holy Paul has recorded for our instruction, and that you would allow the fruits of the Spirit to shine forth from you in your entire life and conduct. By so doing you will illuminate and lead the way in many respects for your newly elected ministers (Lehrer). Do not disparage their youth but rather come to their aid in all circumstances, demonstrate yourself as obedient components of Christ in the Gemeinde of the Lord, that you walk therein as is becoming to the calling to which you have been chosen. See to it beloved brother, that there not be anyone among you who has an evil unbelieving heart, who departs from the living God; rather exhort one another daily, while it is still today. lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sins. Hebrews 3:12-13.

O yes beloved brothers and sisters. I have experienced how much struggle it has involved and still requires in order that I am to be an example in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith and in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12. Indeed, when I consider that I am to admonish and instruct others and then look upon myself, how I am full of sin and vice, yes, there is nothing healthy to be found in my body from the soles of my feet up to my head, so that I am sometimes ensnared into passivity by exhaustion. When I consider that I am to admonish and instruct heads that are already grey, I have found this to be especially hard upon my heart. Like one who was very heavily loaded and then is still to drive up unto a very high mountain, but for the will of the Lord we must do so.

Oh beloved Ohm Toews, I do believe that your experiences will not be that much different from mine, when you are to admonish and instruct heads which have already turned gray, and that you will also find this to be difficult. But in order that the commandments and prohibitions of the Lord be accomplished it cannot be any other way, for no Gemeinde can exist without admonishment and chastising. But beloved! As has already been said, you can come to their aid in many matters. The holy apostle Paul admonishes us so lovingly when he says, "Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Colossians 3:12-13.

Oh beloved! I am in the firm expectation that you will conduct yourself in a respectful manner in all matters; for when we were assembled together at the place of Ohm Enns, and the election was being held, I myself had to acknowledge that an impression was being made with you and with us, and yes, with everyone; that it could not be otherwise but that we were together in one spirit, and in one house. Oh, that together with the poet we might reflect in prayer and supplication, "Wie schoen und lieblich sieht es aus, wenn brueder sind beisammen, eintrachtiglich in einer Haus, und stehn in Liebes Flammen, wenn sie im Geist zusammen stehn, zu Gott in einen Sinne flehn, und holten an mit beten".

If only we would remain steadfast in prayer and in the true fear of God, in the conduct of our lives and in taking the cross upon ourselves daily; Yes, to sincerely seek to follow in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our thoughts and conceptions are always to be directed upwards in all our activities and calling in this earthly life, so that we can say together with Paul that our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philipians 3:20. Oh, how far we frequently fall short in this that we often have our thoughts directed to the temporal. This I know especially well of myself, so that I must frequently sigh and lament with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And I must even now groan with the poet, "Der Suende Menge drueckt mich sehr, mein Fehler mich verdrieszen, wenn, sich mein

Herz die Rechnung macht, recht Fromm zu sein eh es vollbracht, werd ich schon hin geriszen".

Oh beloved Ohm Toews, if we dispose and conduct ourselves according to the commandments and will of the Lord and also in the manner in which the holy Paul has prescribed for us, the words which the prophet Daniel has recorded in chapter 12:3, can serve us as a comfort in that he says, "But the teacher (Lehrer) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and eternally". We have much to struggle and to battle before we will attain the jewel, namely the heavenly Jerusalem.

The ministry is subjected to so many temptations and therefore I pray for your wife that she might have the compassion of the Lord so that she will come to your aid in your service, namely, that she might comfort you when situations arise through which temptations come your way. Also in accordance with the teaching of Paul that, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. But rather as becometh women professing Godliness, with their good works." And in chapter 3:11 the apostle says, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things". Indeed if you will come to greet your husband with all good works you shall acquire a favourable recognition for yourself and "elect for the best part" together with Maria. Luke 10:42.

Oh beloved. I am of the firm hope that you will conduct yourself in such a manner that the people of the world will see your good works and then say "My, what a righteous people these are, and how equitable are their customs, so that they would also praise their father in heaven". Yes, and if we could always conduct ourselves with respect to our neighbours, with enemy as well as friend, so that they cannot honestly say anything evil about us. Rather that if they should slander us, that we may always comfort ourselves that it has occurred for the sake of the will of God and for the sake of truth. For the Lord Jesus says, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the son of man's sake". In addition he says, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you". Luke 6: 22 and 26.

Therefore it can clearly be understood from what the Lord Jesus said that it is not beneficial for the person to be honoured, loved, and well spoken about by everyone. For everyone, who enters into the new birth and who seeks in all earnestness to follow in the ways of the Lord Jesus, will experience for themselves that the people of the world will no longer have love for them. Sirach says: "All flesh consorteth according to kind, and a man will cleave to his like," Sirach chapter 13. Paul says, "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot", 1 Peter 4:4. Oh beloved, we have so many enemies about us, yes, spiritually as well as physically, whom we must repeatedly encounter. David says "that the enemy strides and the godless press about as they wish to show me their clever malice and are very hateful against me. Oh God, be merciful unto me, for they hiss upon me, and are in strife daily and frighten me." Psalm chapter 55 and 56.

Oh yes, we have good reason to take heed, never ceasing to watch and pray that we be not overcome. For we are presently living in an extremely dangerous time where the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. For this purpose he uses the children of men who torment us that as sinners we are to go the way of the flesh, they entice us through arrogance, pride, and sin; and those who blindly assemble themselves thereto, he allows to be forsaken in the end. Oh, thereby he seeks to strike down our soul, and to precipitate our ruin. Nevertheless the most wicked enemy is our own flesh and blood, which seeks to bring us into certainty and also wishes to allow itself to indulge in this, that, and the other. But we must crucify our flesh together with our lusts and desires, in order that we do not forfeit the eternal bliss, as so much is dependent on salvation. If the soul should go lost then everything is lost, and then we have nothing more to hope for.

Nevertheless beloved, when we consider the words which the Lord Jesus says so compassionately in Luke chapter 18:7-8, "And shall God not redeem his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I say unto you that he will save them in an instant!" O the Lord is still merciful unto us poor miserable sinners and wishes to save us, if only our resolve is true and sincere and we seek him with all earnestness. If we seek him from the heart he will allow himself to be found by us, for he has never yet allowed anyone to seek him in vain who has honestly sought to find him. But we must seek him in the proper place where God is to be found for God wishes to be sought for and found in lowliness, no one has yet found him anywhere else. The Lord Jesus himself was born in a cattle barn, therefore no human can find him except it be, as already stated, in humility.

In conclusion we greet you all with the kiss of love, and wish that my imperfect writing might find you physically well and particularly regarding the soul, that it might be well. That is my greatest wish. According to the flesh we are, thanks be to God, relatively well; and also hope regarding the soul, respecting which changes can occur as a poet says, "Es wechselt mit mir oft, bald meine Seel hofft, bald fuerchtet sie das verderben." Nevertheless we are of the firm hope that on that day the Lord will not deal with us according to what we deserve.

Oh beloved brothers and sisters do remember us in your prayers, as we for our part, although in great weakness, also want to remember you in our prayers. We greet you, Martin Klassens, and Jakob Toewses, and especially Ohm Peter Toewses, as well as all our other brothers and sisters in the Lord. I add as my wish for you the greeting of Paul, "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord



Jesus Christ, in sincerity. Amen.” Do forgive my imperfect writing for it has been done in love.  
“Peter Bearg” January 8th, 1867.  
Your humble fellow pilgrim to eternity. Amen, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### 3.07 Heinrich Enns

Another writer to be considered is Heinrich Enns (1807-1881) who served as the fourth Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from 1866-1868. Heinrich Enns was a gifted and capable leader who has been credited as being the drive behind the book publication effort of the Kleine Gemeinde in the 1860s. He was married three times and lived in his paternal village of Fischau where he farmed. This letter to Rev. Peter Toews was written during Enns' period in office as Aeltester.

“Firstly a friendly greeting; March 22nd, 1867  
Beloved fellow servant and brother in the Lord. Paul said, my beloved son Timothy. In my weakness I state further with him “Grace, compassion, peace from God the father, and Jesus Christ our Lord.” I thank God, whom I have served with pure conscience since the time of my youth, that without ceasing, I consider your matters in my prayers day and night.

Yes, beloved. With a few hurried words I want to pour out to you my wounded and sorrowful heart. It seems as if the struggle is always becoming heavier and harder, which you and yes, also the other brethren, will perceive from the enclosed letter which is written to Klassen and Penner in Prangenu. I hope to persevere firmly in the same with the help of God. At the last brotherhood meeting, where Johan Goossen and your father were also present, I became aware of additional matters. These dealings later awakened much grief within me in my weakness, because of which I later wrote to him. If it is the will of God, we hope to begin to deal further with the matter at the brotherhood meeting to be held in Alexanderwohl this coming Sunday.

Alas, beloved brothers and sisters. A heartfelt love compels me to refer to the epistle of Paul to the Colossians, for our consideration and for our strengthening and admonition, when he says, “Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving; With all praying for us, that God open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest as I ought to speak, Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”. Chapter 4.

May the Lord of Peace, give you peace in everything and in every which way. The Lord be with you all. Should suitable occasion arise, then do what you consider advisable also for Friedrichsthal, or if you, beloved fellow servant could drive there it would be even better, or one of the other brethren. From your brother who loves you dearly. Heinrich Enns. Fischau, the 22nd of March, 1867.

I also enclose a letter from the Crimean Wiebes. Have you not yourself recently had a similar visit with him? But it just occurred to me that I do not have the letter at home just at the moment and so I cannot send it along, and as I cannot send the letter along I will make you a summary thereof. He writes first of all that he will have to beg our pardon, but that he had done so out of the deepest love, and that he will not teach the same and instead will have to hold his hand over his mouth. It has become a deep concern for him that he has had to hear that we have not been of one mind and soul. He writes that he is in complete agreement with me regarding the head-covering of the women folk. He has also given many references with respect to the baptism, that it is completely unnecessary to be rebaptized. He has written a complete page. The Spirit had inspired him and was unable to stifle him. We are only to retain the good which he has written. He also wrote that we are to send the letter to your beloved brother in Tiege, which I sent there yesterday along with Johan Esau. I will see to it that it gets to you later. Or possibly your own which is presently perhaps in Hierschau or Waldheim.

As I have written so quickly, I so very lowly, beg you to receive everything from me in love.

### 3.08 Abraham Klassen (1828-1906)

Abraham Klassen (1828-1906), of the village of Prangenu, Molotschna, joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1866. In 1869 he was elected as a minister of the Molotschna congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde. Like Rev. Peter Bearg he was also a convert to the Kleine Gemeinde. In 1874, he emigrated to Manitoba from where he moved to Kansas in 1875.<sup>10</sup> His letter is written to Peter Toews in Borosenko apparently shortly after he and his family had visited there. In his letter he makes unmistakable allusion to the effects of the separatist pietist movement on the Russian Mennonites and also briefly admonishes Toews on the essentials of the faith.

“Letter by Abraham Klassen, Prangenu January 30th, 1869.  
Beloved siblings in Christ:

I would long ago have reported something to you of my journey home, but as I had no opportunity it was not possible. The present opportunity also seems so wearisome, but love compels me to make a brief report. Thanks be to God, we arrived at home on Wednesday evening, where we found our own quite well, except for the little Diedrich who had a large boil under his left arm and became very sick. It is now considerably improved. But matters with respect to the state of our souls

are still very miserable. Please do not forget us in your prayers, for I believe that during our being there you will have perceived very well how matters were in our family. I request again that you come to our aid in prayer.

Beloved brothers and sisters, how needful it is of us during the present dangerous times, to bind ourselves ever nearer to God, for in his Word the Lord says that he will send a hunger into the land. I firmly believe that we already are in this time, for much is spoken from the Word of God and there is a great alarm among the people. It also happens that one reasons with such persons, and then it occurs to me that we are in the perilous time. That is to say, with respect to the state of the soul as never before, so that it is necessary to always give greater regard to the status of our soul.

If only we might continually be more stimulated to love and good works, which is necessary as the Lord says in his own words, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." My beloved, I am sure that we do not wish to abate in prayer and supplication so that we may also call upon the so very comforting words with which the apostle John cries out. 1 John 3:1-10. Please read these verses. This is important because the heavenly Father gladly wishes to grant us the conviction that we are pardoned sinners, so that we can await the approaching hour of salvation with a fervent longing. At the time that Christ poured out his blood on the cross for us lost humanity, enough blood was shed for all our sins. This was the ransom money which released us from the eternal curse. But we must come to him in a living faith; If we wish to comfort ourselves with this redemption we must also learn to perceive that we ourselves are not disposed to anything good. Our own will is impure and is completely unfit for the Kingdom of God. Without exception we must all make haste to him with a truly broken heart and a humble and contrite awareness of sins, and not to slacken until he has mercy on us, for he wishes to give us the conviction that we are his children. The Lord promises in his word that whosoever will truly receive Him with a living faith to them will He also grant the spirit who will lead them in all truth.

Further a few words to you as a beloved minister (Lehrer). I am not particularly concerned that your courage will have become faint in the time which has flown by since our visit. But I bid you that in the will of God you renew yourself afresh in order that you may watch over us, that is to say, over the flock which has been entrusted to you. In my weakness I have made up my mind not to forget you in my prayers. I encourage you with the words of Paul with which the apostle encourages his Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4, from the 12th verse to the end.

I also ask that you forgive me that I was not at your place longer, for the time simply elapsed too quickly for me, as my intentions were to be with you more. And you, beloved Mrs. Goossen (Goossche) if you still find yourself in this mortal body, may the Lord more and more endow you to quietly hold his hand. I will also remember you in prayer so that you might await the approaching hour of redemption with a living hope. I also ask that you greet your beloved parents and all our siblings (geschwister). Also H. Reimers. You, beloved Mrs. Reimer (Reimersche) you appeared to me to be so downhearted at the time when I was with you. But do be comforted, for Godly sorrow worketh a peaceful fear unto salvation. The Lord says in his word, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you life. Take my yoke upon you and come to learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find peace unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light". I bid that you receive this inarticulate writing in love, for it is written in haste. A heartfelt greeting to you all."

January 30th, 1869

Abraham Klassen

### 3.09 Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-1872)

The next letter correspondent is school teacher and minister Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-1872).'' Gerhard Goossen had been a teacher in the Molotschna school system for 17 years only taking up farming when he moved to the Borosenko Colony in the late 1860s. At the point of writing the letter in question here, he was still teaching in the Molotschna village of Lindenau.

"Beloved brethren Toews and Loewen:

Lindenau, December 13th, 1867.

When we took leave from each other in Feretschick, we managed to make it to the *Kabbe*, from where we left very early in the morning as was our custom. By 4 o'clock on Saturday we were in Melitopol where we fed for two hours. We then drove for home into the night arriving in Lindenau at 12 o'clock. The road from Melitopol to our place was almost in the same condition as it was when we were driving there. I suppose you did not come home for Sunday, but during Sunday?

I had the same experience this time as you brother Toews had one year ago when you were returning home from here. I found our small son Peter, who had already been sickly for a time when I left on my journey, deathly sick when I returned home. It seems as if he has improved somewhat by now, but the will of the Lord be done. His way is the best way. The other children and also my beloved wife were quite well. However, right now my wife is not very well. She has spent several nights nursing our son which may be at fault. Everyone is quite well at Loewens, where the grandfather is again exerting himself very much with reading and writing. He has written many long letters.

Now, how did you find matters when you returned home? How are things there with you? How is the matter with respect to which you carried such great concern and sorrow? I hope that the Lord will direct everything for the best, and will bless your true endeavours. He will soften all the hard hearts which still want to be softened. However in the end he gives those who harden themselves

over to a complete suffocation, and then more of the same; for they go the way of Cain, and fall into the error of Baalim and come into the uproar of Korah.

Early this morning I want to go to Fischau, and then drive to Halbstadt and Prischib together with my dear father. Should the *Concordances* already be bound I will send them to you immediately. If they are not yet ready you will have to wait a little longer. Brother Loewen, I will obtain one for you at the first opportunity. Worship service was held in Kleefeld this past Sunday, but I did not attend as the little Peter was still very sick. Brotherhood meeting was also held. Dear father mentioned that all matters stood fairly well, and we firmly hope that matters will always improve. Nevertheless man thinks but God directs. God will direct everything for the best for those who love him, and those who seek him, and those who emulate him in full earnestness and truth.

I must close for this time. Please accept these lines in love, and receive a heartfelt greeting from me and my beloved wife. Also greet all friends and brethren. The Lord be with us all. This is the heartfelt wish of your beloved friend and brother.  
"Gerhard Goossen"  
You had also intended to let me know as to whether there might be a place there suitable for us to move there."

### 3.10 Heinrich Reimer

Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876) was a successful Kleine Gemeinde farmer who was chosen to accompany Aeltester Peter Toews to meet with Governor-General Totleben in 1874. Heinrich Reimer came to an untimely death only a short year after having settled in the village of Blumenhof, Manitoba in 1875. The letter is written after the 1869 reconciliation of the Blumenhof Kleine Gemeinde with the majority of the "Friesens" Gemeinde for which Reimer gives God the glory. He also voices the same concerns already expressed in the preceding letters, namely, the danger and false allure of separatist pietism on the one hand and the ever constant battle against the flesh on the other. He admonishes that all efforts be made towards ever more total commitment to the cross of Christ.

"Alexanderkron the first day of August, 1869. Beloved Ohms, Brethren and sisters.

Firstly, I wish you the dear and worthy peace through Jesus Christ, our beloved Savior. Amen. Beloved Ohms, brothers and sisters. We wish to make all of you aware of our feelings of thankfulness and encouragement with respect to the reconciliation. Indeed, we are very thankful for the great love of our heavenly father which has again been experienced, and which our compassionate God bestows upon us very weak afflicted souls. Ah yes, I must confess that when, with the help of God, the resolution of peace was effected in Fischau, it moved me to tears. In my great weakness I had prayed to our beloved God many times, that he surely would want to inspire all of our hearts for love and for reconciliation, and that we grieving and scattered sheep would again come under one charge. Yes, I hope that all of us will have prayed to our heavenly father, "Lord, your will be done".

If it had not been the will of the Lord, how would the Ohms from the Crimea, the Aeltester Ja. Wiebe and Ohm Bearg, have made such a lengthy journey? And I have the assurance that the Ohms were of assistance for reconciliation to us afflicted souls through the incitement of the Holy Spirit. They also served us with baptism, the Lord's Supper, a love service and ministerial elections.

I repeat again, many thanks are returned to our beloved God and to you. Oh that the Lord would not be sorrowful regarding his lost sheep, but we must take fault if we fall into sin against our loving God. Certainly, our loving God does not wish that any should go lost, but rather that we return again and bid that he, the God of compassion, might once more forgive our sins out of grace.

Oh how can we sufficiently rejoice with heartfelt thanks that the compassionate God of grace is still ruling over us miserable sinners? We must consider this with a grateful disposition and say with the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah that, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness". Yes, so great that we may cry out and say with the king and prophet, "O Lord my God great are your wonders, and your grace which you have evidenced to us". There is nothing equal to Psalm 40. The prophet Isaiah speaks out and says, his counsel is wonderful and magnificently worketh all things. Our benevolent God has marvelously led us insignificant ones, as we have no substance to obtain peace of our own strength, if the loving God had not caused it.

Yes beloved Ohms and brothers and sisters, the matters which have gone so adversely for us through our dispersion, must be allowed to serve for our learning and warning for the future. I mean to say for example as Judas Maccabee said to the Jews, that they should not be provoked by these calamities, but that they should judge such punishments not to be for destruction, but rather as a chastening of our nation. And therefore he never completely withdraweth his mercy from us, and though he hath punished us with misfortune, yet doth he never forsake his people. II Maccabees 6. Similarly may the misfortune which we have had serve not only as a warning, but also an example, so that in the future we might live in greater fear of God and more carefully than we perhaps have done in the past and as Paul says "at all times to follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord". Hebrews 12.

Beloved Ohms and siblings. I find myself and my evil flesh to be so very weak when I think of the danger, how the devil is so everywhere present. Yes, he comes as an angel of light so that I

must cry together with the poet. "Mein Gott ich musz dir klagen, durch dieses Lied die Plagen, die oft mein Herze quaelte, das mir die guten triebe, die Froemmmigkeit und Liebe, bei fleisches schwachheit fehlt". I am sometimes very frightened that the evil enemy will lead us from the narrow path which Christ has walked before us. Therefore, it is my heartfelt plea that you would unite yourselves in your prayers with us very weak fellow pilgrims and pray to God for us, that the loving God might grant true faith and love to us sinners in these troubled times. For which I pray with the poet, "O pflanz in mir so deine Liebe, das nichts als Liebe mich belebt, auf das mein Geist durch heisse Triebe, an dir als einen Liebbling klebt".

I also wish to mention regarding our newly elected minister (Lehrer), Ohm Ab. Klassen, that he is very zealous in his service to teach us of the narrow way and to advise, which is also very essential. But I told him in love that he should not exert himself so much as it would weaken him, to which he replied that indeed his body was only weak. Therefore it is my plea that we might all wish to come to his aid in prayer to the Lord who can readily strengthen him. It is also my plea to you beloved Ohms that you would come to visit us as soon as possible.

I will now conclude this very insignificant writing. It is our wish that this little effort may come to comfort you in the best of health physically as well as spiritually. Physically we are quite well, many thanks be to God, but our spiritual condition is very very poor as stated above. But we must always express our concerns in prayer.

Now beloved Ohms and brothers and sisters, a heartfelt greeting to you from my beloved wife and myself and from the John Duecks. We remain your most subordinate and submitted brothers and sisters, and we say adieu, adieu, with a kiss of love. "Heinrich Reimers""

### 3.11 Heinrich Wiebe (1851-1876)

In 1872 Heinrich Wiebe was a young farmer in the Borosenko village of Rosenfeld. On January 20, 1873, he was elected as a deacon of the congregation centered in Blumenhof, Borosenko. He died an untimely death in a snowstorm near Blumenort, Manitoba in 1876. He was a capable and much loved leader among his people and his early death was a great shock and loss for the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba. This letter follows a pattern similar to the preceding epistles and consists largely of an admonishment and encouragement to his "brother" Peter Toews to prevail against all obstacles.

"Rosenfeld, January 2, 1872

Firstly I wish you the peace of God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Very beloved Ohm Toews, as I have been somewhat ill for a time and hear that you are confined to bed, I am driven by love to write you a short letter. Although I am not bedridden the temporal work is not being attended to. But in everything which the Lord imposes upon us we must carry his cross. After all the heavenly father only imposes loving chastisements upon us in order to maintain his children in love and in truth.

Beloved brother Toews. As your great concern respecting our Gemeinde is not unfamiliar to me, I will make an attempt to write something to you which might serve to strengthen your courage. But because of my inadequacy, I bid you not to receive it unfavourably from me. Although there is nothing good to be found in me, yet it is my comfort at all times that the Lord has given me the security of the rebirth and that purely through his grace and love. For we are saved solely through grace, if only we believe. But this not of ourselves, but only through the gift of God so that no one should boast. Ephesians 2. Oh yes, we continue to be in the time of grace so that a good many warriors of Christ may still join us on the narrow rocky path of this arduous pilgrim journey on the eve of the great day of judgement.

It just so happens that the passage by Paul occurs to me, "Therefore I bid you that ye weary not regarding my concern for you, which I suffer for you, which are to your honour". Which sorrow you also suffer for us; that the Lord may keep us and help us that we faint not. I pray that the concern which you have for us in the Lord enlighten us, and that many more of us perceive that the day of the Lord is nigh.

Oh beloved Toews, may the Lord grant you strength and courage to stand against the peaks of the mountains, for which we call upon our God at all times in our weakness; and how joyfully our beloved Jesus will come to approach us on that day, when we finally will all have overcome through the blood of the lamb. How warmly the beloved Saviour, who has sacrificed his precious life on the body of the cross for us, will come to greet us on that day and say, "Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". Oh who can sufficiently extol the goodness of the Lord and make it manifest as the babes. Therefore let us seize courage anew and by virtue of his goodness console ourselves with eternal life and hope. For who is our comfort and our strength if it be not our Lord Jesus. We are certain that you are zealous to make us partakers of the Lord Jesus Christ and his eternal Kingdom.

Therefore beloved brother Toews, yes all those who are appointed as stewards over our souls, I bid that you forgive my indolence, which I continue to evidence at all times, and also the lack of the fruits of the spirit which I am able to contribute to the day. For good intentions I have a plenty, but in the carrying out of the good, I am lacking. So that I must continually cry out with David,

“Lord, forgive also my hidden sins and remember me not for my mistakes, rather remember me in your great compassion and love”.

Oh yes, there is no other avenue here but to regard and gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the figurative serpent, just as the children of Israel were given no other medium to be healed from the sting of the physical serpent, but that they were to look upon the uprighted serpent in faith. Accordingly there can be no other medium for us but that we in our sickness look upon the cross of Jesus, lay down our torn wounds before him and submit to him.

Thus we can be comforted as we pass through the vale of time as the poet says, “Laszt uns den Weg durchs Thal der Zeit, Gebeugt und betend gehn, und auf die Krone nach dem Streit, mit Glaubensblicken sehn, dann wird uns jede Buerde leicht und jeder Tag bringt Heil, und ob uns Erd und Himmel weicht, bleibt Gott doch unser Theil, geht er mit uns kaempft er voran, was sagt denn unser Herz, sein Licht erleuchtet unsere Bahn, sein Trost vertreibt den Schmerz. Wird unser Fusz auch mued and (mat) mund, und unsere Auge feucht, Doch steht sein ewiger Friedensbund, ob Berg und Huegel weicht, und taglich stroemt uns neue Kraft aus seiner fuelle zu. Sein Geist der alles lehrt und schafft, bringt uns doch einst zur Ruh. Nur unverzagt, wir habens gut, bei unserm lieben Herrn, und opfern Leben Hab und Gut, und dienen ihm so gern. Zwar wird uns Benge doch getrieben auf dunkelheit folgt Licht, ist auch der Feinde Schaar erbost, sie schadet uns doch nich, wo bleibt die Furcht der Mitternacht, die unsere Seele schrecht, wenn uns mit ihrer Gottesmacht der der Liebe Fluegel deckt”.

Cry aloud you guardians of Zion, and lift up your voices in the house of Israel, and allow those who are hungry to find your heart, and those who are miserable to satisfy their soul; then shall the light arise in obscurity, and your darkness shall be as the midday; and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy your soul in the drought; and strengthen your limbs and you will be as a spring of water which never fails; and through you shall be erected what has lain in waste since time gone by; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach and the restorer of paths, that man may pass thereon. Isaiah 58. (Note. Not the Lutheran translation.)

May we diligently wander without murmuring, through the distant desolation. Oh how sad it is that our experience today is still comparable to that of the children of Israel. How unfortunate that it must be lamented, that the present Gemeinde of Israel is so often inclined against Moses and Aron who do not wish for anything but to be able to lead their beloved Gemeinde unto the land. Oh if only I together with my beloved fellow siblings (Geschwister) might rightly and truly be able to battle towards that beloved land. I hope that the Lord will grant us strength and grace in order that, ever more truthfully and zealously, we may strive for the Land of Canaan. “Surely the salvation of the Lord is nigh unto them that fear him, and His glory will dwell in their land; Oh that goodness and truth be met together, and that righteousness and peace might kiss each other”. Psalm 85.

“O du Geist der Kraft und Staerke, du gewisser neuer Geist, foerdre in uns deine Werke, wenn das Satans Macht sich weist. Schenk uns Waffen in den Krieg, und erhalt uns den Sieg. Herr bewahr auch unser Glauben das kein Teufel, Tod noch Spott, uns denselben moege rauben. Du bist unser Schutz und Gott, sagt das Fleisch gleich immer nein, lasz dein Wort gewisser sein. Wenn wir endlich sollen sterben, so versichere uns je mehr, als des Himmelreiches Erben, jener Herrlichkeit und Ehr, die uns unsre Gott erkiet, und nicht auszusprechen ist”. May the Lord grant this for His holy name’s sake.

Now in closing do receive a heartfelt greeting from us. I also bid you that you accept this writing from me in love as it has come from a caring heart. Surely love thinks nothing ill. Do forgive me for not having rewritten and corrected it. H. Wiebe”

### 3.12 Johan L. Dueck (1833-1894)

The final letter in this collection is written by Johan L. Dueck (1833-1894). In contrast to Rev. Jakob A. Wiebe, Dueck came from a family whose Kleine Gemeinde roots went back to 1818 when his grandfather Klaas Dueck immigrated from Prussia. Johan L. Dueck was the son of Johan Dueck (1801-1866) who had been elected as a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1849. Johan L. Dueck lived in the village of Alexanderkron and was elected as a deacon of the Molotschna Kleine Gemeinde in 1869. This letter was written to Aeltester Peter Toews in Blumenhof, Borosenko.

“Beloved brother Peter Toews, Blumenhof: Alexanderkron, the 28 day of January 1870

This evening I was at Cornelius Pletts in Kleefeld, where brother Abr. Klassen, Prangenau, was also present and read for us a copy of the letter which he had written to you, and as Pletts have intentions of leaving from Kleefeld in the morning of the 29th and as brother Klassen has mentioned nothing in his letter regarding the matter of which you had written me, I will quickly write something in that regard.

Shortly after I had subscribed to the writing to which you refer, worship service was held in Kleefeld. After the service the brethren remained together, where mention was also made of this writing, and where many brethren mentioned that they had not subscribed to this undertaking of the Gemeinde. Many others remained silent, except brother Kornelsen, from Lichtenau, and myself. We stated that we had signed, but immediately added that it appeared that we had not done right by so doing. In

part the matter had taken me by surprise, since only little was said about it at the time that the joint covenant was read for the Gemeinde. Then my neighbour, whom I was to assist in slaughtering hogs that day, got up and stated that if those who were to help slaughter hogs at his place could sign first, as it was high time that they got started. Consequently I also signed, but as mentioned, I have not done right by so doing. A number of brethren have already stated that they would willingly forgive us. Nothing much further was said, but this was not the end of the matter for a number of brethren as later circumstances were to prove.

Accordingly I waited for the first opportunity after I had received the letter from you, namely, when worship service was held in Kleefeld on the 18th day of January, and we brethren remained together to discuss the matter regarding brother H. Friesen. Here I again referred to this concern and requested that the brethren forgive me, and in so far as I perceived and was declared by the brethren, I do hope that there will be no more obstacles in this area. If only I can better perceive and be more careful in the future.

We live in a time of great danger, of which you also write and therefore we must seek to achieve the best in everything. We have great cause in this to be awake. So much more on my part in the future, since I have been notified by the Gebietsamt to assume the function of the village Beisitzer. In spite of the fact that I submitted a petition to the Gebietsamt to be excused, they have declared that I cannot be released from this obligation. Accordingly I am compelled to dispose myself to the same. Might the Lord grant grace that his will would be carried out in everything. I do not know of much further to write today as it is already late. It is 12 o'clock. Now I will go to sleep.

I arose today, the morning of the 29th, and looked at the thermometer and saw that instead of it being 25 degree frost and calm like usual, it is only 13 degrees today but with much wind, so that I doubt that Pletts will be leaving. But as I cannot know this I will finish this short letter.

In closing it is my wish that we might be able to repeat in truth and in confidence with the children of Korah: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah".

Finally I also wish that this writing might reach you in good health. Thanks be to God, we are physically quite well. We are hoping to receive a writing from you there at the first opportunity, advising as to your deliberations at the brotherhood meeting. It seems as if the journeying there from here may be postponed until a more necessary occasion. Perhaps someone from there will shortly come here. Should you take council at a brotherhood meeting then do greet all the brothers and sisters from us. Now I must shorten my imperfect but well-intentioned writing as it is time to deliver the letter. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Your brother and fellow pilgrim who truly loves you. Johan Dueck"

"When Johan Toews from Gruenfeld was here, he wanted to leave me money here to pay for the first half of the Crown fees. I did not want to accept at the time as it was not known whether perhaps you would pay it there. Now it has been requested here. If you could greet him and put the matter to him, perhaps he could send the money shortly. I do not have time now to write separately to him. Please accept this in love from me. When Toews was here I also believed that I would be able to disburse these amounts. But since one of our horses died, I have had to purchase a new one, and so the money is short."

### 3.13 Poetry in the Kleine Gemeinde

Poetry was a medium of vital importance to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist Mennonite groups. Each family and Gemeinde had a number of accomplished poets who composed verses for special occasions as well as for general edification. Aeltesten and ministers frequently used these poems as well as the lyrics from the *Gesangbuch* in their sermons and correspondence. These poems were recited and sung at funerals, weddings, anniversaries and other special events. Very few of these verses would have qualified as works of art. Nevertheless the genre served as a vital medium of edification and fellowship among the Anabaptist Mennonites.

Poetry was frequently written to record and memorialize a particular event or theme. This is illustrated by the following poem written by Aeltester Peter P. Toews to highlight the centennial of the founding of the Molotschna settlement in Russia and in particular to commemorate the contribution of the Loewen family of Lindenau and its growth. Toews was interested in this family as he had married Anna Warkentin, a granddaughter of the venerable Isaac Loewen (1787-1873). The poem was published in the December 6, 1905, issue of *Rundschau* and was entitled "Zur Hundertjährigen Erinnerung, Im Interesse der Familie Isaak Loewens von Lindenau, Suedruszlandt"

“Steht da ein Haus schon hundert Jahr,  
Grossvater Isaac Loewen war,  
Der Zeit in Lindenau  
Wo er dies Haus erbaut hat  
Nachher ihm hier sein Sohn vertraut,  
Trieb Feld und Seidenbau.

Worin der Enkel Meister war,  
der nun als Onkel letztes Jahr,  
Von hier aus Canada,  
Dort zum Besuch und Aufenthalt,  
Als Onkel David Loewen galt,  
Das alte Haus noch sah.

Das Haus von dem die Rede hier,  
Von Anno achzehnhundertvier,  
Hat letzter noch geschaut.  
Auch das, wo meine Wiege stand,  
Im Dorfe Fischau er noch fand,  
Vom Vater Toews erbaut.

Was sonst im Lauf der hundert Jahr,  
Ein Familien Erbstück war,  
(Merkwuerdig in der That),  
Dass jeder Generation,  
Des aeltesten Sohnes ersten Sohn,  
Den Namen Isaac gab.

Poetry was used to memorialize the history of communities. The poems of Heinrich Balzer stand as a leading example of poetry written to enshrine certain aspects of the history of the Kleine Gemeinde, such as the poem in honour of Aeltester Klaás Reimer. Another poem written by Aeltester Peter Toews illustrates the genre of poems written to memorialize a particular incident in family history, in this case the family of his grandfather Johan Plett (1765-1833). This poem was written as a tribute to an event which occurred in Prussia during the early married life of Johan Plett when he courageously unmasked and confronted a “ghost” which had terrorized the house of his neighbour. This poem is entitled “Der Mutige behaelt das Feld, Aus den Jugend Erlebnissen unsers Grossvater, Johan Plett”.

1. Stand da ein Haus beim Nachbar leer,  
Das moecht ich haben Dachte er,  
Doch sollt es Wohlheil sein,  
Er soll Dortschpucken eine Zeit,  
Das jeder es zu kaufen scheut,  
So leitet er es ein.
2. So schpuckt es hin und wieder dort,  
Bis mancher es gehoert am Ort,  
Verruhmem wird das Haus,  
Bewohnen will es nieman nun,  
Nur noch der Nachbar feilscht darum,  
Da sollt es ja hinaus.
3. Dem Schpuck musz abgeholfen sein,  
Stellt Groszvater als Mann sich ein,  
Den Geist will zwingen er.  
“Der Mutige behaelt das Feld”  
So denkend! er auf Wach sich stellt,  
Und wens der Teufel waer.
4. Einsam bis schon um Mitternacht,  
Groszvater jetzt am Feuer wacht,  
Da horch! Nun regt sich was;  
Es schleicht erst sacht und schleihend her,  
Nach oben lenkt die Blicke er,  
Da sieh, was ist nun das!

Den jüngen dieser Isaacs seh'n  
Dazu nach Manitoba geh'n,  
War meines Freundes Plan,  
Er sah den Urgrossvater schon,  
Als sechsten dann den Enkelsohn,  
In diesem Kleinen Mann.

Doch woll't der Freund auf Reisen geh'n,  
Und all'die Loewens Kinder seh'n  
Musst er durchs ganze Land,  
Von Texas bis Alberta hin,  
Und Russland noch dazu durchzieh'n,  
Bis er sie alle fand.

Doch besser laesst man das ansteh'n  
Und lieber um das Wiedersch'n,  
Im ober'n Vaterland,  
Uns dieses Weges hier bemuh'n,  
Des Weg's der dorthin fuchrt zu zieh'n  
Hierzu mein Herz und Hand.

P. Toews, Kleefeld, Manitoba  
August, 1905<sup>14</sup>

5. Jetzt kommt die Trepp! herab er schon,  
Der Geist auftretend wie zum Gohn,  
Ganz nah; doch welch Geschick,  
Groszvater stoeszt nun mit Entschlusz,  
Ihm Glut auf seinen Hahnenfusz,  
Dann weicht der Geist zurüek.
6. “Bist wohl der Leibhaftige-nicht,  
Sonst, warum fliehst du, feiger Wicht.  
Hast fuer das Feuer Angst?  
Da solches Doch dein Element,  
Und Heimat wo es ewig brennt,  
Und jetzt dafuer erbangst?”
7. Und waerst du auch der Boesewicht,  
So sollst du mir entkommen nicht,  
Denn jetzt sind wir am Ziel”  
So greift er zu und haelt ihn kuehn,  
Noch eh' er Zeit gewann zum flieh'n;  
Und aus war jetzt das Spiel.
8. Der Starke gab dem Staerken nach,  
Entlarrt ward nun so Geist als Sach,  
Der Speck had aufgehoert;  
Das Haus war jetzt nich lang mehr feil.  
Es wurd nun auch verkauft derveil  
Fuer seinen vollen Werth.

9. So banne auch den Geisterschpuck,  
 Mit allem seinem Lug and Trug  
 Der Enkel\* grosze Zahl.  
 Doch Zieht den Harnisch Gottes an,  
 Und Kaempft verinigt "als ein Mann"  
 Das Feld wird euch zur Wahl. Epheser  
 6:11-13.

10. Christus als Sohn ueber das Haus,  
 Das Gott selbst gerüestet aus,  
 Bezwingt den Starken hier. Luke 11:22.  
 Wohl jedem dem Dies Haus ein Port,  
 Und eignet des Apostels Wort,  
 Das Wort, Dies Haus sind wir" Hebrews  
 3:6. 14

\*Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that the grandchildren of Johan Plett bore the following names, Plett, Toews, Isaac, Goossen, Ens, Friesen (and Harder) and appended to the poem a friendly greeting to all descendants wherever they might be. This poem was found in the poetry book of Jakob L. Plett, a farmer in Blumenhof, near Steinbach, Manitoba. Plett has noted that he received the poem through his cousin's son, John I. Friesen, at that time resident in Kansas. This illustrates the extent to which this genre of expression was used to convey the history and traditions of a family.

Poems were frequently written in honour of special occasions such as a funeral. The following poem was written as a memorial to the aged grandfather Heinrich Reimer (1792-1884) who died in Kleefeld, Manitoba in 1884 leaving a large following of descendants and friends to mourn his death. Heinrich Reimer was one of the few to experience the original emigration from Prussia to the Molotschna colony as well as the 1874 emigration from Russia to Manitoba. In Russia he had resided on his *Wirtschaft* in Muntau where he also married for the second time to Helena Dueck, widow of Kleine Gemeinde minister and farmer Johan Dueck (1801-1866) late of the same village. The poem was composed by the aged school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-1892) as a loving gift and memorial to a valiant warrior of the faith. The lyrics were written to be sung to the melody "Ringe recht wenn Gottes Gnade".

1. Hier soll werden angeschrieben  
 Was nich in Vergessenheit  
 Bald soll kommen angetrieben  
 Fand ich mich schon laenger Zeit.

8. Ringend hat er noch gelitten,  
 Vier und zwanzig Stunden lang,  
 Vor dem Sterben unsern Bitten,  
 Sahen wir ihm Schmerzens krank,

2. Es macht dieses keinem Kraenken,  
 Denn die Liebe dringet mich,  
 Dieses einem Freund zu schenken,  
 Ja aus Dankbarkeit sag ich.

9. Er in West Preuzen geboren,  
 Siebzehn hundert neunzig eins,  
 Als er dreizehn Jahr alt ware  
 Nach Ruszland ist mitgereist.

3. Ich hab manches Guts genossen,  
 Darum soll jetzt diese Schrift,  
 Da aus treuer Hand geflossen,  
 Auch der Dank ja mangeln nich.

10. In den Ehestand getreten,  
 Ist er mit Maria Fast,  
 Wo er angenommen hatte,  
 Land in Muntau, O so laszt,

4. Nun der Zweck von meinen schreiben,  
 Soll Grosvaters Losung sein,  
 Es mag in Gedachtnisz bleiben,  
 Auch Groszmutterchen mit ein.

11. Mittler weil dies bedenken,  
 Dasz da nach geraummer Zeit,  
 Es der Liebe Gott tut lenken,  
 Dasz die Todt der Gattin scheidt.

5. Ruhe fand er in dem Jahre,  
 Achtzehn hundert achtzig vier,  
 Es am Elften July ware,  
 Als er von den Tod von hier.

12. Er zum zweiten mal verbunden,  
 Noch im Alter in die Ehe,  
 Der wie es sich hat befunden,  
 Eine Witwe sich ersah.

6. Ja von hier den Abschied machte,  
 Lebens mued sein Ziel erreicht,  
 Und sein Leben hier vollbrachte,  
 An Jahren wie angezeigt.

13. Recht mit Namen sie sich nante,  
 Johan Dueksche selben Ort,  
 Darauf es sich dahin wandte,  
 Aus Ruszland zu ziehen fort.

7. Christlich war sein ganz Bestreben,  
 Drei und neunzig Jahre lang,  
 Zwei Monat drei Tage eben,  
 Wegen Alterschwaeche krank.

14. Mit dem Groszvater zusammen,  
 Zogen nach Amerika,  
 Und nach Manitoba kommen,  
 Ja wohl nach das Canada.



15. Ausgewandert sie im Jahre,  
Achtsehn hundert siebzig funf,  
Wohnhafte sie in Gruenfeld warin,  
Vier Jahr noch beim Leben sind.
16. Recht schrieb man da sie verschiede,  
Achtzehn hundert siebzig neun,  
Dreizehn Jahre sie in Friede,  
Zusammen gewesen sein.
17. Ihm sind neun von seinen Kinder,  
Durch dem Todt vor ihm gereist,  
Fuenf noch leben doch nicht minder,  
Waren sie hier sehr zerstreut.
18. Ach ja zwei in Ruszland blieben,  
Zwei nach Manitoba gehn,  
Eine Tochter Seiner Lieben,  
Blieb in Manitoba schoen.
19. Ruhe fand ein Sohn hier eben,  
Durch den Todt an diesen Ort,  
Ja es endete sein Leben,  
Da der Todt ihm reikte hart.
20. Es soll nun geschrieben werden,  
Seine ganze Seelenzahl,  
Kinder die von ihm auf Erde,  
Leben sterben ueberall.
21. Ihre sind neun die gesterben,  
Fuenf die noch am Leben sind,  
Groszkinder die ihm erwarben,  
Ein und fuenfzig tot man findt.
22. Merkt am Leben drei und fuenfzig,  
Urgroszkinder sind auch Todt,  
Ein und sechzig, nun soll kunftig,  
Folgen was noch Leben hat.
23. Es sind ihrer vier und neunzig,  
Ururgroszkinder sind noch,  
Zwei am Leben, so belauft sich,  
Diese Zahl im Ganzen doch.
24. Rein am Leben sind der Seelen,  
Hundert vier und fuenfzig nah,  
Die gestorben tut man zahlen,  
Hundert ein und zwanzig dah.
25. So zahlt man sein ganze Reihe,  
Zwei hundert und siebzig fuenf,  
O der liebe Gott verleihe,  
Ihn und uns ein frommen Sinn.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.14 Conclusion

Poetry was also written to express the deepest feelings and emotions of the individual. This is illustrated by the following poem written by Johan Toews (1793-1873), the father of Aeltester Peter Toews. Toews was a cabinet maker and farmer who owned a Wirtschaft in Fischau. The poem was written in about 1850 after Toews had recovered from an almost fatal fever. The experience gave Toews a renewed love for his Savior and a greater sense of his responsibility to win his children for the way of the cross. The poem is entitled "An die Herzen meiner lieben Kinder" or literally "Unto the hearts of my beloved children".

1. Nehmt, Kinder, mit des Vaters Segen  
Dies Wort in Kindesliebe auf,  
Und wenn ihr's lest, so thut erwägen:  
Des Vaters Thränen ruh'n darauf.
2. Herr, du enthältest uns das zu wissen,  
Was noch in Zukunft soll gescheh'n;  
Doch seh'n wir g'nug aus allen Schlüssen,  
Was du zu unserm Heil ersch'n.
3. Mit Wolkenbruch und kräft'gen Blitzen  
Hast du dies Jahr uns heimgesucht,  
Insektenbrut und grosse Hitze  
Verzehrten einsteils uns're Frucht.
4. Wohl bitten wir um deinen Segen  
Doch wieder in zukünftger Zeit,  
Gieb nur, dass wir ihn so anlegen,  
Dass auch der Arme sich erfreut.
5. Wir sind von Habsucht mehr durchdrungen  
Als Mitleid uns genommen ein.  
Verschwendung hat uns teils umschlungen,  
Verschwunden scheint die Furcht zu sein.
6. Mit Arbeit, Sorg' und vielem Schlummer  
Hab' ich ohn' Säumen mich gemüht,  
So ist denn auch nicht ohne Kummer  
Mein Leben bis daher verblüht.
7. Noch heut' erschallt das Wort des Herrn  
In mir, was einst zu Adam sprach:  
Im Schweiss sollst du dich stets ernähren,  
Und nicht dem Unmut geben nach.
8. Und wie ich wohl zu allen Zeiten  
Hab' immer eig'ne Weg' gewählt,  
So hat's doch in bedrängten Zeiten  
Mir dennoch nie an Brot gefehlt.
9. Auch hat mich Gott seit ein'gen Jahren  
Mit grosser Nachsicht übersch'n;  
Was ich sehr deutlich hab' erfahren,  
Wenn seine Hilfe war gescheh'n.
10. Auch diese Zeit, wie schon erwähnt,  
Hat die Gesundheit mir gefehlt,  
Wodurch Gott mir den Weg gelähmet,  
Den er zu meinem Heil erwählt.

11. In 'Dankbarkeit sollt' ich zerfliessen  
Für das, was mir ist Gut's gethan,  
Und meine Sünde kräftig büssen—  
Ach, Gott, sieh' mich doch gnädig an.
12. Auch oft in meinem Wirkungskreise  
Hat Schwermutsseuche der Natur,  
Und auch Verdruss auf manche Weise  
Versucht zu zieh'n mich von der Spur.
13. Auch haben Unvorsichtigkeiten  
Mir vielmals das Gemüt beschwert;  
So hat auch Leichtsinn noch zu Zeiten  
Das Seinige von mir begehrt.
14. Was mir wohl als den grössten Sünder  
Vor allem dennoch hier gebricht,  
Ist, was angehend meine Kinder,  
Für die ich bin gestellt ein Licht.
15. Auch hier fühl' ich für meine Schulden  
Zu bringen meine Bitte für:  
Wollst, ew'ger Vater, dich gedulden,  
Auch wo sie schuldig sind an mir.
16. Oft sind's der Krankheit kurze Zeiten,  
Dass durch den Tod ein Elternpaar  
Genommen von der Kinder Seiten,  
Dass diese werden dann gewahr,
17. Wieviel ihn'n durch den Tod entrissen  
Dann denken können noch erfreut,  
Dass sie sich noch zuletzt beflissen  
Der Elteren Gesälligkeit.
18. Schon fühl' auch ich, wie meine Kräfte  
Bereits so merkbar nehmen ab,—  
Schon oft unsähig zum Geschäfte—  
Vielleicht bald reif genug zum Grab.
19. Nehmt dieses doch ganz ungezwungen  
Von mir, ihr lieben Kinder, an,  
Weil's mir die Zähre abgedrungen,  
Und denkt, dass ich bald sterben kann.<sup>17</sup>

Peter P. Isaac has recorded another example of this type of poem in the **Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern**.<sup>18</sup> The poem entitled "The Traveller" was written by his grandfather Franz Isaac (1784-1825) a farmer and later school teacher of the village of Tiege. Franz Isaac had experienced the emigration from Prussia and the arduous pioneer years in Russia. In the present poem he explores the sorrows and hardships of man's earthly sojourn compared to the joys and glory of the future realm. As such the poem forms a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

Es reis'te ein Wanderer alt und müde  
Das steile Felsenthal hinan;  
Wo selten ein Röschen, ein Blümchen verblüh'te;  
Der Weg ward schmal und steinig die Bahn,  
Und droben da ragte die felsige Spitze  
Noch viele Meilen weit hinauf;  
Bald brauste ein Sturmwind, bald drückte die Hitze,  
Bald hielt ein Abgrund im Wandern ihm auf.  
Er setzte sich endlich im Abendrot nieder  
Und sah' betrübt den Abendstern an:  
Ach funkelnder Stern, jetzt schimmerst du wieder  
Und meine Reise ist noch nicht getan.  
Wie ist mir die Reise so schwer und so bitter,  
Wie wenig Freud hab ich gehabt,  
Da mehr Sonnenstiche, mehr schweres Gewitter,  
Als mich des Lebens Wonne gelab't.  
Ein Jüngling erschien ihm im Abendsterns glänzen  
Dem armen Wandrer vor's Gesicht,  
Ich komme nun, um dich mit Palmen zu kränzen,  
Verlier nicht den Mut, und zage nur nicht.  
Er führte den Wand'rer durch etliche Spalten,  
Im Schimmer des dämmernden Abendlichts fort.  
Im herrlichsten Frühling und jubelndes Walten.  
Ist gegen diesem Anblicke nichts.—  
Es lagen zehn Städte im weitesten Kreise,  
Mit Auen von Blumen, von Bächen getränkt.  
Nun sagte der Jüngling, dies Ende der Reise,  
Wird dir o Wand'rer vom König geschenkt.

Du frommer, getreuer, dein Leben voll Leiden  
 War nur Geburtsweh zum ewigen Glück.  
 Geh ein, zu noch nie empfundenen Freuden,  
 Und lasse dein trauriges Reis'kleid zurück.<sup>17</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER THREE. LETTER CORRESPONDENCE AND POETRY.

1. D.H. Epp. *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* (Mennonitische Post, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1984), 57-58.
2. Cornelius Krahn, "Chortitza Mennonite Church", *ME* 1,568.
3. H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennoniten* (Selbstverlag, Danzig, 1919), 130.
4. *The Golden Years*, *op. cit.*, 172-173.
5. John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Intellect of the Nineteenth Century"; Abraham Friesen, editor; **P.M. Friesen & His History** (Centre for M.B. Studies, Fresno, California, 1979) 1-2. Toews seems to argue that knowledge and wisdom came to the Russian Mennonites via separatist pietism. For a discussion of his view of Heinrich Balzer see *The Golden Years*, *op. cit.*, 234. John B. Toews also discusses his view of the early Russian Mennonite intellect in an article entitled "The Russian Origins of the Mennonite Brethren Some Observations" published in *Pilgrims & Strangers* (Centre for M.B. Studies, Fresno, California, 1977) 90-92. See also "Nonresistance Reexamined, Why did Mennonites leave Russia in 1874" *Mennonite Life*, Midyear 1974, 8-13, for an example of this extremely categorical and prejudiced view of the Anabaptist Mennonites and their leaders such as Aeltester G. Wiebe of the Bergthal Colony.
6. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 628. See also p. 994. It sometimes seems that anyone who was not busily reading the tomes of the radical separatist pietists was categorically denounced as an ignorant anti-intellectual by certain historians.
7. Paul Schach, "Facts and Fallacies about Russian-German Dialects" *Journal of the A.H.S.G.R.*; Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 1984, 21-25.
8. John W. Dueck, "History and Events", *op. cit.*, 87.
9. All of the letters set forth in this chapter are from the Letter Collections of Aeltester Peter P. Toews.
10. A brief obituary of Rev. Abraham Klassen appears in the *Rundschau*, September 12, 1906. Abraham Klassen was born in Tiegerweide on September 6, 1851. Of 16 children, 9 were still living in 1906. As a youth Abraham Klassen had worked in a retail store in Blumenort. He then moved to Neukirch, where he started his own lumber business. He prospered and made plans to build a large new store for which he assembled all the materials. Then he became sick and lost much of his business. At this time he cried out to the Lord. Eventually he joined the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In 1886 he moved to Prangenu and took over a *Vollwirtschaft*. Against his will he was now elected to the *Schwurgericht* or jury, but refused to serve for conscience sake.  
 I am indebted to Henry Fast for referring me to this material. Abraham Klassen was elected to the ministry of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1869. It is noteworthy that at a time of affliction Abraham Klassen, like Job, was drawn nearer to God and joined the Kleine Gemeinde which was striving in grace to live out the commandments of Jesus Christ.
11. *The Golden Years*, *op. cit.*, 132.
12. John E. Friesen Collection, Courtesy Rev. Jac P. Friesen/Roy Loewen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
13. Johan Toews, *op. cit.*, 1-8.
14. I am indebted to Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba, for referring me to this poem.
15. Jacob L. Plett, "Poetry Book", *op. cit.*
16. John E. Friesen Collection, *op. cit.*
17. Johan Toews. *Das Wachsame Auge Gottes*, *op. cit.*
18. Peter P. Isaac, *op. cit.*, German edition, 11-12.

# Chapter Four

## Faith and Practice

### 4.00 Introduction

This chapter will consider the faith and practice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Firstly, with respect to several aspects of organization and administration. Secondly, to offer an evaluation of worship and devotional life. Thirdly, then to look at the evangelical ordinances, and finally to look at the text of a baptismal service.

### 4.01 Administration, the Church Calendar

The worship services of the Kleine Gemeinde originally developed out of small private meetings and prayer circles.<sup>1</sup> It was only natural that these meetings would develop into small and simple worship services when the early adherents of the reform movement were banned from the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde in 1812. The pattern was continued after the formal organization of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1814 with worship services being held alternatively in various Molotschna villages in which the Kleine Gemeinde had a significant membership.

The worship services were originally held in the residences of the various members of the Gemeinde. As the Gemeinde increased in size these services were naturally restricted to the larger homes and *Scheune* (or hay barns) of the membership. The larger farmers had separate threshing barns which provided an ideal shelter for these meetings. These barns were carefully cleaned and prepared for the services to be held. On special occasions, such as a baptism, the service would undoubtedly be held in a hay barn or threshing barn. Rev. Cornelius L. Plett reports in his *Familienbuch* that he and his twin sister Sarah were baptized in the Scheune (hay mow) of (Rev.) Abram F. Friesen in Neukirch in 1866<sup>2</sup>.

The worship services were alternated among the various Molotschna villages by a church calendar which was arranged and settled before-hand<sup>3</sup>. It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde had a particular place for its services in each village where it had a significant membership. No doubt the choice of particular premises was determined by a number of factors, such as the size of the residence or hay *Scheune*, and the availability of the owners to clean and prepare the premises for the services. Anyone meeting these criteria would already have been somewhat established.

By the 1860s the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had grown to the point where it held two regular worship services in the Molotschna each Sunday. The diary of a young church member by the name of Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887) provides a fascinating glimpse into the workings of this arrangement.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1865-1866 Gemeinde Calendar of Peter L. Dueck

"On January 3, 1865, a worship service was held in Neukirch. Father from Kleefeld presented the sermon. A bridal couple was married by Abram Friesen, namely, Peter Friesen and Helena Ens. On January 6, Epiphany, worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. I attended in Hierschau together with A. Dueck. There was no minister there and so H. Friesen of Lanskron read an extract from the writings of Menno Simons. I understand that Peter Friesen of Tiege had preached in Fischau. On January 10, worship service was in Marienwohl. Father preached. Brotherhood meeting was also held where it was presented that Abraham Klassen, Neukirch, wished to join our Gemeinde. Also that a brother by the name of Janzen had left our Gemeinde in the Crimea. I was also present. On January 17, worship service was held in Tiege. Friesen presented the sermon. We were not there as we had been in Kleefeld and Alexanderwohl.

"On January 24, a worship service was held in Neukirch. Father presented the sermon. The Abraham Klassens were accepted into membership. A brethren meeting was held after the worship service, where Friesen, from Kleefeld, was accepted into membership in the Gemeinde. The matter of support for the poor was also discussed. Also Klassen had asked the brotherhood to declare its viewpoint with respect to his house trimmings (Hausrath). Should he remove immediately that which was merely in accordance with what was fashionable? He also wished that no one would take offense or suffer damage if he retained the same until an opportune time. Also Peter Toews, Margenau, confessed and asked for forgiveness for having played checkers in the public house while driving to Berdjansk. He was forgiven. Banns were announced for the bridal couple Isaac Loewen and Elisabeth Janzen. On January 31 a worship service was held in Fischau, where Father presented the sermon. The bridal pair, namely Isaac Loewen and Elisabeth Janzen, were married.

On February 7th a worship service was held in Marienthal, and Enns presented the sermon. We were also there. For dinner we drove to Paulsheim together with the parents. On February 14, a wor-

ship service was held in Tiede. Enns had only commenced the sermon when the service was adjourned on account of Abram Thiessen. He, Thiessen, had come to the worship service and had not wanted to leave. We were not there. On February 28th worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. Enns had presented the sermon in Fischau and Abram Friesen of Tiede, in Hierschau. We did not attend. Worship service was also held here in the school. Ohm Wedel presented the sermon.

On March 7, a worship service was held in Mariawohl. I went alone together with the Duecks. Peter Friesen, Tiede, presented the sermon with a text based on Luke 6 verses 47-49. On the 14th, a worship service was held in Tiede. A service was also held in Neukirch because of the mud. We did not attend. On March 21st worship service was held in Neukirch. Peter Friesen presented the sermon. None of us were there. On the 28th, Palm Sunday, worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. Abram Friesen preached in Fischau. Abram Friesen, Neukirch, presented the sermon in Hierschau, his text being from Matthew 21, verses 1 to 9. I was present together with A.D. and J.D.. It was announced that in the future there would no longer be worship service in Hierschau.

"On Good Friday, April 2, worship service was held in Mariawohl, where Father presented the sermon. We were also there. On April 4th a worship service was held in Tiede, where Peter Friesen presented the sermon. A worship service was also held in Alexanderkron where we attended. Father had preached from the text Mark 16 verses 1 to 9. On April 5th, the first Easter holiday, a worship service was held in Neukirch. Abram Friesen, Neukirch, preached from the text Mark 16, verses 1 and on. I was also present. It was announced that the young people were to be presented in Mariawohl.

"On April 11th a worship service was held in Fischau, Ohm J.F. Friesen presented the Articles of Faith. We were not present. Banns were read for the bridal couple, John Isaac and Elisabeth Wiebe. On the 18th, worship service was held in Mariawohl and Tiede. Abram Friesen of Neukirch presented the Articles of Faith in Mariawohl and Enns in Tiede. The bridal couple were wedded in Tiede. We had attended in Mariawohl. A brotherhood meeting was also held where the young people were presented for the first time. Five young people were presented here. For the 25th a worship service was scheduled in Neukirch but because Thiessen had disrupted the service they had driven to Prangenu. Isaac Friesen of Tiesth had preached. After dinner (the noon meal) brethren meeting was held in Neukirch. On Wednesday, the 28th, a worship service was held in Fischau. Isaac Friesen had preached the sermon. We were not present.

"On May 2nd, a worship service had been held in Marienwohl. Ohm Johan Friesen presented the Articles. The young people (baptismal candidates) were presented together with their witnesses. We were also present. On May 9th a worship service was held in Tiede, where the young people were instructed. We did not attend. On May 13th, Ascension Day, a worship service was held in Neukirch, where Johan Friesen preached. The three questions were presented to the young people. We had driven to Alexanderkron for dinner. On the 16th of May the young people were baptized in Neukirch. Because of the disruption of Thiessen this only took place in the afternoon as he had not come in the afternoon. A brotherhood meeting was held after the worship service and Wiens of Neukirch was accepted into the Gemeinde. Also the bridal couple, Abram Friesen and Agatha Cornelsen were there. On May 23, the first day of Pentecost, worship service was held in Fischau. Friesen from Tiede presented the sermon. We had not attended.

"On the 24th, the second day of commemoration, worship service was held in Mariawohl, where Father preached. We were in attendance together with the Isaacs. On the 30th of May worship service was held in Tiede, where my father presented the sermon. We were not present. The names of those who were baptized in this year are: Male; Peter Reimer, Tiefth; Abram Friesen, Tiefth; Abe Rempel, Margenu; and Cornelius Plett, Kleefeld: Female; Maria Loewen, Lindenu; Katarina Rempel, Paulsheim; Margareta Friesen, Rueckenau; Sara Plett, Kleefeld; Agatha Kornelsen, Lichtenau.

"On June 6th, a worship service was held in Neukirch. Peter Friesen presented the preparatory sermon. Brethren meeting was held after the worship service and many matters were discussed. I was not present at the brotherhood meeting. On June 13, worship assembly was held in Tiede, but it was disrupted by Thiessen. We had been at J. Isaacs for dinner. On June 20, worship service was held in Mariawohl and Fischau. Father had preached in Mariawohl. Preparatory service ("Einigkeit") was held in Tiefenthal. A brotherhood meeting took place in Mariawohl and the holding of communion service was discussed. They also talked with Abr. Rempel of Margenu because he struck his herdsman. He was forgiven. The matter of distribution of land among the brethren was again discussed. It was announced that a general (Grosze) brotherhood meeting would be held in Neukirch on Thursday. I was also present.

"On Thursday the 24th a general brotherhood meeting took place in Neukirch where many matters were discussed. Firstly, J. Friesen, Blumstein, declared himself regarding the somewhat unrefined vocabulary and made amends. Also discussed was the division of land and the signing of the commitments on behalf of the Gemeinde. Also discussed was Franz Isaac, as well as Corn. Fast of Mariawohl, who at one time had also hit a herdsboy. He confessed and apologized and was forgiven. The holding of Communion Service was discussed. I was also present. It was determined that communion service (Einigkeit) would be held on the following Saturday in Mariawohl. On Saturday the 26th, communion was held in Mariawohl. Because of disruption by Thiessen it was held Saturday. We were also present. On the 27th, communion was held in Tiede. We were not present.

"On July 4th, worship service was held in Neukirch. My father gave the Thanksgiving sermon. Communion service was held in Margenau at the senior Abram Rempels. We were in Neukirch. On July 11th worship service was held in Fischau, where father preached. We did not go. On July 18th worship service was in Mariawohl, where my father preached. For dinner we had driven to Rempels in Paulsheim. On July 25th, worship service was held in Tiede, where father had presented the sermon. We did not attend.

"On August 1st, a worship service was held in Neukirch, where Abram Friesen preached. A brotherhood meeting was held and there was a discussion regarding those who had not attended the Communion. On August 8th worship service was held in Fischau, where Abram Friesen of Neukirch presented the sermon. Brethren meeting was held after the worship service. The signatures for the commitments by the Gemeinde were again discussed. Similarly, not to concede for our part in the matter of the "landless" dispute. Jakob Braun, of Schoenau, left the brotherhood meeting in an uproar. We were not in attendance. On August 15th worship service was held in Mariawohl, where Abram Friesen, Neukirch, presented the sermon. I attended together with brother-in-law Isaac. On August 22nd, worship service was held in Tiede, where Abram Friesen, Neukirch, had preached. We were in Tiefenthal. On August 29th, worship service was held in Neukirch. Enns, from Fischau preached. It was announced that henceforth worship service would again be held in Hierschau on the same days as in Fischau. For dinner we had driven to Prangenua.

"On September 5th, a worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. Enns preached in Fischau and father in Hierschau. We attended in Hierschau. On September 12th, worship service was held in Mariawohl. Enns preached and we were there. On September 19th, worship service was held in Tiede, where Enns preached. We did not attend. On September 26th worship service was held in Neukirch, where Ohm Johan Friesen preached. We were also present. On October 3rd worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. Abram Friesen, Neukirch, preached in Hierschau. We attended in Hierschau. On October 10th, worship service was in Mariawohl, where Abram Friesen of Tiede preached. We were also present.

"On October 14, a worship service was in Tiede. Peter Bearg, from the Crimea presented the sermon. We were present. On Friday the 22nd, Ohm Bearg conducted the worship service in Hierschau. On October 24, worship service was held in Neukirch, where Ohm Bearg preached. We were also present. For dinner we drove to Alexanderkron. On October 31, worship service was held in Hierschau and Fischau. On November 7, worship service was in Fischau, where J. Friesen preached. Brother-in-law Isaac, father and myself had driven there together. On November 14, worship service was held in Mariawohl. Brotherhood meeting was also held. Peter Harms from the Crimea was discussed. I was not in attendance. On the 13th, an engagement (Verlobung) took place in Schoenau, namely, Peter Friesen and Maria Isaac. On November 21, worship service took place in Neukirch.

I have omitted to maintain this record until January 3, 1866. On January 3rd, a brethren meeting took place in Neukirch, regarding the matter with Thiessen. In order to discuss whether he could be reaccepted into the Gemeinde without bending his knees, which was not at all acceptable to many brethren. Ohm Enns read out a writing to the meeting in which he blamed the other Ohms in many respects. He also recommended that Ohm Johan Friesen resign his office as Aeltester because he could not perceive this reacceptance as being scriptural. Which truly it was not if the ban had been properly applied to Thiessen. But because the ban had been enacted one week prior to the date for which Thiessen had been summoned to explain his conduct, the Gemeinde had without doubt made an error in this regard. This excommunication had not been properly enacted and therefore it could not serve its intended purpose which was clearly to be seen from the conduct of Thiessen. In order for the Gemeinde to rid itself of this evil and to undo the mistake it first had to occur that Thiessen be reaccepted into the Gemeinde as a brother. Indeed, with a welcoming handshake. This was not quite clear to many of the Brethren at the brotherhood meeting, including myself. But neither could I agree with the manner in which Ohm Enns there dealt with the matter.

On January 6th, Epiphany, a worship service was held in Fischau and Hierschau. We had not attended. On the 9th, a worship service was in Mariawohl. On the 16th of April worship service was held in Tiede. Here Thiessen had insisted on reacceptance into the Gemeinde. The matter was then adjourned to be dealt with in Neukirch. On January 23rd, a worship service was held in Neukirch where a brotherhood meeting was held and Thiessen was reaccepted into the Gemeinde by a majority vote and with the welcoming handshake of the Aeltester. On January 30, worship service had been held in Fischau and Hierschau. Peter Friesen of Tiede preached in Hierschau, his text being from I Corinthians 13 v. 4 to 8. I also attended.

On February 6, a worship service was held in Mariawohl. On the 13th worship service was held in Tiede. We did not attend. On the 20th worship service was held in Fischau. I was present together with J.D. and A. Dueck. On February 27th a worship service was held in Hierschau. Peter Friesen, Tiede, presented the sermon. I was also present, having gone there on horseback. Banns were announced for a bridal couple, namely Johan Thielmann and Maria Loewen. On March 6, worship service was held in Tiede.

On March 3rd my father, Johan Dueck died. He was buried on the 7th. On March 13, worship service was held in Neukirch. A. Dueck and I were also present, having gone on horseback. A brotherhood meeting was held and there was discussion of bringing an end to the discord in order that we could once more build the Gemeinde. On March 20th, Palm Sunday, worship service was

held in \_\_\_\_\_. On the Friday holiday, a worship service was held in Tiege. Peter Friesen, Tiege, presented the sermon. We were not present. On the 27th, Easter Friday, worship service was held in Neukirch. Peter Friesen had preached. We had also attended. After dinner we went to Alexanderkron together with A. Duecks. On the middle holiday, a worship service was held in Mariawohl. Ohm Johann Friesen preached. We were not present as we had been in Prangenuau.

It might be of interest to note that Peter L. Dueck the diarist was only some 24 years of age at the time of the events recorded. In the diary he is referring to his father Johann Dueck (1801-1866) who was one of the senior ministers of the Gemeinde at the time. The Peter L. Dueck church diary reveals that the Kleine Gemeinde had the occasional "Grot Sindach" (lit: great Sunday). This meant simply that only one worship service was held that Sunday and this one service was then attended by all the members and families of the Gemeinde instead of being divided between the usual two. Two services were more convenient not only for size limitations but also because of geographical considerations. The Molotschna covered an area of 20 by 30 miles so that if only one service was held some members might have to travel for up to 20 miles even if the service was somewhat centrally located.

When the Kleine Gemeinde expansionary settlements were founded during the 1860s each settlement developed its own arrangements for worship services modeled of course on that of the Molotschna mother Gemeinde. The diary of Kleine Gemeinde school teacher Diedrich S. Friesen provides a sampling of these arrangements in the Borosenko settlement:

"Sunday, October 20th, 1872. We drove to worship service. For dinner we were at J. Friesens, Blumenhof. Sunday the 29th, we had gone to worship service. A brotherhood meeting was also held. We drove to Corn. Loewens in Gruenfeld together with our parents. In the evening Joh. Reimers came over. Sunday, November 5th, Joh. from Nikolaithal came here. I drove along with him to worship service. Also brotherhood meeting. November 12th. Sunday. We were in Nikolaithal. In the evening Penners were here. November 19th Sunday, still not very nice. We drove to Anafeld. The parents were there. In the evening we were at Ungers. November 26th. Sunday. Drove to Steinbach for worship services. After dinner we were at the parents in Anafeld. In the evening at Joh. Friesens. December 3. Sunday. Johan and Jakob came here by horseback. We drove to worship service. We left Trienchen at Penners. After dinner Wiebes came here. In the evening we went to Penners."

The foregoing are relatively typical entries. It appears that worship services in Borosenko were also held in the various villages with the Blumenhof Gemeinde meeting most frequently in its main village of Blumenhof where it built a fine house of worship and school in the summer of 1872.

Brotherhood meetings were normally held every few weeks and usually after the regular worship service was over. On the announced Sunday the brethren simply stayed after the service and then the necessary business was discussed. This could include, a disciplinary problem, a question concerning someones acceptance into the Gemeinde, business matters, as well as the discussion of various theological points. The "Grote Sindach" referred to above was usually held when a general or all member brotherhood meeting was to be held to discuss some important matter. This might include an excommunication and other important Gemeinde decisions. The Gemeinde or congregation in each area seems to have been more or less autonomous in this regard although naturally a great deal of consulting was done among the members of the ministerial in each area. The brotherhood meetings were chaired by the Aeltester who led the meeting through the various items of business. It is recalled that even as late as the 1930s, issues at brotherhood meetings in the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, were discussed with reference to Anabaptist Mennonite authorities such as Menno Simons, Peter Peters, and the *Martyrs Mirror*.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.02 Organization, the Evangelical Model

The inner functioning of the Gemeinde, as the representative unit of the Church of God, was based on the apostolic polity and organizational model. Daniel Kaufman, a prominent leader of the American Mennonite Church, has provided an exposition of the apostolic church model and its evangelical basis. In his *Doctrines of the Bible*, Kaufman underlines that God is the author of church organization through the scripture. "He (God) supplies the overseers of the church, Ephesians 4, 11-16, gives direction for its government, Matthew 18, 15-17; Acts 20, 28, and Christ is frequently referred to as the "head", "door" "foundation", etc., of the church. Church organization is a very prominent feature in the work of both Christ and His disciples". Kaufman notes that the Bible also uses three suggestive figures or models of the church: 1) the Old Testament temple which prefigured the New Testament church and illustrates its functioning, 2) the body of Christ, 3) the bride of Christ.

One of the important aspects of evangelical church polity is the institution of the offices of the

ministry. Kaufman refers to the report of the apostle Paul that the offices ordained of God for the "work of the ministry" are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The calling, function, and service of each of these offices and their scriptural basis is discussed by venerable expositors of the faith such as Dirk Philips. The highest office in the Gemeinde is that of the Aeltester (Bishop), meaning overseer, or supervisor. It is a scriptural word used in a definite sense. Jesus Himself is called an Aeltester in this sense. 1 Peter 2:25. The Aeltester was in charge of the official functions of the Gemeinde with the awesome responsibility "to feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood", Acts 20:28.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites generally understood the evangelical model to be that the Aeltester was elected for life by the democratic vote of the brotherhood. He was led by the spirit of God and was directly responsible to the brotherhood for his leadership. Consequently, a conscientious leader was secure in his position and could lead and institute changes and policies even though unpopular with vested interests within the congregation. The Aeltester did not need to worry about being dismissed by a church board which was concerned about the bad public relations or the onerous financial requirements of a particular action, nor need he worry that the contents of his sermons would not be favourably received, for he was elected with a biblical mandate to lead and admonish as required, provided of course that he stayed within the democratic mandate of his constituency, the brotherhood. By comparison the pietist Mennonites usually quickly moved from the apostolic polity, to a corporate organizational style where a constitution and board of directors replaced the evangelical responsibility of the Aeltester to his brotherhood and his democratic mandate.

A similar evangelical basis existed for the offices of minister, deacon, pastor, evangelist, missionary, and teacher. The ministry is a divine calling controlled by God. In a treatise "On the sending of Preachers or Teachers", Dirk Philips set forth the evangelical position that a calling to the ministry can be manifested in two ways: 1) Those who are called directly by the Lord, such as the apostles whom he commissioned "to go into all the world." 2) A call through the Gemeinde such as the call given to Matthias who was "numbered with the eleven apostles" Acts 1:15-26. The call is recognized by the conviction of the individual conscience and the possession of the requisite qualifications. In a small Gemeinde the moving of the spirit of God sometimes results in a unanimous consensus among the brotherhood. More often the moving of the spirit will manifest the divine calling through the casting of lots or by the majority vote of the members of the Gemeinde. Matthias, for example, was chosen by lot from among two ministerial candidates appointed from among the brethren of the Jerusalem Gemeinde. Further information regarding the polity of the church of God and the organization of the Gemeinde is found in the work of Daniel Kaufman<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.03 Worship Services

The worship services of the Anabaptist Mennonites were patterned on the evangelical model as set forth in the Revelation of the Apostle John where he describes the spiritual kingdom instituted by Christ as a new Jerusalem: "And I saw no temple therein: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it. And the Lamb is the light thereof . . . And there shall no ways enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abominations, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Revelation 21:22-27. According to this model the primary emphasis of the worship of the Gemeinde and the individual believer was to be on the naked unadorned word of God and the simple moving of the spirit without elaborate embellishments or huge cathedrals, for the glory of the Lamb alone was the light of it.

In their emphasis on simple forms of worship and edification the Anabaptist Mennonites followed the pattern established by the apostolic church of the first and second centuries. In his book **Separated unto God** Dr. John C. Wenger has pointed out that "In the ancient church the congregations of Christians met together for worship in large rooms in the homes of Christian believers"<sup>7</sup> It was only with the decline of evangelical practices in the third century that the Christian church adopted the practices of various heathen religions requiring elaborate ritual and edifices within which to worship.

J.C. Wenger also states that evangelical simplicity should pervade the worship service itself. "The singing ought to be the spontaneous activity of the regenerated sons and daughters of God, rejoicing in their salvation, and worshiping God with reverential awe in the beauty of holiness. The church service should not be the place for the exhibition of vocal or instrumental talents on the part of a few gifted artists"<sup>8</sup> In keeping with the evangelical model the worship of the Anabaptist Mennonites was simple, consisting of congregational singing, the reading of the holy scriptures, an exposition



of the Word of God, and silent and vocal prayer to God. Occasional opportunity for mutual edification in testimony and exhortation was given to all who wished to do so. The feeling of reverence present in such an assembly of worship was not such as was aroused by all manner of outward ritualistic and emotional stimulents, but rather by the quiet and powerful moving of the spirit.

The worship service of the Kleine Gemeinde normally lasted several hours. On Sundays when this was followed by a brotherhood meeting it became an almost all day affair. In keeping with the evangelical model, the worship service itself, was plain and simple. The service commenced with the singing of songs from the *Gesangbuch*. These songs were led by the *Vorsaeuger* (Chorister) who intoned each stanza separately. The songs themselves were generally songs of suffering, commitment, and of prevailing in the earthly spiritual kingdom of God, as well as songs of future bliss in the heavenly realm for those who would be steadfast in suffering. This was followed by a silent congregational prayer where the whole audience would turn and kneel at the benches on which they had been sitting. After a period of silent prayer the congregation would again be seated. Then they would listen to the sermon which was read to them by the minister in charge of that service. The sermon itself was prepared in advance and if appropriate it might be presented at a number of different worship services over the years.

The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde never had any particular concern that this style of service was not fashionable enough or that it did not attract enough people to the service, as they were quite content to follow the evangelical model as well as historical precedent. The Anabaptist Mennonite worship service was the gathering of a group of people who had lived a life of piety during the week to express themselves in worship to their God and mutual exhortation and edification. This was a direct contrast to the churchiology of the separatist pietists whose piety tended to be centered around the church service itself. i.e. The Pietist expressed his Christian piety by attending and becoming involved in a myriad of church services and programing which in turn was designed to stimulate and arouse his present enjoyment of salvation. The Anabaptist-Mennonite style worship service of the Kleine Gemeinde made no attempt to stimulate as the individuals attending were themselves there to worship and not to be entertained.

In view of this theological perspective it is understandable that no great interest was created when the Supervisory-Committee in Regulation No. 4501 in 1843 suggested that the construction of a house of worship be brought underway for the Kleine Gemeinde. They had no great urge to obtain a large stone church for their worship services, even though their services might sometimes be interrupted by crowing roosters, nearby lowing cattle, or a baby crying. There is no indication that the Kleine Gemeinde was ever embarrassed because of the lack of refinement in their style of worship. They were quite content that their humble, plain, and simple service would in grace also be acceptable to their Lord.

For the Anabaptist-Mennonite there was a majesty about a Gemeinde kneeling in silent united prayer which the separatist pietist could never understand. To the Anabaptist-Mennonite there was a grandeur in the acappella singing of the songs of the faith which had been written by the spiritual fathers whose faith had been proven with the shedding of blood. When a congregation of one hundred or two hundred lifted their voices in unison to sing the words, "Kommt laszt uns einmal singen. wie viel gestorben sein, die vormal mit uns gingen, durchs land voll Angst und pein; wie viel von denen sind schon todt, doch nun bei selgen Dingen, gienieszen Himmelsbrod"; In heartfelt sincerity not a dry eye would be found among those present.

To the cultural pietist Mennonites such dull and boring services were no doubt evidence of the stupidity of the Anabaptist Mennonites. How could they even believe that God could be honoured through such nothingness. After all, proper "worship" required elaborately orchestrated singing, with "lively" expressions of faith and joy, a warm informal atmosphere created by speakers with a "high education", who were entertaining and who were ready, able and willing to deliver a sermon on any topic at the moments' notice. Surely this glorious and magnificent affair must unfold within the setting of a beautiful stone structure with properly designed acoustics which could properly symbolize the glory and majesty of God, where the melodious tones of a refined and polished choir accompanied by a magnificent pipe organ, or orchestra could grasp and envelope the sympathetic senses: Then and only then could God truly be honoured and the worshipper properly edified and blessed. To the pietist Mennonites these were the evidence of the spirit.

No doubt the worship services of the Kleine Gemeinde were dull and boring in the eyes of the neighbouring pietist Mennonite groups. No doubt they were also boring to some of the Kleine Gemeinde youths who had not yet been converted. These services were probably also boring to many

adults who had not yet been able to achieve a depth of spiritual commitment where they were joyfully satisfied to worship during the service. In this regard it also happened that Kleine Gemeinde couples sometimes joined other Gemeinden when they got married and later transferred their membership back to their mother Gemeinde after having reached a deeper level of spiritual commitment. It is regrettable that the separatist pietists chose to have such a derogatory and condescending attitude towards the evangelical style worship services of the Anabaptist-Mennonite. After all they were only following the practise and usage of their forefathers and were quite content with the same. The fact that their form of service was humble and simple did not necessarily mean that the spirit of God was not present. The Anabaptist-Mennonites believed that the word of God was sharper than any two edged sword and that it was more than powerful enough to be fully effective without the elaborate stimuli of the separatist pietist which were designed to excite the emotions of those in attendance.

In retrospect it seems regrettable that the pietist groups could not have been more tolerant of the full gospel worship service of the Anabaptist-Mennonites which they referred to as “dead” “boring” “dry” and “Spiritless” whenever they were proselytizing among them. By contrast they described their own church service as “lively”, “warm”, “spirit-filled”, etc. This was also true to an extent because the pietist church service was designed to be entertaining and emotionally stimulating to the partakers whereas the worship service of the Anabaptist-Mennonites had evolved with the intention that it was to be a humble tribute to God. Here again the maximum set out by Rev. Heinrich Balzer in his 1833 treatise **Faith and Reason** “not to judge other Christian confessions, they stand or fall before God” might well have been put to good use by some of these pietist-cultural Mennonite groups.

It should be noted that the Kleine Gemeinde had nothing against a meeting house in principle and in fact in 1872 the Blumenhof Gemeinde, in the Borosenko settlement, constructed a house of worship. However this building was only undertaken when even the largest residences became too small to accommodate the rapid increases in the membership of the congregation at Borosenko. This house of worship also contained a school and teacherage apparently in the Cornies pattern. After moving to America in 1874 the Kleine Gemeinde generally constructed separate meeting houses for worship in each settlement with a large enough population to warrant the same. These structures also served as a school building and were invariably plain utilitarian structures. It appears that the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia preferred to use its excess resources to help its own poorer brethren and to propagate the scripture and Anabaptist Mennonite writings.

#### 4.04 Devotional Life

The members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist Mennonite groups practiced an active and fervent devotional life. The letters of the Kleine Gemeinde indicate that the overwhelming concerns of these members even while visiting each other was spiritual and church related. Although discussion during the frequent visits would no doubt also dwell on secular matters such as how the crop was doing, or the latest babies, the conversation would invariably turn again to spiritual matters. On such occasions songs were invariably sung together from the *Gesangbuch*, especially before a meal, and during the afternoon and evening visit. The guests and hosts would read from the scripture or various writings such as the **Martyrs Mirror**, and frequently discussions took place regarding church and theological issues.

Family worship would vary substantially from one family to the next. Some adults would study the scripture and pray in the evening and others in the morning, etc. The reading of scripture and the inspirational and devotional writings of Menno Simons, Peter Peters, Dirk Philips, and the Martyrs' Mirror was encouraged. Often this was a family affair with the father reading aloud to his family. Most families frequently sang together from the *Gesangbuch* daily. Family prayer was usually silent, and was always practised before a meal. The spiritual responsibility of the head of the house to his family was continually emphasized and the vital importance of the family altar promoted.

Family togetherness was considered essential in the Kleine Gemeinde. When travelling to attend worship service in another village the family would usually go as a group. After travelling for a half hour or more, they would enjoy a two hour worship service, and if the service happened to be followed by a brotherhood meeting this could easily take another hour or more. Children were not necessarily expected to attend and must have looked forward to the opportunity of visiting with their friends with deep anticipation. During brotherhood meetings the ladies would visit in the home where the services were being held or in another Kleine Gemeinde home in the same village.

This family togetherness was typical of the Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in many aspects of their lives, in work as well as relaxation. The visiting itself was an aspect

of family togetherness as cousins and second cousins were important members of the family who had to be visited and with whom social contact had to be maintained. The extended family was undoubtedly one of the important factors in making the lifestyle of the *Kleine Gemeinde* as enriching and vibrant as it was. The familial love and mutual interest was frequently passed on to the extended family and is evidenced in the numerous *Familienbücher* and genealogies written and published by descendants of the *Kleine Gemeinde*. This familial concern is amply demonstrated by someone like the venerable grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) who wrote many letters of love and admonishment to the members of his extended family and his *Gemeinde*.

It seems that this concern and love frequently vanished in the family branches where someone had abandoned the parental faith. Often such individuals did not even want to maintain contact with their siblings and were probably embarrassed to have close relatives who still maintained a traditional full gospel lifestyle. Often such family members, who in their mind had now discovered the "real truth", also developed a superiority complex so that any contact they would have with their "backward" *Kleine Gemeinde* cousins would be condescending at best. The family genealogies show that the descendants of those who made the decision to leave the evangelical faith to join a pietist orientated denomination or other group often disappeared into the world without a trace after a generation or two.

This of course is not to say that many of the individuals who left the Anabaptist-Mennonite fold did not live a very devoted and committed Christian life. Sometimes such individuals even made wonderful contributions in their field after they had left the restraints of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage behind them. In fact it seems that the commitment and seriousness of a *Kleine Gemeinde* background often was a crucible which allowed that individual to rise to substantial achievements in his new social setting whatever that might be. This special dedication and inspiration might even carry over to the children for a generation or two. But the genealogy records show that the end result was the same, faceless assimilation into the world. Cousin would not know cousin and any connection with the former Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage was firmly shunned.

In this regard it would be of assistance to refer back to the philosophical differences between the two movements frequently compared in this book. The concept of *Gemeinde* or brotherhood was integral to the Anabaptist Mennonite. In addition he was only a humble fellow-pilgrim and day-labourer in the peaceable kingdom of God on earth. It followed that mutual support, love, and understanding would be essential to the Anabaptist-Mennonite for both reasons and accordingly it was natural that familial relationships would be important to him. The separatist pietists on the other hand was already in a state of bliss as he enjoyed his future salvation and naturally he had less reason to look to his congregation, brethren and family for love and support.

In a similar vein it is also interesting to compare the Anabaptist-Mennonite concept of devotions with that of the separatist pietist. Because of his emotional orientation the pietist was naturally inclined in favour of elaborate, and passionate public prayers. This same inclination was present in the devotions of the pietist which included extensive and emotional vocal prayers prior to meals and otherwise. In contrast the Anabaptist-Mennonites stressed silent prayer for which they found scriptural basis in such passages as Matthew chapter six. The members of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* spent a great deal of time in private devotions, reading, studying and writing. The members of the *Gemeinde* also believed in spending time in seclusion and in private prayer. e.g. An orphaned girl working as a maid at the place of the *Kleine Gemeinde* minister Abraham Klassen in Prangenau, reports that uncle Klassen regularly retired into the summer kitchen by himself to pray.

#### 4.05 Conversion, A Full Gospel Experience

To the Anabaptist Mennonites conversion was a full gospel experience. Professor John C. Wenger refers to conversion as "the response of the sinner under the conviction of the Holy Spirit in which the sinner repents, renouncing his sin, and exercises faith in Christ as Savior and Lord" In Wenger's view repentance in turn has three aspects: 1) Intellectual, as the recognition of one's sinfulness and helplessness, and a personal knowledge of sin. 2) The emotional aspect of repentance consists of Godly sorrow for sin. 3) The volitional element is the climax of conversion, and is the change of purpose and inward turning to Christ. Conversion in turn has the following aspects" 1) the preaching of the Word of God; 2) Holy Spirit conviction and contrition; 3) repentance and faith; 4) Christian baptism; 5) Christian discipleship and fellowship<sup>70</sup>.

Daniel Kaufman notes that the word "conversion" is used only once in the Bible. Acts 15:3. Nevertheless the doctrine of conversion is fundamental to the Christian faith and means a "turning, a change, a bringing back". In the view of Kaufman a true evangelical conversion has not taken place

unless the believer, "will change his ways, forsake all sinful habits, and in his daily life he will manifest the fruits of a righteous life within". Kaufman cites a number of examples of evangelical conversion: 1) the woman in Simon's house, Luke 7:36-50, 2) Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9:1-18, 3) Cornelius, Acts 10, 4) The Jailer, Acts 16:27-34. Kaufman also notes than an evangelical conversion is manifested by its fruits: 1) "A new creature 2 Corinthians 5:17. 2) Adoption into God's family. Romans 8:10-15. 3) Meekness and lowliness of spirit. Matthew 11:29. 4) Clothed with God's righteousness Matthew 5:14-16. 5) Zeal in the master's cause. Titus 2:14. 6) Walking after the spirit and not after the flesh. Romans 7:9-8:1. 7) Enjoys Christian fellowship 1 John 1:7<sup>11</sup>.

The fundamental nature of evangelical conversion is manifest by the language which the Bible uses to describe its results. Paul Lederach has noted that "it is important to realize that the words "follow me" appear more frequently in the New Testament than "born again" . . . The importance of this has not dawned on much of North American Christendom. John's Gospel in which the concept "born anew" is found, begins with the call to follow. Jesus found Philip and said "Follow me" (John 1:43). It ends as the disciples surrounded the risen Lord. His last words to Peter and John were "Follow me" (John 21:19-22)<sup>12</sup>

In "A Brief Admonition concerning regeneration and the New Creature" Dirk Philips underlines the same emphasis with the following words: "Not everyone who professes regeneration and babbles much of the new creature is therefore a newborn creature born of God, but only he that has partaken of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:3; Hebrews 3:14) and of the attributes of Jesus Christ and the power and character of the Holy Spirit and has become conformed to the image of Christ, and serves God in all submissiveness, obedience and righteousness. 1 John 4:13; Romans 9:30. "Dirk Philips also notes the quiet peace and joy of those who had truly made the way of Christ their own. "And as many as walk according to this rule (that is, according to the rule, standard and ordinance of Jesus Christ), peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. Galatians 6:15"<sup>13</sup>.

Many Christian confessions, regrettably, have departed from the evangelical form and have adopted a legalistic view of conversion as the instant opening and closing of the door to salvation. Hence the separatist pietist talked much of an earthshaking momentary "conversion experience" which resulted in the immediate redemption of the individual through the attribution of God's righteousness. The sinner now commenced a legalistic pursuit of enjoyment of this salvation as an entrance requirement of the assembly of the elect. With the shifting of the work and teaching of Jesus to a future millenium the pietist conversion experience became a totally subjective experiential matter. Naturally all possible outward stimuli were used to induce the necessary state of frenzy, including blaring elaborate music, jingoistic harangues and even heathen techniques such as jumping, shouting, screaming, somnambulism and tongue worship.

To the Anabaptist Mennonite conversion was an evangelical experience, namely, a first hand experience of Christ and the Gospels. Over a period of time the spirit of God worked on the inner man and convicted the conscience of the sinner, which if heeded, eventually resulted in a conscious decision to become converted to Christ, and to become a humble day-labourer in his earthly spiritual kingdom. This view followed the evangelical model of the conversion of the Apostle Paul who had been convicted at the stoning of Stephan, struck on the road to Damascus sometime later, finally making a conscious commitment for Christ after three days of blindness, fasting and meditation. Acts 9:1-18. His Epistles demonstrate that this was only a modest starting point for the apostle who made a life long commitment to the way of his master and the experience of holy discipleship.

John C. Wenger has pointed out that a normative evangelical conversion is not an internal subjective matter, i.e., the efficacy of a full gospel conversion is not determined by the state of feeling or emotions of the believer. "It is not in order for the child of God to anxiously inspect the quality of his faith, wondering whether it is sufficiently strong to save him. Saving faith does not have its eye on itself, but on its object, that is, God. The promise of eternal life is not given to those of exceptionally confident trust, but to everyone who believes on the Savior and yields to him sincerely."<sup>14</sup> Those Christian confessions which legalistically insist on certain emotional states or degrees of feeling saved, do great damage to the biblical teaching on the rebirth and frequently divert the work of the spirit from a conviction to discipleship to a devil pleasing emphasis on the satiation of the inward sensual emotions. Not to say, of course, that the instant emotional conversion experience is automatically invalid. In fact there are several instances where such an experience is recounted in scripture e.g. The case of Zaccheus who immediately gave one-half of all his possessions to the poor.

A number of examples of full gospel conversions are to be found in the literature of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In his *Memoirs* Klaas Reimer describes how the spirit of God convicted him

over a number of years before he really made an evangelical commitment to Christ and his Cross. In fact Reimer's entire exposition manifests a lifelong conversion process by the molding of his being and the refinement of his character through the working of the Holy Spirit and the manifest calling of God. In Reimer's view, the bliss and rapture of salvation working conversion need not be pursued or artificially stimulated as such a state was the promised inheritance of every child of God through eternity.

A similar view of evangelical conversion is found in the writings of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849). Although Friesen was a prominent member of the pietistical Orloff religious community he did not find true spiritual fulfillment until he had made a full gospel commitment to Christ which in his case meant a life time of strife and adversity as he pursued his God given mission to salvage a remnant of evangelical Christianity in Russia. Another example of evangelical conversion is found in the writings of Heinrich Balzer. Balzer's case is even more interesting as he had initially adopted the separatist pietism of the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde which he apparently rejected in favour of the milder Orloff pietism. Through the working of the spirit on his inward man over a good number of years he was finally released from his blindness and able to perceive the simple unadorned truths of the Gospel. As a consequence of his yielding to the Word, Balzer became one of the most profound defenders of evangelical faith in Czarist Russia.

Another example of an evangelical conversion is found in Peter Toews (1841-1922), Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Even as a young lad Toews was conscious that his parents and their Gemeinde were set apart from the world around them. He himself wrote that:

"The witness of my parents was such that I believed in the *Gemeinde* of God from an early age, and that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, to which my parents belonged, was such a *Gemeinde*. The spiteful teasing of my school mates who belonged to other *Gemeinden*, strengthened my faith. i.e. When they called me "*Froamskotuks*", "the Godly one" or the "pious one", because I was held back from carrying on in mischief during the night, taking part in Godless associations, use of tobacco, playing cards, swearing, etc.

"I was baptized and accepted in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde by *Aeltester* Johan Friesen on June 4, 1861. I believed that I was converted, even though I was not instructed in the aspect of being consciously aware of the forgiveness of my sins through faith. The emphasis was more on the living of a life of discipleship. I overcame a special experience in the summer of 1863, through the reading of Menno Simons, **Meditation on the twenty-fifth Psalm**, which at the time was my favorite devotional reading. A spurned proposal of marriage was the cause, and as I had followed the influence of friends instead of seeking the countenance and counsel of God, I came into distress and temptation, and learnt what it was to be tried and tempted face to face by Satan. But much more so I also learnt to seek the Lord, and to experience His friendly countenance and to be secure for ones self, as the Saviour says, "I have prayed for you", etc. The experience was so wonderful, especially for a few days, that it was like bathing in the peace of God. As the poet sings in the song: '*Fort, Fort, mein Herz, zum Himmel*', and so on. '*Hier kann dein Herz sich Baden, schnee weisz im Laemmlens Blut . . .*'" When I married (in the knowledge of God's leading) later in fall my heart was still in this precious peace."<sup>15</sup>

Another description of a full gospel conversion is found in the writings of Abraham B. Klassen (1850-1935), the son of David Klassen (1813-1900) who had served as the 1873 delegate to America for the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde<sup>16</sup>. In his **Memoirs** Abraham B. Klassen describes his conversion as a twenty year old youth and the process which culminated with his baptism and acceptance into the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1870. He describes this experience as follows:

"My life continued without consideration being given to my salvation. Only after some time were disturbing thoughts to be found within me, as to whether I would be able to stand before God in this way. Then, apparently without any human actions having taken place, the spirit of God started to work in my heart, in consequence of which I felt compelled to commence a new life. In the spring of the year 1870 I became minded to unite myself to the so-called Kleine Gemeinde through baptism. At that time it was the practise that those who wanted to be joined to the Gemeinde had to present themselves to the junior minister a considerable time beforehand, in order to first be instructed. After we had received sufficient instruction we were advanced forward and were baptized. When the question was put to me, as to whether I believed that I had received forgiveness of my sins, I was able to answer with a joyful "yes". Thus I had become a young plant in the garden of God. In order to grow, thrive, and increase, such a plant now had to be, and should be nurtured in Godly living . . ."<sup>17</sup>

Here again is an experience which the separatist pietist could never understand. How could anyone be saved without screaming, emotional singing and harangues, drums beating, etc.? Seemingly such a simple unadorned working of the spirit of God was beyond the comprehension of the separatist pietist. In fact, someone like Peter M. Friesen, apparently interpreted the lack of artificial stimulants and legalistic expressions of faith in the Kleine Gemeinde to demonstrate that the group was "devoid

of any joyous knowledge of God's grace<sup>18</sup>. Such a categorical attitude was very typical of separatist pietism.

Even a child of the Kleine Gemeinde such as Martin B. Fast displays this regrettable character of separatist pietism, when he states that most of the Mennonite youth in his day were accepted into the church without being converted<sup>19</sup>. He goes on to state that only a few people were converted, or "saved", to use pietist terminology, during the first years in Russia<sup>20</sup>. It is unfortunate that so many capable young men such as Fast fell prey to such blindness.

Martin Fast also related an interesting incident from 1880 the year in which he underwent his pietist style "conversion experience". At this time Fast was working for Abraham F. Thiessen in Jansen, Nebraska, and he made haste to tell his uncle about his great experience. The reader will recall that Thiessen was the Kleine Gemeinder who had paid the full price for heeding the call to the cross. He had suffered imprisonment, the ridicule of his co-confessionists, and the sacrifice of family and earthly wealth for the sake of biblical justice among the Russian Mennonites. One can well imagine the reaction of this persecution-scared veteran of the faith when the young enthusiastic Fast approached him to describe his pietist style conversion. Fast himself recalled that Thiessen had chuckled and replied, "Martin, you have now ascended upon a small sandhill where children eagerly play. I myself was at that state once, but I have proceeded further up the ladder in order to find the deeper truth."<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.06 The Ordinances

Dirk Philips, the great evangelist and theologian, describes seven ordinances in his powerful exposition of the Church of God. "*The first rule of order* is that the church above all other things maintain the pure and unadulterated doctrine of the word of God (Matthew 28:19-20) and along with this have true ministers who are properly called and chosen by the Lord and the church"<sup>22</sup> The proper calling of the ministerial of the evangelical Gemeinde has already been discussed in section 4.02. Pure doctrine was an ongoing concern of the Anabaptist Mennonite church as is reflected in numerous confessions and statements of faith over the centuries. In his treatise **The Doctrines of the Mennonites** J.C. Wenger has referred to the seven articles Schleithem Confession adopted by the infant Swiss Mennonite church in 1527, as well as the eighteen article Doctrecht Confession adopted by the Dutch Mennonite Church in 1632<sup>23</sup>. Reference should also be made to the important thirty three article confession of faith written by Aeltester P.J. Twisk and first published in 1600<sup>24</sup>.

Only little attention has been given to the doctrinal writing of the Prussian Mennonite church notwithstanding considerable activity in that area. A major Confession of Faith was written by Aeltester George Hansen in 1703. This confession placed great emphasis on evangelical discipline and outlined helpful guidelines for the implementation of the same. This emphasis underlined the fact that the Prussian Mennonites remained very insecure and subject to persecution during the early part of the 16th century. The confession of faith written by Aeltester Hans von Steen almost a century later returned to a more balanced exposition of the fundamentals of full gospel faith.<sup>25</sup>

The twenty article 1792 Prussian Confession of Faith composed by Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of Elbing represented a century long high point in the exposition of evangelical faith<sup>26</sup>. The Kleine Gemeinde naturally adopted this confession as its own and continued its use throughout its sojourn in Russia as well as thereafter. This twenty article statement of faith confessed that the Word had existed from the beginning and was made flesh in Jesus Christ. The word was Jesus Christ and became Jesus Christ incarnate. This teaching elevated the scripture to a component of the trinity in a spiritual sense. The gospel, containing the teachings of Christ, was the spiritual sword by which he would judge and destroy his enemies. Revelation 19:21. The followers of Christ would have his name written on their foreheads, Revelation 22:4, meaning that his commandments were written in their hearts and obeyed by them.

The leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde were naturally very upset when in 1834 the Prussian Mennonite Aeltesten published a new Confession of Faith which deleted much of the strict evangelical flavour of the 1792 Confession, thereby manifesting a gradual abandonment of the full gospel teachings of their forefathers. The full text of the twenty article Confession of Faith as employed by Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) in 1844 is set forth in Section 4.08 of this chapter.

"*The second rule or order* which Christ established in his church is the proper, scriptural use of the sacraments of Jesus Christ, that is, of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For the penitent, believing and regenerated children of God must be baptized and for them the Lord' Supper is ordained"<sup>27</sup> Sections 4.07 - 4.09 of this chapter consist of the text of an actual baptismal service of the Mennonite

Kleine Gemeinde in the year 1844. Section 12.09 of **The Golden Years** contains an extract from the text of a sermon presented for a communion service by Aeltester Klaas Reimer in 1829. The theological significance of baptism and communion is dealt with in the standard Anabaptist Mennonite reference works such as: John C. Wenger, **The Doctrines of the Mennonites** (Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1952), John C. Wenger, **Introduction to Theology** (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1954), Daniel Kaufman, **Doctrines of the Bible** (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania 1928) and in the **Mennonite Encyclopedia**.

An ancient booklet of 1852 entitled **Kurze Aelteste Geschichte der Taufgesinnten (Mennoniten genannt)**<sup>26</sup> provides an interesting description of the practice of baptism and communion service among the Russian Mennonites at that time, which would also apply to the practice of the Kleine Gemeinde:

“The assemblies of the Mennonites for the worship service to God, which are entirely devoid of outwardly show, consist of songs, prayers, preaching, and catechism. They practice silent prayer. Baptism is conducted once a year, usually two weeks before Holy Communion. After the baptismal candidates have indicated their desire to receive holy baptism, and after they have been instructed and examined, they are presented to the Gemeinde by the Aeltester as such who wish to be received into the Gemeinde by holy baptism. Each member of the Gemeinde is then asked whether they have anything to say in that regard, and as to the testimony they can give of the candidates. These presentations are made to the Gemeinde on two consecutive Sundays. The confession of faith is also presented to the Gemeinde on these Sundays by the Aeltester. On the third Sunday the candidates must appear before the Gemeinde in order to be seen by all the members present.

The baptism itself is held on the fourth Sunday. After an appropriate sermon by the Aeltester the candidates arise together whereupon the Aeltester asks them the following questions: 1) Whether they are remorseful for their sins, and whether they seek forgiveness and cleansing from the same through baptism, and whether they have the intention to serve God through a holy life? 2) Whether they believe that Jesus of Nazareth, born of the virgin Mary, etc., is truly the son of the living God? 3) Whether they believe and confess, that the teachings of the Gemeinde as they have been presented on the preceding two Sundays, are in accordance with the Word of God, and whether they promise to steadfastly follow the same? When each one individually has affirmed the questions with a “yes” all the candidates kneel down and the Aeltester presents an admonishment to them. Then the Aeltester and all the members gathered in the assembly, kneel and pray silently for the blessing of the candidates. When the silent prayer is ended, the Aeltester places his right hand upon the head of the candidates (all candidates are kneeling) and says: “Upon the confession of your sins, and your heartfelt remorse for the same, and upon the confession of your faith that you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the son of God, I baptize you in accordance with your will and desire, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen”. After each candidate has received baptism the Aeltester takes each one in turn by the hand and raises them up with the words “Arise, brother (sister), welcome into the Gemeinde of the Lord”. In conclusion the Aeltester pronounces a blessing and the service concludes with a song”.

“The holy supper is generally held fourteen days after the baptism. In a preparatory sermon a week earlier, each and everyone is admonished to truly examine themselves, before they enter to partake of the holy sacrament. On the appointed day the service to God consists of the usual singing, silent prayer, and a sermon especially prepared for the communion service. The assembled members then kneel and each one prays silently by themselves. This is followed by another short admonition. The Aeltester now proceeds to stand before a table which is covered with a white cloth, and upon which a number of small loaves of bread are lying and a number of beakers are standing. A tin (zinnerne) flask of wine and a basket filled with loaves of bread are standing at the side of the table. The Aeltester now takes one of the loaves and as he does so he presents the first part of the introductory remarks, which emphasize that the loaf is not the body of Christ, and that it is only a token of his crucified body, in the same way that Jesus is also referred to as the manna and the rock. The bread is to signify the community of believers, and the breaking of the bread is to place the suffering of the Savior before their eyes. This is followed by further appropriate admonishments. The Aeltester then breaks off a piece of the loaf for himself and likewise for each of the ministers sitting next to him, and then also for each of the other members throughout the entire building. In so doing the deacons carry the basket of loaves for him. When he is finished he returns to the table and asks whether anyone has been missed in the distribution of the bread, and if no one answers, he speaks as follows: “Take my beloved, and eat of the bread of the Lord!” Whereupon each one eats his bread in silence.

After the bread is eaten, the deacons place a flask of wine upon the table from which the Aeltester then fills a beaker and says the second part of the blessing, in which he points out that the wine is not the true blood of Jesus, but only a symbol thereof, just as the pouring out of the wine is only a symbol of the shedding of the blood of Christ. He then closes with the words, “Take, my beloved, let us all drink thereof”. He first drinks from the beaker and then passes the same to the ministers sitting next to him. The deacons and ministers now carry many beakers of wine to all parts of the assembly passing it around so that each one has opportunity to drink from the wine. All this time, songs dealing with holy communion are sung. The entire service is then brought to an end with a closing admonition and the pronouncement of a blessing. The Mennonites themselves call the conducting of the Lord’s Supper “a unity in spirit and in faith”. Accordingly no unbaptized person or

members of other confessions are permitted to partake of the service. Nor is any member allowed to take part who is unreconciled with his neighbour in some respect”.

Other writers such as Danial Kaufman consider the ordinances to be only the outward signs which God has instituted for his church and for the edification of his followers. The importance of the scriptural ordinances lies in the blessing which extends from their faithful practice. Kaufman refers to seven scriptural ordinances: Water baptism, Communion, Feet Washing, Devotional Covering, The Holy Kiss, Anointing with Oil, and Marriage<sup>29</sup>.

“*The third ordinance* or order which Christ established in his Church is the washing of feet of the saints, which Christ commanded his disciples to observe, John 13:4-17, and this for two reasons. First, he would have us know that he himself must cleanse us after the inner man, and that we must allow him to wash away the sins that beset us. Hebrews 12:1. The second reason why Jesus instituted the ordinance of footwashing is that we shall humble ourselves among one another, and that we hold our fellow-believers in the highest respect for the reason that they are the saints of God and members of the body of Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Ghost dwells in them”<sup>30</sup>. The institution of footwashing in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde is discussed in Section 11.09 of **The Golden Years**.

*The Fourth Rule or Ordinance is Evangelical Separation*, without which the Church of God cannot stand or be maintained. The application of this ordinance in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde has already been discussed in Sections 11.10, 15.06, 16.16 and elsewhere in **The Golden Years**.

“*The Fifth ordinance is the command of love* which Christ gave his disciples saying, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to another”. John 13:35-36, and John 15:12-17 . . . Then again brotherly love is shown in this that among one another we cheerfully bear one another’s burdens, not only in spiritual matters, but also with temporal gifts, which we have received from the Lord, that we minister to the necessity of the saints. Romans 12:13. And Paul writes to Timothy: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19”.<sup>31</sup> The application of the evangelical ordinance of community of sharing within the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde has already been considered in Chapter Eighteen of **The Golden Years**.

Dirk Philips describes the sixth rule as follows:

“*The sixth ordinance* which Christ has instituted for his church *is the keeping of all commandments* (Matt. 28:20), for he demands of all his disciples a godly life, that they walk according to the gospel, openly confess the truth before men (1 Cor. 7:19; Phil. 1:27; Matt. 10:10-32), deny self, and faithfully follow in his footsteps, voluntarily take up his cross, forsake all things and earnestly seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 16:25; 1 Peter 2:22; Matt. 6:16,20), the unseen heavenly things and eternal life. He also teaches his disciples to be poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), have godly sorrow, meekness, purity of heart, mercy, peacemaking, patience in persecution for righteousness’ sake and to rejoice in conscience when they are despised and rejected for his name’s sake (Luke 9:23; 17:33).

He also instructs his own in true humility and warns them faithfully against all spiritual and carnal pride. Moreover he holds before them the fact that they must hear and keep God’s word, hunger and thirst after righteousness, beware of false prophets (Luke 8:14; John 8:47; Matt. 5:6), not follow the hireling and flee from the strange voice (Matt. 16:6; John 10:12); also that they are to fast, and to pray without ceasing, that they are to guard against gluttony, drunkenness, and anxiety regarding bodily food and raiment (Matt. 6:5; Luke 21:34); that they must watch, and prepare for his appearing (Matt. 24:32; 25:13), that they must beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (Matt. 16:6), so that they will not glory in their own works and seek a false righteousness therein; that they shall not watch for the mote in their brother’s eye and not be aware of the beam in their own eye (Matt. 7:3); also, not to swallow camels while they strain at gnats, etc.

“Yea, he prescribes to his own the rule of perfection, to “love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good unto them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44), and from the heart to forgive them their debts; not to avenge themselves, but to leave the matter to God, to whom all vengeance belongs (Rom. 12:19). Also, that they are not only to guard against the works of the flesh which are manifest, such as murder, adultery, false swearing, etc. (Matt. 5:22), but also against anger, evil speaking, inordinate lusts and desires of the heart, and that they are to guard against all kinds of swearing (Matt. 5:34), and not to do this in any manner, on pain of hell-fire, as may be seen in the gospel according to Matthew. The apostles likewise teach in their epistles that Christians must in all things show themselves obedient children of their heavenly Father as the elect and chosen ones of a holy God (Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Cor. 6:4), as the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the instruments of the Holy Ghost, as a royal priesthood, as a chosen generation (1 Peter 2:9), as a people owned by God, a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Eph.



5:27; Tit. 2:14), as the children of light, who must walk no longer in darkness, but in the light, having been called out of darkness into the wonderful light that they might declare the power of God, and are therefore delivered from the hand of their enemies to serve God in holiness and in righteousness all the days of their lives (Luke 2:70)."

"This is the philosophy of heaven, which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, received of his Father, brought down from heaven and taught his disciples. This is the counsel and will of God, the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:27), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit; and in all this the Lord Jesus Christ is to his own a Master sent of God, whom they must hear (Matt. 3:17; 17:5); a Shepherd or Prior, whom they must follow (1 Peter 2:25); an Example, to which they must conform themselves (Rom. 8:29). This is the rule of Christianity, of which Paul writes: "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). But those who will not walk according to this rule are not Christians, let them profess what they will."

Dirk Philips describes the *seventh rule* as follows: "The seventh ordinance or rule is that *all Christians must suffer and be persecuted*, as Christ has foretold and promised them, saying: that the world shall have joy, but "ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33): "But be of good cheer," for "your sorrow shall be turned into joy." "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt. 24:9): yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). Paul concurs with this and says: "If so be that we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together," and inherit our heavenly Father's kingdom (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). "Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Thus Paul and Barnabas testified in all the churches that they must through much persecution and suffering enter the kingdom of God (Acts 13:50). In short, the entire holy scripture testifies that the righteous must suffer much, and possess his soul in patience (Luke 21:19). Where there is a godly Abel there does not fail to be a wicked Cain (Gen. 4:1,2, etc.); where there is a chosen David there is also a rejected Saul to persecute him (1 Sam. 18:11); where Christ is born, there is a Herod who seeks his life (Matt. 2:16); where he openly preaches and works, there Annas and Caiaphas, together with the bloodthirsty Jews, gather together and hold counsel against him (Matt 26:3,4; Mark 14:1, Luke 22:1; Acts 4:6), nor can they cease until they have killed him, and force Pilate to do their will.

Thus must the true Christians here be persecuted for the sake of truth and righteousness, but the Christian persecutes no one on account of his faith. For Christ sends his disciples as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16); but the sheep does not devour the wolf, but the wolf the sheep. Hence they can, nevermore be counted as a church of the Lord who persecute others on account of their faith; for, in the first place, God, the heavenly Father has committed all judgment unto Jesus Christ (John 5:22), to be a Judge of the souls and consciences of men and rule in his church with the scepter of his word forever (Luke 2:68-79). In the second place, it is the office or work of the Holy Spirit to reprove the world of the sin of unbelief (John 16:8).

Now, it is evident that the Holy Spirit through the apostles and all pious witnesses of the truth did not administer this reproof by violence or with the material sword, but by God's word and power. In the third place the Lord Jesus Christ gave his church the power and established the rule to separate from her, avoid and shun the false brethren, disorderly and disobedient, contentious and heretical people, yea, all in the church who are found wicked, as has already been said (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 5:13; Tit. 3:19); what is done over and above this is not Christian, evangelical nor apostolical.

In the fourth place the parable of the Lord in the gospel proves clearly to us that he does not permit his servants to pull up the tares so that thereby the wheat be not pulled up also; but they are to let the wheat and the tares grow together in the world until the Lord shall command his reapers, that is, his angels, to gather the wheat into this barn and cast the tares into the fire (Matt. 24:30).

From this it is evident that no church may exercise dominion over the consciences of men with the carnal sword, or seek by violence, to force unbelievers to believe, nor to kill the false prophets with sword and fire; but that she must with the word of God judge and expel those in the church who are found wicked; and what is done over and above this is not Christian, nor evangelical, nor apostolical. And if some one ventures to assert that the powers that be have not received the sword in vain (Rom. 13:1), and that God through Moses commanded that the false prophets be put to death (Deut. 13:5), I will give this answer in brief: The higher power has received the sword or authority from God, not that it shall judge therewith in spiritual matters (for these things must be judged by the spiritual, and spiritually, 1 Cor. 2:13), but to maintain a proper policy and good order among its subjects, to protect the good and punish the evil. And God's command through Moses to put the false prophets to death is a command of the old, and not the new testament.

Contrasted to this we have received another command from God that we are to take heed of false prophets, that we are not to give ear to them, that we are to shun a heretic, and thereby commit them to the judgment of God (Matt.7:13; John 10:5; Tit. 3:10). Now, if, according to the old testament command, false prophets were to be put to death, then this would have to be carried out, first of all, with those who are looked upon as false prophets and antichrists by almost the whole world. Likewise the higher powers would be obliged to put to death not only the false prophets, but also all image worshippers, and those who serve idols, and who counsel other people to commit sacrilege (Deut. 13:1; Ex. 22:18), and all who blaspheme the name of the Lord, and who swear falsely by that name, all who curse father or mother and profane the Sabbath (Ex. 20:7-10; Deut. 27:17); for they are all alike condemned to death by the law as well as the false prophets are.

It is therefore nothing but an effort to sew fig-leaves together to hide their shame, on the part of those who would decorate their tyranny with scripture and propose that they do not put Christians to death, but only heretics, and that God thus commanded through Moses. The world even looks upon the most pious Christians as the most wicked heretics, just as all good prophets were always looked upon by the world as liars, agitators, fanatics and deceivers (Jer. 11:21; Amos 2:9; Matt. 5:11; 23:30; Acts 6:14), and Christ himself was numbered with the transgressors (Matt. 26:55), and the apostles are set forth as the least, and as it were appointed unto death, made a spectacle unto the world, as a byword, reproach and the offscouring of the world (Psa. 44:13,14; 1 Cor. 4:9), and this is still the case with all genuine Christians; but they are comforted herein, for they trust in the Lord their God, and comfort themselves with the glorious promise given them by God, namely, that they are blessed or saved. Matt. 5:10-12), that theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and that the Spirit of God rests upon them when they are persecuted for righteousness' sake, when men say all manner of evil against them falsely and for the sake of the name of Christ, if they have become partakers of the sufferings of Christ and for his sake are despised, knowing that they shall also be made partakers of his glory (Matt. 5:12, 1 Peter 4:14; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12).

I have now briefly pointed out and discussed what the church of God is, how and by what means it is built up, what ordinances and rules are included, by what symbols it is portrayed, how it may be recognized, and how distinguished from all sects: for in all false and antichristian churches these things are not found, namely, no real birth, no real distinction between law and gospel, that brings forth fruit, and by which people truly repent and are converted from unrighteousness unto God (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8), no true knowledge of the only and eternal God, who is life eternal, the fullness of wisdom and of righteousness, that is manifested by the keeping of the commandments of Christ (John 17:3; Wis. of Sol. 15:3), no true knowledge of the pure, holy, and spotless humanity of Jesus Christ, no faith that produces fruits, no scriptural baptism or Lord's Supper, no Christian washing of the feet of saints (John 13:5-17) in the quietness of true humility, no key to the kingdom of heaven, no evangelical ban or separation, no shunning of the temples of idolatry and of false worship, no undissimulated brotherly love, no godfearing life, no keeping of the commands of Christ, no persecution for righteousness' sake. All these ordinances and evidences of true Christianity are found in no anti-christian churches in true form and condition, but everywhere the reverse, as may be clearly seen in these days, if so be that a man has eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand (Matt. 13:9; Rev. 2:7; 3:6).<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.07 Preparatory Sermon for Baptism

The remaining three sections of this chapter consist of the text of a baptismal service performed by Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) in 1844. The text of the service was recorded in 1852 and preserved by Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, Molotschna, the youngest brother of Aeltester Friesen.<sup>33</sup>

**Introductory Presentation** - "May the God of Peace and Jesus Christ, the prince of peace, who says, My peace I give unto you My peace I commit unto you, also pour out over the present assembly the Holy Spirit, which is the true master teacher leading and guiding us in all truth to the glory, praise and honour of our God.. This, I wish from the heart to all my beloved hearers as well as for myself, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Beloved friends! Faith is a particular knowledge whereby one has hope and does not doubt that which cannot be seen. Hebrews 2:11. For this reason we have gathered together at this time in order to renew the same in our mind in the name of Jesus, in order that we would not err in any manner from the way which leads to heaven, and rather, that we would seek to conduct our life and walk in accordance with the proscriptioms of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also that at the end of our pilgrimage, we may have the comfort of eternal rest for our souls, through the all abundant grace of God and through the holy blood of Jesus!

"When the children of Israel had sinned in the wilderness in the time of Moses, God created fiery serpents who bit them so that they had to die. In order to save the people of Israel, Moses at the command of God, had to erect a brass snake and the ones who looked upon this brass snake were healed. Likewise with us, for through the fall of Adam all of us have been wounded and made the partakers of the eternal damnation, from which there is no other cure or redemption but Jesus, who had to die on the cross for our sins, as he himself says "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:14-15. "There is no other way whereby man can obtain salvation but through the grace of God and through faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore we believe in Christ Jesus for we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

Such a faith and the total reliance which a believer has in Jesus Christ, is reckoned to the believer as righteousness, Romans 14. This is also in accordance with Genesis 15 where it is stated that Moses "believed in the Lord, and that this was counted to him for righteousness." Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hebrews 11:6. Accordingly we must firmly embrace our redeemer Jesus with all our faith, we must place all our trust in him, and in humility and meekness, be obedient to his commandments and proscriptioms out of an upright heart, forsaking the world with all its

pleasures, and crucifying our flesh and denying our lusts and desires, and serving God and our Lord Jesus in spirit and in truth. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. 1 John 3:8. The Son of man hath come for this reason, as the Apostle expresses it, that he would destroy the works of the devil and that the sinner should be converted from sin and shall be born anew in the spirit and shall follow in the image of the Lord who has created him. Colossians 3:10.

This is why the blessed grace of God has appeared over all people and chastizes us, that we shall deny the ungodly ways and the lusts of the world, and that we shall live in this world in modesty, piety and righteousness, and that we may await upon our blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11. Jesus has overcome the world for us in order that henceforth the sin within us shall be put to death, and be made powerless and that we may live in accordance with the will of God. For anyone who wishes to partake of the death of Jesus must be spiritually born again otherwise he can not enter into the Kingdom of God. John 3:3-6. The apostle Paul says that the natural man, that is to say, a man who continues in the old ways of nature, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them. 1 Corinthians 2:14. In this we must become one spirit with God. 1 Corinthians 6:11.

Alas, my most dearly beloved. We must recognize that it is easy to speak of the word of God and his will, and to boast about faith in Jesus, but that it is totally another matter to be reborn, to have peace with God, to become a partaker of his Holy Spirit, and to receive the power of the Spirit, and therefore Paul wishes that everyone would examine himself, 2 Corinthians 13, whether we also have the faith, whether we are walking in the Spirit, and whether Jesus Christ is in us. Those who cannot truthfully affirm the same must feel heartfelt lament.

In such a case all the godly worship, the partaking of baptism and communion, and all knowledge and learnedness are completely in vain. This is also evident in some of the principal personages during the time of Christ, whether it be Annas and Caiaphas or Pilate and Herod, although each one of them was wise and learned enough. For none of them recognized the works of God, and had they known the works of God they would not have crucified the Lord of Heaven and of earth. No one will come to know of God through learnedness or human wisdom. Therefore let us praise our Lord Jesus the father of heaven and earth that he has hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and that he has revealed them unto the babes. Matthew 11:23. Accordingly it is evident that we cannot be united with God through knowledge and learnedness, but that we can only become one with God through true repentance and an alteration in our heart. We must be reborn through water and the spirit for otherwise we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God, as has already been said.

The fruits of the spirit are also evident where the new birth has taken place. These are love, mercy, joy, peace, patience, brotherhood, faith, gentleness and goodness. Galatians 5:22. These fruits do not spring forth among the lovers of the world and are extinguished among the thorns of this world, such as worry, riches and self-gratification. Luke 8:14. All followers of Christ do well to see that they are not once again overcome by the world, rather that they continue always in the fruits of the spirit already mentioned. Matthew 24. Indeed to seek to live out and to follow the example and teaching of Christ so that we might be a good example to the new followers that they would be persuaded, not only by our words but through practice and truth, to follow the teaching which God has given us during the time of our sojourn here. Through his word God has convinced us of the truth and he draws us to himself with all power. John 6:44.

Consequently we are to shine forth in all Christian virtue, humility, gentleness and meekness, but first and foremost we are to show his love not with our mouth but in deed and in truth. We do well to bear in mind the words of the apostle when he says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and pure, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. In that you hold yourself to the word of life. Philippians 2:14-16. For it is becoming of each and every Christian person not to murmur against God and his all-knowing dispensation whether our lot in life is to experience joy, poverty or adversity, or come what may. At all times our well-being is to be satisfied which ever way the Lord leads us. Job 1:21.

And should it be that God has endowed us with earthly possessions, that we at all times are ready to demonstrate love and compassion to our neighbours who are in need, even if our property, which of course is not really ours but the Lord's would thereby diminish. And even if our wealth thereby decreases we are to do so with joy, Romans 12:8, for that is the will of our Lord. Therefore we do well to see to it that we far rather direct the property of our Lord to one of the least of his brethren. Matthew 25:40, instead of expending the same for our own well-being, luxury, or otherwise in expensive household furnishings, and vain glorious clothes. Whereby we are not only a bad example to the beloved newcomers to the faith, but also that we will be unable to stand before God when we ourselves will be called to give an account, and accordingly will have to be shown to the left hand of the Lord as those who are damned in the eternal fire when the command will be given, "give account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Luke 16.

At this time I will also address a few words to our beloved youth, who have decided to receive the water baptism, and thereby also have committed themselves to join our Gemeinde. I bid you that you would truly take to heart and ponder everything which I have presented to you today, and that which will later be taught regarding the teachings of our faith. You must honestly prepare yourselves for this privilege if the entrance into the Gemeinde is to be of any benefit to you. Oh do prepare

yourselves through true repentance and prayer unto God, and build as living stones in the temple. 1 Peter 2. In order to avoid a continual struggle henceforth, make sure at this time that you submit your fallen nature and through the forthcoming baptism you should bury the former man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Ephesians 4:22. Consider well what you intend to say through your baptism, and how you thereby commit yourself unto God in accordance with the gospel of our Lord Jesus to follow him in holiness and righteousness for so long as you shall live.

Therefore my beloved young hearts. You should learn to distinguish the bad from the good while there is still time and to give careful consideration to the recompense which God has promised to both the pious and the godless for then I hope that the evil ways would be and remain a horror to you. The danger to the soul in the present time is very great. Temptation is present on all sides and the times in which we live are exceedingly evil, Ephesians 5:16, and therefore it is necessary, in every way that we diligently study God's holy word and truly learn to know the same, that we firmly cling steadfast thereto, not to turn from the same neither to the left nor to the right, in order that we attain the true understanding of the truth. For to know thee is perfect righteousness; yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality. Wisdom 15. The Lord Jesus says, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". John 17:3. With these words I close this short admonition and direct myself to our confession of faith.

Firstly, a few preliminary remarks. Beloved brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Yes; unto everyone who has overcome unto righteousness through the same precious faith, bestowed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Also to our beloved mature youth, who must have been somewhat adorned by the sweet words of God and the joy of the Lord, so that they have been inspired to willingly bend their shoulders under the soft yoke of Christ, and to have the heartfelt desire to enter into the covenant with him through baptism. I wish for you and greet you with the word of the beloved apostle Peter, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Beloved in the Lord. In accordance with the Holy Scripture we are now willing to state the fundamentals of our faith in definite articles, not only for today but repeatedly in the future as well, in order that we may thereby direct our beloved youth onto the heavenward way, and to encourage all of us onward as well, so that none of us would depart from the way of truth. Rather that we would remain steadfast until the end. All of us are living in the grace of God during this time of grace and would dearly attain unto eternal salvation hereafter.

With clear and unequivocal words the apostle states "that without faith it is impossible to please God" for "whosoever wishes to come unto God" he says "must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him". Hebrews 11:6. At the same time, the nature of our belief is no little matter, and therefore we wish to demonstrate and confess the basis of our faith, and how we must believe if we are to please the Lord with our faith, in twenty articles. The apostle James says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." James 2:19. Therefore it is not sufficient merely to believe that there is a God for a faith which is pleasing unto God must principally also carry over unto works. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Galatians 5:6. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also". James 2:17 and 26. With such precious words Paul also says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. Titus 3:8.

We should take particular note of the faith of Abraham which is recorded in the Holy Scripture as a model for us to follow. Indeed, Abraham is referred to as the father of all them that believe. Romans 4:11. The faith of Abraham certainly prevailed in the face of all the most difficult trials and was never found wanting. Not at the time that he was required to depart from his fatherland and family, Genesis 12, not at the time that he was commanded to circumcise the flesh of the foreskin of every male among the men as well as himself even though he was already 90 years old, Genesis 17:23, nor even when he was to slaughter his son Isaac whom the Lord had given him through the promise, Genesis 22. Behold, the faith of Abraham never wavered in these trials or the many others which he experienced. He was not fainthearted, disobedient, nor did he murmur. Instead he was patient, pious, trustful, and obedient unto his God.

Do take note, for we are also to be pious, patient, trusting, and obedient to everything which the Lord Jesus teaches and commands of us in his Gospel. Just as if God Himself had descended in a bright cloud over us and had spoken to us in a living voice saying to us, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 17:5.

At the same time the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, repeatedly directs us unto Jesus in whom we are to believe and to whom we are to be obedient. Thus Moses, among others, very clearly directs us unto Christ and says, "The Lord the God will raise us unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. Deuteronomy 18:15. Jesus himself directs our faith to the Holy Scripture and says, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John 7:38.

If anyone will not believe according to the scripture, such faith will not stand before God in eternity, for John says, "he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not

the record that God gave of His son. 1 John 5:10. If we do not believe God's witness of his own son this will also be the state of our love to God and unto Jesus Christ which must validate our faith and keep his commandments. Paul says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema Maranatha. 1 Corinthians 16:22. This is to say, he shall be accursed. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. 1 John 5:3.

Our faith must be girded with love and obedience if it is to be pleasing unto God, and at the same time, our faith must be firmly grounded only on the teachings of Jesus and His apostles in order that nothing can lead us to depart therefrom. Paul says, "As ye have therefore received Jesus Christ the Lord, so walk ye in Him". Be rooted and built up in him and continue steadfast in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. And then the apostle once again addresses the matter and says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ". Colossians 2:6-9.

Ah, my beloved, this warning of the apostle certainly deserves our earnest attention in our present times, in that the true faith and pure love has more or less disappeared from the face of the earth, because almost everything found in the churches and schools has been surrendered to the philosophy of men i.e. unto human or worldly wisdom, which is an abomination before God, 1 Corinthians 3:19 and Matthew 11:25, but which are seized and powerfully practiced in accordance with the teachings of man and according to the ordinances of the world. Colossians 2. Oh, I repeat once more, let us receive from the apostle this warning against the like.

Although most unworthy, I also entreat you that in the compassion of God, you would take heed that your minds should not be corrupted through this from the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3. For the complete and living fullness of the Godhead is found in Christ and not in learnedness or in the wisdom of this world. Christ says, "The light of the body is in the eye: If therefore thine eye shall be single, the whole body shall be full of light. Matthew 6:22. Therefore continue singly unto all virtue and hold steadfast to the faith which you have been taught, which you will also hear presented today, which faith was once presented unto the saints. Jude 3.

It must strike our hearts and occasion us great pain that so many are departing from the true faith which was once delivered unto the saints and which has been sealed with the blood of Jesus and such a multitude of witnesses. Revelation 17:6. It cannot but grieve us severely when so many put this faith and good conscience away from themselves, 1 Timothy 1:19, and receive the wisdom of the world. It is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." 1 Corinthians 1:19-21.

How sad indeed, for the salvation of so much of humanity and yet we have the most to watch for ourselves, and to see to it that we ourselves are not robbed through philosophy and evil distractions, in accordance with the doctrines of man and the ordinances of the world, and not according to Christ. Ah, do take note of the manifold ways in which we poor humans can be robbed of our crown if we do not take good heed. How many people have not already been robbed in the area of humility alone where human reason corrupts the mind from simplicity in Christ and finally perverts faith to such an extent that many can no longer realize that pride and vanity are the inspiration of all spiritual and physical sin and a great abomination before God. Isaiah 10:15; and 1 Peter 5:5.

How many have not already been corrupted from simplicity in Christ in the matter of brotherly admonition and punishment by the Gemeinde and robbed of their faith to such a degree that they can in no way believe that the entire Gemeinde can thereby go lost and be cast into hell. Matthew 18:9. In like manner there would apparently be many matters in which it could be demonstrated from the Holy Scripture that our people has allowed itself to be robbed. Alas that we would not so soon allow ourselves to be removed from him that called us into the grace of Christ, through them that would pervert the gospel of Christ. Galation 1:7.

Alas, I say again with the apostle Paul, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Colossians 2. For man needs neither human reason nor great learnedness for the Godly salvation. Rather Paul says, "the Lord will give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ." 2 Timothy 2:7. The Lord Jesus himself says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father but by me." John 14:6. Here we see how the entire fullness dwelleth in him, neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12.

Oh how very necessary it is that we ground ourself on His word alone, that we cling ourselves firmly to Him, and that we conduct our life and walk in such a manner that we follow in His footsteps, 1 Peter 2:21, and at the same time that we always humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, in order that we shall receive grace from God in all our undertakings, 1 Peter 5:5, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow unto the glory of God the father. Philippians 2:10. For in Him alone the faithful have their righteousness and strength. Isaiah 45. For Christ Jesus is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Behold my beloved, submit yourselves unto the lords and kings of this world thereby bestowing them with due honour, 1 Peter 2:17. How much more important is it not that we humbly submit ourselves before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords everytime that we mention the name Jesus

and that to the honour of God the Father, as we have also been taught since the very time of our youth, in order that we do not disregard Jesus and that we do not use His name in vain. Here we have much to do to see to it that our mind should not be corrupted from simplicity in Christ, 2 Corinthians 11, and therefore I repeat together with our beloved former Aeltester Menno Simons, "Humble yourselves and repent".

With this I intend to close my opening remarks and direct you now to the statement of our faith, which is also constituted upon the teaching of Jesus and the simplicity in Christ. Therefore I bid that you would listen with ears to hear and that you would receive the same with hearts of understanding.

First, let us direct ourselves to the Giver of all good gifts with a worshipful prayer, and entreat Him that he would grant us the gifts of His spirit, for the presentation as well as for the hearing. Yes, that He might open our hearts and understanding that the same would not take place without a blessing unto all of us. For without him it is impossible for us to do, speak or think anything good. John 15. Beloved, as we are all obligated to pray for one another, I would wish that you would be mindful of me in your prayers before God, that he would endow me, weak and imperfect menial servant that I am, with ability, wisdom and understanding. Indeed that he might clothe all of us with the armor of salvation, and the cloak of righteousness, in order that through his abundant grace we would finally come to stand before him at the end of our lives, and thereby be saved. --Therefore direct yourself together with me in prayer. ---

The words of our text are written in Romans chapter 10, verse 10, and are as follows: "If man believes from the heart he is thereby made righteous, and if man confesses with the mouth he shall be saved."

#### **4.08 Confession of Faith**

##### **Article One, of God, the Creator of All Things**

First of all we believe with our heart and confess with our mouth, with all the godly patriarchs of old, who have lived from the beginning of the world, and also with the apostles of the Lord Jesus, and with all holy men of God after them, in one eternal, incomprehensible God, who in six days has created heaven and earth and all things visible and the invisible substance and on the seventh day he rested. Genesis 1. The apostle says, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, that all things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Hebrews 11:3. Through His mighty word He keeps, governs and bears all things; for He is a righteous, holy, perfect, incomprehensible, spiritual being. John 4:24. God exists of Himself and does not require any help, neither is he worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. Acts 17.

God is without beginning and without end, a Lord of Lords and a King of Kings, over all of us and in all of us. Revelation 17. He is a terrible God and a consuming fire. Revelation 4. He is also righteous, holy and merciful, full of love, grace, and peace. But He is a God, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. 1 Timothy 6. The heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. Isaiah 66. He is everywhere present, he sees and hears, and knows all things, nor can any man think or plan anything in his heart which He does not know. Therefore we say with the Apostles in Hebrews 4, all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do".

This all-knowing God will not give His glory to another, nor His praise to graven images. Isaiah 42. He is God alone and no one else. All must obey His commands. Even the angels stand before him in fear and trembling. 2 Esdras 8. His word is mighty and His command is strong. When He speaks it is done and when He commands, it is there. Therefore every knee in heaven and on earth should bow before Him and every tongue should confess that He alone is the Lord. Therefore we must love Him with all our strength, fear and serve Him and be obedient to Him. We also say with Sirach, "There is one above all, the creator of all things, a mighty King who is greatly to be feared, the Lord sitting upon his throne, a triumphant God. Honour and glory to his Holy name unto eternity." Amen.

##### **Article Two, Of The Son of God**

Secondly, we also believe and confess that there is a Son of God, who is called the Word, of whose Father was laid the foundation of the world and through whom the earth and all things have been made. For in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and all things were made by Him, John 1:1. As well the apostle says in Hebrew 1, God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these days spoken unto us by His Son, by whom also he made the worlds. David also says. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth. And Paul says. God created all things by Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:9.

Of this son of God we believe and confess, in accordance with the testimony of the scriptures, for when man through his transgressions and sin fell into eternal death, God who loved man was merciful and gave His only begotten Son, who was one with Him in all things and sent him to us. He became man, humbled himself, and was made in the likeness of men. Philippians 2. He has taken upon himself the burden of our sin, and paid the iniquity of us all, Isaiah 53, and through His bitter suffering and death on the cross he has reconciled us with God. He was taken from the cross, laid into a tomb, arose on the third day, and was seen to ascend into heaven, Acts 1, where He sits on

the right hand of God and has all power in heaven and on earth, Matthew 28, and He will come again at the end of the world to judge and to reward each and everyone according to their works. Neither is man given any other name whereby He can be saved, but through Jesus Christ, Acts 4:12. Therefore every knee should bow before Him, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Philippians 2.

### **Article Three. Of God, the Holy Spirit**

Thirdly, we believe in and confess also a Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from the Father, and who is the true comforter, the power from on high. John 15. This Spirit leads in all truth, and as many as are led by this Spirit, they are the sons of God, Romans 8, but all those who have not the Spirit of Christ they have no part in Christ. Romans 8:9. Through this Holy Spirit the believer examines all things even the mysteries of God. For the Spirit has all power, overseeing all things, examines and proves all the Spirits, no matter how understanding, pure, and subtle they may be, Wisdom of Solomon 7. All the holy men of God have spoken through this Holy Spirit, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Peter 2:1. Wherefore all Godly honour is due unto this Spirit. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost has never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation, Mark 3:29. Through this Spirit all believers, have fellowship one with another. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God. Therefore we worship, give praise and honour unto the Spirit, together with the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, unto all eternity. Amen.

### **Article Four, Of the Trinity of God**

Fourthly, we believe and confess, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are one all-powerful God, according to the testimony of John who says, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three agree in one," 1 John 5:7. Not only united, but it is one God. For as God is an incomprehensible God, this is also incomprehensible to us and yet believable. The Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father and is sent by the Father and the Son, John 14 and 15. Therefore these three are indivisible as is clearly shown in the discourse between Jesus and Philip, when the latter says to Jesus, "Show us the Father", and Jesus says unto him "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Or else believe me for the very works' sake," John 14:11. Also in John 12 Christ says, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me." In John 10, verse 30, we read, "I and my Father are one." In this sense Paul also wishes the Gemeinde the Peace of God with the following words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen." This is also our heartfelt wish for our brothers and sisters.

### **Article Five, Of the Incarnation of the Son of God**

Fifthly, we believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. As we read in Luke 1, when the angel greeted Mary she was troubled at his saying, but after various discussions he said unto her. "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest and he shall be King over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And the angel said unto Joseph, "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 1:20. Upon reflection it is evident that he was not of the flesh and blood of his mother. John says, the Word was made flesh.

Yes beloved, the Word, or the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, who was with God in the beginning, and who was God has become flesh. John supports this in his First Epistle, Chapter 1, when he says. "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, seen and experienced, of the Word of Life." But what have they seen and felt other than his human body? We read about this in John 20:27, where the Lord says to his disciple Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Behold, that is of the word of life and he was the word of life. Therefore, we confess that He was with God, and also that He was God, before the time that He came to redeem the human race. Then He was sent from God into the world, was conceived in Mary by the Holy Ghost, and was made flesh and man, and took upon himself the form of a servant, Philippians 2. But He did no sin, 1 Peter 2:22. He came forth from the Father into the world, departed from the world again, and went unto his Father, John 16. Glory, power, and majesty is due unto Him in all eternity, for the profound humiliation, which He suffered for us. Amen.

### **Article Six, Of the Church of God**

Sixthly, we believe and confess that the Lord our God has had a visible Church from the beginning of the world, and that His Church will continue unto the end of the world. This Church had its beginning with Adam in Paradise, and thereafter he chose the pious as His own people. With Noah He renewed His promise and He made a covenant with Abraham and his seed after him. Genesis 17. In the Second book and Fifth Chapter Esdras also speaks of this and says: Oh, ruling Lord, among

all the multitudes of nations thou hast gathered thyself one people, whom thou hast shown favour and given the law that is approved of all. This was the Church of the Old Testament.

When, however, the Lord Jesus came upon this earth, he sent forth his servants unto all the world to gather unto himself a church from all peoples, races and nations, through the preaching of the gospel. Yes, unto all those who repented and made amends for their sins, who believed in the gospel, and who converted themselves to Jesus, He gave power to become the sons of God, according to John 1. For all those belonging to His church must be of one body, and nourished of one spirit and have become one with God. Paul says, that through his own blood the Lord Jesus has purchased himself a church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish, Ephesians 5.

As such the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, of whom Jesus is the cornerstone. Although there are many confessions in the world, which actually claim to be the Church of God, there is only one true-minded Church, which the Lord hath always kept and preserved amidst the evil and corrupted generation. Therefore we wish that the Lord Jesus shall say unto his own, "Keep my commandments, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world", Matthew 28.

#### **Article Seven, Of the Character of the Church of God**

Seventh, we believe and confess that the Church of God shall and will at all times be recognizable by virtue of its scriptural faith, doctrine and actual life. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Galatians 5:6. This is only wrought by grace through God's word in the heart of Man, through the rebirth, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the living word of God, 1 Peter 1:23.

At the same time all true members of the Church of God must bear good and not evil fruit. Their entire life and practice must be based on the teachings of the gospel. However, the Lord Jesus says, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up," Matthew 15:13. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 7:21. Paul says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." Philipians 2:14-15.

The Church of God at all times should also be recognizable in this, that she withdraws herself from all those who walk disorderly and not after the tradition which we have received from God, 2 Thessalonians 3. and in 2. Corinthians 6, it is commanded, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers and I will receive you." The Lord Jesus also warns us to beware of false prophets, who come to us in sheep's clothing, they either add to or take away from His word or command, Matthew 7. Those who have truly been sent of God, will abide with the wholesome word and doctrine, John 3.

The Church of God must be recognizable in its love as the Lord Jesus says, "A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another; as I have loved you, --- By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," John 13. And, by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments, 1 John 5:2.

#### **Article Eight, Of the Teachers and Deacons of the Church**

Eighthly, we likewise believe and confess that the Lord Jesus as well as His apostles after Him have ordained shepherds, teachers and deacons in the Church of God. They are to be elected to their offices in the fear of the Lord, of which we find sufficient instruction and example in the New Testament. For the Lord Jesus himself at first appointed twelve apostles, then he chose seventy others, and sent them out to teach, Matthew 10 and Luke 10. Afterwards the apostles elected Matthias by lot, to take the place of the fallen Judas, Acts 1. And when the disciples became many and the widows were neglected in the daily ministrations, the Church elected seven deacons for their necessities of life, Acts 6. In the first chapter of his Epistle to Titus, Paul also writes, "for this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain Aeltesten in every city."

With respect to the nature or character of an Aeltester or teacher, the apostle Paul teaches that, if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly, Titus 1, not given to wine, no striker, not carrying on a dishonourable profession, but patient, not given to disputation or anger, not double-tongued, one that ruleth well his own house, and who holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience; And let these also first be proved, then let them serve, being found blameless. Nor should the Aeltester be a novice, lest he be lifted up with pride. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 1 Timothy 3.

In this manner the blessed ones shall be ordained for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Ephesians 4:12. The Gemeinde should prepare itself for such an election, in fasting and prayer and should direct itself unto God in humility, so that the Lord, who knows all hearts, would reveal whom he has chosen for such service, Acts 1. For then the Gemeinde will have the firm assurance that through his power and the working of the Holy Spirit, God will direct the hearts in such a way, that the Church of God will be edified through the election.



### **Article Nine, Of Baptism**

Ninthly, we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus has also ordained that his followers shall baptize with water on the confession of faith. For Jesus himself says, Go ye into all the world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned, Matthew 28. We read more about this commandment in Acts chapter two "When on the day of Pentecost, they were all with one accord in one place, the Holy Ghost was poured out over them, where, out of every nation under heaven the multitude came together, then Peter preached unto this multitude of faith in Jesus, and forcefully demonstrated that the Lord Jesus was the long-promised Redeemer of mankind. They were pricked in their heart and said: Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved? Then Peter said unto them: Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." So these were not baptized against their will, or without faith, but only after their conversion and on the confession of their faith. In the same way Philip explained the scriptures to the eunuch from Ethiopia, who said to Philip, What doth hinder me to be baptized? Philip answered, If thou believest with all thine heart, then it shall be done. He said: I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They went down both into the water and Philip baptized him. No others were baptized by the apostles, only those, who were first taught, those who were converted from their sins, and who believed in Jesus, and themselves desired baptism.

Should anyone wish to ask? What is baptism for and what does it signify? This will serve as the answer. Baptism is a testimony of the washing away of our sins which has taken place through the blood of Jesus. Just like the water is being used to cleanse the body, the blood of Jesus purges our souls from dead works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:14. Peter says, Baptism doth also now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, 1 Peter 3:21. Paul also says regarding this, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also (after the baptism) should walk in newness of life, Romans 6:3-4.

### **Article Ten, Of the Lord's Supper**

Twelfthly we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus commanded his followers to observe the Lord's Supper in remembrance of his bitter suffering and death for us lost humanity. Our Lord Jesus suffered himself to be baptized by John in the Jordan as an example for us, and therefore his followers who love him should not regard themselves as wiser than our Lord and disregard baptism, Matthew 3:15. In the same way He Himself also observed the Lord's Supper with his disciples. He took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body which will be broken for you. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. This do in remembrance of me", Matthew 26. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul says, "As often as ye do eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show the Lord's death till he comes." But it is not possible to eat His flesh and drink His blood unless it be done spiritually for the cleansing of our souls. The bread and wine, which we partake of in the Lord's Supper, shall serve all believers as a remembrance, that is to say, that all those who partake of the Lord's Supper with each other, are to be constituted as one body and to be united as is bread made of many kernels, and as the oneness of the wine which has been joined together of many grapes. They shall endeavor unto one faith and knowledge of the Son of God, Ephesians 4:3. There would be much more to set forth regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper, but we will not do so at this time, as a further exposition will be made when we observe the Lord's Supper, which we expect God in His grace to bestow upon us. And therefore we conclude this article with thanksgiving, because we have been reconciled with God through grace, having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest of holy by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10:19.

### **Article Eleven, Of the Washing of the Saints' Feet**

We believe and confess that the Lord Jesus has taught his own the washing of the feet according to John 13, where it is stated, "When Jesus knew that his hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him; Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Had Jesus not washed away our sins with His blood, we would have no part with Him. But since He would wash us in his blood through the suffering which He was willing to endure, He wanted to demonstrate to His disciples that without such suffering neither Peter nor we could have a part with Him. The washing of the feet is, therefore, a very remarkable memorial of the cleansing from our sins. It is also a command of the Lord, when He says further, He that is washed needeth not

save to wash his feet. John 13:10. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you, John 13:14-15.

Thus the washing of the feet is a token of remembrance of the cleansing from our sins through the blood of Jesus, 1 John 1:7. It is to be a humble service of love whereby they show that they are of one mind among each other. It is to signify a community of believers who thereby demonstrate that they have the same love, and that they are not vainly ambitious to provoke one another to seeking vain honour, not to use or hate each other, but rather to love. It further means to hold dear and honour our fellow believers, to regard each other reverently and to esteem each other better than ourselves, Romans 12 and Philippians 2. At this washing of the feet and the honouring of one another it is also suitable that we observe the loving exhortation of the apostle Paul in Romans 16, where he says: Salute one another with an holy kiss. Peter also says; Greet ye one another with a kiss of love. 1 Peter 5:14.

#### **Article Twelve, Of Good Works**

We believe that a truly courageous Christian is duty bound to bring forth good works into the light, but not the way of the scribes and the Pharisees, who made broad their phylacteries, and wide the borders of their garments, to make a pious show before the people, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and vice, Matthew 23. They liked to be seen by the people when they gave their alms, and wanted to be praised and honoured for their zealous worship services. But Christ said "In vain they do worship me", Matthew 15:9, they have their reward in so doing, Matthew 6:2.

Therefore Christ says: "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"; And, therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; Do well and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest." Luke 6. In the same way one should not cease giving alms, showing mercy to all those in need, for it is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts 20. "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly", Matthew 6:3-4.

One should not allow himself to think that it is possible to earn something from God by good works. Oh, no, for Christ says, "when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have only done that which was our duty to do." Luke 17:10. For we are not those who can do good things of ourselves, for it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, Philippians 2:13. Wherefore, we must continually and earnestly direct ourselves to God in all humility, so that he can lead and guide us in all truth.

#### **Article Thirteen, Of Matrimony**

As our thirteenth Article, we believe in and confess a state of matrimony, constituted by God himself in paradise, when he created one man and one woman, whom he joined together and gave his blessing over them, Genesis 1. But when men fell away from God and took many wives, the Lord Jesus finally came and said: Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Matthew 19, and Jesus taught that matrimony should again be practiced in its original constitution. The apostles have also provided an abundant teaching as to the practice of matrimony, that marriage is to be between two true believers, who marry in the Lord. They shall also experience salvation through their marriage if they continue in faith and love and holiness with sobriety, 1 Timothy 2.

For marriage is to be honourable in all and the bed undefiled, Hebrews 13, for God has directed that all non-marital relationships shall be eradicated, Leviticus 20. We have the terrible example of Onan who had sinned secretly unto God and therefore was put to death. Genesis 38. In the Wisdom of Solomon these are called shameless sins, Chapter 14. Paul regards them as the weak ones and denies them the Kingdom of God, 1 Corinthians 6:9. In Romans 1:27, reference is also made to similar sins which belong among those which are to be shunned without notice and which are a great abomination before God, who sees all which is concealed. Therefore young persons, as well as married people, have much to take heed that they would not defile themselves through such hidden abominations and thereby fall from the grace of God. Ye shall be holy, for I am holy, saith the Lord God, Leviticus 19.

Divorce was also practised in the time of Moses, which the Lord Jesus again completed abolished and prohibited. For Jesus says "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," Matthew 19:6. Therefore they are not to be divorced. But should one die, the other is free to marry whom he will, but not to anyone too closely related in blood. Regarding which the Lord our God has given regulations and prohibitions through the laws of Moses, as we can read in Leviticus 18. Paul confirms this with the following words: "Only in the Lord", 1 Corinthians 7:39. According to this, marriage should not be entered into thoughtlessly, or even shamelessly, and in carnal desire, according to one's own pleasure, but only with thoughtful consideration of the Holy Scriptures and in the fear of God to follow the prohibitions against marriage of blood relations rather than to breach the same carelessly or in desperation.

We also believe according to the scriptures, that it is not permissible to marry outside the church except that the other party is also united with the Church of God and becomes one with it, for Paul says to the believers, Be ye not unequally yoked, 2 Corinthians 6. God has given a commandment,

and should someone do so in spite of these teachings, the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, shall be cut off from among his people, Numbers 15. Therefore we pray to God that he save us from the love of the world, that we would not depart from the Church of God and again be joined to the world, 1 John 2:19.

#### **Article Fourteen, Of Evangelical Excommunication**

We believe in and confess an evangelical ban or separation of the offending members by which the Church of God is kept pure and free of all ungodly, unrighteous, and carnal life, Matthew 18. But our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us how we are to implement this ordinance where he says: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." (The Jews sought to avoid all fellowship with them, whether in eating, drinking or in business. John 4:9; Acts 11:12, Nor were they allowed to enter the temple. Acts 21:28).

But should anyone sin willfully, this is a sin unto death and is not to be prayed for 1. John 5:16. Such wanton and depraved members should be cut off and cast away without any prior admonition in order that the entire body would not become defiled, and need to be cast into hell, Matthew 18. Just as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, 1. Corinthians 5, the church must see to it that no root of bitterness spring up to cause trouble and thereby defile many, Hebrews 12.

The members of the Gemeinde shall withdraw themselves from the separated ones and shall have no company with them, so that they may be ashamed, 2 Thessalonians 3. No one is exempt from this ordinance, neither husband nor wife, neither parents nor children, for the Lord has instituted this ordinance for edification and not for destruction, 2 Corinthians 10. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother, 2 Thessalonians 3:15, and when he repenteth, there shall be more joy in heaven, than over those, which need no repentance, Luke 15. Their sins and transgressions shall not be remembered anymore, Isaiah 43:25. Those who manifest such righteousness working repentance shall again be received and accepted, lest perhaps they would be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, 2 Corinthians 2:7.

#### **Article Fifteen, Of the Free Will of Man**

We believe and confess of the free will of man, that man has the choice to do good or evil. Deuteronomy 30. In Ecclesiasticus 15, it is written, "God has given the free choice unto man. If thou wilt, to keep the commandments, and to perform the acceptable faithfulness." This is also evident with Adam and Eve in paradise, who had a free choice to be obedient or disobedient unto God, Genesis 3.

Nevertheless, the soul of man is inspired unto good, through the spirit of God, in order to overcome the evil within him. But not of himself but only through prayer and supplication unto God. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, Philippians 2. As was also said to Job: "Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?" Job 38. All of this proceeds from above, from the father of light who does not want the death of the sinner, but that the wicked be converted from their sins and live, Ezekiel 33. The apostle Paul also testifies to this, that God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth, 1 Timothy 2. Since the Almighty God does not compel anybody to follow the good, it would be even less appropriate for a person who believes in Christ to compel anyone to follow the good, through strictness or through force.

#### **Article Sixteen, Of Revenge and Nonresistance**

We believe and confess that right-thinking Christians who are dead to the world and who are reborn from God, are not allowed any revenge, not to repay evil with evil, 1 Peter 3. Even though Israel apparently was given freedom in this regard by the laws of Moses, Deuteronomy 2 and 3. But our Lord Jesus says as follows in Matthew 5, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you that you resist not evil and further that you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye then? Do not even the publicans the same?"

Paul says: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good," Romans 12. The apostle Peter states likewise, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing, 1 Peter 9. We also confess it is wrong to accuse anyone before the authorities, 1 Corinthians 6. Nor to go to law one with another thereby to gain something for ourselves. For we have no lasting abode here and rather seek our future possession and citizenship in heaven above.

#### **Article Seventeen, About Swearing an Oath**

We believe and confess that a Christian born of God must at all times walk in the truth and

do what is right. Therefore it is not necessary for him to evidence his "yes" or "no" with any further words for when he says "yes" it must also be "yes" and when he says "no" it must also be "no". Otherwise he shows that his yes and no cannot be believed and that he has turned away from the simplicity of truth.

Nor should a Christian swear because our Lord Jesus himself says, "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; nor by the earth; nor by thy head," Matthew 5. We must at all times govern ourselves by this teaching, and seek to live out the same, so that just as God is a light, that we would live in this light at all times, and that no falseness and deceitfulness be found in us, for all falsehood, lies and deceit are of the devil. And all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, Revelation 21.

Therefore one must walk in the truth before God and man, and not swear, even as the apostle James says: But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation, James 5:12. Should somebody seek to force us to swear by compulsion, then we must be more obedient to God than to man.

#### **Article Eighteen, Of Office and Government**

We believe and confess that God has at all times and in all countries ordained government. Over Israel he was Lord himself, Ecclesiastes 17 and Deuteronomy 30. We recognize the authorities as the servants of God and believe it to be a wise provision of God that they govern the cities and kingdoms, since almost all people no longer allow themselves to be chastened and governed by the spirit of God. Wherefore God has ordained government to protect the good and to punish the wicked, thereby to maintain the world in its order, until he finally will summon everybody to judgement.

Nevertheless, Christ our Saviour, speaks to his own and says: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you", Matthew 20. Peter also admonishes the believers and says: "Dearly beloved, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. And further: Honour all men. Fear God. Honour the King, 1 Peter 2.

But one does not find any teaching in the New Testament that the believers are to help govern in any worldly office. Quite to the contrary Christ says: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight," John 18:36. Nor should anyone take it upon themselves to resist the government. For such a one who opposes the authority says Paul, shall know that he resisteth the ordinance of God, Romans 13. We are also bound to pay taxes and duties willingly and to obey and be ready unto every good work. To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men, Titus 3. All praiseworthy authority, which governs well and justly, will be rewarded by God. For the Lord preserves every good work of men as a seal of his pleasure and as the apple of his eye, Ecclesiasticus. We however are also bound to pray unto God for their blessed well-being, Jeremiah 29.

#### **Article Nineteen, Of the Resurrection**

We believe and confess a resurrection of the dead, for it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgement, Hebrews 9. Our sinful flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Therefore Paul says: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body, 1 Corinthians 15:44. And further: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

The Lord Jesus says likewise in John 5, "For the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." This agrees with what Daniel says in Chapter 12: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord, 1 Thessalonians 4.

Even Job, who was plagued beyond mercy, consoled himself with the resurrection, and said: For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, Job 19. From the books of Moses and the Psalms the Lord Jesus demonstrated to the Sadducees, who believed in no resurrection, that the dead would rise again, Matthew 22. In his Revelation John says: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books accord-

ing to their works.” Revelation 20. Finally, we say with Paul: For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words, 1 Thessalonians 4.

### **Article Twenty, Of the Last Judgement**

We believe and confess a final judgement which will be held on the last day, when God will resurrect the dead. The Son of God, who has come to redeem all who believe in him shall be the judge. He shall come to judge the entire human race, indeed, all who have ever lived and who live at the time, and will give them their reward according to their works and faith, good or bad. Those who have been obedient to God and his word will then be full of great joy, but those who have been disobedient will fall into great fear and remorse. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, Matthew 24. He is near and shall come unaware, yes, as a thief in the night, as a snare which traps an unsuspecting bird, Luke 21.

This shall be the day, of which the prophet Malachi prophesies, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, Malachi 4:1. On this day the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up, 2 Peter 3.

Oh, we would do very well to ask ourselves, whether we have truly prepared ourselves for this great day—which will surely come through righteousness working repentance and supplication unto God; Or whether our conscience will accuse us in one respect or another? Alas, we pray that no one would delay until it were too late and the trumpet shall sound. Rather today, today, if ye will hear the voice of the shepherd, let us hear his voice, and not harden our hearts, Hebrews 3. Oh that we might be alert in the last hour, and not live in complacency as it was in the days of Noah and Sodom, which the Lord Jesus has prophesied shall be the situation of most everyone at the time of his coming, Luke 17.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, so that the day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth, Luke 21. And Enoch also, of the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied of these things saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgement upon all, Jude 14. The prophet Daniel has also seen in a vision, till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgement was set, and the books were opened, Daniel 7.

Indeed my beloved, here the books of our conscience shall be opened, our wanton sins, the hidden disgraces and abominations of our lives, and the manner in which we have lived and conducted ourselves, shall be clearly set before our eyes. Those, beloved, who have to the best of their ability, served God, kept his word, and lived their life in holiness and righteousness, shall then be surrounded with unspeakable joy, and be like them that dream and not even be conscious that it be so, Psalm 126. On the other hand, those, who have not taken his word to heart, but have enjoyed this world in the pleasures of the flesh and lived in many evil lusts, shall fall into indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish, Romans 2:8. All people, who have ever lived, both small and great, the high and low, will have to come before the great judgement of God. The sea and the earth shall give up their dead, so they may all be judged out of those things which were written in the books, Revelation 20.

Indeed, according to the scripture which makes us aware of the truth, all mankind must once be judged, as the Lord Jesus himself says in John 12, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” At that time the wicked shall not get away with his unrighteousness, and the hope of the upright shall be realized. Every deed will find its place as deserved. That which was hidden in the darkness, and the counsels of the heart shall then be manifest, 1 Corinthians 4. Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement, Matthew 12:36. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God, Romans 14:12. Fear and terror will overcome the Godless, their countenance shall be fiery and they shall gnaw their tongues for the pain which they shall experience, their very conscience will accuse them. They shall seek death and not find it; they will want to die, but death will flee from them. They will say to the mountains: Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him for the great day of his wrath is come, and who, shall be able to stand? Revelation 6. Then He will come in His vengeance against all who have not been obedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they shall suffer greatly. But in his might he will appear to his faithful saints and in His glory unto all the faithful. Then He will sit on his throne of glory and all nations will be gathered before him, and He will judge everyone according to their deeds and thoughts. 2 Esdra 16.

The wicked will be full of dismay and despair when their sins shall be made manifest before their eyes and they shall be smitten in their conscience, Ecclesiasticus 4. And the Lord shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, Matthew 25. Then they will be with all the saints, with unspeakable joy, before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in His temple; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat,

Revelation 7. But those on His left hand shall hear, like a thunderbolt, the hard judgement, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Alas, for they shall find themselves forsaken in eternal agony and pain. And they will see those to the right and say they are those whom we mocked and reviled on earth, and whose life we held for foolishness, how is it that they now enter into eternal rest, and we unto eternal pain and suffering, Matthew 5. Nor shall anyone be able to help them that are lost henceforth, and they that are lost shall nevermore persecute those who through long suffering in good works have gained the victory. 2 Esdra 7. The ungodly will be thrown into torment where they shall stay for ever and ever, and where the lake of fire shall rise and burn without ceasing and where they shall have no peace for ever and ever.

On the other hand, the righteous, who have in patience and good works striven for eternal life, shall come before God and enter unto heaven and a joy that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him and who have placed their trust in Him alone, 1 Corinthians 2:9.

My beloved listeners, I have now presented to you the fundamentals of our most holy faith and together with Peter, I testify that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand, 1 Peter 5:12. In which faith we do exercise ourselves together with the apostle Paul, to have always a good conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men, that we might follow in the way, which many call heresy and a sect, and to serve the God of our fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets, Acts 24:14-16. Whereby we may also have a perfect hope that we are to be placed to the right hand of God after the resurrection of the dead. May the God of all grace help us unto this end, Amen. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

#### 4.09 Closing Admonition

Before we again go our separate ways, let us first go to and worship, praise, honour and thank our God. For it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds, Psalm 147. Indeed who would not be moved unto the most heartfelt praise and thanks by his rich goodness, for our most loving and gracious God is also building a spiritual Jerusalem, a small and ridiculed church during this abominable time, Daniel 9. Even today He is drawing together the downtrodden and persecuted souls so that we shall always continue to remember His commandments, and testify of His immeasurable love and grace and strengthen ourselves in our most holy faith.

Oh, that a good many would allow themselves to be gathered together, in order that their broken hearts and souls might be healed and comforted here during this time of grace, and that their suffering would be relieved, before the sudden destruction cometh upon us, as travail upon a woman with child, from which is no escape, 1 Thessalonians 5:3. In which the apostle also admonishes that we are to pray, plead and make intercession for all man. For our Lord will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth, 1 Timothy 2.

Let us pray for the Church of God that our gracious Father might preserve the Gemeinden in constant watchfulness, in peace and in love, that they might be one, just as our Lord Jesus has prayed to His Heavenly Father, that they all may be one; as Thou Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me, John 17.

Let us also pray for the shepherds, teachers and leaders in the Gemeinde that God at all times would prepare righteous men for that purpose; and after we have been called therefore, that God would preserve us in his truth so that through his grace we might be able to teach and propagate his word in purity, honesty and without falsehood, and that we might inspire and regulate the Gemeinde unto all comfort, blessedness and unto the salvation of the soul.

Let us also intercede with God for our youth and other younger people that they might direct their ears unto the words of truth while it is yet time, that they would deny the world with all its pleasures, and that they would strive to submit their shoulders in willing obedience to the gentle yoke of Jesus.

Let us also pray for those who have separated themselves from God and his Gemeinde through their sin, that their hearts would be smitten unto remorse and penitence, and that through grace they would once again be united with God and rejoined to the Gemeinde for the salvation of their souls. We as a Gemeinde also wish to intercede with God our father, for the emperor, princes, and all the authorities of the land, and for any other matters which one of us may have in their hearts and which may be in need of prayer. Amen.

Now my most beloved young friends! You have made a commitment to become united with the Gemeinde through baptism. You should pray especially that you have rightly understood our most holy fundamentals of faith and truly taken them to heart. Indeed, in humility you should constantly bring yourself before God with pleading, sighing and supplication, that he might work faith within you, and grant the strength to follow and practice the faith as confessed by us and presented here today. You should know, my beloved youth, that the faith which we confess with our mouth and which we have just confessed is not the possession of everyone, rather it is a gift of God, 2 Thessalonians 3.

For this reason it is impossible for someone who continues to be fleshly minded and who has not commenced a new or better life, to receive faith from God or to hope for the same. The Spirit

of God does not enter into an evil soul nor does it dwell in a body overgrown with sin, Ecclesiasticus 1. The Lord Jesus says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned, Mark 16:16. Therefore baptism without faith is without purpose and without merit. for baptism is the work of man but faith is the work of God, John 6:29, and proceeds from the preaching of the word of God. Therefore you have great reason to be truly attentive to that which is preached and to plead with God that he would grant you understanding and faith enabling you to do so.

And for all, you have a very great reason to cleanse yourself of all sin and to keep yourself from the ways of the flesh which war against the soul, 1 Peter 2. "Mortify therefore your members which are on earth," says Paul, "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is adultery: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. In which ye also walked sometime. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Colossians 3. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that for the time which you have remaining here, you would live according to the will of God and not in the flesh according to the lusts of men. For the time past of our life suffices us to have wrought the will of the heathen, during which we lived with the world in all its evil and in its earthly pleasures. Rather now we are to live in holiness and righteousness according to the will of God, of which they think it strange that ye no longer run with them to the same excess of riot and disorderly ways, speaking evil of you. But who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead, 1 Peter 4.

Oh! All evil and disobedient persons will one day stand dumbstruck before this Judge not knowing how to answer even one of the thousands of questions put to them. Therefore my most beloved young hearts, who have lived in comparative innocence for so many years, you are being earnestly pursued at this time towards the reconciliation of your sins. You are earnestly being directed to the grace of God which is offered to you in that God hath overlooked the time of innocence, Acts 17.

Oh! Do take to heart the acceptable season, that is the day of salvation, 2 Corinthians 6, during which God still wishes to receive repentance for sins, Ecclesiastes 2. Do not neglect the same until another time or until you are instantly seized into eternity, where there will be no more time for repentance as we may read in Revelation chapter 10, "That a mighty angel came down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire; and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And the angel lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, that there should be time no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets."

My most beloved, everything has already come to pass, except for the sounding of the seventh angel, after which we must all come before the judgement seat of our great and holy God. Oh, but my young and tender hearts, do not neglect to prepare yourselves for a holy judgement and such a terrible and frightful future, with a pious walk and godly manner, that you might longingly await the coming of the day of the Lord in which the heavens shall pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, 2 Peter 3.

For nothing can stand before this great pealing thunder and fiery zealous judgment, no intelligence, nor learnedness, no science, nor beauty; and much less so, egotism, pride or self-display, nor an angry, malicious life or a loveless manner. Rather all these as well as those who have otherwise remained disobedient to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, have nothing but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries, Hebrews 10. Nothing of the like shall stand and survive the consuming fire, other than faith, hope and love, of which, however, the greatest virtue is love, 1 Corinthians 13:13. All this should truly convict, inspire and motivate our hearts in this eleventh hour in which faith has almost entirely disappeared from the earth and the love has grown cold, which demonstrates that the end of all things has come.

My beloved young friends, you should allow your hearts to be smitten, convicted and moved unto righteousness-working penitence, whereupon everyone should submit themselves unto baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2. Therefore do surrender yourselves unto God, your gracious and compassionate Heavenly Father. that He may move His work within you, pray unto him without ceasing in all your concerns, with pleading and supplication, and follow only His word and will, and then He shall make it well with you. Amen.

Now then, my beloved young friends, if you are ready and willing to submit yourselves to the holy commandment of Jesus in everything, and wish to be baptized, would you be so good as to rise. By standing you are signifying that you continue steadfast in this regard. Three questions will now be presented to you.

First, Do you believe that the articles of faith as presented unto you are correct according to the Holy Scriptures? Is it your desire to follow and practice the same according to the ability which God will grant unto you? And to cling firmly unto Jesus and remain true to Him until the end? If so answer . . .

Secondly, I ask you. Whether you have a heartfelt remorse for all your sins, whether they be

done knowingly or unknowingly? And whether you will seek to avoid the same in the future and not knowingly acquiesce to anything which is contrary to the commandments of God? If so answer . . .

Thirdly, I ask you. Whether you desire to receive baptism on the confession of faith and the confession of your sins, as the sealing of a covenant with God? If so answer . . .

Now you stand here before God and his Gemeinde and confess that you wish to unite yourself with God, and that you will be obedient unto Him according to His holy word and serve Him for your lifelong days. You are also confessing that you are truly sorry for all your sins and that henceforth you shall heed and shun sin. Upon which confession you desire to receive baptism as a final seal of your covenant which we expect (if it be the will of God and you remain steadfast herein) to formalize here today with the help of God. Do take seriously to heart what we have been taught that we may remember what we have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent, Revelation 3:3. Call upon God with upright hearts, and out of his goodness He will bestow his spirit upon us, which will distinguish good and evil for us.

If you will cling unto God with all your heart and follow his word in truth, you have the beautiful promise that He will be with you all your days unto the end of the world. God will hold you so firmly and keep you in His watchful oversight that not a hair of your head shall perish if it be not His will, Luke 21. Oh how great the grace and love of God that he bestows such indulgence upon a fallen and sinful humanity and that he sees to our every need. God also speaks through the prophet Hosea in this regard and says, "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving kindness and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness and thou shalt know the Lord, Hosea 2. Behold, this is what you shall experience and receive from the Lord if you convert yourselves unto him with your entire hearts. The Lord speaks through the prophet Jeremiah and says, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jeremiah 31:34.

Oh my beloved young friends. Are these abundant promises which God has spoken unto us humanity not more than sufficient for us? We may confidently ground ourselves thereupon, renounce the world, crush our own will, and take upon ourselves the gentle yoke of Jesus, so that after our death we shall be with Him in eternity, where there will be fullness of joy and loving abundance for ever and evermore. We pray that the God of all grace would truly help all of us together to prepare ourselves unto that end. Amen, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Now my young friends, if you still remain steadfast in your intentions, would you be so good as to rise. By this you are now presenting yourselves before the Gemeinde, but principally before God, who knows and sees everything which you speak, think and do, Jeremiah 9. You are to make your solemn vows before him not only for today, rather you must also keep the same for so long as you live if you seek to enter into the eternal rest, which is denied unto those who obey not the truth, Romans 2:8. You should now prepare yourselves, that God and his spirit might dwell in your hearts and at all times convict you and punish you as soon as your flesh, intellect and desires, seek to breach the promises which you are making with God here today.

Yes, take note my beloved that you have truly cleansed your hearts, that it may be said of you. "Come ye blessed of the Lord, for I have prepared my house for you, that you may be as the temple of God and that His spirit may dwell in you, 1 Corinthians 2, who will teach you all truth and lead and guide you always, so that you may joyfully depart from here at the end of your days in peace and blessedness. You must also be righteous, have a heartfelt commitment and always seek to live out the solemn vows and promises which you have made here today. This is not a matter in which you are responsible to us, but rather to an all-seeing and all-knowing God, who has eyes as flames of fire, a great Jehovah, a holy God of majesty, before whose glance the earth heaves, and the angels quiver, and the seraphims cover their faces, Isaiah 6 and 2 Ezra 8, before whose holy throne the four and twenty Aeltesten fall down and cast their golden crowns before his stool and say, Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things, Revelation 4.

Behold such an eminent and holy God before whom all knees must bow. You must also bow before him at your baptism and make a covenant with Him to serve Him according to the holy scripture, all the days of your life in holiness and righteousness, and that you seek to live out your promise in so far as you are capable and God may provide. Only thus can your entry into the church (and Gemeinde) of God be well and beneficial unto eternal salvation. Therefore you should henceforth walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, and take his gentle yoke upon you together with all the saints. Indeed, come to know true meekness and heartfelt humility through Jesus and you shall find peace unto your souls, Matthew 11.

We find written of those who desired to be baptized in the Jordan by John, that in so doing they confessed their sins, Matthew 3. I shall also present a number of questions to you which you should true-heartedly answer to us:

First, I ask of you whether you are truly sorry for all the sins which you have done? Answer . . .

Second, I ask of you whether you have committed yourself to serve God in holiness and righteousness, for all the time of your life, according to what His holy word requires of us. Answer . . .

Third, I ask of you whether you confess that the articles of faith, as they have been presented to you, are true and correct according to the Scripture. Answer . . .

Fourthly, I ask you whether you also believe from the heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that we must seek our salvation in Him alone. Answer . . .



Fifthly, I ask you whether you desire to be baptized, by me unworthy one, upon this your confession. Answer . . .

Now then, I wish to baptize you upon the confession of your faith and covenant which you have made here today before God and the Gemeinde. However, since there is none other who plants and waters besides God alone who must bestow his blessing for all, if the same is to be done for the honour, praise and worship of his name, let all of us together therefore kneel down before His holy and almighty throne, and trueheartedly pray unto Him in deepest humility for these souls who are coming unto him, that our abundantly loving God would strengthen and prepare them and also fill them with his power from above, in order that they might grow and increase in Christ unto their death. Let us therefore kneel in a prayer of faith.

— Congregation kneels for silent prayer —

Now that we have prayed unto God out of true hearts, we can also have the firm hope that he shall pour out his spirit over us and bless our work according to his will. Now then, would you please kneel down before us:

— Candidates kneel before the congregation —

My most dearly beloved. It is surely not necessary for you to kneel before us, nor do we accept such honour. Rather, such honour belongs to our great and holy God, who has created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is contained therein, He who carries and continues the entire creation with His mighty arm. This honour belongs to Him, and to our redeemer Jesus Christ, who has freed us from the power of Satan. Before whom, in the words of the holy Paul, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ alone is Lord, Philippians 2. Behold, for you have kneeled down before His almighty and holy throne, in order that you might thereby seal the covenant which you have made here with God.

The commandment of Jesus shall now be fulfilled with respect to yourselves as it is written, "Go ye forth unto all the world teaching all people, and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And thus I say together with John, "I indeed baptize you with water, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire, Matthew 3:11.

My beloved young souls, I wish this for all of you from the bottom of my heart, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ would baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with true humility and heartfelt meekness, and with the fire of pure love. Having trust and confidence in this, I will now take to hand the water in order to serve you with the outwardly symbol.

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"Upon the confession of your sins, and upon your testimony and profession of your heartfelt remorse for your sins, and upon the confession of your faith, that you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and according to your wish and desire, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

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The commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ has been brought into fulfillment in you, and the covenant which you have made with God before the Gemeinde has been sealed in you with baptism. Now you must also see to it that you follow and practice that which you have promised, and therefore you must not waver either to the right nor to the left. For no man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God, Luke 9:62. And Peter says, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, 2 Peter 2:20.

Oh, I bid that you shall beware, for together with Jabez you have made a solemn vow unto the Lord, Therefore you should henceforth present your bodies as a living sacrifice unto the Lord, which is holy, acceptable unto God, and which is your reasonable service, Romans 12. For those of you who have now been baptized should know that you have been baptized unto his death! This is to say as much that you shall now die unto your old sinful nature, which you are to bury through baptism. Just as Jesus was once resurrected from the dead you must also awaken as a new being spiritually. You should arise today and walk in a new life, Romans 6.

This should be a very earnest matter for you that you would commence a new and better life. that from henceforth you would be as living stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God, 1 Peter 2. For God knows and recognizes your innermost being and hidden thoughts from a distance, no one can deceive Him with a deception or outwardly manners. Indeed, each and everyone of us will only experience the grace of God according to the innermost sighing and longings of our hearts. If your thoughts and desires are directed only and alone unto God and his righteousness you may be comforted and have a firm hope, that He which hath begun a work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, Philippians 1.

Therefore, I bid you, my most beloved young souls, always allow the affections of your heart

to be directed unto God and His holy word, for then you will be able to overcome everything which shall detract you or afflict you here in this world. For who has ever had trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did abide in his fear, and was forsaken? Or whom did he ever despise, that called upon him? Ecclesiasticus 2:11.

Therefore you should fear God and do nothing contrary to his will. Pray without ceasing and call upon the Lord in your heart, allow your spirit to cry out unto Him day and night, and He shall stand by you always, in times of deprivation, danger, grief and temptation. He will help you and direct you so that the same shall unfold for the best of your soul and unto his glory. Therefore you should be true to the solemn vow which you today have made with God, continue steadfast in the truth which has once been accepted, and with your life and walk teach the goodness of him who has opened your eyes, and turned them away from darkness unto his wonderful light, to receive forgiveness of sins, and to receive the inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ, Acts 26.

Having the hope that you are ready and willing in your heart for that which has been presented, we now wish to receive you and accept you as our beloved brothers and sisters.

You have now been added unto the Church of God (and his Gemeinde), you have now become members of the body of Christ of which the Lord Jesus is the head. We are no longer strangers among one another, rather we have become brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus our Lord, who has said, whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother, Matthew 12:50. Behold, this eminent and almighty Lord of heaven and earth wishes to receive us sinful beings, who have caused him to be tormented and to die the most shameful death and who, on account of our sins, have caused his sweat as it were great drops of blood to fall down upon the earth, Luke 22:44; This most gracious and compassionate God wants to receive us as his brothers and sisters if we submit ourselves unto his will.

Oh, my beloved. Surely this is a completely unlimited love for us sinful beings for which we without question should love him above all else. Let us be true and obedient unto him until the end of our days, as is required of us by his word, come what may and regardless of what he has destined for us. For not a hair of our heads shall perish without his will, Luke 21.

Beloved, do not allow this to be forgotten, that you are no longer guests and strangers to God, rather that you are now citizens of the city of God and his house companions. You are entering into the eternal and heavenly kingdom of God and if you are otherwise faithful in the love of God and continue by faith in Jesus Christ, you have the promise that you shall then triumph with unspeakable joy and glory before the countenance of God together with all the saints when this life is over.

For the sake of the will of Christ you should therefore willingly take upon yourselves everything which may befall you, and together with Moses you should rather elect to suffer discomfort than to possess the present pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures, riches, power and luxury which is contained in the world, having respect unto the recompense of the reward, Hebrews 11, 26. The Lord Jesus himself says, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven, Matthew 5:11-12.

In conclusion, my most beloved young people, I beseech you with the words of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 15, "be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Unto which I pray that the God of all grace might prepare, empower and strengthen you, as well as all of us present, through Jesus Christ. AMEN.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FOUR. FAITH AND PRACTICE..

1. John B. Toews, *op. cit.*, 26.
2. Rev. Cornelius L. Plett, *Familienbuch*, Courtesy of Marie Heinrichs, Satanta, Kansas.
3. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*
4. This diary was found among the papers of Mrs. Abraham R. Penner, a daughter of Peter L. Dueck. Courtesy of Mrs. Bill Wiebe, Steinbach, Manitoba.
5. Interview with Peter A. Plett, Landmark, Manitoba, 1981.
6. Daniel Kaufman, *Doctrines of the Bible* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1928) 311-439.
7. J.C. Wenger, *Separated Unto God* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1951), 202.
8. *Ibid.*, 205.
9. J.C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1954), 272.
10. *Ibid.*, 273 11. D. Kaufman, *op. cit.*, 282-289.
12. P. Lederach, *A Third Way* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., 1980), 21.
13. Dirk Philips, *Handbook of Christian Doctrine* (Pathway Publishing Co., Aylmer, Ontario, 1966), 309-310.
14. J.C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology, op. cit.*, 275.
15. *History and Events, op. cit.*, 63.
16. There is presently no known blood relationship between delegate David Klassen (1813-1900) and Rev. Abraham Klassen, Prangenau, Molotschna, referred to in section 3.08.
17. Abraham W. Klassen "Erinnerungen" *op. cit.*
18. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 93.
19. M.B. Fast, *Mitteilungen, op. cit.*, 62.

20. Ibid, 68. It might be well to note that these types of pejorative and categorical judgements amongst members of the Mennonite church became especially pronounced with the inroads of separatist pietism in the 18th century. One of the most unfortunate results of this influence was the obsession that the pietist Mennonite had to convert his Anabaptist Mennonite brethren to his particular understanding of pietist truth. The pietist now regarded his former brother as an unsaved heathen wretch who must be snatched from his "cultural legalism" at any cost. Naturally, a considerable chasm was created in the Mennonite world when the pietist Mennonites denounced the salvation of their Anabaptist Mennonite brethren. The pietist Mennonites added the epithet "anti-cultural and isolationists" when many Anabaptist Mennonites who remained in the Old Order preferred not to partake in community and inter-Mennonite activities together with the people who considered them to be "dumb, ignorant, and unsaved". This was especially the case after such community endeavours had frequently been used as convenient platforms for proselytization.

In fact, the elitist and categorical attitudes of the pietist Mennonites relative to their Old Order brethren must be regarded as the terrible curse of the Mennonite church over the past two centuries. Where the pietist Mennonites should have sent their ministers to the Anabaptist Mennonites to learn about full gospel faith, they sent so-called missionaries to denounce and harass them as unsaved heathen, insisting that they immediately abandon all their teaching and lifestyle as "legalistic garbage". Where the New Order Mennonites could have helped their brethren by sending earnest Christians to work together in brotherly love in schools, newspapers, and other secular areas they have too often sent people who employed these mediums as platforms to convert their Old Order brethren to the Jung-stilling or Jerry Fallwell interpretation of Christian truth.

Over the past several centuries this New Order fratricide has done much to detract from the beautiful testimony of the Mennonites as the "peace-loving children of Christ" who are not afraid to interpret his teachings literally. This cancer has also done much to create an attitude of isolationism on the part of Old Order Mennonites. Having been betrayed by their New Order brethren so often, they understandably find it difficult to trust such "Christians". Proselytization by the New Orders over the centuries has also resulted in abandonment of full gospel faith by many tens of thousands of Old Order Anabaptist Mennonites. In view of the complete negation of their faith by the New Orders, many tens of thousands have simply rejected the evangelical (Mennonite) faith entirely with the result that the Fundamentalist, Pietist, and Pentecostal (tongue worshipping), churches in prominent Mennonite areas such as Manitoba are now filled with people of Mennonite background. This is to say nothing about the countless broken hearts, wasted lives and family separations which this proselytization invariably left in its wake.

What is most remarkable is the fact that notwithstanding all the foregoing, the Old Orders have largely been able to maintain an attitude of Christian love and forgiveness towards the New Order Mennonites. One would hope that at some point, the new Order Mennonites would also be able to regard the Anabaptist Mennonites as fellow-Christians, a courtesy which they already extend to many radical separatist pietist and fundamentalist groups. However, given that the faith and theology of the New Orders is based on separatist pietism and fundamentalism, which are inherently categorical and judgemental by nature, such a change in attitudes is not very likely. If only the New Orders could leave their Old Order brethren in peace and rather worry about their own faith and witness to the world around them. One asks the question, in a war-waging world of four billion people, filled with militant American, Arab and Communist fundamentalists, what great damage can be done by a hundred thousand or so Old Order Anabaptist Mennonites whose reverent life in their peaceful assemblies has stood as such a dramatic witness for the efficacy of full gospel faith over the centuries.

21. M.B. Fast, *op. cit.*, 15.
22. Dirk Philips, *op. cit.*, 383.
23. J.C. Wenger, *Doctrines of the Mennonites* (Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, Pa., 1952), 71-85.
24. Harold S. Bender, "Confessions of Faith", ME 1,681.
25. *Confession Oder Kurtzer und Einfaltiger Glaubens - Bericht, der Alten Flaemischen Tauf-Gesinnter Gemeinden in Prussen, 1768.*
26. The writer has been unable to obtain a copy of this 1792 Confession nor do the major North American Mennonite archives appear to have a copy. The fact that this is the only 20 article Confession referred to in among the Prussian Mennonites, and the internal evidence of Kleine Gemeinde writings, all points to the conclusion that this was the Confession adopted and used by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.
27. Dirk Philips, *op. cit.*, 386.
28. Author Unknown, *Kurze Aelteste Geschichte* (Odessa, gedruckt bei Franzow & Uitzache, 1852) 17-20. I am grateful to Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba for referring me to this material.
29. Kaufman, *op. cit.*, 378-439.
30. Dirk Philips, *op. cit.*, 388-389.
31. Ibid. 392-294.
32. Ibid. 394-400.
33. This invaluable Confession of Faith was preserved by John E. Friesen, of Blumenort, Manitoba, a grandson of minister Klaas Friesen, of Rosenort, Molotschna.

# Chapter Five.

## Social Views And Morals

### 5.00 Introduction

The concluding chapter of this section on lifestyles will consider Kleine Gemeinde social views and morals within the context of Russian Mennonite society. The topic will be discussed under the following headings: First, the relationship of Mennonite society to the Russian civilization within which it existed. Two, the Mennonite transition from religious community to cultural elite. Three, a model of decline and renewal. Four, Kleine Gemeinde social views and morals.

### 5.01 Mennonite Life in Russia

In considering the relationship between Mennonite society and its Russian environment, the analogy of the womb and embryo would be very appropriate; the Russian setting provided many of the requisites which would result in a prosperous Mennonite society. Dr. Frank H. Epp describes how this favourable social cradle became the catalyst for a thriving secular society:

"Aside from the hardships of pioneering in a foreign culture, the conditions for a truly happy Mennonite development existed in Russia from the beginning. The large and exclusive block settlements symbolized by the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies have already been mentioned. Families were allotted over 175 acres of land, a more generous assignment than for other colonists. Other privileges included freedom of location and occupation, loans for farm and industrial purposes, the unrestricted exercise of religion, a permanent exemption from military and civil service, and the right to local self-government."

"With productive land and a relative administrative autonomy, and without military obligations, the Mennonites proceeded to establish what later became known as the "Mennonite commonwealth" of Russia. This was a self-contained cultural island in which Mennonites governed themselves, established their own schools and welfare institutions, developed a self-sufficient economy with little outside interference, and practised their religion with few restrictions. (Mennonites were forbidden to proselytize and they never did gain permission to found a theological school.) The characteristic features of the commonwealth were: neatly organized *Strassendoerfer* (street villages); big families in which sons and daughters both had assigned tasks; large and luscious vegetable and flower gardens; sheep and cattle by the thousands collectively supervised by village herdsmen; billowy fields of grain which would eventually necessitate the erection of grist mills; and elected civic and religious leaders."

Another scholar, Dr. E.K. Francis, has characterized the social order within which the Russian-Mennonite colonies were contained as a closed inward looking society which was fostered and encouraged by a benevolent, paternalistic, and progressive government administration.<sup>2</sup> Several aspects of such an administration and the effects which it had on Russian-Mennonite society have already been considered in **The Golden Years**, Chapter eight. Dr. Francis goes on to explain how these factors resulted in the development of a unique and separate Mennonite social system within Russian society:

"Two factors are responsible for this emergence of a closed Mennonite social system in the new country. On the one hand, the immigrants were motivated not just by a desire to escape a felt threat to their religion and economic well-being, but still more by the hope of finally realizing the utopian community suggested by this same religion, in complete separation from the wicked world. On the other hand, the framework of Russia's Colonial Law fostered the isolation of immigrant groups and protected them in their homogeneity and self-sufficiency. This law was the work of eminent jurists, often Baltic noblemen of German extraction who were entirely familiar with German agrarian institutions.

Although it did regulate the life of the Mennonite immigrants in great detail, it was not completely imposed upon them from above. Basically, the Colonial Law of Russia, enacted first on March 19, 1764, and after several amendments incorporated in the Russian Code of Law of 1842, was an adaptation of the traditional solidaristic form of settlement and community organization familiar to most immigrants and readily adopted by them. In addition, the authorities were quite flexible in the application of the law. They were anxious to learn by their mistakes, to consult the settlers themselves, and to make adjustments in the legal and administrative practices wherever necessary. In this process of constant readjustment the Mennonite colonies occupied an extraordinary position. A. Klaus, a high Russian official in the colonial administration and a keen student of society, remarked later that the Russian Government, "convinced of the surprisingly quick success of Mennonite economy, took their institutions, up to a certain degree, as a model for the organization of the majority of the other colonies of foreigners in the Ukraine."<sup>3</sup>

## 5:02 Transition from Faith to Cultural Elitism

This fertile physical and social setting resulted in the development of what has been characterized as “the golden age of Mennonites”.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that the term fits most appropriately with respect to the secular side, i.e. the economic success of Russian Mennonite society. Such “worldly” prosperity could not be achieved without substantial sacrifice. In fact, the very success of this society was in a sense its undoing. Dr. Francis points out that the cost of this achievement was secularization which in turn destroyed the centrality of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

Amidst all this rapid progress and worldly success the role of religion, once the *raison d’être* of the group, almost receded into the background. It seemed that at the moment when the Mennonite utopia, the community of the saints and saved, lay within reach of realization, it became secularized and void of its spiritual content, a commonwealth of ordinary people with the ambitions and motivations of sinners and the fallen nature of man. Religious convictions and interests now were one aspect of everyday life, perhaps still a central but by no means the only aspect. Many concessions had to be made to other conflicting interests which frequently dominated and determined action. Religion, at one time a spiritual power permeating all personal hopes and desires, was institutionalized, and religious institutions, were but one factor among many other institutions, often more in the foreground of attention.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars have expressed similar views. As a result of being able to subsist as a prosperous closed cultural island in a sea of miserable Russian peasantry, the Mennonite world in Russia lost the fundamental characteristic of being a religious society determined to follow their Savior whatever the cost, and instead became a culturally elitist society. This is the view put forward by anthropologist James Urry, who has studied the Russian Mennonites from the viewpoint of his discipline:

They (the Mennonites) had shifted from viewing themselves as a religious community to an idea of themselves as an elite group of colonists whose task was to present the world with a model image of an enlightened and perfected people. Thus they changed from being an inward looking religious society dedicated to following a narrow path in opposition to the world, to an open culture which was above the world in its advancement, knowledge, and way of life. The sense of “being different” thus shifted from one of a religiously oriented lifestyle to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker but merely one amongst many.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the shift in identity from being primarily a religious society to being a culturally elitist group, many of the Russian-Mennonites developed a rather negative view of Russian society around them. In this regard they merely adopted the view of the world also held by the other German colonists in Russia. Dr. Adam Giesinger explains this attitude of cultural superiority:

Much more isolated from Russian life and not directly affected by the great issues which stirred the Russian land were the German settlers on the Volga and in the new provinces of the South. They had come to Russia by special invitation and on special terms. They were not serfs of the Russian landowners nor even of the crown itself, but free peasants with special rights and privileges guaranteed by the Manifesto of 1763 and the Colonization Law of 1764. They called themselves “colonists,” not peasants, and considered themselves, as indeed they were, culturally superior to the uncouth and ignorant native peasants. Their settlements were closed to outsiders and remained so almost to the end of their days. Within them were German schools and churches to preserve the culture and religion they had brought with them; and elected leaders governed affairs (with some interference, as we shall see, from appointees of the central government). Although they made a notable contribution to the economic life of the country, the German colonists took little interest in any phase of Russian life that did not affect them directly. In the first century few even bothered to learn the language of the country.<sup>7</sup>

## 5:03 The Mennonite View of Russian Society

Because of their special privileges and exemplary success many of the Russian-Mennonites considered themselves superior to the German colonists as well as the Russian peasants. This negative attitude sometimes included a cynical view of the surrounding world which is difficult to understand from a contemporary perspective. This attitude can be detected even in the writings of someone like Senator Peter Jansen who was otherwise regarded as a fair and upright man. In his *Memoirs* Senator Jansen shares some recollections of his boyhood days in Russia which illustrate this world view:

I might as well say something here of the Russian traits and character. Roughly speaking, one can divide these people into four or five classes, the mushiks or farmers and laborers, including all kinds of small tradespeople, the storekeepers and merchants (kuptsi), the clergy, the officials and military, and the nobility.

“With individual exceptions, and of course, they are many, all the classes are trying to get the best of each other and think it smart and laudable to do so. The amount of graft practised on all

occasions is simply beyond the comprehension of an American or Western European. It is really amusing to watch two Russians trade. For instance, one wants to buy a horse. He will approach the owner and say, in a casual manner, "Is that little kneesprung pony for sale?" The vendor will appear very much insulted and reply: "Little pony? You must have taken a drink very early this morning. Yes, I will take 100 rubles for that beautiful horse and not a cent less, so help me God." The prospective buyer pretends to walk away and calls back over his shoulder, "I might offer you 50 rubles for that cripple if he were not blind in one eye." The seller will then come down to 90 rubles and swear up and down upon his salvation and the memory of his mother that this is the least he will take. They will haggle for an hour or two and finally agree probably upon 75 or 80 rubles, and go off together and take a drink. No trade of any importance is concluded without taking at least one drink, but generally many more.

"It is the same in stores; one never expects to pay the price first asked.

"The officials practise graft openly and seem to consider it part of their emoluments.

For instance, my father, like all merchants, had to take out a trading license each year, without which he could do no business. After I grew up, he generally sent me to get these papers.

"I would drive up in our droschka to the proper office, called "Kaznatchestwo" and, after waiting a long time, would finally be admitted to the Chief Clerk, whose business it was to make out the permit. After stating what I wanted, he would shake his head and say: "I am awfully sorry, Peter Corneyvitch, but we are so terribly busy. Come again in a week." I would then offer him probably 10 rubles to accelerate his movements, at which offer he would laugh and write the figure "50" on his pad. Finally we might agree upon 25 rubles, and he would reach into his desk and bring out the papers all ready and made out, waiting for me to come and redeem them.

"The lower classes are very superstitious and are especially afraid of suicide.

"I remember one instance when such a one was found at the edge of a village. The police were notified and the "natshalnick" ordered the corpse carried into the nearest house. The owner tearfully objected, as it would forever desecrate his abode. He slipped the official a 5 ruble note, who ordered his men to move on. The same process was repeated at the next house and so on along the line.

"The clergy, as a rule, are gross and sensuous, of course again with many individual exceptions. They take advantage of the superstitions of the ignorant mushik and milk him to a finish.

"In the country the village priest (Pope) is given the use of farm land, which his parishioners work for him. As is generally known, the church has innumerable holidays or saints' days on which no orthodox church member will work. The idea is to go to mass in the morning and get gloriously drunk in the afternoon. I had a very good friend amongst the country clergy, a jovial fellow and good sport. We used to hunt together and evenings drink tea and play cards. When his crops were ripe or his fields needed plowing, he would assemble his flock on these saints' days and explain to them that, while it would be certainly very wrong for them to work in their own fields, they would be serving the Lord in a double sense by cutting his grain, and besides he would have a nice little keg of "vodka" and some lunch, "sakuska," ready for them as soon as they were through. You should have seen them hustle.

"They have long periods of "fast days," when they are not permitted to eat meat, but may eat fish. My clerical friend was quite strict in the observance of these days for his congregation, but he himself found a way out of it. I remember one such fast day I sat at his table when the servant brought in a nice piece of roast pork. He turned to her and asked, pointing to the meat, "What is this, Mashinka?" She knew her cue and seriously answered, "Your Reverence, this is fish." He smiled at me and said: "If she says it is fish, it must be so. Let us eat it."

"A wedding generally lasts a week, and all the relatives, neighbors and friends eat, and especially drink, during this time at the house where it is being celebrated.

"Christmas holidays last a week, also, and Easter the same. The latter marks the ending of Lent or the "big fast," as they call it. Services at the church last all night Saturday before Easter, and the faithful bring enormous quantities of edibles to be blessed by the popes, amongst them a specially prepared rich cake called "paska," which is consumed in unbelievable quantities; also colored eggs of all hues. With the strike of twelve midnight the fast is over and eating lasts until either the supply or capacity is exhausted."

The foregoing extract is included here to illustrate the attitudes of the Russian-Mennonites during the 19th century. The views of Senator Jansen would have been considered as being of the more progressive and liberal at the time. No doubt there were also colonists as well as Mennonites who considered the Russian peasant to be little more than an uncivilized savage. Certainly some Russian-Mennonite employers also took advantage of the helplessness and simplicity of their Russian labourers occasionally treating them with less respect than their livestock in which they had a substantial investment of money.

#### 5.04 Social Concerns and Non-conformity

This attitude is somewhat difficult to understand from the viewpoint of Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrine. In retrospect it seems astounding that so little concern for the social and economic plight of the Russian peasant was expressed among the Russian-Mennonites. In contemporary terms the

situation could be compared to the vast gulf fixed between a wealthy North American farming district and that of a slum in a large North American city or perhaps a slum in a large Latin American city. Although there were some restrictions on proselytizing by the Mennonites among the indigenous population there is no record that there was any restriction against the provision of economic aid. In fact precedent existed for such action since Johan Cornies at the request of the Russian Government administration had provided training apprenticeships to Russian students, as early as 1839<sup>9</sup>. Certainly countless opportunities existed among the legions of Russians working in various capacities among the Mennonites by the 1860s.

Of course such aid, even if emanating from every Russian Mennonite household, would have been only an insignificant trickle in the gorged thundering river which represented a cruel and heartless Czarist Russia enroute to its meeting with destiny. Although proselytizing was apparently prohibited the situation did not appear to call for the “saving of souls” who would then also wallow in an overabundance of economic resources amidst a sea of poverty, all the while shouting to the high heavens of the “peace in their hearts”.

On the contrary the Anabaptist Mennonite concept of the building of “the spiritual earthly Kingdom of God” by His disciples with whatever resources could be mustered even though insignificant, would have appeared to be very relevant. No doubt thousands of acts of kindness were informally extended to the Russian people. However, the expressed concern in this regard does not seem to have been very vocal. At least not in view of the fact that the concept of sharing and advancing the “peaceable earthly kingdom” is central to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

This theology was developed largely on the basis that the Gemeinde of true believers would always be only a small remnant within the fabric of society. It is evident that the situation of the Mennonites in Russia was drastically different. The “society of the world” from which the true believer was to be “nonconformed” was almost completely removed from the daily life experiences of the Russian-Mennonite colonist. Separation from the “world” was supposedly achieved by this physical separation which should be distinguished from the case of the Hutterite Brethren where the separateness was necessary because of the practice of community of property.

In Russia, the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde, theoretically a voluntary group of committed believers, became a kind of State church. Here membership and entry could be gained only by the accident of birth into a privileged society. This ecclesiastical authority had the responsibility of establishing and maintaining a social order which naturally also included the physical punishment and discipline of the offenders against the society which was directly contrary to the very tenets of the faith. There is no evidence that any attempt was made to reinterpret and redefine Anabaptist-Mennonite theology in order to make it applicable to the new social order. It appears that this and other aspects of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith were simply ignored by the ruling Russian-Mennonite hierarchy at the time.

The prosperous closed settlements resulted in the same process of secularization previously experienced in Holland and Prussia. Doctrinal indifference and spiritual decline already firmly rooted in the Prussian Mennonite settlements was expanded and transplanted to the Russian steppes. As had already been experienced in Holland, Prussia, and elsewhere, many of the Mennonites in Russia responded to the dual threats of secularization and moral decline by turning to the balmy breezes of pietism for their salvation, instead of seeking once more the true vision of evangelical faith. Pietism, in turn encouraged other elements in Russian-Mennonite society to seek to rediscover the essentials of their faith in the unabashed pursuit of culture and wealth. Although the process occurred largely by default, the teachings of pietism, thus came to fill the gap which the foregoing factors had created in the spiritual constitution of the Russian-Mennonites.

### **5.05 A Model of Decline and Renewal**

The decline in the teaching and practise of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith already evident in Prussia became painfully obvious as soon as the first Mennonites arrived in Russia. The descriptions of the strife and turmoil among the Mennonites in the Chortitza colony founded in 1789 are painfully repeated in every historical account. Moral conditions among the Molotschna Mennonites have been recorded for posterity by some of the pioneer Mennonites leaders. The descriptions of Klaas Reimer, the founding Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, are well known. In his vibrant and intense style Reimer has recorded the strife and disputation rampant in Molotschna society. In his *Memoirs* he compared the situation to that of the people of Israel, over whom God appointed evil and despotic rulers when the people became rebellious, arrogant and proud.

Heinrich Balzer, a gifted minister and brilliant writer who had left the culturally progressive Orloff-Halbstaedt Gemeinde in order to find expression for his own spiritual needs, felt that the situation was so terrible that it truly tainted the name Mennonite. In his 1833 treatise **Faith and Reason** Balzer describes the situation as follows:

“The peace of the church has been destroyed. Pride, ostentation, vanity, greed for money and lust for wealth, avarice, drunkenness, luxury, vicious life, masquerades, obscene songs, gambling, and above all the miserable smoking of tobacco - they all have become the passionate habits of the Mennonites to such an extent that in their denial they would not recognize any praiseworthy advantage over the pitiable Nogaians who know no greater bliss in this world or in the hereafter than the gratification of their lusts”<sup>10</sup>.

Another prominent leader Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, describes developments since the secession of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812 as follows:

“Ever since it has been perceived that the practise of spiritual discipline was declining more and more, the evil Godless practises such as debauchery, fighting, lying, cheating, and the like, have taken the upperhand. Yes, my beloved reader, enough tears cannot be shed to sufficiently lament the fact that the thieves and drunkards are not even put under the ban. Quite to the contrary, it is even accepted as a defense, if in consequence of his drunkenness the offender has indulged in other infamous acts and vices, notwithstanding, that drunkenness constitutes a mortal sin and is cause for the ban of itself. 1 Corinthians 5,11 and Galatians 5,21”<sup>11</sup>.

This was the setting in which the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde originated and in which its faith and practise evolved. This was the experiential womb which gave it birth. A revival and renewal movement based on full gospel theology. Once more a remnant of society was determined and led by the spirit to emulate the Apostolic church guided of course by the teachings of scripture and the faith of the spiritual forefathers. The difference being that this time the society within which this remnant existed was itself a Mennonite society. Kleine Gemeinde theology was completely based on these circumstances and in general was a realistic interpretation of evangelical teachings within these surroundings.

It is noteworthy that when the Kleine Gemeinde emigrated to North America in the 1870s it naturally adopted its own form of closed block settlement, having already gained experience with such a system in the Markuslandt and Borosenko colonies in Russia. There is no indication that any attempt was made to reinterpret its previous theology which was very appropriate as long as the Kleine Gemeinde was a three per cent minority in the population of Russian Mennonite society. It seems that to an extent the Kleine Gemeinde in America recreated the problems which had bedeviled the Molotschna Mennonite settlement three-quarters of a century earlier.

History also repeated itself when later renewal movements in the Kleine Gemeinde turned to various brands of American fundamentalism for inspiration instead of seeking once more the vision of their forefathers. In fact North America individualism was perfectly suited for the teachings of an inward Christianity so that heavy inroads on Anabaptist-Mennonite ranks were to be expected. Thus the Molotschna Mennonite experience would tend to repeat itself. It is interesting to speculate on the effects and ramifications of such factors on the later development of the various Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in North America. It is perhaps remarkable that any groups were able to maintain even some aspects of their full gospel teaching in view of the fact that so many Russian Mennonite groups discarded their burdensome and unattractive theology as quickly as they could.

Notwithstanding the demanding teachings and exacting full gospel faith of the Kleine Gemeinde, the group expanded sufficiently to maintain a membership equal to some three per cent of the Russian Mennonite population from 1812 until the time of emigration. Being a small minority resulted in a constant interaction in the larger society. This was one of the most important factors in making the daily life of the Kleine Gemeinder in Russia as rich and vibrant as it was. Until the expansionary move out of the Molotschna in the 1860s the average member of the Kleine Gemeinde had repeated daily interaction with his other neighbours. This interaction extended to all aspects of Molotschna social life; e.g. schools, Brandordnung, Waisenamt, village affairs, cooperation with the Agricultural Society, and general commerce.

Only where Molotschna Mennonite life contravened Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings as interpreted by the Kleine Gemeinde was social interaction interrupted. Thus when Molotschna Mennonite weddings became the setting for moral debauchery and the display of pride and arrogance the Kleine Gemeinde people felt that they could not participate. Or when such offices as that of village mayor became embroiled in the battles between the cultural traditionalists and the progressives and later



between the financial establishment and the have-nots, the Kleine Gemeinde members would no longer occupy these offices as to do so would be contrary to their principle of nonresistance. Other activities such as the pursuit of wealth and ostentation were discouraged and held as being contrary to biblical teachings.

Naturally not every member of such a movement would be equal to the call. Certainly individuals as well as parts of the movement would fall back into dry formalism from time to time. There is no reason why this could not occur from time to time with an Anabaptist-Mennonite group, in the same way that it frequently occurred in all branches of the Pietist movement. Nevertheless it is difficult to understand the accusation of historian Peter M. Friesen that the Kleine Gemeinde was "too narrow-minded, too frightened, too isolationist and opposed to education, it never made a profound impact". This seems to be directly contrary to the facts of the Kleine Gemeinde experience.

Indeed the work of some Russian Mennonite historians would have the reader believe that the Kleine Gemeinde and other like-minded groups were semi-human beings, living from day to day by rote, in direct contravention of all scriptural and spiritual leading. Regretably these misleading views, written at the time when the Russian-Mennonite cultural and pietist empire was at its peak, have too often been repeated by subsequent historians without question. Consequently numerous generations have had the view that the heroes of Russian Mennonite story have been the pietist Mennonites and the cultural Mennonites. "The true and ideal Mennonite was a prosperous, cultured German pietist," and those who kept the faith were considered to be a lesser species and the villains of the peace.

This is the popular view which has stood as the benchmark for Russian-Mennonite historiography for almost a century. Of course the reader will have to examine and prove the facts and judge for himself. Hopefully a time of greater tolerance will come when those individuals who preferred to continue to teach and practice the faith of their forefathers, even if not always perfectly understood, can also be accepted and respected in the Russian-Mennonite historiography as Mennonites.

## 5.06 Kleine Gemeinde Social Views

The truth of the matter was that the day to day lifestyle of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia was a rich and vibrant one. A high level of piety and morals was maintained. No drunkenness or debauchery was known within the Kleine Gemeinde. The group had started with small house prayer meetings and became known for its sincere devotional practices and moving worship services. The letters of the Kleine Gemeinde in the 1860s reveal a daily life of devotions and edification. In addition the average Kleine Gemeinder had repeated daily contact with his non-Kleine Gemeinde neighbours the extent of which has already been detailed elsewhere. No doubt this interaction was sufficient reason for the members of the Kleine Gemeinde to be constantly on the alert, not only in life and example, but also in their knowledge of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. They were to be prepared to give an account and explanation for their faith and conduct at all times.

For the Kleine Gemeinde the Molotschna was a crucible in which Anabaptist Mennonite theology and a dynamic social setting combined to create a peculiar social view. This was sometimes referred to as "Kleingemeinsch" by other Mennonite groups when they wished to joke or sneer about the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Probably the equivalent term in the case of the Mennonite Brethren Church was "Huepfer" or literally the "joyful jumpers". This referred to the legalistic practise of some of the early secessionists of joyfully jumping and dancing to the beat of drums and other stimulating music, as well as to other practises such as mixed kissing which on at least one reported occasion apparently resulted in a fall into carnal sin. Of course it would be most narrow-minded to seize upon one such term from the gossip at the time in order to dismiss and smear a sincere and legitimate movement which eventually became very successful. Likewise the reader should be careful not to be misled and deceived into dismissing the Kleine Gemeinde in the same fashion.

Certainly, there was an attitude or mind set which was peculiar to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In view of the reports that some of the neighbours belittled the efforts of the Kleine Gemeinde to live a godly life, it is important to examine what the peculiar attitude was. Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), expresses the view as follows:

"It might be beneficial to refer to what the Holy Apostles mention with respect to vanity expressed in clothes, the smoking of tobacco, and other similar embellishments. For James says, "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" Whoever wishes to be the friend of the world will be the enemy of God. And John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world". And Peter says "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against

the soul". And Paul says, "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of the light". And more of the same in numerous additional verses. I am of the view that this encompasses everything which is unnecessary for the sustenance of the physical body, and that which is a hindrance or damaging to the edification of my neighbour and the furtherance of the salvation of the soul".<sup>12</sup>

In other words the gratification of passing sensual pleasures was to be avoided and replaced with more edifying activities such as prayer, helping the neighbour, etc. Daily actions and decisions were to be undertaken with a view to the seriousness of the mortal life and its short fragile duration. No sacrifice was too great, or perhaps one should say, no self-denial was really a sacrifice, if made in the service of the master.

This view was eloquently expressed by Johan Toews (1794-1873) who grew up in a Kleine Gemeinde home and who was the father to Peter Toews, one of the Aeltesten who would lead the Kleine Gemeinde out of Russia. In 1850 Toews suffered a severe and almost fatal illness which led him to a deeper appreciation for the love of God and his manifestation in his life. In his autobiography **The Watchful Eye of God**, written in 1850, Johan Toews admonishes his children and family to learn to know the love of their Saviour. He explains his feelings and concerns for the spiritual well-being of his children as follows:

"Since I was stricken by a very severe fever in the year 1850, I have been greatly burdened, especially during the moments of oppressive fever, with meditations and feelings. Seemingly without realization, I found myself in the act of rhyming, of which I really had no special gift. I have composed some of my mental conceptions into rhyme, which are intended for you, my precious children.

The imperfection of the verses reveal, that I, dear children, have taken my concern to the Lord Jesus. It is my hope and desire, that these simple words may find a way to your hearts, and be cherished as words of remembrance from your father. Even as you bear away my mortal body to its final resting place, may these words speak to you as if I were here in person, admonishing you to adhere to a truly zealous deportment, which is pleasing in the sight of God. Therefore have I compiled a part of my own biography, which is intended to set before your mental vision, several important and very instructive experiences, that happened during my lifetime.

"I have told you, beloved children, what is to follow here, but nevertheless, I want to remind you again, of the ever, watchful eye of GOD, even though we are endangered by whatever the situation may be. By personal experience I must say, how exceeding willing the good Lord is, to save those, who are worthy of His Grace. He permits dangers to befall us, where we are at fault, and also dangers, whereby we may be drawn closer to Him. Meditate on Ps. 50, where He says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble," etc. Both of these have I experienced; even in self-realization, I pleaded with the Lord; for He prompts the prophets to say: "They turn their backs unto me, and not their faces; but whenever agony sets in, they cry out: "Help, oh Lord!"

Even so was I; my eternal salvation was but naught to me, and I cared very little about God, - I only called upon Him, whenever I found myself in real bodily danger; being blinded, I did not realize the unsaved state of my soul.

The Lord did not forsake me, but rendered several tests of mercy and faithfulness, to save me from eternal doom. This was His purpose in several lifesaving experiences, that I had to go through. How sorry I am now, that I grieved the Lord, who first loved me with exceeding love, where I repaid Him with coldness and ingratitude. Had I immediately turned unto Him, after I experienced the first proof of His goodness, - had I surrendered with undivided heart, and denied the deceiving ways of this world! For with Him, there is eternal bliss. The world and all its sensuality shall pass away.

After recounting a number of episodes where he was saved only by the boundless grace of God, Johan Toews goes on to express the deepest and innermost feelings of his heart.

"These experiences were important to me, and I found them to be more and more impressive for me as the Lord opened my eyes to the purpose of such miraculous leading. Whenever I reflect with respect to these as well as all the other wonderful things which the Lord has done unto me, I must stoop down to the lowest dust before his feet and confess, as did Jacob the patriarch: "Lord, I am too insignificant to be worthy of the least of all the compassion and faithfulness which you have shewn unto me your unworthy servant".

May this writing serve as a warning for you, my beloved children, and perhaps also for my grandchildren; that you do not thoughtlessly commit yourself into any danger; But should you nevertheless have fallen into such situations, may it also serve as an encouragement for you to trust and to call upon the one, who has revealed his omnipotence and love to your father in such miraculous ways: Of which the Holy Scripture also speaks, "O thou that heareth prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come".

Beloved children! Before I conclude this writing, I cannot refrain from drawing your at-

attention to one peril which far exceeds all others, namely the danger of the soul. Through the fall of Adam, sin has entered into this world, and death hath come by reason of the entry of sin. Death hath penetrated into the hearts of men, for they all have sinned. In our natural state we are separated from God, for our sins constitute a partition between God and man. However, a punishment is pronounced upon the latter, namely, the unspeakable eternal torments of hell.

Therefore beloved children! What do we gain, if we can live here in respectability, good fortune, and pleasure; if in the hereafter our lot shall be as it was with the rich man of whom we read in the New Testament; who in the torment of Hell pleaded in vain for a small drop of water. All of us would be subject to this destiny, no one could have been spared from this fate, if Jesus Christ had not come into the world to set the sinner free. This Jesus is the Lamb of God who bears all the sins of this world. Oh how great is the love of the father who did not spare His only begotten son, but rather surrendered him for us all.

Oh how great is the love of our Savior, that He would descend into such degradation and torment for us. Oh how he did battle, perspiring sweat like blood, how His blood did flow from the holy wounds? Oh how great was His distress, as He gave himself on the Cross of Calvary in atonement for the curse against us.

Children! Jesus has so much love for us. Untiringly he follows us in order to draw us into His compassion, in order that through honest penitence we become converted to him: so that we should become partakers of his Spirit which will then give us the evidence that we are the children of God! Woe unto them, who reject his grace and wantonly continue to do so. The danger is great! Children, speed in haste from the Sodom of this world, save your souls, do not look behind you and also do not stand still. Remember Lot's wife. Lord Jesus, help us!

The word of God take oft to hand,  
It will refresh your soul,  
And thereby preserve until the end  
Then Heav'n will firmly be your goal." "Johan Toews"<sup>13</sup>

The foregoing philosophy was reflected in the day to day life of the Kleine Gemeinde people. In their daily decisions and momentary thoughts they were exhorted to have in mind their beloved Saviour whom they were privileged to serve. Reference is made to the diary of Kleine Gemeinde teacher Abraham R. Friesen for an example of this kind of attitude. On March 22, 1871 he refers to the death of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Gerhard S. Kornelsen with the notation that, "everything seems to be speeding towards eternity, and is being readied for the end". On January 23rd, 1872, Friesen, who apparently was also an accomplished amateur astrologer, refers to the heavenly signs, "A sign occurred in the heavens like the Northern lights; It was a deep red at one spot in the north like in October of 1870, but it spread very rapidly and was really amazing, for it became red exactly under Orion, and it had white patches and streamers from different directions, many of which went into the south and at 10:00 o'clock, what looked like a star actually formed above us, with tremendous streamers in all directions . . . Live to see what will happen in Russia."<sup>14</sup> On February 14th he noted a letter and numbered code followed by the words "something big is looming, for whoever shall live to see it". Again on June the 14th Friesen has philosophically noted, "We mortals are actually of no account if we allow our fleshly nature to rule, in the place where the good spirit ought to be . . . How sad."

### 5.07 Kleine Gemeinde Morals

It is important to examine the practical implementations of the philosophy expressed. One would naturally expect that a high degree of self-denial would result. Aeltester Abraham Friesen expresses the view with the following principle: matters of the flesh were to be crucified if they were unnecessary to human sustenance or if they hindered the individual's spiritual edification or that of his neighbour. This teaching resulted in the emphasis on avoiding unnecessary embellishments and refinements for which the Kleine Gemeinde became known.

Thus for example, the fancy cornices and other elaborate fixtures which became popular with the Russian-Mennonite property owners by the 1840s, were considered unnecessary to the salvation of the soul, and were rejected by the Kleine Gemeinde. In fact, even the leaders of the normally inflexible Agricultural Society who regulated the details of building construction, adjusted the building codes to accommodate the Kleine Gemeinde tendencies towards a plain and simple lifestyle.

In comparison to their Mennonite neighbours the Kleine Gemeinde seemingly maintained to a greater degree the traditional Mennonite emphasis on simpler styles, subdued colours, and preferences for material of quality so that it would be durable and cheaper in the long run, rather than opting for all the latest fashions and frills.<sup>15</sup> This was even reflected in the clothes of the Kleine Gemeinde

which tended to be more conservative and in more tasteful colours, such as "heavenly blue" and other darker and more dignified shades. In fact Peter M. Friesen claims that the Kleine Gemeinde painted all their house adornments, wagons and furniture in blue<sup>16</sup>. This is probably somewhat of an exaggeration, but nevertheless the point is telling.

Similarly the Kleine Gemeinde were generally quite conservative in adopting new technological innovations, frequently waiting several decades until a new gadget had demonstrated that it was in fact a useful and helpful instrument worthy of the expenditure. This was also a beneficial philosophy from the economic standpoint as frequently such new gadgetry and styles would be discarded as useless by neighbours who had been less astute. The notable exception to this general principle was in the area of agricultural techniques where the Kleine Gemeinde itself was generally at the forefront.

Another unique application of the Kleine Gemeinde viewpoint was with respect to the weddings and other social affairs of the Molotschna Mennonites which were often conducted in a manner contrary to all basic evangelical principles. It is interesting to trace the Kleine Gemeinde position in this regard to Aeltester Peter Peters, whose mild form of Mennonite piety frequently seemed to serve as a guide for the group. In a general reference to the pursuit of wealth, ostentation and other worldly objectives, and in particular reference to great feasts, meals and elaborate weddings, Peter Peters makes the following comments regarding participation in such events:

"Great feasts, elaborate banquets and weddings, are full of danger for a true Christian, because the world is so desolate that seldom is anything carried on at such occasions except frivolity and vanity, so that one's nature is alienated from reverence and pious thoughts; Secondly one is so sated with food and drink (Luke 21:34) that in general all this time has been fruitlessly occupied and thrown away.

It would be much better to remain alone for oneself and to avoid such frivolity, and in the quietness to occupy oneself with prayer and thanksgiving, between God and your soul (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 5:20), and thereby to rather hold a banquet with our Lord, who also says "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). This is truly a rewarding time, a blessed time, which one spends together with the Lord: It directs ones thoughts upwards towards heaven, and makes one forget all frivolity and vanity, and brings such individuals into such a contentment, and into rest, and peace, that he can truly say together with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here". (Matthew 17:4)

The above words were written by Peter Peters in the early part of the 17th century. Some two hundred years later this issue was again very real as the wedding feasts of some of the Molotschna Mennonites had degenerated into immoral debauchery. The Kleine Gemeinde preferred to avoid such "celebrations" which caused some hard feelings among their friends and neighbours. In his **Einfache Erklarung** published in 1845 Aeltester Abraham Friesen mentions that the members of the Kleine Gemeinde seldom attended other weddings for reasons similar to those outlined by Peter Peters. Aeltester Friesen explains this practice as follows:

"See, my beloved reader, the first point of note regarding our non attendance at the normal weddings, has its basis in the fact that we, and particularly our youth, can thereby occur damage to our souls, for a human by nature is always inclined towards evil: Indeed, the flesh lusteth against the spirit, Galatians 5:17; and you know very well, beloved reader, that the majority of weddings are no longer fashioned after the example of the youthful Tobias, Tobias 9:12, but now instead consist of the pleasure of the eye, the lusts of the flesh, and all manners of pride and ostentation . . ."

Do decide for yourself, beloved reader, why should we change our practise in this regard. You can see for yourself how the miserable, deluded people appear on these occasions, the one is arrogant and the other even more so; the pipe of tobacco in the hand and a songbook under the arm, as if the all-knowing God and the suffering and dying Lord Jesus can be honoured and served thereby. Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" 2 Corinthians 4:10. But through these activities only the life of the flesh is manifested.

Likewise the person of the ladies. The one appears in splendor and the other even more magnificently, without regard to the words of the Apostle, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, Isaiah 3: 16-24; 1 Peter 3:4; 1 Timothy 2:9-10. However only few are still obedient to the foregoing as they would rather emulate the magnificent woman of which you read in the Revelation of John. Revelation 17:4."

"And then when all the guests in their magnificent apparel have been assembled, and the wedding ceremony, or the eulogy at funerals, is completed; then the smoking of tobacco is the first deed by which they place their fleshly disposition into the light of day for everyone to see, and whereby they trod underfoot their service to God. Romans 8:8. Then follow the usual disgraceful activities of these banquets, of which the Wisdom of Solomon speaks, "Come

on therefore and let us enjoy the good things while they are with us: And let us use our bodies while they are young. Let us fill ourselves with the best wine and ointments; let us not allow the May flowers to pass us by” etc., of which you may read more in the book of Wisdom.

“Then the lewd jesting, laughing and baiting by both sexes commences, the mad singing and guzzling; where in many instances the music and dancing takes place; that it therefore is no longer a christlike life of piety, and rather could be called a Godless life according to pagan desires. Ephesians 4:17-19. “So that for ourselves and our youth, we have ample reason to refrain therefrom: So that in truth we can say with Peter “For it is sufficient, that in the past times of our lives, we have lived according to the pagan will; for we walked with them in lasciviousness, lusts, drunkenness, gluttony, banquetings, and abominable idolatries”. 1 Peter 4:3. Do see, beloved reader, and this astonishes our opponents, “that we no longer run with them in desolation, and excess of riot, and in their slanders”, says Peter. 1 Peter 4:3-4.

In his explanation regarding attendance at such weddings and banquets, Aeltester Abraham Friesen also refers to the Confession of Faith of George Hansen, (died 1703), Aeltester of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde during the latter part of the 17th Century; as well as to the Confession of Faith of Aeltester Hans von Steen (1705-1781) who was the predecessor of Aeltester Peter Epp (1725-1789) of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde. Epp in turn had a direct connection to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde being the father-in-law as well as the inspiration of Klaas Reimer, the founding Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Thus it can be seen that the teachings and practises of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia were certainly not their own particular innovations as some critics would claim.

One of the most remarkable positions of the Kleine Gemeinde was its rejection of the use of tobacco which was generally used among the Russian Mennonites at the time. This is noteworthy as some two centuries later even the government authorities realize the dangers of smoking so that they conduct an aggressive campaign against the practise. The writings of Peter Peters again provide a theological base for the Kleine Gemeinde position with regards to the practise of smoking. In his devotional book **The Way of the City of Peace** Peter Peters expresses the following views pertaining to the smoking of tobacco:

“The Lord guard us from evil deeds and offenses, and may He lead us on his holy path, and protect us from the evil abuse, which has infiltrated so miserably, the vain use of tobacco; among the lowly as well as the mighty, among ministers (Lehrer) as well as the common people, in huts as well as in houses, by night and day, as if it was a divine service. But without a doubt, it is rather a service of the devil, an evil practise, and an unseemly mannerism, mostly used Godlessly and frivolously, a fruitless occupier of time, a vexation to the innocent, a misleading of the youth to seduce them into idleness; For it arises as the mother of eager drinking. In total, it consists completely of shamefulness. Smoking, spitting, and when it is dried out, then to smoke anew; as if it were a sacrifice of Bacchus, to lead many to his banquet.

O all of you, who love your souls and who want to follow the unblemished life of our Lord, avoid and shy away from this evil custom like a plague, and rather follow the unblemished Lamb, withersoever He goeth (Revelation 14:4) in all chaste and honourable customs, as otherwise you bring shame upon your good name by the smoking of tobacco.

“And if you are a minister (Lehrer), and an upright individual comes to you to visit, he will suffer a great burden on your account, and all your uplifting lies under your feet, he will be shamed, offended, or misled by you; And should he follow your example he will be hurt even more. Since where the evil habits root themselves they become as a second nature. That which formerly was such a burden and a bitter taste; now becomes so beloved that if they should have some spare moments the tobacco pipe appears; and the one contributes to the other, the time is occupied thereby among the high and mighty as well as the lowly.

“If you cannot perceive that this arises from evil, then you must be blinded and your hearts must be darkened, for our time is so precious and passes by so quickly: So that at all times we have reason to make haste with our time, in order that we may bring to God the fruits of thankfulness and reverence; which is all too much extinguished by this shameful custom”.

The Anabaptist Mennonite position is not merely a negative taboo as Peter Peters goes on to provide his readers with instruction regarding a more desirable alternative.

“Therefore I would advise all the innocent ones who have not yet partaken of this evil habit; keep yourself pure and use your time to better advantage instead of exhaling the shameful stench and fumes, seek to thank your God and to relate of His wonders, and to honour His name, sound out the trumpet of the word of God, that is a much more desirable fragrance, a sweet flavour, and a sacrifice which is acceptable to God. While the vain tobacco smoker spends his money to the detriment of his wife and children, rather make use of your money for the poor, and visit those who are suffering, for this shall be a sweeter fragrance to the Lord.

“I have placed the foregoing before my fellow man out of love, as a warning and as a sound teaching, so that it might move the heart of someone to turn from this great frivolity,

who has been misled by the great evil habit of smoking tobacco, so that they might again be released from their bondage, and that those who are still free, would not allow themselves to be led astray by such a shameful and lewd mannerism.

“If anyone out of great distress because of weak eyes, or other severe circumstances, should use tobacco in reasonable quantities and without offending anyone, this would be a free matter, for finally all parts of creation are good in some respects. May the Lord grant us wisdom so that we may achieve propriety in all matters, and so that in truth we can live in reverence and in the fear of God, so that we may live eternally hereafter. Amen.”

It appears that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was the only 19th century Mennonite group in Russia which repudiated the use of tobacco<sup>17</sup>. Within a century most Russian-Mennonite groups would have adopted the same goal even though not always achieved in practise. However the Kleine Gemeinde never adopted smoking and drunkenness as their cardinal sins as some pietist groups were prone to do, all the while giving a free rein to the pursuit of wealth, pride, vanity, and ostentatiousness. The full gospel teachings of the Anabaptist Mennonites resulted in a far more holistic view of piety and morals.

### 5.07 Testimonials

Of course there would always be some critics of the Kleine Gemeinde who would deem their teachings and beliefs to be “small-minded religious concerns”<sup>18</sup>. One particular writer then goes on to detail how his own particular denomination banned and counter-banned each other, burned books which were not in keeping with their particular brand of pietist teachings and refused to consider anyone else as belonging to the church of God.<sup>19</sup> Of course when the foregoing and many similar events occur, all of which is detailed in a writing of several hundred pages, it is always the spirit-filled leading of men of God at work, all of whom no doubt have “a joyous knowledge of God’s grace”. This same writer suggests the piety of the Kleine Gemeinde was only a shallow legalism and that if in fact they had lived an uplifted life then it was only “the devil which had led the Kleine Gemeinde to build on good works”.

Surely the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was as prone to error as any other Russian-Mennonite group. The group probably fell into more errors and suffered from more deficiencies. Nevertheless it is noted that the analysis of the foregoing writer seems to place the Kleine Gemeinde into a no win situation. If they participate in Molotschna Mennonite life they are condemned as part of the evil mass of traditional immoral Mennonites. If after seven years of patient and loving renewal efforts they were excommunicated and then organized a separate little flock they were condemned as being isolationist and narrow-minded. If they practiced their faith and lived out a life of piety they are condemned as simply building on good works. All the while other Russian Mennonite groups built a cultural empire often based on greed, the pursuit of wealth and the oppression of the poor; but these groups of course are led by the spirit of God and can do no wrong.

Fortunately the reader is not dependent on such observers. Other more impartial witnesses also recorded their impressions of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. If it is true that “the Spirit can be known by its fruits” then reference can be made to other witnesses who had no reason to favour or disfavour the Kleine Gemeinde. One of these is Abraham Toews, of Tiege, who served as the Oberschulz of the Molotschna Mennonite colony from 1842 until 1848. Oberschulz Toews is quoted as saying of the Kleine Gemeinde “that in the fourteen years of his service no member of the Kleine Gemeinde had carried on any legal process, nor was involved in a transgression; and even more definitely that no member was punished by reason of having committed an offense”. David H. Epp, the biographer of Johan Cornies after referring to the practise of the Kleine Gemeinde of reading only the Bible, Gesangbuch, catechism, the *Fundamentals* of Menno Simons, the *Martyr Spiegel*, and *The Wandelnde Seele*, goes on to say that “at the time the members of the Kleine Gemeinde, which definitely quickly increased in size through the addition of new members, endeavoured to live a strictly moral life”<sup>20</sup>.

In *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, H. Goerz says of the Kleine Gemeinde that “the people were otherwise honestly pious and exerted themselves to live a Christian walk and lifestyle in accordances with their beliefs. They were exceptionally competent entrepreneurs (farmers) and quickly became quite wealthy”<sup>21</sup>. Jakob P. Becker, a co-founder of the Mennonite Brethren Church, quotes Jakob Martens (a minister of the Orloff Gemeinde) as follows: “Furthermore, it is a fact that among us an entire church, the so-called Kleine Gemeinde avoids the use of worship books (referring to the writings of the separatist pietists used by many Russian Mennonite congregations) entirely, and yet there is no trace of dangerous fanaticism among them. Instead there are many sober, faithful and thoughtful witnesses, and a wholesome program of activities among them”<sup>22</sup>.

Reference is also made to Franz Isaac, Russian-Mennonite historian and advocate of the landless during the 1860s. In referring to the place of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in the history of the Molotschna Mennonites Isaac says, "that for a long time they were signaled out by a common ridicule, and the exemption from statute labour could not be enjoyed by their ministers as could other ministers. However they endured everything with great patience and rendered their invariably punctual obedience to the local as well as to the higher authorities. Their entire striving was to live out the teachings of Jesus, Matthew 5:39-41 . . . After this Gemeinde had quietly and peacefully lived among the other Gemeinden for a half century, and had shown that the secular authorities had not found it necessary to subject a single member of their Gemeinde to punishment during this whole time . . ."23

## 5.08 Conclusion

The faith and teachings of the Kleine Gemeinde resulted in an "other worldliness" which the pietist with his inwardly Christianity could never understand. This "other worldliness" is manifest in a poem which Johan Toews (1793-1873) wrote to express his feelings at the death of his twenty-year-old son Jakob in 1859. The poem entitled "Der Kirchhof"<sup>24</sup> forms a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

"Aber Herr, lehre doch mich, dass es ein Ende mit mir haben muss, und mein Leben ein Ziel hat, und ich davon muss." Psalm 39:5.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stiller Kirchhof, Ziel der Leiden,<br/>Wenn wirst du mich nehmen auf—<br/>Dann, wenn ich von hier werd' scheiden<br/>Und beenden meinen Lauf.</li> <li>2. Dass dies einmal wird gescheh'n,<br/>Unterliegt dem Zweifel nicht,<br/>Denn die Zeit heisst alles gehen,<br/>Wenn ihm erst die Kraft gebricht.</li> <li>3. Komm' ich und seh' schon von ferne<br/>Dich vom Park geschlossen ein,<br/>Will mein Fleisch denn doch ungerne<br/>Von dir eingezwungen sein.</li> <li>4. Doch ich werd' trotz dessen Wille<br/>Deinem Schosse einverleibt,</li> </ol> | <p>Wo Gott weiss, wie lang die Hülle<br/>In der Ruh' verschlossen bleibt.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Tret' ich jetzt auf dem Teraine<br/>Deiner Hügel gross und klein,<br/>Seh' ich an dem Grabesteine,<br/>Hier schon ruhen mein Gebein.</li> <li>6. O, so öffnet mein Gemüte<br/>Sich durch einen Thränenlauf<br/>Und fordert durch Gottes Güte<br/>Mich zur wahren Busse auf.</li> <li>7. Leider bleibt es ein Gezerre,<br/>Und was hab' ich für Gewinn,<br/>Wenn man mich wird durchs Gesperre<br/>Tragen auf den Kirchhof hin?</li> </ol> |
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## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FIVE. SOCIAL VIEWS AND MORALS.

1. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920* (Macmillan, Toronto, 1974), 161.
2. The Russian system of colonial administration and the effects which it had on the Mennonite colonists has been considered in chapter Eight of the *Golden Years*, op. cit., 110-118.
3. E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., Altona, Manitoba, 1955) 20-21.
4. Epp, op. cit., 161.
5. E.K. Francis, op. cit., 23-24.
6. Quoted by Frank H. Epp, op. cit., 170.
7. Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev* (Marian Press, Battleford, Sask., 1974), 47-48.
8. Peter Jansen, op. cit., 20-22.
9. D.H. Epp, *Johann Cornies*, 80-84.
10. *The Golden Years*, 244.
11. Abraham Friesen, *Einfache Erklärung, 1845* (Himmels Manna Druckerei, Quakertown, Pa., 1901), 5.
12. Abraham Friesen, *Eine Kruze Beschreibung...Anno 1820*, (Druck von Paul Springer, Beatrice, Nebraska, 1904), 8.
13. Johan Toews, op. cit., 1-5. As translated by Cornelius I. Toews.
14. These other worldly terrestrial occurrences in 1870 are also mentioned in other sources, e.g. by John F. Toews (1858-1931) who mentions that sometimes the heavens were alight with great red flames. On one particular night when the lights were especially brilliant exactly overhead, two great streams of light separated, one streaking to the west and one to the east
15. Gaeddert, op. cit., 31-32.
16. Peter M. Friesen, op. cit., 198.
17. Gaeddert, op. cit., 27.
18. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 198.
19. *Ibid.*, 380.
20. D.H. Epp, op. cit., 102.
21. H. Goerz, op. cit., 57.
22. Jakob P. Becker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. (M.B. Historical Society, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1973), 121.
23. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 93.
24. Johan Toews, op. cit., 23-24.

# *Part Two*

## *Conflict On The Molotschna*

### **Chapter Six**

#### **Quest For Power**

##### **6.01 Introduction**

The social and religious history of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony during the third quarter of the 19th century will be considered under the general title **Conflict on the Molotschna**. The reason for this title will quickly make itself evident to the reader. The topic will be treated in three separate sections, each dealing with a particular aspect of a most troubled and lamentable period of the history of the Russian Mennonites. Chapter Six will deal with the power struggle between the Orloff group and the remnants of the former Grosze Gemeinde led by Oberschluz David Friesen. Chapter Seven will consider the clash between this same power group and the new radical brands of pietism which were sweeping their way across Russia. Chapter Eight will examine the mounting socio-economic disparity among the Molotschna Mennonites and the resulting "landless" dispute of the 1860's and 1870's.

##### **6.02 Review of Molotschna History, 1804-1850**

The power struggle between the Orloff group and the remnants of the former Grosze Gemeinde led in part by Oberschluz David Friesen, quickly embroiled all the Gemeinden in the Molotschna. In truth it became a war, an ugly conflict of paper and ink, with deep hostilities involving most of the religious leaders of the day.

In considering this subject it is helpful to briefly summarize the socio-religious developments in the Molotschna prior to 1850. Reference is made to the earliest years of the settlement when the reform ministers, Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen, worked with patience and devotion to renew the Grosze Gemeinde then under the leadership of the quarrelsome and spiritually insensitive Aeltester Jakob Enns. After seven years of concerted efforts the two ministers were excommunicated by the Grosze Gemeinde and consequently felt they had had no choice but to organize their own small flock as a separate Gemeinde. Molotschna history over the next decade centered primarily around the life and death struggle for survival of the new Kleine Gemeinde versus the nearly monolithic Grosze Gemeinde.

The hegemony of the Grosze Gemeinde was further challenged in 1824 when its culturally reactionary wing reorganized itself as the "Rein" or pure Flemish Grosze Gemeinde. In the meantime the progressive wing under the leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast emerged as the Orloff Halbstadt Gemeinde. Under the domination of Johan Cornies the Orloff Gemeinde became the progressive, cultural and pietistic trendsetter among the Russian Mennonites.

Molotschna church and social history for the next two decades centered around the raging battle for supremacy between the two groups. This was a war to the finish for the hearts of the people. Whose philosophy would prevail? The cultural reactionism of the "Grosze" Gemeinde or the cultural pietism of the Orloff group? In the end the Orloff group, under the dynamic leadership of Johan Cornies, would be the ultimate victor. In 1843 the power of the "Grosze" Gemeinde was broken when it was forcibly reorganized into three smaller Gemeinden under separate Aeltesten. The final triumph of Cornies was symbolized by the deposition and exile of Heinrich Wiens, who had become the Aeltester of one of these smaller Gemeinden. With his exile from Russia in 1846, the last organized resistance to the cultural and socio-economic innovations of Orloff appeared to be shattered. Johan Cornies and his supporters reigned supreme.

It was noted in chapter five that the Mennonite religious institutions in Russia very much resembled a state church from the start. In order to have legal capacity in this closed Mennonite society, such as to own land or even to be married, one had to be a member of some recognized branch of the Mennonite church. As no proselytizing was done, this meant that membership into the exclusive and



privileged society was obtained only by birth. In 1850 the establishment of a state church became a reality in all but in name with the formal organization and strengthening of the Molotschna Kirchen-Konvent. This was a committee of the Aeltesten of the seven Gemeinden in the Molotschna which now acted as a joint ecclesiastical authority. Local and government authorities would take actions at the request of this authority and would seldom act without the concurrence of this body.

Through all of this the Kleine Gemeinde attempted to maintain a friendly neutrality. They were unable to endorse either the culturally reactionary "Grosze" Gemeinde or "the socio-economic advancement at any cost" policy of the Orloff group. Thus the Kleine Gemeinde attempted to avoid embroilment in the socio-economic and cultural battle raging around them as much as possible. Seemingly they concentrated instead on spreading the evangelical message of peace through the publication of a number of books, and in their daily witness to the faith.

The Kleine Gemeinde desire to remain aloof from these battles was not always successful. It seems that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had established a good reputation with the government authorities as one Gemeinde which still believed and practised the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, the particulars of which were apparently better known to the government officials in St. Petersburg than to many Mennonites. Previous letters of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, such as his letter to the Hutterite Brethren of 1848, demonstrate that occasion had already arisen where the goodwill of the Kleine Gemeinde was called upon by the government authorities in order to deal with a difficult problem. It appears that the Supervisory Committee in Odessa was not prepared to act regarding important matters on a recommendation of the Kirchen-Konvent without first obtaining the opinion of the Kleine Gemeinde. This is amply illustrated by the post 1850 history of the Molotschna church.

### 6.03 The Orloff Barley Dispute

The major ecclesiastical events for the years 1850-1862, will now be considered. It has been said that when the Mennonites were recuperating from the demands made on them by the Crimean War, and when there was nothing left for them to fight about, they finally had to start a new war with respect to a desjatine of barley over which two landless "Anwohner" tenants had started an argument. And long after these two parties had settled their differences, the church battles really started to gain momentum.' This struggle became famous in Russian Mennonite history as the so-called "barley" dispute or *Orloff Gerstenstreit*.

Franz Isaac states that this dispute was nothing less than the coming to life of the residual hatred from the church divisions of the first half of the 19th Century. During the Cornies era these under-currents had not dared to rear their ugly heads. However, with the death of Cornies, socio-economic leadership fell to the Oberschulz David Friesen in Halbstadt who was unable (and perhaps unwilling) to keep these forces under control, so that any slight spark was sufficient to re-ignite the conflagration.<sup>2</sup> In his historical work, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, H. Goerz has provided an excellent summary of the incident which triggered this affair:

"In the spring of 1858 the Orloff Anwohner, Klaas Friesen, had rented two desjatine of land to another Orloff Anwohner Peter Janzen, who plowed the land and seeded barley. When it later came out that Friesen had also rented the land to another farmer the matter was referred to the village Schulz who made a report to the Gebietsamt on the basis that the second renter had been first. Based on this information the Gebietsamt decided that the second renter should "harvest the crop but that Janzen should be paid for seed and work."

"But as the parties could not agree on the value of the seed and work the Lichtenauer Gemeinde became involved in order to conclude the matter as the second renter was their member. In the meantime Friesen had admitted to Aeltester B. Fast of the Orloff Gemeinde that he had first rented the land to Janzen. Aeltester Fast could now have acted to settle the matter but most of the parties involved were members of the Lichtenauer Gemeinde even though they lived in Orloff. Then the village Schulz made another report to the Gebietsamt that the confession by Friesen was not voluntary and rather obtained under duress by Deacon Wall."

"Now the Gebietsamt demanded that Wall answer to these charges and that he be removed from his office as punishment. Upon investigation Aeltester Fast determined that the charges of duress were false and refused to act and now turned to the Aeltesten Ratzlaff (Rudnerweide), Wedel (Alexanderwohl), and Lenzman (Gnadenfeld) with the request that they investigate and advise with respect to the matter. But these Aeltesten sided with the Lichtenauer and the Gebietsamt against Orloff. This resulted in a lengthy give and take, advising, consulting and exchange of accusations without end. By now the matter centred more around Deacon Wall than the two desjatine of barley. The matter became more and more critical. Members of the Gemeinde were excommunicated and others left voluntarily. This odious affair continued for almost two years. Finally the Orloff Gemeinde sent two of its members, Phillip Wiebe and Johan Cornies Jr., to seek advice from the Supervisory-Committee

in Odessa. Shortly thereafter, Privy Counsellor Lange came to the Molotschna where he conducted an investigation and eventually decided in favour of Orloff ruling that the Deacon Wall had done nothing contrary to law. However many meetings and consultations were required before any of the parties were able to reconcile.<sup>3</sup>

The foregoing is a brief factual summary of the fact situation. This account has been freely translated and shortened somewhat from the work of historian H. Goerz. A full and detailed description of this episode is provided by historian Franz Isaac in his book, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*.<sup>4</sup>

#### 6.04 The Kleine Gemeinde Admonishment for Peace and Love

Space does not allow the exposition of all the letters, accusations, declarations and counter declarations, which were written among the parties to this matter. What is important is that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was very concerned about the continuation of such strife among their fellow Mennonites. From their neutral position they could clearly see that the situation was extremely disturbing to the government authorities. Even more important they could also clearly see that this disputation was only a continuation of the strife which Klaas Reimer and Cornelius Janzen had valiantly battled for seven years before they were excommunicated for their efforts in exhorting their brethren to return to the full gospel teachings of the faith.

As the senior Gemeinde in the Molotschna and as the only Gemeinde aggressively promoting the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde felt responsible to make all possible efforts to resolve this lamentable situation. Accordingly on June 26, 1860, the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde sent a letter to all of the Molotschna Aeltesten expressing their views and a prayer for a peaceful resolution of the matter. This letter provides an intimate insight into the situation:

“To the venerable Gemeinde Aeltesten Heinrich Toews, Benjamin Ratzlaff, Dietrich Warken-tin, and Johan Harder:

“Dearly beloved friends! With heartfelt greetings, we humble servants of the gospel wish you much grace and unity from God our heavenly Father, and from Jesus Christ our Savior, who has procured for us an eternal Kingdom, and who through His Holy Spirit proceeds to encourage and direct us onward on the path of life, in order that we as a chosen people might be prepared for his Kingdom.

“Venerable Aeltesten! with an impartial and upright heart our love towards you impels us to exhort you with the words of the apostle to his Timothy. 1 Timothy 4:16. Nevertheless we do so in great weakness and imperfection and realizing that we have enough to look after ourselves and our own flock. But as the controversy between the Orloff Gemeinde and the other Aeltesten are still continuing, and in so far as we are aware, are apparently worsening, and becoming ever more firmly entrenched and which controversies have now apparently reached the intensity that the matter is to be submitted to the higher government authorities for resolution; yet we cannot neglect to share something with you and to counsel you regarding our viewpoint in this matter. Although it is only from our insufficiency and inadequate abilities, we do so from the bottom of our hearts.

“The matters which have arisen for us in these later perilous times threaten the loss of all the blessings and prosperity which all of us have thus far enjoyed in this land under such a gracious and wise government. These matters could bring with them extremely serious consequences, not alone in the material realm, but much more for the soul, which is by far the most serious consequence for all of us. We are afraid because several quarrels and many unpleasant matters and unchristian incidents have already occurred and taken place right here among us Mennonites. These were matters which rightfully should have been quickly settled, reconciled and cleared away amongst ourselves as the Holy Scripture everywhere teaches us so plainly and so emphatically, and which would also be in accordance with the teachings of the Confession of Faith which we have accepted.

“One could say that in the beginning the authorities exhorted and warned in a brotherly and guileless manner. But simultaneously they also earnestly admonished us and referred us back to our principles of faith, so that we had to be amazed by the intelligence and foresight of our government which meant so well for us. This benevolence is evident from the original of the 1826 writing sent from the Ekatherinslav Contoir (Kontor) to the spiritual Konvent of the Molotschna Mennonites regarding the then current quarrels and discord respecting which a complaint had been made to the Kontor and which matter was put before the Kontor for resolution. Yes, they had concern about bringing such disunion before the higher government authorities.

“Nevertheless in cases of non-observance of the principles of our faith the Comitaet (Supervisory-Committee) will not fail to apply the harshest measures in order to remove those who in any way have been the cause of the uproar. But as is stated in said writing the Comitaet confidently hoped “That such venerable men who are guided in their course of life by the fundamental rules of the sacred gospel and by the spirit of truth, and who take no part in bickering and not forgiving, would put forward every effort to make an end to this quarrel, which was not in any way appropriate to their profession of faith”. Behold, such an esteemed and worthy government that is not only concerned about our temporal well-being but also for the salvation of our souls.

“However, this fatherly admonition by the higher authorities was not sufficiently taken to heart, and far too much went unheeded. Further insubordination and disputations have subsequently arisen among us Mennonites which have also been referred to the higher authorities for resolution. As a consequence the Fuersorge Comitaet (Supervisory-Committee) felt itself compelled to intervene by application of the harshest measures upon some individuals which had earlier been threatened. Thereby it exercised the authority which God has given them to protect the good and to punish evil. At the same time the authorities also earnestly and forcibly warned all of us; that if we want to avoid losing our privileges we must be peaceful and conduct ourselves as submissive to the Government. Indeed, we would have only ourselves to blame if unpleasant consequences come our way, because we have forfeited our special privileges.

“Behold, beloved Aeltesten! These threats that we would forfeit our privileges are inducements to us that we also bear in mind those former and lamentable dealings. We should like to remind ourselves, as well as you, of these dealings in order to prevent even more serious and for all of us even more sorrowful consequences, which can extend themselves even to our descendants. With an impartial spirit we therefore provide our heartfelt counsel to both sides to make an end to the disputations which you have with one another, and also that you be reconciled one with the other, and that you forgive each other while you are still on the way to the judge, in accordance with Matthew 5:25.

“Do also consider that in our time we will all be in need of much forgiveness from God, and that we will wish from the heart that he would indeed forgive us in all our sins, transgressions and errors. It must be considered that if we do not forgive the errors of our neighbours, God will also neglect to forgive our failures, according to Matthew 6:15.

“Therefore we beseech you collectively, beloved Aeltesten! And not in a trivial cause, but out of fear with a true heart. Do not allow any more unchristian and unscriptural matters to be brought before the authorities. Nor should any legal action be brought against anyone because our Confession of Faith so clearly states that it is not fitting for us to make anyone do good by power or force of the authorities, rather only by faith. Please compare the matter with the Holy Scriptures according to our Confession of Faith, and bring about reconciliation and agreement.

“We are also to judge and punish in circumstances where reconciliation does not occur and those that are disobedient and those who are living in sin, and also those that rebel against the *Gemeinde*, must be expelled from the *Gemeinde* and put away from among us, in accordance with the teachings of Paul, 1 Corinthians 5:13. So that we can say in the truth, “They are not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, 1 John 2:19.” Further, let us strive after those things which serve to bring us peace and the betterment of everyone, and pursue peace towards everyone. For this is what the Lord Jesus bequeathed to us and shared with us in such a fatherly way, as he says in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you”.

“For in peace God has called us, 1 Corinthians 7:15. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messengers that publish peace, according to Isaiah 52:7. And in conclusion we say with the Apostle Paul, “Finally my beloved brethren, rejoice, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, forgive one another if someone has a complaint against the other and live at peace with one another, and the God of love and peace will be with you”. Otherwise at least for our part, we do not wish to express ourselves about individual matters. But, we do want to present our view with respect to the actions of the *Kirchen Konvent* when they encroach upon a *Gemeinde*, and arbitrarily make decisions about certain matters. We want this view to be known in love.

“According to our understanding, good results, like love, peace and unity cannot be brought about unless the actions of the *Kirchen-Konvent* regarding a minister or brother of a particular *Gemeinde* in which these actions are to take place, are worked out together with them in unity; so that the brethren as well as the minister of the particular *Gemeinde*, can all satisfy themselves regarding the guilty one in the matter. Even then the latter must also give their consenting vote to the action. For otherwise, if the matter is dealt with one-sidedly or arbitrarily, it cannot other than arouse hatred, conflict, disunion and scandal. This is what the experience in this matter has again openly brought to light and very clearly evidences.

“Finally it remains our only desire, that all division and strife might be put aside and that true peace might be restored. Also if we have at all in any way offended you, or if we have offended you with this letter, as it deals with such a sensitive matter, we ask to be forgiven. We also ask that you overlook and accept everything in love, since it has not been done by us other than out of love. Together with the apostle, we say “Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak,” Hebrews 6:9.

“Thus we remain with kind regards, your fellow servants (ministers) of the Gospel. Aeltester Johan Friesen, Lehrer Klaas Friesen, Lehrer Abraham Friesen, Lehrer Johan Dueck, Lehrer Heinrich Enns, Deacon Klaas Friesen, Deacon Jakob Friesen.<sup>5</sup>

Colony of Neukirch, June 26, 1860.”

## 6.05 The Peace Negotiations

The foregoing is a firm expression by the entire ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde that such a disputation and strife should not continue. For at risk here were not merely the material privileges and blessings which the Mennonites enjoyed in Russia, but far more important that such a hatred

and strife would severely damage and hinder the salvation of the Mennonites who were after all to be the messengers of peace and not the strifemongers. Historian Franz Isaac has reported that Privy Councillor Lange had required that Johan Friesen, the third Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, also take part in the deliberations and arbitrations which were to resolve the matter.<sup>6</sup> In a letter of June 28, 1860, Aeltester Johan Friesen reported back to Privy Councillor Lange that a meeting had been held with all seven Aeltesten and that there are definite indications that a peaceful conclusion can be reached.

"To the most Honourable Highest Excellency Privy Councillor, A most Submissive Petition.

"After your Honour was so gracious as to impart his instructions to us Kirchen Aeltesten in Halbstadt, that we put aside the disputation which prevails here, the Orloff Gemeinde was given the direction to immediately declare in writing what was needed to be done in order to achieve that end.

"With this written declaration of the Orloff Gemeinde at hand, we seven Aeltesten met yesterday, being the 27th day of this month, in Alexanderwohl. Notwithstanding all our efforts made to arrive at a decision, none could be achieved. However I am convinced that the Orloff Gemeinde is possessed of a no lesser desire to achieve order among themselves, and in general to bring about the wished for peace.

"Therefore your most Honourable Excellence, my most humble petition would be as follows: That you not wish to regard me and my Gemeinde in such a manner, and if possible, to be favourably disposed to us and with the help of God to support us in the future; In order to assist us in making an end of this, for all of us, very detrimental strife.

For which purpose your Honourable Lord Privy Councillor will best know how to advise us. Aeltester Johan Friesen.<sup>7</sup> Neukirch on June 28, 1860.

According to Franz Isaac, the Orloff Gemeinde had submitted terms for a peace which were quite reasonable. However, the acceptance of the same was hindered by Aeltester Lenzman. This was the reason for the above report to the Privy Councillor by Aeltester Johan Friesen who wished to make sure that the Kleine Gemeinde was not falsely blamed for this failure and to seek the aid of Lange in arriving at a peace. The Privy Councillor knew that it was Lenzman who had vetoed the peace settlement and considered the Kleine Gemeinde accordingly. On August 3 and 4 the Privy Councillor visited each of the other Aeltesten with the result that another general *Aeltesten* conference was held on August 5.

In his *Sammlung*, Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that Johan Friesen was repeatedly summoned to attend the peace negotiations of the Aeltesten, in order to act as arbitrator between the warring factions.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that Bernhard Fast, onetime Aeltester of the Grosze Gemeinde and Aeltester of the Orloff Gemeinde since its organization in 1824, had died during the early part of 1860. It appears that notwithstanding all his "progressive reforms", Aeltester Fast had lacked a spirit of peace and a knowledge of the evangelical faith and in fact had been one of the first of the Pietist-Mennonites to openly work against the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia. Fast was replaced as Aeltester by Johan Harder, who was a man of an entirely different quality. Johan Harder possessed a truly Christian spirit and a sympathy and interest in the advancement of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In addition Harder had many near relatives in the Kleine Gemeinde, including an uncle and four aunts, so that he was intimately acquainted with this group. As a result of this change in leadership an alliance was formed between Orloff and the Kleine Gemeinde which lasted until 1875.

It now became possible for Aeltester Johan Friesen, no doubt greatly assisted by the change in leadership in the Orloff Gemeinde, to negotiate a peace settlement among the antagonists at a meeting of all the Aeltesten held at Alexanderwohl on August 5th, 1860. The following is the resolution of peace which was achieved through the efforts of Aeltester Friesen.

#### "Resolution of Peace

"All the divisions which originate from the Orloff land dispute are hereby ended, and we Aeltesten want to forgive and forget everything which has occurred in connection with this matter, and in the name of the Lord to mutually build and plant in love.

"To which we give witness by subscribing our names hereto. August 5th, 1860. The *Aeltesten* of the Gemeinden. Benjamin Ratzlaff, Peter Wedel, Dirk Warkentin, Heinrich Toews, Johan Harder, August Lenzman, and Johan Friesen."<sup>9</sup>

Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that this *Resolution of Peace* was not signed by all the Aeltesten. Rather it was signed by Aeltester Friesen on behalf of the other Aeltesten pursuant to their consent and at their request.<sup>10</sup> This oversight on the part of Aeltester Johan Friesen, no doubt omitted because Friesen had too much trust and confidence in the other Aeltesten, was to have severe consequences later. Both Aeltester Peter Toews and Minister Franz Isaac<sup>11</sup> have recorded the terms of the actual

peace settlement between the parties, which was as follows:

"All the Aeltesten of the Molotschna Mennonite Bezirk unitedly desire that those members of the Orloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde who were excommunicated from that Gemeinde, as that Gemeinde had decided on July 26th of this year, would all realize that they have been dealt with rightly by their *Gemeinde* in the matter of Thomas Wiens and the *Aeltester* election, in order that they might all be reconciled with their own *Gemeinde*, should anyone wish to return to their own *Gemeinde* in such circumstances.

"The other Aeltesten for their part agree to accept such members and in such a case the Orloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde agrees not to place any obstacles in the way of such acceptance. In conclusion of this matter the church *Aeltesten* do now wish to forgive and forget all incidents which had occurred in this regard, and in the name of the Lord to foster a mutual love.

That this conclusion was accepted by the six church Aeltesten at the conference of August 6, 1860, is certified by the name of the undersigned. "*Aeltester Johan Friesen*"

"Attested to at the wish of the Honourable Privy Councillor. "*Aeltester Johan Harder*."'<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly enough only the *Aeltesten* Johan Friesen and Johan Harder felt obligated to thank the Privy Councillor for his help and support in obtaining a peaceful settlement to the whole affair. Both of these Aeltesten delivered a letter of thanks to the Privy Councillor prior to his departure from the Colonies. Both letters have been recorded for posterity by Minister Franz Isaac in **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten**, whose account of these events is regarded as authoritative. The letter by Aeltester Friesen is presented here in order to illustrate the feelings of the two Aeltesten.

"To the Honourable Member of the *Fuersorge* Committee, Privy Councillor Lange. From the *Kirchen Aeltester* Johan Friesen.

"As a consequence of the graciousness of God and your beneficial endeavours, the long desired peace between the local *Gemeinden* was finally achieved yesterday. Consequently I have felt compelled to present to you in the name of my *Gemeinde* our heartiest thanks, in the hope that you will graciously accept this simple evidence of our love and recognition.

"At the same time we make the request to your Honour, that our thankfulness and most subservient sentiments might be brought to the attention of his Excellency the most Honourable President of our *Fuersorge* Committee. We will not neglect to remember you in love in our prayers for the well-being of the gracious Father of our Country, and for your well-being as well as that of all our eminent patrons. We will continually strive to show ourselves more worthy of the manifold experiences of your grace.

"Neukirch, on August 6, 1960. Aeltester Johan Friesen."<sup>13</sup>

## 6:06 Attempted Revocation of the Settlement of Peace

The struggle was not yet over. As this resolution was entirely contrary to his previous position, Aeltester Lenzman was still unable to descend from the heights of his arrogant opposition and therefore only six Aeltesten had approved the conditions of peace. As the other Aeltesten also found it difficult to acknowledge this deed of settlement because of the position of Lenzman they requested that Johann Friesen certify on their behalf that they had accepted this act. Privy Councillor Lange knew very well that Oberschulz David Friesen was manipulating the whole affair in the spirit of the former Grosze Gemeinde, and now demanded a report regarding the settlement of the matter not from the Aeltesten but from the Gebietsamt. The Aeltesten were thus obligated to report to the Gebietsamt with respect to the resolution of peace. This was done by forwarding to the Gebietsamt the copy of the resolution of peace which has already been set forth above.

Aeltesten Johan Friesen and Johan Harder now set about optimistically to put the resolution of peace into effect. Aeltester Johan Harder held meetings with his Gemeinde and on August 11th his members were advised of the terms of the settlement made and asked to dispose themselves to the same. On the same date both Aeltester Friesen and Aeltester Harder signed a letter sending copies of the Peace Resolution to all the other Aeltesten. However, they were bitterly disappointed in their hopes that the dispute had finally come to an end. The circulation of copies of the Peace Resolution as reminders of what the other Aeltesten had agreed to did not find good reception among the latter. The Aeltesten now revoked their earlier agreement which they returned with the following writing:

"To the Church Aeltesten Johan Harder and Johan Friesen. By the return of these writings we declare to you, that we have not recognized in its entirety the letter signed by Ohm Friesen\*, which is also appropriately evidenced by the fact that we have not personally subscribed to the same. If however one of your members would have erred during this matter, which for so long has been in dispute, be it in words or otherwise it would only be reasonable that this be acknowledged to the one who knows our hearts and as well to the Kirchen-Konvent.

However, in the matter of Thomas Wiens and the Aeltester election, we have conceded to the Orloff Gemeinde no right to demand a confession from its members admitting their

error because we ourselves have not considered this to be an error. It was decided that those members whom the Orloff church society could not by love persuade to return to their Gemeinde, would be given the liberty to go over to another Gemeinde. Otherwise, we consider the matter of dispute to have terminated and will, in relation to this matter, cease all unnecessary correspondence.

From the Conference  
in Pordenau, August 23, 1860.

The Aeltesten - Benjamin Ratzlav,  
Peter Wedel, Heinrich Toews,  
Dirk Warkentin.”<sup>14</sup>

To this revocation and rejection of the earlier agreement and resolution of peace, Aeltester Johan Friesen and Aeltester Johan Harder reply as follows:

“To the Venerable Kirchen Aeltesten Benjamin Ratzlav, Heinrich Toews, Peter Wedel and Dirk Warkentin. Dear brother Aeltesten!

“We are not in the least disposed and in fact would consider it wrong to renew correspondence regarding this unhappy quarrel which, with the help of the Lord and our fatherly authorities, had found its final settlement in the Conference of August 5, 1860, to return to their Gemeinde in such a manner. And the other Aeltesten for their part agree to also accept such members and in such a case the Orloff and Halbstadt Gemeinde agrees not to place any obstacles in the way of such acceptance.

“In conclusion of this matter the Church Aeltesten do now wish to forget all incidents which have occurred in this regard, and in the name of the Lord to foster a mutual love. That this conclusion was recognized in the Conference of August 5, is certified by the subscription of the names of the Church Aeltesten. — Johan Friesen and Johan Harder.”<sup>15</sup>

For many this latest writing by the Aeltesten Friesen and Harder was sufficient to conclude the barley dispute of some two and one-half years duration. Some of the members of the Halbstadt Gemeinde were received into the Lichtenauer Gemeinde and some of their members into the Halbstadt Gemeinde. However, that is not to say that peace had been achieved for this defeat was too much for the *Oberschulz* David Friesen to accept peacefully. Immediately after Privy Councillor Lange had departed from the Colonies the *Oberschulz* went to Aeltester Johan Friesen and attempted to invalidate the resolution of peace. But Franz Isaac reports that Aeltester Johan Friesen was not the man who would allow himself to be misled and used.<sup>16</sup>

As the *Oberschulz* had not been able to achieve his object through Aeltester Johan Friesen he made a further attempt to renew the strife and salvage some of his hurt pride by attacking the minister Abram Isaac of the Orloff Gemeinde, apparently on the grounds that Isaac had admonished one of those who had given false testimony in this matter. However, Rev. Abram Isaac and Aeltester Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde were able to perceive the intentions of the *Oberschulz* including his attempt to mislead Aeltester Johan Friesen.

Thus the matter was finally concluded although Franz Isaac notes in his work that the desire for revenge on the part of *Oberschulz* David Friesen had not been extinguished and that this would be costly for the Orloff Gemeinde in the next episode of Molotschna Mennonite church history. The account of the barley dispute has been provided in rather full detail in order that the reader can truly obtain a taste of the spiritual level of some of the Molotschna Mennonite leaders. Indeed matters had not improved at all since the days of Aeltester Jakob Enns.

If the account of this episode has seemed rather lengthy it should be noted that this includes only a more detailed description of the events which occurred during the last six months or so of the dispute after the Kleine Gemeinde had finally stepped in to attempt to resolve the affair. A full description of the matter would include the writings which evidenced the disputation between 1858 and 1860 which writings are contained in the work of Franz Isaac. The foregoing certainly emphasizes the tremendous effort which the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was prepared to make in order for peace to be achieved in the Molotschna.

## 6.07 The Halbstadt Church Building dispute

The Halbstadt house of worship dispute, was the second major event in the period of church history under consideration. For the sake of simplicity this event will be referred to as the Halbstadt church dispute or simply as the “church building” dispute. The authoritative *Die Molotschnauer Ansiedlung*, by H. Goerz provides a brief summary of the facts in this situation:

“The church building constructed in Petershagen in 1810 at the expense of the Russian government had become deficient and had to be replaced. The church leader Johan Neufeld of Halbstadt promoted the idea of rebuilding the church in Neu-Halbstadt and also promised to pay all expenses over a certain amount per member. Without anyone’s approval he had the foundation of the church laid out much bigger than had been anticipated. Nevertheless the construction was completed and the new church dedicated for service on December 28, 1858 by Aeltester Lenzmann as Aeltester B. Fast by now was an aged and sickly man.

Part of the agreement with Neufeld had been that the Orloff *Gemeinde* would pay for the building materials. It turned out that Neufeld had to pay out 200 rubles for the transportation of materials. Now he felt that since the *Gemeinde* had not kept their word he was also released from keeping his word. In the meantime Neufeld had joined in party with the same group which had pursued the barley quarrel, and their plan was now that they would take the Halbstadt church building away from the Orloff *Gemeinde* and utilize it for the Lichtenau *Gemeinde*. This situation resulted in an exchange of accusations and declarations between the antagonists until the matter was also referred to the Supervisory Committee in Odessa for resolution. The conclusion of the affair was that the church building went to the Orloff *Gemeinde* but that the latter was to repay to Neufeld two-thirds of his costs which they were very glad to do.<sup>17</sup>

The foregoing is a free translation and an abbreviated summary of the situation as outlined by H. Goerz. Those readers who wish to inform themselves of all the pertinent details regarding this matter are referred to the detailed work of Franz Isaac who sets out the full text of many of the writings pertaining to this matter.<sup>18</sup> The primary focus of this section will be on involvement of the Kleine *Gemeinde* in resolving the matter in dispute.

A study of the documentation provided by Franz Isaac quickly reveals that the old party spirit of revenge and hatred had once more found occasion to rear its ugly head. Again the Orloff *Gemeinde* squared off in battle against *Oberschulz* David Friesen and the majority of the Aeltesten of the Molotschna Kirchen-konvent. When the Orloff *Gemeinde* attempted to pay Neufeld the 200 rubles he returned the money with the words "that he would rather have the church". After extended negotiations and exchanges a conference of the Church *Aeltesten* was called for May 3, 1861, to be held in the Alexanderwohl church house. As *Aeltester* Harder insisted that full settlement had previously been made with Neufeld he refused to attend and declared that as far as he was concerned the matter was concluded and that the church building obviously belonged to the Orloff *Gemeinde*.

The *Aeltester* of the Mennonite Kleine *Gemeinde* reported on the results of this conference to *Aeltester* Johan Harder in a letter dated August 15th, 1861:

In accordance with your request we report to you that the Church *Aeltesten*, at the conference held in Alexanderwohl on May 3, 1861, agreed among themselves that the church building dispute as set forth in your letter of February 24th, 1861, to this conference, respecting the house of prayer at Neu-Halbstadt and church representative Johan Neufeld has been concluded and shall remain concluded. Neukirch, August 15th, 1861. "*Aeltester Johan Friesen*" "*Minister Abraham Friesen*".<sup>19</sup>

The opponents of the Orloff *Gemeinde* were not yet ready to let the matter be and Neufeld himself filed a complaint with the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. This resulted in a quick visit to the Molotschna by the President of the Supervisory Committee which had as its consequence a flurry of conferences. By now many of the Mennonite leaders no doubt wondered how much longer the patience of the Supervisory Committee would hold out. Eventually another conference was held on January 2, 1862, in order to achieve a final resolution on the dispute. Here a settlement was achieved on the basis that Orloff *Gemeinde* was to be acknowledged as the owner of the Halbstadt church building and that they were to pay two-thirds of the costs of the same. Although the Halbstadt *Gemeinde* was quite happy to pay two-thirds of the costs of the building they were prepared to do so only on a voluntary basis.

## 6.08 The Kleine *Gemeinde* View

The Kleine *Gemeinde* was unable to agree with the resolution of the Kirchen-konvent and as a consequence they wrote to the *Gebietsamt* as well as the Agricultural Society requesting that they be released from further involvement in this lamentable squabbling. They had only become involved at the special request of the Privy Councillor in order to assist and advise with respect to the restoration of peace. They had attended the conferences and arbitrated and negotiated and done what they could. All efforts had been unsuccessful and accordingly they begged to be released from the affair. Here follows the letter of explanation by *Aeltester* Johan Friesen of the Kleine *Gemeinde*:

**"A Declaration to the Highly Esteemed Gebietsamt as well as to the Agricultural Society**

"As is commonly known we had no part in the matters in dispute, and we came to the conferences held in this regard only after the Lord Privy Councillor had summoned us there for the purpose of advising as to the restoration of peace. But because no enduring peace could be brought into existence. His Excellency, the most Honourable President of the Supreme *Fuersorge* Committee admonished us very earnestly, but lovingly, to establish an enduring peace. For this purpose he also gave us various peace proposals and we all gave his Excellency our pledge to put forth all possible effort on our part, in order to restore a true peace and

to again bring to existence unity and an end to the issues in dispute.

But no agreement was reached and no peaceable arrangement regarding the House of Prayer\* has come into existence. The Gebietsamt in conjunction with the Agricultural Association and a number of *Aeltesten* have composed a Resolution which we also were to be party to; but which we did not, and cannot sign because of our conscience. According to Matthew 7:1; James 4:12; 1 Corinthians 5:12: Therefore this writing shall serve as our declaration stating why we did not sign this resolution. To this we would add our most submissive petition, to very kindly spare us from all conferences in the future, because we cannot attend them without offending our conscience. Should occasion arise we would also ask that you be our advocate before the higher government authorities so that in accordance with our desires we would be excused from attending all conferences.

In the firm hope that you will favourably regard our humble declaration and petition, we solemnly promise to acknowledge at all times our indebtedness to your goodwill and at all times to confess our gratitude for your concern and endeavours; and to allow Pauls' teaching, Hebrew 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord", to continue to serve as our teaching and standard, as it has in the past.

"To which I have most respectfully and submissively given my signature in the name of my fellow servants. *Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde*, "Johan Friesen".<sup>20</sup>

Neukirch, February 4th, 1862

The Gebietsamt was not prepared to release the Kleine Gemeinde from the efforts to achieve a peace in the Molotschna. After all the Kleine Gemeinde was the only group left in the Molotschna which still maintained some semblance of neutrality in the whole affair. In addition the Kleine Gemeinde seemed to be greatly respected in the higher government circles as a group which still followed the full gospel teachings of their forefathers. Accordingly the *Gebietsamt*, in a letter dated February 10, 1862, required that the Kleine Gemeinde make a definitive statement of its views regarding the ownership of the Halbstadt church building. The reply of the Kleine Gemeinde was provided in a letter dated February 13th, 1862.

A Declaration for the Mennonite Gebietsamt at Halbstadt.

"Because the Gebietsamt did not consider our declaration regarding the House of Prayer to be adequate, and requires that we express ourselves more definitely in that regard and also refers back to the last conference in Halbstadt, and states that we had verbally assented to the resolution:

We declare the contrary that we did not agree with the resolution as it was formulated in writing, but we did agree to the resolution as it was discussed at the said conference, and still do so. However, there is no objection on our part if both parties are agreeable to the written resolution.

As the Gebietsamt insists that we say to whom the House of Prayer belongs we must state that in our opinion it should belong to the Halbstadt and Orloff Gemeinde for whom it was built. In the name of my fellow servants.

Neukirch, the 13th of February, 1862

Aeltester Johan Friesen<sup>21</sup>

## 6.09 Conclusion of the Church Building Dispute

As a result of further lengthy exchanges between the parties the affair dragged out until August 1, 1862, when the Supervisory-Committee in Odessa stepped in and ordered that the Orloff Gemeinde was to be recognized as the owner of the Halbstadt church building and that it was also to reimburse Neufeld for two-thirds of his costs in the construction of the same. However, the Orloff Gemeinde resisted this order noting that Neufeld had originally been excommunicated for his unscriptural conduct and nothing was owing to him. Finally the Supervisory Committee clarified its previous ruling in the matter with the explanation that the provision for the payment of two-thirds of the cost to Neufeld was only meant to refer to the indication by the Orloff Gemeinde that it was voluntarily prepared to do so. This seemed to satisfy both parties to the dispute. This final settlement closely followed the recommendation of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.

Finally the church building dispute as well as the barley dispute were concluded. Both disputes were sparked by trivial incidents and resulted in serious disputation between the Orloff group and its opponents in the former *Grosze Gemeinde* who were now led by Oberschulz David Friesen. The foregoing incidents were essentially internal matters which became contentious only because of the quest for power of Oberschulz David Friesen and the lack of sensitivity in the leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast. Subsequent chapters will reveal that the same forces continued their struggle with the difference that now the matters in dispute came to be of wider socio-economic significance.

The barley dispute and the church building dispute clearly evidence the great concern of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for a true and lasting peace among the Mennonite brotherhood in the Molotschna. In this quest the Kleine Gemeinde was to be sadly disappointed.



## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SIX. QUEST FOR POWER.

1. Abraham F. Thiessen, **Ein Brief nur fuer die Mennoniten in Berdjanschen Kreise**, (Odessa, Ulrich and Schultze, 1872)3.
2. Franz Isaac, **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten** (H. J. Braun Halbstadt, Taurien, 1908), 123.
3. H. Goerz, op. cit., 62
4. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 123-155.
5. Peter P. Toews, *Sammlung*, op. cit., 332-337
6. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 149.
7. Peter P. Toews, op. cit., 338.
8. *Ibid*, 339.
9. *Ibid*
10. *Ibid.*, 349.
11. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 149-150.
12. Peter Toews, op. cit., 339-340.
13. *Ibid.*, 340-341.
14. *Ibid.*, 340-341.
15. *Ibid.*, 341-342.
16. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 154.
17. H. Goerz, op. cit., 63.
18. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 156-173.
19. *Ibid.*, 163.
20. Peter Toews, op. cit., 349-351.
21. *Ibid.*, 351 See also J. J. Hildebrand, **Hildebrand's Zeittafel** (J. Regehr, North Kildonan, Manitoba, 1945), 198-225 for a valuable chronological sequence of the Molotschna disputes during the 1850s and 1860s.

# Chapter Seven

## The Religious Wars

### 7.00 Introduction

This chapter will consider a second major aspect of the troubled history of the Molotschna Mennonites after 1850, namely, the impact of a new brand of radical pietism known as Wuertemberg separatism which resulted in the formation of several new religious denominations, including the Mennonite Brethren, The Templers, Klaas Epp's radical premillennialists, and others. This chapter will review the founding of these new radical pietist Mennonite groups and their early history.

### 7.01 Socio-economic Roots of the Religious Wars

The socio-economic background of the religious wars which swept the Molotschna during the 1860s must also be considered. According to several major Russian Mennonite historians the early adherents of the Mennonite Brethren church came predominantly from the lower "landless" class in the Molotschna. Presumably the same statement applies to all the pietist based splinter movements of the 1860s. It is noted here that if any Russian Mennonite group at the time represented an average cross section, it would be made up of about seventy percent landless servants and small tenant farmers, about thirty percent full farmers (Vollwirten) and possibly one or two larger farmers (estate owners) or factory owners. Therefore it would be more correct to say that a higher than average percentage of the adherents of the radical pietist groups in the Molotschna were of the "landless" class.

For example, C. Henry Smith in his *The Story of the Mennonites* makes reference to the fact that this struggle for secession had an economic as well as religious base:

"This unlovely controversy just described was not exclusively a religious one. It had somewhat of an economic basis as well. This was just the time, it will be remembered, of the struggle between the landless and the landowners. Most of the settlers in the Kuban colony were of the former class; Claaszzen also was of this group. Mennonite Brethren were the most numerous contingent in many of the newer colonies founded after this; and among the poorer in the old colonies. Economics and religion even here could not be entirely divorced."

In view of the class arrogance and shallow vanity of some members of the Russian Mennonite establishment at the time these more humble economic origins should not be a shame to the present membership of any church. Nevertheless current Mennonite Brethren historians have quite properly pointed out that its early membership also included some more well-to-do individuals such as Isaac Matthies, a wealthy Molotschna businessman. Others such as leader Johan Klassen made their way upward from the landless class. Another interpretation is that the early secessionists included many teachers and progressive entrepreneurs who lacked political power in the village system where only the Vollwirt had a vote.

Another historian, Dr. E.K. Francis, maintains that it was only an economic consideration which kept the infant Mennonite Brethren Church from abandoning the Mennonite faith entirely and joining some non-Mennonite group such as the Baptists. Dr. Francis explains that "under the Russian legal system, renunciation of the Mennonite faith also carried with itself loss of important rights and privileges, including military exemption and the holding of property in the Mennonite settlements.<sup>2</sup> Very much to the credit of the fledgling group is a petition dated in the end of 1871 or early 1872 and sent to the Minister of Colonial Affairs (*Reichs domain*) and signed by the Bishop, numerous ministers and many of the more prominent members of the Mennonite Brethren Church in which they plead that the Minister might have compassion with the impoverished class and also plead that the land which had been given by the Czar might be distributed to the poor.<sup>3</sup> The socio-economic aspects of the conflict in the Molotschna will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. Nevertheless this all important factor cannot be divorced from the topic at hand.

### 7.02 The History of Pietism in the Molotschna

A brief review of the historical origins of pietism will be helpful in understanding the influence of the movement on the Molotschna. Pietism developed within the embryo of a Lutheran Church which had become Orthodox and doctrinal by the latter part of the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> Within this framework the founders of the movement, Philip Spener (1635-1705) and August Franck (1663-1727), sought to promote a warm inward spiritual relationship with Christ and a greater emphasis on the piety of

the individual believer. In this setting of a dogmatic and sacramental state church, pietism undoubtedly provided a wholesome and badly needed spiritual stimulus. In fact Spener and Francke were the first to insist that their efforts were directed solely to the renewal of a church which in their view had become indifferent and stale. The movement quickly enjoyed phenomenal growth.

But problems developed as soon as pietism spread beyond the boundaries of the Lutheran Church which had given it birth. As pietism was not based on doctrines of its own it was very susceptible to an individualistic spiritualism and mysticism. Although pietism provided a renewed emphasis on the individual piety of the believer this was frequently subverted by the centrality of inward edification, the enjoyment of salvation and the realization thereof. As a consequence many later species of radical pietism were unable to consider as Christian anyone who did not share their exact revelations and consequential practices. This denial and renunciation of the salvation of other denominations, including the Anabaptist-Mennonites, was to cause untold heartache and sorrow among families and friends, including internally in the infant Mennonite Brethren church. As a result of this individualistic spiritualism many species of radical pietism became very categorical and also developed very rigid legalistic forms of piety which were strictly enforced in a manner akin to the punishments of the English puritans.

The older historical pietism had made organized inroads in the Molotschna as early as 1821 when the Orloff Verein school was founded by a group with pietist leanings and staffed with a teacher committed to propagating these teachings among the Mennonites. Pietism made further inroads in the Molotschna with the immigration of complete church groups from Prussia who had already abandoned many Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings in favour of pietism. e.g. The Gnadenfeld Gemeinde which had largely adopted the teachings of the Moravian style of pietism. Thus pietism itself, was not anything new in the Molotschna. In fact, numerous denominations of pietism were already represented on the Molotschna, and in Russia generally, each of course maintaining that it had the ultimate and true understanding of the grace of God and conversion. Consequently the internal battles and rivalries between these groups frequently made even the divisions of decaying cultural Mennonitism in the Molotschna look civilized by comparison.

The position of the Anabaptist-Mennonites was that they were not to judge any of these groups and that each confession would have to give their own account to God. Nevertheless one can well imagine that many Anabaptist-Mennonite knees must have been worn bare through the repeated prayers for grace to be maintained in a disposition of love and compassion towards the adherents of these foreign teachings who now denied the faith of their fathers. Nevertheless there is no record of a single incident where the Kleine Gemeinde returned this self-righteousness with anything but love. The Anabaptist-Mennonite would maintain this was a truly singular testimony to the boundless grace of God.

It is important to note that the pietism which swept through Russia during the 1850s and which so dramatically affected the Molotschna Mennonites was a very radical one with numerous extremist branches. Many of the Molotschna Mennonites were frightened and horrified when they heard the rumours and gossip of the excesses of the pietists among the neighbouring German colonists. e.g. A Mennonite Brethren historian, Jacob P. Becker refers in his book to a reported incident among the pietists in the Volga region who "were going to the extreme in the doctrine of free grace to the point that baptismal services were accompanied by music and dancing and baptizing was done in the nude at night. They were unable to baptize during the day because of hecklers."<sup>5</sup>

These types of extremes also found some foothold among the early adherents of radical separatist pietism in the Molotschna. Thus the early secessionists came to be known as "Huepfer", literally "jumpers", for their shrieking, wild dancing, and extreme self-righteousness. Historian Peter M. Friesen must be credited for having the courage to record some of the less favourable aspects of the movement he so dearly loved. In this regard one is mindful of Aeltester Klaas Reimer who recorded for history the incident where a radical pietism, based on an over-emphasis on the scriptural teachings of humility and repentance, almost overwhelmed the Kleine Gemeinde some fifty years earlier. A short extract from the invaluable descriptions by Peter M. Friesen will illustrate some of these excesses of the 1860s:

**Spiritual Despotism:** In the meantime, a frightful spiritual despotism developed in the two M.B. congregations in the Molotschna and in the Old Colony. It was led by B. Becker, Bernard Penner, and Gerhard Wieler who promoted the excessive exuberance, and by those who followed them for reasons of sympathy or fear. This conscience-frightening, even enslaving and torturing despotism had already begun during the period of the doctrine of freedom, during the "sordid" year from the fall of 1861 until the spring of 1862. The teaching consisted

of merciless condemnation and mockery of every personal conviction, culminating in the feared "ban" (excommunication), in which dissidents were "delivered over to Satan." "Because silence also speaks," even those not participating in expressions of exuberance, which developed into formal dancing accompanied by wild music and the beating of drums, were excommunicated (as happened to Jakob Reimer, Gnadenfeld). Religious books, which had earlier been treasured and which later were again accepted within the church as containing materials useful for study and devotion, even if not absolutely free of error, were burned. In the same way this dictatorship forbade members having any friendly association with people who thought otherwise. Even a hearty greeting of closest relatives was forbidden since that constituted "fellowship with the world."

The same system prevailed in the M.B. Churches in the Molotschna and in the Chortitza area. Threats and letters of excommunication were also sent to the Kuban, especially to Claassen, mainly by Benjamin Becker who, like G. Wieler, had bestowed upon himself the rank of apostleship! Claassen was bitterly accused of forcing reconciliation with W. Bartel, Heinrich Bartel, Abraham Cornelissen and those like-minded upon the church, after his return from St. Petersburg. He was called a "smeared" too (as W. Bartel earlier called the brotherly recognition of those who were still in the "Babylonian Church.") It is remarkable that now W. Bartel has for a considerable period of time been closely associated with Abraham Cornelissen, whom he earlier counted among the overly-rational and ship-wrecked brethren! Finally, Heinrich Huebert was relieved of his position by the "strong ones" (after he had been falsely accused of having baptized Russians, and had been held in custody by the legal authorities during the winter of 1865, until November of the same year, for about ten months). Finally, the serious and moderate party (Daniel Fast, Philip Isaak, Johann J. Fast, Jakob Jantz, Christian Schmidt, Abram Schellenberg, and others of the same mind as Heinrich Huebert and Jakob Reimer—who had since moved to Ekaterinoslav), succeeded in restoring order under Claassen's leadership<sup>6</sup>

Peter M. Friesen also records one instance where the pietist teaching of free grace was carried to such an extreme that several of these early extremists fell into carnal sin.

In the meantime, during the spring of 1862, the false teaching of the so-called "liberated" and "strong ones," a group of five leading brethren, J.B., J.K., H.B., J.M. and B.B., was exposed in its perversion through a scandalous lapse into sin by three persons (one of these brethren and two sisters). This "doctrine of freedom," the name by which the "June Reforms" of 1865 subsequently condemned it, consisted of the following: "We are free of sin; it is dead. There is neither man nor woman, but Christ is all and in all." The four "free" brethren now most severely attacked the fifth, their "bosom friend" (as Wilhelm Bartel so dramatically describes them), after he had fallen into sin. They would not understand or admit that they also were guilty through their overzealous teaching and their own unwise and questionable behavior based on the assertion that sin could not entice them any longer. Wilhelm Bartel, now rightly so, exposed this fact to them unsparingly. Because the sinners had shown repentance, he did not want them excommunicated, which latter action, however, the four accomplished. One of the sisters doubtlessly was repentant; she also was forgiven. The other one, judging from the written material, was not; and the fallen brother justified himself (accusing the others of complicity in the misdemeanor because of their false teaching). He did this, in our opinion, in a too bold and insufficiently repentant manner, although he had endured frightful spiritual agony and felt keenly the shame and the hurt that he, formerly an eloquent witness to the Gospel, had caused to the Lord and His work. Later he was found utterly repentant and has long since become a useful member of the church in America, though holding a modest position.<sup>7</sup>

These incidents serve as an example of the excesses of the radical pietist movement inside the Mennonite colonies. What is important is the traumatic impact that the report of such incidents must have made on those who still remained firm and true to the evangelical faith.

### 7.03 The Founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church

The Mennonite Brethren Church was by far the most significant of the new radical pietist groups in the Molotschna. Naturally the secessionists, as they were often called, also wanted to obtain legal recognition as a Mennonite denomination in the Molotschna. In pursuing this objective they quickly met the determined resistance of the Mennonite establishment which was in an uproar at the time in the wake of the "barley" dispute and the "church building" dispute. After a lengthy series of bitter internal wars and lamentable organizational battles, this new group experienced very rapid growth during the 1880s and later, and within a century it had become the second largest Russian Mennonite denomination. The massive historical work of Peter M. Friesen forms the most extensive source of information regarding the early divisions and other difficulties of the infant movement. The main focus of this review is the effect which separatist pietism had on the residents of the Molotschna and the Kleine Gemeinde, and therefore these details will not be considered here.

C. Henry Smith provides a helpful summary of the founding and subsequent development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in his **The Story of the Mennonites**.

“By far the most serious religious controversy was that which during the middle of the past century resulted in the formation of what is known as the *Mennonite Brueder Gemeinde*. As already suggested, because church membership was almost taken for granted among the Mennonites, religious fervor was not carried to a high pitch. The Gnadenfeld congregation, however, in the Molotschna was an exception to this generalization. Here for some years Bible study, prayer meetings, and missionary festivals had been in general vogue.

Here was located, also, an advanced *Bruderschule* which for a time, under the direction of Johan Lange, a teacher trained in Germany, exerted considerable influence upon the cultural and religious life of the community, not always, however, of the most wholesome sort. In the neighboring German Evangelical colony, too, labored an evangelical pietist, pastor Wuest by name, a sort of John Wesley, well known among the various Protestant German colonies of south Russia. Pastor Wuest was a fiery preacher, stressing wherever he went especially the free grace of God as a means of eternal salvation, and the need of a greater sin-consciousness, and a more vital religious experience among church members than prevailed generally among both the Mennonites and Lutherans of that day. This evangelical preacher frequently visited Gnadenfeld mission festivals and prayer meetings. Partly through his influence, a small group of laymen from several villages about Gnadenfeld, desirous of a more emotional type of religious life, and protesting against what they regarded as the spiritual lifelessness then prevalent among many of the churches of the time, began to meet as a small prayer group in private houses. At one of these meetings at Elizabethtal in January 1860, after vainly asking elder Lenzman to administer the communion to them as a special group, and at a time other than the regular date set for this rite, they observed the ceremony by themselves without the elder's assistance and against his advice.

This bold and revolutionary step, of course, immediately arrested the attention of the church elders. Communion, according to the traditional practises of the church, could be administered only by an elder, never even by a mere minister, to say nothing about an ordinary layman. At the same time this group of eighteen men, without a preacher among them, drew up a document in which they stated their reasons for desiring to withdraw from the main body; this they presented to the elders. Among these reasons were—

“The religious decay of the entire Mennonite brotherhood, and on account of the Lord's will and our conscience we can no longer fellowship with you as a church. For we fear that God's judgment is inevitable, since the prevailing Godlessness crieth unto Heaven. Besides we are fearful lest the Government repeal the special privileges granted to the Mennonites on account of their open transgressions. It is sad to behold on market days how the Mennonites carry on such a frivolous life, in which even ministers take part.”

This charge made by these sinstricken souls that the whole church was spiritually dead, and no longer fit to function as a soul saving institution, of course, did not soften the determination of the majority of the elders to stop the secession movement, which, if allowed to proceed unhindered, might endanger the unity of the whole denomination, and might even threaten their special privileges enjoyed under the government. But opposition had the usual result. It in turn strengthened the convictions of the small band, and their numbers increased. In the meantime a similar movement for a more vital spiritual life based on a more real religious experience had also arisen in the Chortitz colony, though perhaps from not quite the same source. In almost every congregation throughout both colonies there were a few sensitive souls who joined the new following. Gradually throughout the year 1860, in spite of the strenuous opposition of the elders, the movement crystallized into a new and separate church organization.

If the old church was spiritually dead, then of course, the baptism by which members had been admitted into its fellowship was not valid. Soon the new body demanded that recruits from the old church be admitted into the new only by rebaptism. A little later in the year some one questioned whether the traditional Mennonite method of baptism by pouring was scriptural. The decision was in the negative, and immersion was adopted as the prevailing method. At the same time ministers and elders were elected; and before the year had passed, a new church had been completely organized and had begun a vigorous campaign for recruits.

In the main, the new body did not deviate far from the fundamentals of Mennonite doctrine. They stressed especially, however, the emotional side of their new religious life; and insisted that conversion was a very definite experience, marking a decided turning point in ones whole spiritual existence; and was not the result of a gradual and evolutionary growth through the medium of catechetical instruction as practised by the main body of Mennonites. Religious depth was inclined to be measured by the intensity of definite emotional experiences.

In the early years, in common with other similar movements advocating a freer and more spontaneous expression of their newly found liberty under the free grace of God, and under the stress of deep emotion, which was often whipped up to a high pitch, the new body made much of enjoying their spiritual freedom. They became quite demonstrative in their religious practises, giving free vent to their emotionalism in their prayer meetings, held in private houses for a time, in much singing, clapping of hands, and, like the modern Nazarenes in shouting, dancing and bodily contortions. Some

of them, simple literalists that they were, found Biblical justification for their emotional extravagances in the example of David and his harp, and the Scriptural admonition to make a joyful noise unto the Lord with the trumpet and timbrel; violins, organs and other musical instruments were introduced into their worship; communion was administered at frequent intervals; foot-washing followed the breaking of bread; and since men and women were spiritually equal, the sexes sometimes observed the rite indiscriminately. The "holy kiss" also was practised in a few cases without distinction between brethren and sisters. Several cases of immorality found their way into the records. Like the early Quakers in New England, occasionally a few of the more fanatical attended the meetings of the old church, and insisted on breaking into the regular worship with some sort of demonstration or uncomplimentary remarks of their own.

These fanatical outbursts of course, were not usual, and were confined to the earlier years of the movement. Time and sensible leadership rid it finally of these excesses; the whole movement in spite of its occasional intemperate fanaticism was not without its beneficial influence upon the old church. Under the spiritual leadership in the main body of such elders as Lenzman of Gnadenfeld, Harder of Ohrloff, Suderman of Bardiensk, and others, more progressive activities and a deeper spiritual tone was increasingly fostered throughout the church at large in the years that followed.

At best, however, the followers of the new found freedom remained convinced that theirs was a superior type of religion; and it was their duty to share this new discovery with their erstwhile misguided fellow Mennonites. Long after the first stages of fanaticism, above referred to, had been spent, it was still customary for groups of the new following to invite themselves to the homes of the members of the old church, and if not asked inside, to remain outside, to sing appropriate penitential hymns and offer prayer in behalf of their erring brethren, in the hope that this procedure might bring them to see the true light; for to these zealots, the old church was still hopelessly corrupt.

But the new group insisted that they were still followers of Menno Simons. The old church, not they, had departed from the true faith, they said. They were the real Mennonites. This insistence that they be still regarded as Mennonites, was due to the fact that the peculiar privileges enjoyed by the Mennonites were granted by the Russian government to Mennonites as a special body. Under any other name the new group would likely forfeit these privileges; consequently they clung to the name and many of the fundamental doctrines of the original Mennonite body. They finally assumed the official name of *Mennoniten Brueder Gemeinde*; and fastened upon the old church from which they had withdrawn the title *Kirchliche Mennoniten*, perhaps, because, like the state church, the latter assumed somewhat of a "churchly" attitude in their religious practises.

This assumption of religious superiority did not make for congenial relations between the old church and the new. During the first decade of the controversy, in the sixties, the two factions carried on one of the most unlovely religious feuds in all Mennonite history. The majority of the elders in the old church regarding many of the revolutionary practises of the new group as a menace to the traditional beliefs of the Mennonite faith, and fearful lest dissension within their ranks might furnish the Russian government an excuse for cancelling their special privileges, went to unjustifiable lengths, nevertheless, in trying to prevent the dissenters from gaining official government consent for organizing a new church in which they might practise the kind of religious life which their consciences demanded. The fact that the "Brethren" had already withdrawn from the old church did not prevent the elders of the latter from expelling them; and applying in some cases the doctrine of avoidance, which because of its denial of all economic intercourse between the excommunicated and his former brethren, resulted in complete economic ruin of the one expelled.

After exhausting all the ecclesiastical means of discipline without success, the elders turned to the civil authorities, the *Gebietsamt*, whose Mennonite officials for the most part were equally opposed to the formation of a new religious organization. The Agricultural Commission, too, joined the other governmental agencies in the protest. Even the non-Mennonite *Fuersorge Komitee* at Odessa shared the views of the other authorities. But all to no avail. Religious conviction thrives on opposition. Although the leaders were threatened with Siberia by these various agencies if they persisted in carrying out their intentions, and some were actually imprisoned for a time, while others had suffered economic ruin, yet the movement made continued though slow progress.

In the meantime, the *Molotschna Brethren* had sent one of their number, Johan Claasen, to the imperial court at St. Petersburg to intercede in their behalf with the central government. After a stay of several years, Claaszen finally secured official recognition for the organization of a new church without the sacrifice of their special privileges as Mennonites. At the same time, too, in 1862, he had received a land concession under favorable conditions for a new settlement along the Kuban river, in the upper Caucasus. Soon after, two Brethren settlements were started here, from both the mother colonies, where for some years they endured serious economic hardships, but were free to practise their religion unmolested. In 1872 the Kuban church had a membership of one hundred and fifty, which by 1914 had increased to a total population of fifteen hundred. Some years later Claaszen was granted a gold medal by the Russian government, not for his services in founding a new religious body, but for his services as a colonizer of a new frontier settlement. Not all of the Mennonite Brethren of course moved to the Kuban at this time; many remained in the old colonies.

This unlovely controversy just described was not exclusively a religious one. It had somewhat of an economic basis as well. This was just the time, it will be remembered, of the struggle between

the landless and the land owners. Most of the settlers in the Kuban colony were from the former class; Claaszén also was of this group, Mennonite Brethren were the most numerous contingent in many of the newer colonies founded after this; and among the poorer in the old colonies. Economics and religion even here could not be entirely divorced.

Although the Brethren in course of time outlived their earlier fanatical practices, they never lost their emotionalism nor their missionary zeal; and it may be added, their sense of superior piety. Being strict immersionists, they associated freely with the Baptists; and at one time in their early history they seriously considered joining that body. It was only the Mennonite peace doctrine, and the practice of footwashing; and the fear, perhaps, that they would lose their Mennonite privileges by joining the Baptists that prevented the assimilation. Their extreme emotionalism, too, made them easy marks for the more or less fanatical religious movements common among an emotionally religious people. They later lost some members to the Adventists and other religious fadists. In number, the Mennonite Brethren have had a steady growth. The original eighteen, in 1860, grew by 1872, at the time of the organization of their general conference to six hundred. A number of them from various villages joined the trek to America in the late seventies. By 1914 they composed about one-fourth of the whole Russian Mennonite population. Since the world war, due to their common hardships, the two wings of the church have largely dropped their old antagonisms, and have worked in harmony in all matters that affected their common interests.<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing is a brief survey of the secessionist movement and its early radical image, as well as its later consolidation and organization into the vital and loving church of today. However, it should also be noted that although the new group had accepted some four hundred and sixty-five members in the Molotschna by 1872, the church only had a membership of some two hundred in the latter year.<sup>9</sup> Presumably the reference is to individuals not families. This loss of membership was at least partially due to the heavy emigration to the free land grants in the Kuban, as well as to other outlying settlements. Nevertheless, these statistics do emphasize that the church was still relatively unstable during the early years and naturally also suffered from a heavy loss of members through excommunication, proselytizing by other pietist groups, conversion of some adherents to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, etc.

#### 7.04 Reaction and Toleration

Regrettably the infant secessionists movement quickly ran into the opposition of Oberschulz, David Friesen and his power establishment who have already been referred to in the preceding chapter. The Oberschulz and the five Aeltesten who supported him were determined to stomp out all vestiges of the new movement by whatever means possible. Although the majority of the Molotschna Mennonite leadership since the founding of the colony rejected the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings and teachings, they were equally opposed to the militant pietists who regarded them as "the church of devil-serving Babylon". Thus the struggle became a battle between the cultural Mennonite establishment represented by the Oberschulz and the five Aeltesten who controlled the Kirchen-Convent, and the fledgling but militant pietist movement.

In the barley affair and church building affair it had largely fallen upon Aeltester Johan Friesen of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde to negotiate and work for a peace settlement between the David Friesen power block and the Ohrloff Gemeinde which at the time was still suffering under the spiritually deficient leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast. In the matters pertaining to the secession of the Mennonite Brethren, the Kleine Gemeinde and the Ohrloff Gemeinde were able to act in alliance as a peaceable influence between the two warring factions. That this was possible was largely due to the fact that a man of tremendous Christian virtue and spirit had in the meantime become the Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, namely Johan Harder who had replaced Bernhard Fast in 1860. The achievement of this alliance was that the efforts of the Oberschulz and his supporters to banish the secessionists from the colonies were defeated and that the Mennonite Brethren were eventually accepted as a part of Russian Mennonite life.

The major responsibility for the achievement fell on the shoulders of Aeltester Johan Harder. His role has been very well documented by historians Franz Isaac, Jakob P. Bekker, Peter M. Friesen and others, so that there is no need to review the voluminous documentation between the various parties here. Suffice it to say that Aeltester Johan Harder was one of the few Mennonite religious leaders whose conduct during this period still bespoke of the spirit of nonresistant Christendom. He was fondly remembered by all parties in this war of words for his conciliatory leadership, gentleness, and kindness and is generally recognized as being responsible for the peaceful outcome of this separation.<sup>10</sup>

The alliance and unwaivering support of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was also essential to

the eventual peaceful outcome of this matter. At a crucial point in the whole affair the Kirchen-konvent, here referring only to the five Aeltesten who supported the Oberschulz, decided to ask the Supervisory-Committee to physically banish the Secessionists from the Molotschna. Such a decision would not be carried out and endorsed by the Supervisory Committee in Odessa, unless it had the approval of all the Mennonite groups in the Molotschna. Consequently the government authorities refused to take any action without first obtaining and considering the advice of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde whose opinion as a neutral body was seemingly very highly regarded.

In this matter the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde again stood steadfast against the use of unscriptural means and wrongful tactics against any individual or group even though the avowed intention of the radical pietist movement was the outright destruction of Anabaptist-Mennonitism wherever and however possible. Aeltester Johan Friesen firmly set forth and unequivocally maintained biblical teaching in this regard. His reply to the request for the opinion of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in this matter is as follows:

“Declaration to the Molotschna Mennonite Gebietsamt at Halbstadt.”

“We have been asked by Peter Schmidt, member of the (Agricultural) Society, for a declaration of our position, with respect to certain of the members of their *Gemeinde* who have seceded. We have little to advise and declare which would add to what we are taught by the Apostle, in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 ‘And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed’. Also see the further declaration of the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:32, where he states that such disobedient ones should be judged and proved by the *Gemeinde*, in order that they would ultimately not have to be condemned together with the world. Other similar references with respect to this matter could be brought forward from the Word of God.”

“However, as in accordance with 1 Corinthians 5:12, we are not to judge those who are without us and as there are no members of our *Gemeinde* among these secessionists, we do not wish to express ourselves further in this regard.”

“We have also undertaken the labour of discussing this matter personally with them, and have tried to dissuade them from their intended action, which however did not seem to have much effect on them. Therefore we request that you do not take offense if we gladly refrain from becoming involved in this matter, and not take part in a matter with which we are not totally familiar, and which is foreign to us. We would gladly be of service to you in any matter that is not contrary to the Word of God.”

“In all other respects, please consider me to be your most subordinate friend.

Neukirch, on the 25th of March, 1860.””

*Aeltester Johan Friesen,*

No matter how potentially dangerous and harmful the antagonist might be, the teachings of the full gospel faith prohibited the use of unscriptural means even for self-preservation for that was in the hands of a higher power. Supported by the firm stance of the Kleine Gemeinde, Aeltester Johan Harder was able to thwart and deflect the maneuverings of the *Kirchen-Konvent* in this matter.

The lamentable affair also evidences the danger to the Mennonite Church whenever the leadership decides that the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings are too radical, too simple, or too old-fashioned, to be read and disseminated as had happened among the Russian-Mennonites. For had the rank and file of the full farmers on the establishment side of the battle been knowledgeable in the teachings of the faith they could never have allowed themselves to be misguided and misled by Oberschulz David Friesen and his cohort Aeltesten in their unevangelical treatment of the secessionists. On the other hand had the early secessionists been well read and knowledgeable in the writings and teachings of the forefathers, they would surely not have fallen prey to the extremist pietist teachings as was the case in the early years of the movement. Nor would they have adopted the radical pietist teaching that salvation required faith, as well as a baptism by a particular mode and style<sup>12</sup>. Nor could the pietist teaching of a future millenium and the dispensing of the teachings of Christ ever co-exist with the Anabaptist Mennonite concept of the immediate spiritual peaceful Kingdom of Christ.

The position of the Kleine Gemeinde in this regrettable affair could hardly be improved upon even with the advantage of hindsight. Love your enemy. Do not use unscriptural means to achieve your goals no matter how important they may seem. Remain “neutral but friendly”<sup>13</sup>. This concludes this consideration of the role of the Kleine Gemeinde in the battle regarding the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church. The Aeltesten Johan Harder and Johan Friesen must certainly be recognized in any listing of prominent Russian Mennonite leaders for their devoted efforts to keep peace among the cultural Mennonites and pietists in Molotschna.



## 7.05 The Templer Gemeinde

Another important radical pietist splinter group originating in the Molotschna during the 1860s was the Templer Church, also known as the Jerusalemfreunde. This particular group was rooted in Wuerttemberg pietism and was founded by Christian Hoffman. One of the central beliefs of this group was the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. All true believers were called “out of Babel” to which he later added the concept of gathering them in Palestine in order to be enabled to “build the temple of God”. This was in keeping with the separatist pietist theme of an eastern refuge for the true believers.

It has been noted that the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde which emigrated to the Molotschna in 1833 had already fallen under the influence of various shades of pietism in Prussia. This group now sent one of their members, Johannes Lange, to take a teacher training course in the school of the Templers in Prussia where he was influenced by the teachings of the Templers. When he returned to Russia to teach in the Gnadenfeld brotherhood school he tried to propagate the Templer brand of pietism which was not appreciated by the Gnadenfeld authorities. A long drawn out controversy now took place which finally involved the ecclesiastical, civil and governmental authorities with the result that teacher Johannes Lange was imprisoned in Halbstaedt in 1863. Twenty Mennonites then signed the document establishing the Templer Church or the Friends of Jerusalem in Russia. Like the Mennonite Brethren, the Templers were only hardly tolerated by the general populace in the Molotschna and so in 1866 a separate Temple settlement was founded in Kuban<sup>14</sup>.

The secession of the Temple church from the pietist Gnadenfeld Gemeinde was marked by a very bitter struggle which also included the Brudergemeinde. It is unfortunate that the categorical nature of separatist pietism has all too often stood in the way of wholesome Christian cooperation between various factions of the movement. Peter M. Friesen laments the obvious ill-will and strife which divided Gnadenfeld, the Templers and the Secessionists in this case;

“h) The extent to which personal sympathy and antipathy, jealousy, injustice, religious narrow-mindedness and factionalism played into the quarrel between the two, then three groups—the extent to which adherence to principles and honest idealism were at work, is difficult to say. Much, though not everything, is clarified in Chapters XI to XXV, the history of the M.B. Church. At any rate, Claassen believed himself to have been deprived of the rewards of his sacrifices and the victory of his ideals. He was and remained an advocate of cultural improvement (and as such an admirer and student of Johann Cornies), as is indicated by his activity on behalf of the Kuban settlement (XXV, B) and many other incidents. It also needs to be said that in spite of all that had happened, Claassen and Reimer entrusted the education of their own sons to Lange’s school. And when their plans in Gnadenfeld had completely failed, Claassen, Reimer and some others founded a school for the poor amongst the German (nearly exclusively Lutheran and Catholic) foreigners in the market town of Grosstokmak, situated between Ladekopp and Fuerstenau. This school collapsed in 1861 due to an inadequate teaching staff, support and, perhaps more importantly, due to a lack of interest, since purely religious concerns stood in the forefront of the battle and early life of the new M.B. Church (XVII).

i) The great harm derived from the fact that the “brethren” of Claassen’s stripe could not work together with the “Templers” of his time cannot be described. An immense latent intellectual wealth was contained in the latter’s pedagogical, ethico-religious and social goals. We will be able to touch upon the “Templer” movement only several more times, and that only in passing; enough, however, to allow—for the purposes of this book—their true nature and, sadly! their degeneration (in our view) to be expressed. A sense of profound sadness overcomes us whenever we deal with the contentions and divisions of these three groups of “brethren,” and during the quarter century which we have spent on this study we have not learned how to remove this sense of grief from our soul. For some of the best men given to us in Russia during an entire century were to be found in all three groups! Men who rank next to our two most prominent ones: Johann Cornies and the minister Bernhard Harder. The evil, apparently incurable “Anabaptist illness,” the passion to divide, drove them apart and diminished each individual’s strength considerably.<sup>15</sup>

One certainly sympathizes with the view and lament expressed above over the apparent inability of these three groups to work and co-operate in brotherhood. But it is difficult to understand how Peter M. Friesen can blame this passion to divide as being the “evil,” apparently incurable “Anabaptist illness” as all three of these groups found their theological foundation in pietism. i.e. All of them had rejected the full gospel faith to a greater or lesser degree and had looked to separatist pietism for their spiritual inspiration. The doctrines which divided the three groups had nothing whatsoever to do with the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and one is at a complete loss to understand how they could be blamed for this traditional factionalism and lack of co-operation between various brands of radical

pietism. Why not blame Confucius? It would in fact be far more truthful to say that the lack of cooperation and respect between various pietist groups was rooted in the intolerant teachings of separatist pietism, that anyone who had not experienced conversion just so and so, or had not been baptized in such and such a manner, was not a Christian and was consequently doomed to eternal damnation.

In fact dissension among Anabaptist-Mennonite groups was invariably caused by someone who had come under the influences of separatist pietism and who now wanted to impart this new truth to his congregation and to convert his former brethren. And then the divisiveness would start. Had the new convert to pietism simply been satisfied to practice his faith in peace in the model of Spener and Francke there would have been no battle. Had the convert to pietism been prepared to treat his former Anabaptist-Mennonite colleagues as brethren and to respect their salvation, there is no reason why the two movements could not have co-operated together in many endeavours. If the view of Peter M. Friesen is correct, then an individual can adopt another faith, attempt to convert his former brethren, and then if these former brethren are steadfast enough not to immediately flock to the banner of the new faith and instead resist the foreign teachings, then the original convert can add the self-righteous epithet that the original group is the cause of dissension and exhibits the "Anabaptist-disease". Something seems to be amiss in this analysis.

The end result of the battle between the Gnadefeld, Templer, and Huepfer, was that in 1863 the Templer Johannes Lange was arrested and thrown into prison in Halbstadt. This episode is marked by an interesting anecdote. According to H. Goerz, as Lange was languishing in prison and feeling devastated and forgotten, he requested of the Aeltesten that they come and share Holy Communion with him, but apparently no one cared enough for him to do so. Finally a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde took the initiative and is to have visited the poor man in prison<sup>16</sup>. The reader who would like to know more about the story of the Templer Gemeinde is referred to the work of historian Franz Isaac who devotes an entire chapter to this group.

It has been said that the establishment of the various separatist pietist groups in the Molotschna occasioned more strife, petitions, travel and conferences than all the previous struggles put together. Mile long complaints were filed with the Supervisory-Committee and submitted to St. Petersburg on behalf of the new groups<sup>17</sup>. One result of the separatist pietist battle among each other and with the Mennonite establishment was the founding of new settlements in the Kuban and Caucasus in 1866.

One important reason for this expansion was that many of the separatist pietists came from the "landless" segment of the Mennonite population and therefore petitioned to obtain a free land grant from the Crown where they would have a chance to get established. Another factor was the obvious social tension which was created when the separatist pietists denounced the faith of their relatives and friends and also denied their salvation. This created the feeling on the part of the secessionists that they would like to have their own settlements where "the devil serving Babylon" which they had left would not be entitled to settle among them.<sup>18</sup> The members of the Mennonite Brethren church tended to settle in the Kuban while the Templers tended to settle in the Caucasus. Regrettably the disputation and strife above referred to continued unabated in these new settlements.

Dr. Adam Giesinger describes this outward settlement of the separatist pietists from the Molotschna as follows:

"In the meantime the Russian government, which cared little about what heresy a Mennonite happened to believe in so long as he was peaceful, became very concerned about the religious strife in the Mennonite settlements, because it affected the economic life of the region. A decision was therefore reached to separate the warring groups by encouraging the dissidents to move away. In March 1864 the Saints were offered crown land for 100 families on the Kuban River south of Stavropol in the North Caucasus. Not that many were found, however, who were willing to go to pioneer in a new area. A total of only 67 families, some of them from the Chortitza colonies, moved to the Kuban and founded there, in 1867-69, the two villages of Wohldemfürst and Alexanderfeld. Two other factions of the Saints, differing somewhat in their views from the emigrants to the Kuban, left the mother colonies about the same time. One of these, under Hermann Peters, calling itself the Apostolic Mennonite Brethren, went first to the Crimea and later to Kirjanowka in Siberia. The other, under Jakob Reimer, went to rented land in the Alexandrovsk district and later founded Wiesenfeld and Kronsart near Pavlograd. The Templer too, when they realized that there was no hope of receiving legal recognition, decided to found a settlement of their own, where they could worship as they pleased. In 1867 they founded Tempelhof on rented land in the Pyatigorsk district of the North Caucasus, which they left in 1895 to found Olgino on land of their own farther east. Although these migrations did not remove all dissident brethren from the mother colonies, religious quarreling gradually subsided in the next few years."<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that the secessionists were also known as “Die Heilige” or “The Saints” because of their profession of a superior faith and piety.

Another pietist Mennonite group which originated at this time was the Apostolic Brudergemeinde founded by Herman Peters of Gnadenheim, Molotschna. Herman Peters was one of the early members of the Mennonite Brethren Church and was also among those who expressed their new found joy of salvation through shouts and the use of musical instruments and in other legalistic forms of piety. When the Mennonite Brethren moved to eradicate this type of activity from its ranks Herman Peters and about 20 followers seceded to form the new group. Later the group moved to the Crimea and subsequently to Siberia. One of the interesting practices of the group was that they broke their bread instead of cutting it, since “Jesus took the bread and broke it”. Consequently the group was sometimes also referred to as “the Breadbreakers”<sup>20</sup>.

## 7.06 Claas Epp and Radical Premillennialism

The impact of pietism on the Molotschna Mennonites cannot be fully understood without some mention of Claas Epp (1838-1913) and radical premillennialism. But first it is necessary to review the various teachings pertaining to the millenium which refers to the thousand year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation chapter 20.

There are essentially three major interpretations of this teaching, namely, amillennialism, postmillennialism and premillennialism. The most prevalent of these is amillennialism which holds that the thousand year reign of Christ referred to in Revelation Chapter Twenty, was inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah through the birth of Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church and older Protestant Churches are amillennialists. The Anabaptist-Mennonites also believed in a present millenium but differed substantially from mainline amillennialism in that they believed that the earthly kingdom of Christ was a peaceable spiritual realm through which Christ reigned in the hearts of all who accepted his rule and became converted to him. The writing of Peter J. Twisck entitled **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ**, is a sound exposition of this viewpoint (see chapter 17).

Postmillennialism entails the belief that the second coming of Christ will take place after the thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Through Christian teaching and preaching the world will be Christianized and as a consequence, social, economic, and educational problems will gradually disappear until eventually the earthly reign of Christ is ushered into force. This seems to have been the view of the Aeltesten Wedel and Goertz who emigrated to the Molotschna Colony in 1817 and shortly thereafter. In his **Memoirs**, Klaas Reimer has noted that these two Aeltesten worked powerfully to bring about a union of all Mennonite groups in the Molotschna as well as other pietist influenced groups in Russia. According to Reimer, this prospective reign of peace and prosperity was seen by the Prussian Mennonites as ushering in the dawn of the millenium.

Probably the most significant millenial interpretation for the Russian Mennonites was that of premillennialism. According to this view the second coming of Christ would take place before the millenium and hence the name premillennial. Christ would then institute his thousand year earthly reign together with his saints. This was the form of millennialism which was adopted by most of the radical pietists. These later forms of pietism lacked a doctrinal base of their own and consequently they tended to mysticism and spiritualism, placing great emphasis on individual revelations. Premillennialism was a perfect compliment to these forms of pietism as the concept could be spiritualized and mysticized in infinite ways thus serving as an escape mechanism for generations of Christians who were lacking in sound doctrine. One writer has characterized this aspect of millennialism as follows:

“Dreamers through the years have sought utopias and “golden ages” connected with this thousand-year period. Although it is mentioned seven times in a few verses of Scripture, it is very incomplete in its description and detail. This left open doors for fantasy and misunderstanding. Early Christians sought a quick return of Christ. Exact dates for His return were predicted as the years progressed. The medieval emperor Otho III (983-1002) believed that the second coming would be during the year 1000. When it did not occur, the monarch became deeply depressed. Joachim of Floris, a Roman Catholic abbot, said Christ would return in the year 1260. He even called Emperor Frederich II (1215-1250) the Antichrist. Other theological persuasions saw the Roman papacy as the Antichrist. During the Reformation a new millennial fervor began because of the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people. One Michael Stifel foretold the exact year, day, and hour Christ would return to set up His kingdom: October 19, 1533, at 8:00 a.m. In the sixteenth century the elector of Brandenburg, Joachim II, went to Kriegsberg near Berlin to be a firsthand witness to Christ’s second coming.

However, in the face of national catastrophes interpreted as divine judgment; millennialism

has occasionally taken on the attributes of concrete practice rather than mere belief. This was true in the case of the radical Münsterites and of Melchior Hofmann in the sixteenth century, as well as in the initial movement of the Mennonites to Russia in the late eighteenth century. These radical millenarians emphasized escaping the tribulation of the Antichrist and the finding of a "place of refuge" for themselves and the rest of the remnant who escape the dragon. They claimed to know the exact place and time of the return of Christ, as in the case of Hofmann, or attempted to bring in the kingdom by force, like Münsterites.

Thus millennialism may be invoked as a general escape mechanism for those Christians who experience enormous spiritual and physical conflicts with hostile forces in the world. Their hope must take some tangible form to resolve the conflict. In some cases, it may involve economic factors, such as the landless aspiring to future prosperity. In other cases, political oppression has triggered the impulse to prepare for the second coming. But that does not explain all millennial movements. The phenomenon is one of the most complex, persistent, and interesting in all of religious history.<sup>21</sup>

Jung-Stilling (1780-1817) was one of the prominent premillennialists of his day. He was a writer, physician, and professor at Heidelberg University in Germany. His voluminous writings promoted a form of radical premillennialism and became very influential among the Russian Mennonites. For example, Tobias Voth, the first teacher of the Ohrloff Secondary School in 1821 professed to have been converted to the teachings of Jung-Stilling. Naturally he also used his position as a secondary school teacher to promote these views. In their writings, Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1840) and Rev. Heinrich Balzer, have referred to the inroads which these teachings achieved among the Prussian and Russian Mennonites.

Jung-Stilling most directly influenced the Russian Mennonites through his famous allegorical novel entitled, **Heimweh**, literally a sentimental nostalgia.<sup>22</sup> **Heimweh** pertains to an Oriental monarch whose empire extends over all of Europe and Asia. This empire is threatened by a secret conspiracy in France which is countered by a group loyal to their ruler. The true subjects of the emperor have a deep yearning to reach the final kingdom of peace in the east among the Tartar tribes in Central Asia. Eugenius the hero of **Heimweh** ultimately becomes a prince and begins his journey to the East accompanied by his faithful servant. One writer has characterized the substance of **Heimweh** and its relevance to the Mennonites as follows:

Jung-Stilling expresses a definite belief in millennialism and "withdrawal chiliasm" throughout **Heimweh**. Very passionately he declares that Eugenius "will gather the small band of protected believers from all nations and lead them . . . until the kingdom of our Lord begins. He who has ears let him hear!" That this is a theological injunction is quite evident. Jung-Stilling's fanciful Pietism and chiliasm became an encouragement to certain enthusiastic Mennonites. In **Heimweh** their biblical faith was enhanced. There they learned of the time when the Antichrist will come, rule, and tempt the world, and then according to Revelation 12:4, the only refuge which the Antichrist cannot reach will be Central Asia, the region south of Samarkand.

Not only was **Heimweh** well known among Mennonites, but South German Mennonites adopted one of his hymns, and Jung-Stilling's works were widely read by all Mennonites in general. They were impressed by his deep insight. For example, in the **Taschenbuch**, he calls for a merging of the sects; the Mennonite principle of nonresistance he considered of little hindrance, because if all people became Mennonites coercion would be unnecessary. While showing genuine appreciation for Mennonite faith and life, Jung-Stilling never completely agreed with their belief in pacifism in a world of continued warfare. His admiration for Mennonites could not win him completely to their principles of religion. In spite of these differences, Jung-Stilling's chiliastic influence on the Russian Mennonites was very significant.<sup>23</sup>

It is evident that the fanciful pietism and millennialism of Jung-Stilling had a significant influence to the Russian Mennonites in general, where the novel **Heimweh** became a second Bible.<sup>24</sup> However, a group led by Claas Epp, Jr. (1838-1913) literally accepted the writings of Jung-Stilling, especially the novel **Heimweh**, as the ultimate truth. The group led by Epp lived in the Trak settlement in the Volga region which had been established by Mennonites emigrating from Prussia in 1853. The Epp family had been a very distinguished one in Prussia. The father of Claas Epp had been the leader of the Mennonite groups which settled on the Trak and his uncle, David Epp, was a prominent leader of the pietist Mennonites in Prussia serving as a minister of the Heuboden congregation until he also immigrated to Russia in 1862.

From the very beginning of the settlement, millennialism as well as escaping from military service, had been a vitally important factor. It appears that an almost fanatical mixture of millennialism and pietism had been brought along from Prussia so that serious problems developed when one leader in the settlement became too fanatical about the millennium and too illogical in his biblical presenta-

tions. In time the whole community joined in the study of millennial prophecies.<sup>25</sup> Claas Epp Jr., was a gifted and attractive leader, although he was sometimes very ruthless.

Naturally the implementation of the universal military draft was of great concern to Epp and his group as this seemed to herald the unfolding of events as predicted by Jung-Stilling. After a great deal of soul searching, Epp and his followers rejected emigration in favour of remaining in Russia. Here they would rather “work in private circles, and emphasize the imminent end of the age and the premillennial return of Christ”. Epp concluded that the Mennonites as a chosen people had been offered an “open door” to refuge in the east where they were to prepare a haven for the other believers of the Christian Church who would be fleeing from the tribulation. Through the application of the teachings of Jung-Stilling, Epp in honest sincerity was able to definitely establish that the second coming of Christ would occur before the end of the year 1889.<sup>26</sup>

Epp promoted these teachings aggressively thereby arousing opposition from Cornelius Wall, another member of the radical millennialist group. This was a continuation of the rivalry between the Wall and Epp family, which went back to the previous generation in Prussia. Epp out-manoeuvred his opponent by insisting on immediate aggressive action in order to bring to fruition the eastward migration. Epp now became the undisputed theological leader and prophet of the group. Historian Richard Belk characterizes the theology of Claas Epp, Jr. as follows:

In 1877, he incorporated his ideas in a book entitled **The Unsealed Prophecy of the Prophet Daniel and the Interpretation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ**. This prophetic work not only used the Revelation but also went back into the Old Testament to the Book of Daniel for “unsealed” prophecies. This work is divided into three main chapters dealing with the prophecy to the Gentiles, the prophecy to the Jews, and the prophecy given to Christians, or new covenant people. The book contains a foreword by David Hamm emphasizing the second coming, the “little flock” of faithful followers, and his conviction that Epp was “compelled by the Spirit of God” to write this book. In the second and third editions the author brought his thinking up-to-date in revised prefaces. All three editions were distributed and paid for by Epp himself. The first edition of the book sold out in a few days. Epp’s hope was that the book’s startling contents, written as a witness in the last days, had awakened the brotherhood of the Trakt. He was not disappointed in this expectation, for everyone read his book and began studying more intensively the doctrines of the judgment and the last days. The message that the coming of the Lord was near perhaps within the next decade, and that only the faithful would be saved was a part of everyone’s conversation. The destruction of all European governments except Russia’s and the demise of all churches except the “great whore,” the Roman Catholic Church, raised many eyebrows and caused hours of discussion.

In the preface to the third edition, Epp explains Jung-Stilling’s ideas as developed in **Heimweh**. He points out that before Eugenius went to the place of refuge, south of Samarkand, he went to Europe, joined a Mennonite family, then with his wife and a faithful servant, he searched for his utopia. In this manner, Epp identified himself with the fictional Eugenius who led his followers to Asia. All Epp needed was a reason to implement his theological theories, and that justification was provided when the Mennonites faced the decision of the Russian government to cancel their special privileges.<sup>27</sup>

The story of Claas Epp and the radical millennialists is a fascinating part of Russian Mennonite history. While most Mennonites who were still concerned about the principle of non-resistance had their sights on North America, these radical millennialists prepared to migrate in the opposite direction to Turkestan, a newly acquired Russian Province in Central Asia. As time passed Turkestan became a truly fabled lotus land for these radical millennialists and a symbol of hope, refuge and salvation for many of the Mennonites of the Trakt settlement on the Volga. In 1880 the great trek to the promised land in the east was undertaken and the first Mennonite settlement in the eastern part of the Russian empire became a reality.

## 7.07 Conclusion

Although the great trek eastward of Claas Epp and his radical millennialists only included 600 people it underlines the extent to which some of the Russian Mennonites in fact treated the writings of separatist-pietism as being equal to the Bible. The eschatological format of Jung-Stilling was accepted without question by the separatist pietist groups in the Molotschna. This included the belief that Russia would be the safe haven of the church in the end times and therefore these teachings had a major impact on the decision of many Russian Mennonites during the 1870s to remain in Russia<sup>28</sup>.

Not surprisingly these teachings also had a tremendous impact on the older Mennonites Gemeinden in the Molotschna. This becomes most evident from a story told by M.B. Fast regarding Bernhard Harder the great Russian Mennonite evangelist. Johan Harder, Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemein-

had died in 1875 after which Abraham Goerz replaced him as Aeltester. Bernhard Harder preached the ordination sermon and apparently commenced to expound on his interpretation of the future 1000 year reign, going well over his allotted time. It seems that many members of the audience at this time were not yet totally submitted to the Jung-Stilling style eschatology as Fast recalls that almost one-half of the audience had left the building by the time Bernhard Harder had finished<sup>29</sup>.

Bernhard Harder was the most influential Russian Mennonite ministers of his day and no doubt made a substantial contribution to the almost total acceptance of premillennialism among the Russian Mennonites by the end of the 19th century. The above episode is of special interest as it marked a sharp boundary between Johan Harder who advocated the full gospel teaching of a spiritual earthly kingdom and his successors who departed from this teaching<sup>30</sup>.

In conclusion it is also mentioned that eventually the old historical distinctions between the Mennonite Gemeinden of the Kirchen-Konvent fell away. By the turn of the 20th Century these groups came to be known collectively as the "kirchliche" Mennonites. These groups no longer read and promoted the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings and instead found spiritual inspiration in the older and more subdued style of pietism combined with an emphasis on socio-economic and cultural achievements in the tradition of Johan Cornies. The great spiritual awakening of the 1860s had finally eliminated the cultural reactionary Grosze Gemeinde although the cultural pietism which replaced it went far to the other extreme. In the end the so-called Kirchliche Gemeinde was influenced by radical pietism almost to the same extent as its younger somewhat more radical sister the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Mention should also be made here of several other pietist separatist groups which originated from the socio-economic turmoil of the Molotschna Mennonite colony during the 1860s. One of these was the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Gemeinde which broke away from the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde congregation in 1869. This group insisted on the rebaptism of all who wished to join them, although the baptism was by the forward mode of immersion and not the customary Baptist style. The dramatic style conversion experience of radical pietism was also adopted. Nevertheless the K.M.B. continued to stress daily discipleship so that they continued to manifest some of the best traits of the Kleine Gemeinde for many years. In 1874 the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren church emigrated to America where they settled the villages of Gnadenu and Hofnungstal, in Kansas.

Another group which should be mentioned here is that of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church which was started by Isaac Peters (1826-1911), a veteran school teacher from the Molotschna. The first congregation of the group was organized in 1880 when Isaac Peters withdrew from the Bethesda Mennonite Gemeinde near Henderson, Nebraska. Although Isaac Peters himself was quite familiar with tenets of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and strictly opposed the pietist-like teachings which made baptism into a sacrament, the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren later adopted many standard pietist teachings such as baptism by immersion, etc. It is interesting to note that later during the 1880s in America all three of the leading pietist-Mennonite churches, namely the Mennonite Brethren, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, proselytized for new members among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Janzen, Nebraska. In doing so these groups were seemingly competing with each other as having the true form of conversion experience, mode of baptism and style of inward subjective piety.

Mention is also made of the Mennonite Alliance Church which was formed in Russia in 1905. The new movement emphasized a strong spiritual life with great interest in evangelism and mission activities and attempted to retain the best of the Mennonite heritage. They practised strict church discipline and also baptism by immersion, although they would accept new members who had not been baptised by this mode. This group was spiritually related to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren in America<sup>31</sup>. The foregoing are the more significant churches which developed out of the radical pietism which inundated the Molotschna Mennonite settlement during the 1850s and 1860s.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SEVEN. THE RELIGIOUS WARS.

1. C. Henry Smith, **The Story of the Mennonites** (Mennonite Book Concern, Berne, Indiana, 1941) 433.
2. E.K. Francis, op. cit., 258-259.
3. Abraham F. Thiessen, **Die Agrarwirren bei den Mennoniten in Sued-Rusland** (Self-published, Fairbury, Nebraska, 1887), 13.
4. See **The Golden Years**, op. cit., Chapter Four, for a review of some of the more significant kinds of pietism.
5. Jakob P. Becker, op. cit., 155.
6. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 274-275.
7. *Ibid.*, 271-272.
8. C. Henry Smith, op. cit., 427-434.
9. John A. Toews, **A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church** (General Conference of M.B. Churches, Fresno, California, 1975)
10. David H. Epp, "Johan Harder (1811-1875)," M.E.2, 660. See also P.M. Friesen op. cit., 253.
11. Aeltester Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, op. cit., 330; See also **History and Events**, op. cit., 11-12.
12. Harold S. Bender, "Immersion", ME III, 14-17.
13. H. Goerz, op. cit., 80.
14. Cornelius Krahn, "Temple Church", ME IV, 695-696.
15. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 108.
16. H. Goerz, op. cit., 88.
17. J.J. Hildebrand, op. cit., 213.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Adam Giesinger, op. cit., 190.
20. Cornelius Krahn, "Herman Peters," ME IV, 153.
21. F.R. Belk, **The Great Trek** (Herald Press, Scotsdale, Pennsylvania, 1976), 52-53.
22. *Ibid.*, 54.
23. *Ibid.*, 55.
24. *Ibid.*, 60.
25. *Ibid.*, 58.
26. *Ibid.*, 60.
27. *Ibid.*, 60-62. For additional information on separatist pietism in the Molotschna see a series of articles in the **Journal of Mennonite Studies**, Volume 3, 1985, namely; Harry Loewen, "Echoes of Drumbeats: The Movement of Exuberance among the Mennonite Brethren," Victor G. Doerksen, "Mennonite Templers in Russia," and A.J. Dueck, "Claas Epp and the Great Trek Reconsidered."
28. One should not be too harsh in judging the Russian Mennonites of the 1870s for falling prey to such teachings. A very similar line of religious fanaticism was found in movements such as the Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists who evolved from the 19th century American evangelical movement. Even in more modern times a good percentage of American protestants, the so-called evangelicals, believe in a bizarre teaching which holds that upon the second coming of Christ he will reinstate Jewish tribal blood sacrifices and establish a physical kingdom located in Jerusalem. Hence these evangelicals, also known as dispensationalists, have a religious interest to travel to the holy land where they will some day rule the nations of the world together with Christ. Some of these so-called evangelicals actually interpret Revelation 19, 21, that Christ at this time will personally slay his enemies by the sword.
29. M.B. Fast, **Mitteilungen**, 8-9.
30. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 570.
31. C.H. Smith, **Smith's Story of the Mennonites** (Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1981), 283.

# Chapter Eight

## The Landless Struggle

### 8.01 Introduction

By 1860 only about thirty percent of Molotschna Mennonite families were Vollwirten.<sup>1</sup> The remaining families were disenfranchised landless Anwohner. During the 1860s a powerful movement arose among these landless people demanding that the surplus lands reserved in each village be distributed to them in accordance with the original intention. The resulting socio-economic struggle is known as “the landless dispute”, and was probably the most intense of the Molotschna wars.

It has already been mentioned that this socio-economic struggle was one of the main contributory factors to the religious ferment and unrest discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>2</sup> At the very least the turmoil it caused contributed to the fertile ground which the ideas of the radical German pietists found among the Russian Mennonite community after 1850. The struggle of the landless will be reviewed under the following headings: One, the historical development of the landless class. Two, the role of Abraham F. Thiessen, a Mennonite revolutionary. Three, an analysis of the landless dispute.

### 8.02 Historical Development of the Landless Class

First, a consideration of the historical origins of a landless class among the Molotschna Mennonites. In 1804 almost all of the 400 families who pioneered in the Molotschna received a full allotment of 65 desjiatines of land (175 acres) establishing a relatively classless society. The subsequent immigration into Russia also included many poor craftsmen and labourers so that in a short time a small class of landless people developed. In addition much surplus land had originally been set aside for the further population increases of the Molotschna Mennonites so that many of the sons, and grandsons, of the original pioneers were able to establish prosperous farms in new villages laid out on parts of these reserve lands. However, this opportunity was restricted to those whose parents were already well-to-do as the regulations of the Agricultural Society required that anyone who wished to farm would have to possess some 1000-2000 rubles in order to lay out his farm buildings to the prescribed dimensions as every farm in the Molotschna was to be a progressive model farm.

In any event, this method of land distribution was terminated in 1863 by which time roughly three-quarters of the land reserved for the Mennonites had been occupied.<sup>3</sup> The remaining 29,000 desjiatines were taken up as follows: 7,200 desjiatines were surplus lands owned by the various villages, 6,000 desjiatines were surplus lands belonging to “Tschumakenweg” or transport roads crossing the Molotschna. Some 15,820 desjiatines remained as part of the reserve land which had been given out by the Supervisory Committee in Odessa on very long term leases at a nominal land rental. These leases were held as follows: By the Molotschna settlement for community sheep pastures 4,460 desjiatines; 3,000 desjiatines to a Klassen as an incentive to develop the sheep industry and operate a cloth factory in Neu-Halbstaedt; 260 desjiatines to the estate Felsental; 3,500 desjiatines to the estate Jushanlee originally established by Johan Cornies; and 4,600 desjiatines to the estate Steinbach owned by Peter Schmidt.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime the landless group had grown to the point that by 1841, 1700 families out of 2733 in the Molotschna owned no land.<sup>5</sup> The fortunate ones in this growing proletariat made their living by pursuing a trade or small scale manufacturing. It has already been mentioned that some of the landless who had the help of family and Gemeinde were eventually able to make their way into the full farmer class, but this was the exception rather than the rule. By far the greatest part of the landless class little better than existed as the generally poorly treated menial servants of the full farmers and large estate owners. Those who were somewhat better off lived as poor “Anwohner” on small remnant parcels of land of about one-third of a desjiatine (or about one acre) left over at the end of the village. These small lots were sold to the Anwohner for 100 rubles.

Many of these poor Anwohner attempted to eke out a living as small tenant farmers by renting little tracts of land on the reserve land of their village. However, the Anwohner had no legal voice in local affairs as only the landowners could vote at village meetings and hold office, etc. This in spite of the fact that the Anwohner had to pay his full share of the taxes which were levied on a per capita basis so that a poor Anwohner with a large family would frequently pay more taxes than his rich neighbour Vollwirt with a small family.



The landowning class was in complete control of the village assembly and would then rent the reserve lands to themselves or to some leading power in the village at a nominal rent of say 50 kopeks per desjatiine. This local entrepreneur would then turn around and lease out this land to his dear Mennonite "Anwohner" brethren, whom he generally would not otherwise talk to because of the extreme class consciousness which was developing among the Russian-Mennonites by this time, for a rental which might be up to five or eight ruble per desjatiine. By 1865 this growing Molotschna Mennonite proletariat consisted of 2356 landless families of whom about 1063 were Anwohner. At the same time there were 1384 landed families in the Molotschna.<sup>6</sup> In addition there were about 490 families living on owned or rented farms or in towns outside the Molotschna settlement. The landowners comprised less than one-third of the population but had all the rights.

### 8.03 The Battle of the "Landless"

Naturally such a situation resulted in tremendous social unrest. In *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, H. Goerz describes the situation as follows:

"This state of affairs was a powerful incentive for dissatisfaction, disputation, and general social unrest. After a time the populace divided itself into two camps, each regarding the other as enemies. The landowners, who had deaf ears for all the presentations and demands of the indigent, and on the other hand the landless, whose demands were not fashioned without self-interest. This fissure cut through the middle of Gemeinden and families. It frequently happened that the father was in the one camp, but the son in another. Also, the ministers could not and did not really want to help for almost without exception they belonged to the propertied class. Many of them were the richest farmers in the village."<sup>7</sup>

The foregoing pressures were suddenly aggravated between 1860 and 1862 when the 50,000 Nogaier natives emigrated *en masse* to Turkey. The lands thus vacated were immediately settled with Russian peasants and some 10,000 Bulgarian colonists. The land of the Nogais had been the one main source of cheap land for the landless Mennonites. In addition a series of crop failures during these years added to the miseries of the poor.<sup>8</sup> In their desperation the landless now turned to their own leaders and government authorities for relief. As the landless did not have voting rights the only expression which they could give their complaints was by way of numerous petitions to various government authorities.

Certainly no aid was forthcoming from the elected officials of the Molotschna settlement. After the death of Johan Cornies in 1846 the political power in the Molotschna fell to David Friesen who became Oberschulz in 1848. As part of the reaction to the enlightened despotism of Cornies the reactionary thinkers left over after the disintegration of the Grosze Gemeinde forces in 1843 were able to take control of the district office as well as almost every village office.<sup>9</sup> A few years later the office of chairman of the powerful Agricultural Society was also lost to these forces when Philip Wiebe, the son-in-law of Johan Cornies, had to resign from the office because of ill health<sup>10</sup>. His successor in office was Peter Schmidt, a nephew of Klaas Wiens.<sup>11</sup> Klaas Wiens was the very well-to-do pioneer Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony who had founded the 4600 desjatiines estate Steinbach.

It has been stated that both Schmidt and Friesen were egotistical and unscrupulous individuals who treated the petitioners with absolute contempt, telling them bluntly that they would not release the reserve lands to the landless as then the landowners would lose their present source of cheap labour.<sup>12</sup> It is related that the father of Peter Schmidt had once rented 4600 desjatiines of land from the reserve at a rental of 2 kopeks per desjatiine which was also the rental which the son continued to pay. However, by now he was renting out most of this land for three to four rubles per desjatiine, i.e. A profit of some 2000 per cent annually. By the end of the 1850s the political offices in the Molotschna were firmly in the hands of these self-seeking individuals. Naturally the landless would receive absolutely no relief from leaders such as these.

The oppressed lower class also directed their petitions and entreaties to the religious leaders but with no more success, as the Aeltesten and ministers were usually of the more well-to-do in the colonies and more concerned about protecting the status quo than the spiritual and economic plight of their parishioners. Originally the Orloff Gemeinde was under the leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast who lacked the spiritual depth necessary to perceive the plight of the landless. With the election of Aeltester Johan Harder in 1860 the religious leadership in Ohrloff came into the hands of a man truly devoted to the principles of peace and brotherly cooperation and eventually some help was received under his leadership. Some of the other leaders in the Molotschna colony eventually also came to the aid of the landless. These included Philip Wiebe who used his connections and influence in higher government circles on their behalf.<sup>13</sup> Another group, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, continued to

pursue the ideal of biblical Christianity so that the entreaties of their own poor and downtrodden were heard and dealt with in an evangelical manner, much to the subsequent self-benefit of this Gemeinde.

By 1863 the landless could no longer tolerate the exploitation and oppression of their co-confessionists. In November of that year they elected three delegates who were to represent them as advocates of their cause, namely, Franc Isaac, Jakob Doerksen and Johan Fast. Isaac Fast was delegated shortly thereafter as most petitions pertaining to this matter after 1863 also bear his name.

The November 1863 petition "signed by one hundred and fifty colonists requested the extension of the franchise, the appointment of an impartial commission to investigate the condition of the landless, and lastly the immediate distribution of all the remaining reserve and surplus lands among them so that in time they would be financially in the position to settle either on Crown land or to rent land from some nobleman"<sup>14</sup> In response to this request the Guardians Committee directed that Oberschulz Friesen and Agricultural Society chairman Schmidt settle the claims of the landless and also directed that the landless present concrete proposals regarding land reform. Consequently the landless elected two representatives from each village who prepared a submission dated February 1, 1864, setting out the petition already referred to above with the additional submission that the land be allocated in smaller parcels and in such a way that the Anwohner could farm the land from their existing properties which in most cases represented all the equity they had.<sup>15</sup>

However, these representations were only symbolical as the Supervisory Committee in Odessa worked hand in glove with the landowning faction, who insisted that the land be divided into half farms of 32½ desjatines by the settlement of new colonies.<sup>16</sup> This would bankrupt many of the Anwohner because their entire equity in their old properties would be destroyed if they had to set up new yards and buildings. In addition the land owners would only agree to distribute a smaller portion of the available reserve lands. This then became the official policy of the Supervisory Committee in 1865.

In his documentary history, Franz Isaac has compared this position of the landless as the poor exploited servants of the landowner with the men of Gibeon who became the bondsmen of the people of Israel. However, Isaac goes on to note that: "the landless were not prepared to be condemned in perpetuity to be the hewers of wood and the drawers of water like the men of Gibeon. For the higher hand had not yet decreed their total extermination so that they would look upon such a servial status with joy, as an unearned alternative to death. Ultimately the landless also found confirmation that all are equal before the law." The attitude of the Mennonite establishment in this instance is reflected in the statement made by the Oberschulz that the landless could not even subsist on a half of a desjatine and now they wanted even more land<sup>17</sup>.

Undaunted by this attitude the Commission of the Landless went ahead and prepared a proposal for land reform which they submitted to the Supervisory Committee as well as the Gebietsamt. The most important addition to the previous proposals was that the land be apportioned in parcels of 12 desjatines each so that the greatest number of landless could be helped by the land distribution. In addition the taxes were to be based on the amount of land owned, and it was to be recognized that these lands belonged to the Mennonite community as a whole and not to anyone individually. In this way the community would have to accept the responsibility of providing land for its poor people. In the view of Dr. David G. Rempel these were constructive proposals. They showed "a fine community spirit and a sense of reality. They were also very reasonable in light of Mennonite history and doctrine, in which equality of persons and responsibility of the community for the welfare of its members have always been cardinal principles"<sup>18</sup>. But the landowners did not see things this way and fought vigorously to maintain their privileged position.

By now the whole affair had become so bitter and involved that the Minister of State Domains decided to send a member of the Council of Ministers, Islavin, to investigate the matter. Islavin was an excellent choice for the task because he was honest, meticulous and sympathetic to the cries of the downtrodden. The appointment and work of such a prominent investigator also coincided with a growing support on the part of some of the church and community leaders. Not surprisingly it was the Ohrloff Gemeinde under the leadership of Aeltester Johan Harder which was prepared to officially commit itself as favouring and supporting the plight of the landless. Here follows the text of the petition which was submitted to Privy Councillor Islavin by the Ohrloff Gemeinde:

"Your Excellency, member of the Council of Ministers of State Domains, and Privy Councillor, Lord Islavin.

We recognize that thousands of fellow brethren are without land and without a means of livelihood. We as the spiritual overseers cannot remain indifferent with respect to the lam-

table prospects for the future which are developing in this matter. Rather, we must deal with the serious dangers to the moral circumstances in our Gemeinden.

Since there is a solution for the current situation through the presently available land, we feel ourselves compelled to support the wishes of our poor landless in this respect. Accordingly we submissively bid your Excellence, that you make appropriate arrangements to bring an end to this oppression and poverty. Such a measure will be an uncountable benefit for us and the referenced brethren, as well as for our posterity.

August 20, 1865

Aeltester Johan Harder,

Ministers Kornelius Penner, Jakob Martens, Franz Klassen Abraham Regier, Bernhard Harder, Franz Isaac, Korn. Isaac, Franz Balzer, Jakob Isaac, John. Regier, Aron Rempel.<sup>19</sup>

#### 8.04 A Partial Victory

It seems that finally things were happening. In addition to the widening support for the cause of the landless, the Privy Councillor found irregularities in the public accounts of Oberschulz Friesen in the amount of 133,000 rubles. Although the landowners made a last desperate attempt to discredit the representatives of the Anwohner, by accusing them of being dangerous revolutionaries, Islavin decided in favour of the landless<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, an Imperial Edict was issued to the Supervisory Committee on February 14th, 1866. This provided for the distribution of 16,000 desjatinas of reserve and surplus land among the landless homeowners in 12 desjatinas parcels. The recipient could decide if he wanted to work his allotment from his present Anwohner premises even though this might be 15 or 20 werst away from his land, or whether he would build right on his allotment in new villages. All the Mennonite villagers were granted the right to vote. In addition each landowner was to pay a small annual fee per desjatinas for the creation of a colonization fund. A Land Commission made up of representatives of both warring factions was to supervise the distribution of the land. In addition to this edict, Islavin also removed from office Oberschulz Friesen, as well as the Chairman and the Inspector of the Supervisory-Committee. In the view of Dr. David G. Rempel, this decision amounted to a "socio-economic revolution in this territorial teacup".<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly the newly formed Land Commission went to work to plan the details required so that the terms of the Imperial Edict could be carried out. A land surveyor was engaged to prepare a plan showing the actual land holdings to be distributed. It was found that in 1866 there were 1063 Anwohner who met the requirements of the land distribution. However, by 1869 when the land distribution was to go into effect, additional premises had been constructed so that a total of 1563 families were to participate in the land distribution. The report of the Land Commission was submitted to the Supervisory-Committee on December 4, 1869. In addition to the 12 desjatinas of land to be allotted, each of the landless was also to receive limited rights to the community pastures of his village so that the total allotment came to 16 desjatinas per family.

The Land Commission also worked out a colonization plan by which 50 kopeks per desjatinas and 10 kopeks per adult person were to be paid into this fund. In addition the income from the 5000 desjatinas of surplus land and 6000 desjatinas of the 'chumaki' roads which had been narrowed, were also to be paid into this fund. This colonization fund was used to purchase additional blocks of land outside the colony which was then sold to landless families on favourable terms, who then moved to these new settlements as pioneers. According to Franz Isaac the Sagradowka settlement in Cherson province was the first daughter colony purchased by the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. The Sagradowka settlement consisted of 21,276 desjatinas of land which was bought for 500,003 rubles. Seventeen villages were established in this settlement. It might be of interest to the reader that several Kleine Gemeinde families were also among those to settle in Sagradowka. The land shortage was also alleviated by the emigration of 1874-1876 so that nothing further in the way of colonization was apparently necessary until 1884 when the Memrik settlement was established followed by a settlement in Samara in 1891.<sup>22</sup>

This completes the account of the landless dispute according to Franz Isaac in his book **Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten**. In this work Franz Isaac has preserved some fifty pages of material, including many of the documents pertaining to this unsavory affair. Franz Isaac himself seems to have been one of the more influential figures involved in the representation of the rights of the poor. In concluding his chapter pertaining to the landless dispute, Franz Isaac notes that "it is with shame that he had to admit that characters such as Oberschulz Friesen belonged to the Mennonite family". Isaac in turn praises Philip Wiebe very highly for the part he played in influencing the higher authorities to hear the plea of the landless representatives. Although the Molotschna Mennonites always liked

to think of themselves as the leading foreign colonists in Russia, Isaac states that “nowhere else in Russia was there such a battle and disputation with respect to the rights of the landless”. In his view the final resolution of the landless problem cut through the mushrooming caste system which was developing among the Molotschna Mennonites where two-thirds of the population were the servants of the other privileged one-third.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to note that Franz Isaac who was one of the leading representatives of the landless was also a minister of the Orloff Gemeinde. Like Aeltester Johan Harder, Franz Isaac had close family connections to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. His sister Anna was the third wife of Johan Friesen, the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. In addition his sister Justina was married to Bernhard Fast who at one time served as a minister of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. And finally Franz Isaac himself was a first cousin to Johan Isaac who was the forefather of the Kleine Gemeinde Isaac family which settled in the area of Kleefeld, Manitoba, in 1874.<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing represents a brief summary of the generally accepted version of the regrettable landless affair. The socio-economic elite in the Molotschna had become too greedy and had to be chastened. With the encouragement of community leaders like Philip Wiebe, the landless finally were able to organize under the leadership of advocates such as Franz Isaac. When a fair-minded government finally sent an honest and sympathetic Privy Councillor Islavin to report on the situation the influential Orloff Gemeinde under its new leader Aeltester Johan Harder also threw its weight behind the cause of the landless. Finally the heartless Oberschulz David Friesen was deposed together with the closeminded Supervisory Committee officials who had supported him. Although the landless had asked for the distribution of all available land, a compromise was reached whereby 10,000 desjatines was held back in the community reserves. However, a community fund was established for further land purchase so that in the decades to come there would be an opportunity for the members of the landless class to also become landed farmers.

## 8.05 The Struggle Continues

A closer investigation reveals that the landless affair did not end in 1869. A review of the historical sources indicates that there is another side to the story. It seems that not all the principal figures in the affair were satisfied with the compromise settlement achieved by the Land Commission in 1869. The leader of this unsatisfied group was a farmer, grain dealer and businessman by the name of Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-1889), who was a son of onetime Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde minister, Peter Thiessen. Through his mother, Abraham F. Thiessen, was a grandson of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) the second Aeltester of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. In 1866 Abraham Thiessen was excommunicated from the Kleine Gemeinde and then reaccepted into membership later during the same year thereby causing a serious division (See chapter ten).

What was a son of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde doing in a life and death struggle on behalf of the landless? Especially in view of the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde had quietly solved the problems of its own landless. Why would anyone risk life and family in such a cause when they did not have to? In reviewing this situation in an article in *Mennonite Life* in 1969, Dr. Cornelius Krahn goes on to raise the question as to why a leading historian such as Franz Isaac does not even mention Abraham Thiessen in his *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*?<sup>25</sup> Dr. Krahn has also questioned the view of Peter M. Friesen who characterized Abraham F. Thiessen as an atheist and materialist who destroyed the Kleine Gemeinde. Fortunately Thiessen, like his grandfather before him, was a prolific writer in his cause so that his own writings provide additional information respecting these intriguing questions.

The published writings of Abraham F. Thiessen consist of three small books of some twenty-five pages each, which he published in support of the cause of the landless between the years 1872 to 1887. In these books Thiessen passionately presents the arguments for his cause. What is also noteworthy is that all of these books were approved by the strict Russian censors who would not allow publication of anything smacking of revolution, even though the contents of Thiessen's books do seem revolutionary from today's perspective. In fact Dr. Cornelius Krahn has entitled the *Mennonite Life* article above referred to as “Abraham Thiessen: A Mennonite Revolutionary?”

What was so revolutionary about this remarkable son of the Kleine Gemeinde? The book which Thiessen published in 1887 and which he entitled *Die Agrarwirren bei den Mennoniten in Sued-Rusland* provides some of the answers to these questions. This booklet consists of articles which had been published in the St. Petersburg Herald. In one of these articles Thiessen provides a brief summary of the landless dispute for the readers of the Herald a translation of which is included here.

### **“From the St. Petersburg Herald”**

It will not be unfamiliar to the editor of the “St. Petersburg Herald” that during the past 14 years many deputations have come out of the Mennonite colonies of Southern Russia. These delegations, which sometimes consist of one individual and sometimes more at the same time, appeared in St-Petersburg and submitted numerous petitions respecting a complicated land question. Some of these petitions contained over one thousand signatures. I also belong to these Mennonite colonists and I bid you to accept the following for your worthy pages in clarification of this land matter.

As early as the 1860s the Minister, General-Adjutant Selenoi, was made aware, from our villages, of the great injustice which had arisen by virtue of the fact that the land which had been allocated for the Mennonites had not been given to the settlers entitled thereto. Secondly, that the land utilization was directly contrary to the laws in effect at the time. The Lord Minister then instituted a personal investigation as a result of which inquiry the Minister succeeded in having a remedy to this injustice enacted by his Majesty, on February 14th, 1866. Pursuant to Sub Nr. 2799, his Majesty sanctioned the recommendation of the Minister which provides as follows: “All the unsettled land to be found in the Colonies is immediately to be divided among the landless Mennonites, who have their own dwelling houses. This division shall be carried out by a Commission elected from among the Colonists, and shall be ineffective as against everyone involved for a two week appeal period, with the unequivocal indication that after the expiration of two weeks, no further appeal will be entertained and the division shall have the final irrevocable force of law.”

“While the Commission was going about its work the leasees of these lands sought to hinder this division through all sorts of means. On one occasion they tried to lay out new villages on these lands, and in fact some had already started with the actual settlement. However, the Lord Minister Selenoi required that the command of the Czar be carried out to the letter, and that the land was to be divided among such of the poor who already had their own houses; and accordingly these well-to-do settlers again had to vacate these lands together with their building material.

Subsequently the leasees influenced the chairman of the Supervisory Committee Ettinger to continue to lease out at least 10,000 desjatinies. However, Ettinger could not do this by himself and so he wrote to the Minister of Crown Domains on August 10, 1868, sub No. 8766 in this regard and gave his writing the form as if it was written in the name of the Mennonite Gemeinden. On March 11, 1869, sub No. 210, the Minister replied as follows: “This land has been given to the Mennonites for division and I do not deem it proper to lease the same in order to purchase land for the poor from the rentals and I order that without delay, you proceed to work out a proposal for the division and to present the same to me for approval, in accordance with the requirements of the Edict of the Czar dated February 14, 1866”.

Thereupon the Commission concluded its work and had a special plan of survey prepared by a land surveyor. This map together with the proposal for the land division was presented to the Committee on December 3, 1869, sub. Nr. 127, together with the request that the same be presented to Minister Selenoi for his approval. In accordance with the command of the Czar this project first had to be presented to each of the 56 villages where it was read to the village assemblies and approved by the signature of the villagers (A. Thiessen notes the wisdom of the Minister in that the proposal also had to be read and signed by the full farmers, in order that it have the power of law. Article 159 of the Colonial Law.), and each and every one was accommodated by a two week appeal period before the proposal came into effect. This requirement had promptly been satisfied and as no appeal followed, the project became law on December 1, 1869, and could not be revoked by the Minister, Privy Council, nor Senate.

But Ettinger, the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee dared to attempt one more attack against the land division. He presented neither the project nor the map to the minister. Instead Ettinger was bribed and on February 1, 1870, he made an intentionally falsified presentation to the Minister, showing record of 297 families fewer and likewise showing 6000 less desjatinies, and so on. Accordingly 1266 families received only 12 desjatinies and 297 families received no land at all, notwithstanding that the land division settlement clearly stipulated that: “In accordance with the Supreme Command 16 desjatinies of land have been allocated to each of a total of 1563 families”. More than 10,000 desjatinies of land were saved for the leasees by this deception.

The cheated 1562 landless now elected a minister F. Isaac, a member of the Commission which had prepared the project, and the writer of this letter. The former belonged to the 1266 more fortunate ones, and the latter to the 297 who were totally cheated. When the deputation brought him the results of the election the former made the following reply: “The throne of God is high above us and the Czar is far away. I cannot and will not be unfair to my family in defending a cause in which government representatives lead a struggle of life and death against us, which they are forced to do in order to be consistent, after the first crooked step had been taken”.

Consequently I undertook the task alone, and on May of 1870, I appeared before the Minister Selenoi where I discovered that neither project nor map had ever been presented to the Minister. On the 4th of May, His Excellency said to me, “You remain here in St. Petersburg, until I have investigated the situation. This must be cleared away”. However, only a few days later the Minister was crippled through a stroke after which the director Baron Medem declared to me that now nothing could be done until the fall. The Ministry requested an answer from the Committee with respect to my accusations of July 3rd, 1870 sub Nr. 4197; November 9, 1870 sub Nr. 7263; March 31, 1871 sub Nr 1714:

May 31, 1871 sub Nr 3575; June 7th, 1871 sub Nr 690; and November 27th, 1872 sub Nr 6721. To put it briefly everytime the attorney appeared in the Ministry a letter was written to Odessa but everything remained as it was. The land map and the project continued to lie there, until Count Valuyev became the Minister of the Department of Crown Domains.

But when I now came to the Ministry I experienced that Ettinger and these leasees had accused me as if I was truly the excrement of mankind, who instigated the people against the authorities. Indeed his Highest Excellence said to me, "You are the most severely accused" to which I replied "Highest Excellence, I am being denounced; I and 1500 of my brethren have been cheated out of 10,000 desjatinas of land which the Czar had granted to us. The evidence is to be found with the Committee in Odessa (the land division project and map). The Committee has already had this material for four years and does not forward it". Then His Highest Excellency said to me, "I will have an inquiry made through the offices of the Governor-General but if your accusations are not confirmed you will have grave concerns to answer for". I replied, "I have only stated as much as I can prove", and left the ceremonial hall with the joy of victory.

Four weeks earlier I had been able to obtain a copy of the land division project in Odessa, through the conscientiousness of a member of the committee at that time, who had no association with the chairman in this deception. Accordingly I knew that the matter would shortly come to a head.

In January of 1873, I, Jakob Wiens, and Isaac Fast, a member of the Land Commission, received an invitation to appear before the Governor-General. The Privy Councillor Ettinger was also summoned to be present there. After the latter had listened to my accusations he said, "The complaint of Thiessen is based on falsehood. Neither such a project nor such a map exist. These individuals are only stirring up the people". To which I replied, "I indignantly throw the word agitator back to you. If we were not to receive the land why was the Commission allowed to work on the project all these years and why were the results to be read to all the 56 village assemblies and signed by all the villagers? It would have been just as easy to reject the command of the Czar, and then we need not have been roused up". Now the Governor-General interjected and said, "You are accusing a high official of suppression, which is punishable if you do not have proof. The Privy Councillor has unequivocally stated that he has never received such documents".

"Highest Excellence", I said, for by now my words were pouring from a breast which was wounded and bruised in this regard, "even though I and fifteen hundred of my brethren have not received our rights in four years, if these charges are too severe then I beg for forgiveness, but they certainly are true for here is the proof". With which I drew out of my vest, the copy of the 24 page project, where I had carefully kept it hidden until the time was right. I had been prepared for this eventuality and was not overcome by surprise through the move. When Ettinger perceived that the copy was certified in his office he blew up and only stutteringly brought forth a few words in French.

We Mennonites were dismissed and spent the remainder of the day in our hotel, in suspense and concern and trembling pain. How will this end we asked each other? "The Privy Councillor is won", I said. "But you will be punished" the councillor of the Gebietsamt replied to me, "if such a high official even mentions the word punishment, that is worse than if the Gebietsamt has already handed down a judgment." "What are we to do now? said Wiens, "for we were dismissed so suddenly. But it is good that all three of us were witnesses to the outcome, and could see how the Privy Councillor was terrified, for no one would believe anyone of us alone."

While we were discussing what had occurred, it had become evening, and a messenger of the Governor-General arrived with the invitation that we were to appear before him again the following morning at 10 a.m. We spent a sleepless night. Fast, in particular did not even close his eyes. In the morning there was no thought of eating breakfast. We went straight to our meeting. After we arrived in the reception room the Governor-General asked us, "Is that the map and project which you wanted to have located?" With this he pointed to the table. We double checked and replied, "Yes".

Thereupon we were graciously dismissed and the project was sent to the Ministry on February 19, 1873, sub 345. Here the Minister stated that jurisdiction over the colonists had now been transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and whether we might send the documents there. The Baron Medem in our presence was then requested to send the papers away. The minister told us, "You will again find these papers with your minister." But how surprised we were when all the other papers but not the map and the project were with the Governor.

I was just on my way to make another journey to St. Petersburg when I was arrested and taken prisoner on my property without a warrant for my arrest nor was any reason given to me. After two years I was able to escape this imprisonment by my own means and have now lived in America for ten years. However, I received, especially in the latter years, many hundreds of letters containing the plea to come to their aid. Not only did they not give the people their land but over and above everything else they punished them when they did make a request for the land. Yes, on some occasions as in Wernersdorf great conflict had resulted. Here one hundred Russian farmers told the Mennonites, "The Czar has given you the land, take it into your possession and no one will molest you, for then we will come to help you." The result was that the local officials and the secretary together with their helpers had to vacate the field in full flight and nevertheless were unable to leave the scene completely unmolested.

In the village of Conteniusfeld the village mayor Wiens, the same one who had been caught in the act as he was gathering money for secret purposes, allowed himself to forcefully sell the property

of the poor people in order to collect the unpaid pasture fees for the pasturing of their cows in the community pastures.

However, in Gnadenfeld there was a conscientious secretary, a Mennonite, who did not support such acts of violence. So, what was to be done? The secretary had to be dismissed and in the place of the Mennonite a foul and useless barbarian was located, who was qualified for all manner of circumventing and disregarding of law, whose name is Kludt. As soon as he had occupied the position of secretary the uncivilized robbery commenced. Firstly in Contentiusfeld where 31 judgments for punishment and damages were decreed against the poor families in one single village alone, men as well as women, for failure to pay the pasture fees.

When the Justice Sessions dismissed all these sentences, Kludt grasped at different tactics so as not to come into conflict with the law. He now called his barbarian actions "collections of old debts". For the law did not allow one part of the Gemeinde to collect pasture fees from the other part. Accordingly Kludt wrote "old debts" in all the papers instead of pasture fees. Now the people who had already been freed by the Judge were arbitrarily put under arrest. In fact in one case this was done on the cultivated field where a young baby boy was left standing alone with the horses after the father had been taken into confinement. Meanwhile the women and the mother, who knew nothing about what had occurred, were awaiting the return of their loved ones. When they went out with the lanterns around midnight they finally found the weeping little boy helplessly standing near the horse, and who now related to them of how his father had been taken into confinement. Notwithstanding that the law only permits farmers to be imprisoned during the seeding season for very serious offences, and also provides for an automatic appeal period, the people in Gnadenfeld were odiously treated worse than smugglers under the leadership of Kludt.

Further, in Halbstadt, the same people who allowed the rich to be recorded as being deceased in order to carry off a land swindle, confined a poor family father, Franz Bueg, for six days in a hole so small that he could not even lie down and which had neither a window nor airwell. This was to be a punishment for having requested the division of land, which was his legal right by virtue of a command of the Czar. A poor man by the name of Boldt in Contentiusfeld was robbed over three hundred rubles for pasture fees, which Kludt deceitfully called "old debts". In addition he was confined for many weeks and finally brought to silence after he was threatened with a whipping and exile. This unfortunate dilemma, into which my brethren in Russia have come without any fault of theirs has persuaded me to heed their call and to make another effort to help them.

I have left my wife and child, and my home, and submitted myself to the law of Russia. I have already received permission to remain in Russia initially for a period of six months. My petition submitted to the very highest authorities was registered on July 15 under the number 12320 and shortly thereafter a command was issued to requisition the map and the land division project from the Ministry of Crown Domains. This time it will be possible to cause a decision to be made within a very short period, the result of which I will later take the opportunity to share with you." "A. Thiessen"

"Editor's note: We will entertain no objections to the publication of the foregoing writing as the writer has submitted to us proven copies of all the documents which are referred in this writing as well as of the land division project. Editor, St. Petersburg Herald."<sup>26</sup>

## 8.06 The Struggle for Justice

The foregoing serves as an overview of the landless dispute up to the time of the publication of *Die Agrarwirren* in 1887. Thiessen ends his report on a very optimistic note. He feels that now the battle will finally be won. Some of the other writings of Thiessen shed further light on the whole affair and the methods which the land hungry establishment used to retain some 10,000 desjatines of land and many of the poor workers in their control. In *Die Agrarwirren*, Abraham F. Thiessen refers to the attitude of some of the establishment Mennonites in the Molotschna as follows:

"These unashamed rich swindlers do even more damage with respect to morals. For not only have I been told to the face by many people that "for money we do what we want," but the Mayor of Sparrau openly stated to me in front of his assembled village assembly at the village office "That for money the Minister of Crown-Domains gives us exactly the decisions that we want." The people in the villages could not differentiate that it was not the minister but rather only individual officials hidden in the Ministry who falsified documents and in fact deceived the Minister himself. Thiessen goes on to analyse the result of this robbery in terms of the amount of money involved: "After the Minister Selenoi instantly became sick and all his wise plans were destroyed by shallow individuals like Ettinger, Baron Medem, and so on, the affairs of the community were advanced on the basis of the following senseless enterprise. They had stolen the pasture rights of fifteen hundred and sixty-three families and the entire cultivated land of another 300 families. They now rented out these 11,500 desjatines of land for ten rubles per desjatine annually which brought in an annual income of 115,000 rubles. In seventeen years this would have amounted to 1,995,000 rubles.

Add to the community chest money

200,000

Also 50 kopeks per desjiatines yearly 65,000	
which in 17 years will be	1,105,000
For every soul 1 ruble tax for land purchases	
15,000 rubles annually in 17 years	225,000
Interest at 6% in 17 years	880,000
Total	4,285,000

This amounts to over 4,000,000 rubles. In addition to this come the sale proceeds of the land which would be received from the settlers together with 6% interest. Therefore it can be seen that interest would accumulate on interest. Is this not a completely senseless and planless mismanagement?"

Thiessen points out that the fruits of this robbery from the poor will double every 17 years. And certainly the community fund will not grow as long as officials can steal 133,000 rubles and remain unpunished. In the Chortitz colony the mother settlement had made a payment to the daughter colony of 130,000 rubles with respect to which the daughter colony stated that through this gift not even a tenth of what had been stolen was now repaid. Apparently the situation was even worse in the case of the Molotschna daughter colony Sagradowka.<sup>27</sup>

In *Die Agrarwirren* Thiessen describes another episode where an attempt was made to bribe a judge to pass a sentence against him:

"The enterprise of the leasees regarding these lands, which according to the edict of the Czar belonged to the landless, was as follows: They paid 40 kopeks to the Crown, and 12 kopeks per desjiatines in money to the local officials. Then they rented out the same land to the self same poor Mennonites to whom the land really belongs for five to ten rubles per desjiatine.

Peter Schmidt, one of these renters, with whom the colonist Ewert associated himself as loyal companion perceived that I was standing in the way of their enterprise. Accordingly he made a serious charge against me at the Criminal Justice Department with the help of Mr. Kowalsky. As Schmidt and Ewert were driving on their way to the investigatory Judge in order to present their complaint against me, a spring broke on their wagon. Through this interruption which required a repair to their wagon, the coachmen were able to report that a dozen hams and one hundred pounds of butter were packed away on the wagon. This made it possible for me to insure that the necessary witnesses were at the house of the Investigatory Judge. As soon as the pair came up to the house they entered into the courtroom, while the coachmen brought the gifts into the pantry of the Judge. Then the Judge came among them like a peal of thunder and threw out the pair as well as the hams. "Are these supposed to be the evidence against Thiessen" he cried out after them? The pair departed from the yard of the Judge like sheepish dogs. Naturally the affair ended in my favour and in addition cost the Inspector Kowalsky his job as well as the 2,000 rubles which he had received as a gift from my opponents. Thanks to the honesty of Governor von Reitern."<sup>28</sup>

These are some of the incidents recounted in *Die Agrarwirren*. It is important to note that the position of Thiessen as well as the honesty of his documentation is fully verified by the editor of the St. Petersburg Herold. This seems to establish the veracity of Thiessen without question. Furthermore had the case of Thiessen not been properly documented and true the powerful Mennonite establishment would no doubt have made sure that the Russian censors would not have allowed these booklets to see the light of day. In addition, *Die Agrarwirren* also contains a reprint of a letter written by a full farmer "vollwirt" praising Thiessen for his work and also blaming his earlier support of the establishment faction led by the Oberschulz on the deceitful means and false propaganda of this group, namely, spreading the lie that Thiessen and his supporters wanted an equal division of all the land of the community.

The foregoing will leave few illusions as to the fierce and bitter state of the developing battle. In the words of Franz Isaac, the establishment faction represented by the Oberschulz had once practiced deception in the preservation of its privileged position in Russian Mennonite society and now it could back down without losing face. On the other hand, Thiessen was a persistent and vehement champion of the rights of the landless in their deplorable state.<sup>29</sup> His first book written and published in 1872 provides additional examples of his brilliant advocacy on behalf of the downtrodden. The book entitled *Ein Brief nur fuer die Mennoniten in Berdjanschen Kreise*, was the text of an address made by Thiessen to a conference of the Mennonite Aeltesten and Ministers in Alexanderwohl on August 7, 1872. At this time Thiessen apparently still hoped to be able to rally additional support for his cause from the ministerial.

In a moving and persuasive appeal to the assembled clergymen, Thiessen demonstrates his abilities and intelligence. In this writing Thiessen also demonstrated that he would utilize all available legal tactics to expose the fraud which has been committed. He lists the following as the worst criminals



on the side of the oppressors. i.e. Peter Ewert, Peter Schmidt, Gerhard Fast, Klaas Wiebe, David Friesen, Andres Voth, and Diedrich Peters. In this connection Thiessen also refers to the pietist teachings which have become the vogue among the Russian Mennonites as follows:

“As you Aeltesten and ministers very well know, the greatest percentage of the full farmers are not inclined this way. Indeed, they do not even know what is actually being done in secret. Accordingly it is up to you to make the members of your Gemeinde aware of “what will serve as peace in our time.” The always present “sermons of peace” are not sufficient for this purpose as is aptly demonstrated by our history in Russia. For over half a century this has already been preached. And why then do the actions not follow the preaching? What is the reason? Answer. Because the people are not shown in the direction, that they should consider “what will serve to bring peace in our time.” Jesus says “That he who is not faithful with little things to him will nothing greater be entrusted.” Are we not the unfaithful with respect to temporal matters? Does one class have the right to enslave and oppress the other?

The government is proceeding step by step with the pace of progress and with respect to the election of officials and the settling of peace between the citizens, so that these rights will be granted to all the people including the lowest of classes in order that they will govern themselves. This is exactly what Menno Simons envisioned in the consequence of a revelation from God some three hundred years ago for he founded his Gemeinden on these same fundamentals.<sup>30</sup>

Thiessen notes that even the secular government of Russia is outpacing the Mennonites in terms of democracy and equality. Thiessen then goes on to point out to the assembled clergymen, the irony when he as the advocate of the poor downtrodden Mennonites must use the laws of the land to defend his clients in the Russian courts against the false and ungrounded charges of the propertied group:

“Aeltesten, do consider this, thirty-one judgments of punishment and fines have already been handed down regarding the Continiusfelder, and who knows how many more are still forthcoming. But the blame is carried by Ewert and Wiens. Is it not time that the Aeltesten examine and prove the matter? It always seems so abhorrent to me, to stand before the judgment and to have to defend Mennonites against a Mennonite Oberschulz, whereby the Judge then has to admit to me that my advocacy is lawful. At the same time all the concerned parties are members fit for Holy Communion. For Mrs. Wiebe in Contentiusfeld, Ewert had actually requested that the Judge hold her in three month’s arrest. Now instead of three months or ninety-two days, only seven days remain to be appealed.”<sup>31</sup>

It appears that Thiessen is more than a petition-bearer and intermediary between the landless and the government for he has taken up his cause so devotedly that he is also defending his people in the Russian Courts where the trumped up charges are brought against them. It is understandable that the Oberschulz group would not take kindly to these measures in a society where there is normally long-suffering and silent submission to dominance and injustice. Thiessen laments that for his efforts in freeing such “criminals” he is blamed for the whole landless affair as if he had started it.

“But Schmidt and Ewert in their presentation to the Judge call me an atheist. I must in fact concede that according to my faith the spirit which inspires these two in such avenues is not the correct one. The evidence of this spirit is given to us in the epistle of Jude, verses 13 and 19. The same spirit also inspires the deacon Andreas Voth when in a petition to the authorities he states that “The people for whom Thiessen is working do not want to have any land; the work of Thiessen is an outright deception, and so on.”

Thiessen then deals with the efforts of his enemies to dry up his means of support by vilifying him for receiving donations from the people he is defending. He points out that because of these attacks Johan Fast from Tiede, and Jakob Doerksen, finally had to give up their promotion of the cause of the landless. This treatment extends to more than mild shunning on the part of Schmidt and Ewert.

“If Schmidt or Ewert and Company would have had as much sympathy for their fellow human beings as, I will not say as Christians, but as the members of the Humane Society have for animals, I would not have needed to fear such persecution, and it would never have come to my mind to have to prepare this writing. If I could rent several thousand desjatiines of land for 45 kopeks per desjatiine and then turn around and be able to rent the land to someone else for three to six rubles per desjatiine, then I would also find it easy to be a famous benevolent Christian. Even if I rented out a good portion of the land for three rubles, i.e. for 45 kopeken I would ask only two rubles and 55 kopeks yearly interest, then it would also be easy for me to be such a Christian or to become one. Then I would also be able to work for the rights of the oppressed without receiving any support, which however is not possible for me now. However, I would much rather remain in my present circumstances, which compel me to seek support in order to be able to work for the poor, than to become rich like the above mentioned benefactors(!!!) and to aid them in their oppression.”<sup>32</sup>

Thiessen also points out the anomaly that now the Oberschulz and his associates blame him for the landless affair and for having taken the matter to the attention of the higher government authorities:

"I find it very noteworthy that these people who have the opportunity to use and speculate with the land of the poor, now everywhere are screaming that I am the worst possible Mennonite. As grounds for this charge they submit that I have directed the land matter to the attention of the authorities. Notwithstanding, that I am merely asking for the land which was given to the poor by the highest authority, while these, through all manner of lies, have stolen the same. Yes, and even more. One of these heroes wanted to impress it upon my conscience that I had taken this matter up to the highest authorities. But what do they themselves do? Answer: They themselves come there with lies while I come with the truth. I once heard one of these people wondering how there could have been such hardened Iscariots at one time. But they find to be quite in order to continue their own treachery against the people. In fact they would like to apply money and hams, if only they might win support for their dealings."<sup>33</sup>

Thiessen then goes on to review some of the other dealings for which the Oberschulz and his associates can take the credit:

I refer to the ministers who allowed their names to be used in order that Lange and his Gemeinde could be banned to Siberia. I also refer to those men who were involved in submitting to the law those who renounced the Gemeinden and founded the Bruedergemeinde, although this did not actually come to pass as the government thought in a more Christian manner than the Aeltesten, but the evil intention was there. I refer also to the individuals who signed the well-known libels (since they had not yet repented of these dealings). Surely these parties only have little understanding of the truth and what is right. On exactly this point Menno Simons says, "Every individual, no matter what he may call himself, who takes part in bringing to knowledge those who are astray, unsaved and the same, with any means other than the Word of God and by a good example, is a partaker of the fellowship of the Beast from Hell; and to persecute people regarding matters of faith is a work of the anti-Christ."<sup>34</sup>

The Aeltesten, the sons of the Aeltesten who during the 1830s had prohibited the sale of the writings of Menno Simons among their people, now again hear the radical message of non-resistant Christianity from a son of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde." Thiessen closes his address by admonishing the Aeltesten and ministers to elect honest representatives to conclude the matter in order to save themselves from a complete fall and desolation by building together in brotherly love. In conclusion Thiessen expresses his confidence in the knowledge that there were many among the clergymen who realized that it was better to quickly clean the wounds that they could heal properly. As the alternative Thiessen mentions that he will have to proceed to publication as another means of promoting his cause.

In his *Mitteilungen*, Martin B. Fast also refers to the struggle between the landowners and the Anwohner. He mentions that finally men like Franz Isaac, who was his grandmother's brother, and Abraham Thiessen, whose niece he eventually married, stepped into the affair in order to aid the landless. Although his parents, Peter Fast, were later able to purchase the full farm and Feuerstelle of grandparents, Martin J. Barkmans in Rueckenau, they were also Anwohner during the 1860s, operating a treadmill and a windmill. Peter Fast became a so-called Anwohner Schulz and attempted to negotiate between the Anwohner and the landowners. To further the cause Peter Fast signed a petition which was to be sent to the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. However, the the petition somehow found its way to the Gebietsamt in Halbstadt which was very opposed to the land division. "Then father was hauled away and was to go into prison, but he pleaded for grace and had to promise he would not do this again, and was allowed to walk home by foot."

This illustrates the power that the forces of the *Oberschulz* could apply against those who dared to speak up. However, the whole affair was not without a humorous note. Martin B. Fast goes on to relate a light-hearted incident which came out of this otherwise very serious affair. "Shortly thereafter a mass assembly was called at the Gebietsamt office. Father did not go there but neighbour R. was there. When he returned in the evening he quickly came to our place - father was not home - and said, "Na Fasche, nu haw eck dem Harn Islawin oba mol got di Wohreheit gesagt!" i.e. Well Mrs. Fast, now I have really told Lord Islawin the truth about the whole affair." As a result mother became worried since father had already been in trouble. Then R. went on, "Na Fasche, sie ma ruhig, eck wea all an dise sid von de Wulfslegt aus eck doamet aunftung!" i.e. Do not be alarmed Mrs. Fast, for I was already on this side of the Wolfs hollow when I commenced to speak." Apparently it was about 14 werst from Halbstadt to Tiegerwiede and the "Wolfs Hollow" was about in the middle between the two villages."<sup>35</sup> Although humorous, this incident illustrates the trauma and tension caused by the landless dispute.

## 8.07 Conclusion of the Landless Battle

What was the final conclusion of the landless affair? In his article "**Abraham Thiessen: Men-**

**nonite Revolutionary?**", Dr. Cornelius Krahn points out that there seems to be some anomaly in terms of the final results of the mission of Abraham F. Thiessen. The material presented in this chapter indicates that the final settlement of the Land Commission was thwarted when Ettinger falsified documents and records so that it appeared as if he was complying with the 1866 Edict of the Czar, when in fact he had managed to hold back some 10,000 desyatines of land and a corresponding portion of the cheap labour force.<sup>36</sup> It was now a matter of deciding whether to accept this compromise or not. It seems that the majority of the landless who had received an allotment of land were now prepared to close their eyes to the plight of the others and to remain silent in the face of the continued deception.

However, Abraham F. Thiessen was not one of these. He worked mightily for the cause of his people. For his troubles he was called everything from an "atheist" to a "nihilist" by his enemies. In 1874 he was seized by the Russian secret police and banished to Siberia where he spent two years in the hell hole of a Russian prison camp. Through almost miraculous means Thiessen was able to bribe his way to freedom. Martin B. Fast who frequently worked as a labourer in Thiessen's enterprises in Janzen, Nebraska, provides the following intriguing glimpse of this escape: "At first Thiessen set out as a Russian mason. But as frequently as was necessary he changed his disguise and finally came to the border of the Austrian empire. Here he was cornered by the Russian secret police. But he had just enough time to change his disguise to that of an Austrian nobleman, and drank expensive wine with the secret agents, and escaped to Switzerland and finally to America."<sup>37</sup>

Thiessen now made his home settling in Jansen, Nebraska, among his family and friends. Here he again was a member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde which he loved so dearly, apparently coming to a repentance over the earlier difficulties he had occasioned for this group. He married for the second time to Anna Heidebrecht, the daughter of one of the leading Kleine Gemeinde families in Jansen. Three sons were born of this marriage. One of Thiessen's interests during the few peaceful years he was able to spend in Jansen, was the development of the silk industry which he commenced on his farm one-quarter mile west of the Town of Jansen. Apparently Thiessen became well informed about this industry.

Those readers who would like to dismiss Abraham F. Thiessen as some kind of radical, trashy riff-raff, should take note that the Thiessen family was one of the leading Kleine Gemeinde families in the Jansen settlement. Through the personality of brother John P. Thiessen the family was involved in many of the leading businesses in that community. These interests originally started in the field of lumber, implements, and hardware and later also extended to the Janzen State Bank where John P. Thiessen served for many years as the President.<sup>38</sup> Later when he was no longer directly associated with the Kleine Gemeinde, John P. Thiessen also served in the State House of Representatives as well as a State Senator. It is evident that the heritage of Abraham F. Thiessen is one of gifted and devoted men, ready to serve at the call of their communities.

But what was happening to the 297 landless families back in Russia? According to the information presented the racketeering of the Oberschulz and his henchmen was still going on even though a good chunk of the land had been wrested from their control. In the meantime literally hundreds of the oppressed brethren in Russia were writing to America begging Thiessen to come back to once more help them to obtain what was lawfully theirs. Dr. Cornelius Krahn has noted that in **Die Agrarwirren** Thiessen concluded his presentation on a very optimistic note. This time the wrong would be righted. The guilty ones would be brought to justice. The impoverished and oppressed would finally receive their land!

Regrettably this was not to be. Like the Kleine Gemeinde whose son he was, Abraham F. Thiessen had to find his ultimate victory in the face of defeat and extinction. Rundschau editor Martin B. Fast has recorded that "He (Abraham F. Thiessen) became a citizen of the United States. Shortly thereafter he planned to travel to Russia to bring these officials to justice. But soon no news was received and Uncle Sam found him in imprisonment. Thiessen was then slipped over the border without having been able to vindicate his cause, and came home to Jefferson County, Nebraska."<sup>39</sup> Here he died on his farm on May 7, 1889. He was buried near a mulberry hedge on his own farm. At the same time the issue of the Landless Mennonites in Russia was quietly forgotten.

## 8.08 Interpretation of the Landless Struggle

It is helpful to consider the significance of the landless struggle to the Russian Mennonites. The viewpoints of four major participating groups will be examined. These are, the Anabaptist-Mennonites,

the reactionary remnants of the Grosze Gemeinde, the mild cultural pietists and the radical separatist pietists.

Firstly, the Anabaptist Mennonites, represented in this study by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The evangelical teaching of community of property required that generous provision be made for the poor. Accordingly the Kleine Gemeinde set about to solve its own landless problem. Fortunately, the group had sufficient resources to be able to remedy this problem without appeal to the government or any outside party. Land was simply rented and later purchased and given or sold to those who needed it on terms which they could afford to pay. It seems that in spite of all the unrest and turmoil which existed at the time, the Kleine Gemeinde was largely successful in this regard. The success of this program was a strong testimony of the gospel to all in the Molotschna and served as a great encouragement to many.

However, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde could not be unaffected by the religious and socio-economic turmoil all around it. No doubt this contributed to the internal unrest in the Kleine Gemeinde which will be examined in a subsequent chapter. But there is no record that the Kleine Gemeinde ever formally placed its support behind the cause of the landless. It certainly was not contrary to Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings for them to have done so. Certainly the Kleine Gemeinde was not afraid to take a stand for social justice as it had demonstrated in the case of Anna Thiessen and with respect to the secessionists, to name two instances. Accordingly it must be concluded that only the internal difficulties which the Kleine Gemeinde was experiencing at this time prevented it from taking a more prominent stand on behalf of their oppressed brethren.

Nevertheless the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was involved in a more general way as many of the advocates of the downtrodden had originated from the group. This included men of peace such as Aeltester Johan Harder, and minister and advocate Franz Isaac, whose influence insured that a compromise solution would be achieved which provided a great measure of relief to the landless. Peter Fast, the father of M. B. Fast, is another example. Uppermost of course is Abraham F. Thiessen whose role has been considered at some length. Thiessen continued to promote the radical socio-economic teachings of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde but differed in his interpretation as to how far the individual or group should go to promote and advance the cause of that vision.

It stands to the everlasting good credit of the Kleine Gemeinde that even though it was itself beleaguered and embattled during these years, (struggling with a division and reorganization, the social and religious turbulence of the time, emigration and the pioneer settlement on the barren lands of the American west), that it produced sons who were prepared to further the cause of social justice in the spirit and tradition of the full gospel faith.

### **8.09 The View of the Cultural Pietist Mennonites**

Secondly, the role of the cultural Mennonites as represented by Oberschulz Friesen and his associates. It should be mentioned that the deception and deceit of this group in no way extended throughout the entire full farmer class. Abraham F. Thiessen himself states that "to the honour of his Mennonite Brethren he must mention that of those who have inherited their farms or who have acquired them by other legal means, not one has to date dirtied himself with such impure dealings."

The Oberschulz and his friends were in firm control of the Molotschna political and social institutions. Historian Franz Isaac in discussing the Ohrloff barley dispute, the Halbstadt church dispute, and the secession of the radical pietists, makes the point that the Oberschulz and his henchmen represented the reactionary forces of the Grosze Gemeinde once subjugated and put under control by the great Johan Cornies. Isaac goes on to state that with the death of Cornies in 1847 these forces again came to life and took hold of political power in the Molotschna Colony. They now dictated to the Gemeinden which together once had made up the Grosze Gemeinde.

Thus the despotism of Aeltester Jakob Enns, which had almost snuffed out the infant Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde as well as its leader Klaas Reimer some 50 years earlier, was now replaced by the despotism of Oberschulz Friesen. It should be mentioned that the designs of this group to some extent now also incorporated the strategies of Johan Cornies. i.e. That it is alright to pursue wealth, culture, or social and community advancement by any means. Cornies himself had provided an example in such situations as the banishment of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens, etc. The only difference here would be that in the case of Cornies many of his motives were in fact socially redeeming and badly needed community reforms. It seems that once this principle was accepted among the Russian Mennonites a dangerous precedent was set which would continue to haunt the community.

When the Oberschulz and his friends realized that total victory was beyond their grasp they showed themselves to be quite practical and capable of making the most out of their near defeat. They settled

for a compromise thus saving some 10,000 desjatines and a corresponding number of cheap and readily available servants for their cause. The numerous pictures of the elaborate mansions and embellished palaces of the members of this group which frequently find their way into books about the Russian Mennonites stand as mute testimony to the entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen of these individuals. Most of the actual palaces and mansions have long since been destroyed and obliterated so that no trace of this former grandeur remains.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites would see the machination of the forces of the Oberschulz as a direct result of the reaction of Aeltester Jakob Enns when Klaas Reimer reminded him of the basic principles of the faith. A similar response was given by Grosze Gemeinde Aeltester Jacob Warkentin when the Kleine Gemeinde published the **Foundation of Christian Doctrine** of Menno Simons. After these books had been transported to Russia, at great cost and effort, the Grosze Gemeinde openly worked against their sale among their members. Consequently, it cannot seem surprising when the sons and grandsons of these leaders had no ear for the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings during the "wars" in the Molotschna.

Thirdly, the position of the Orloff Gemeinde as representative of the mild mannered pietism which had entered the Mennonite fold through Johan Cornies during the 1820s. There is no doubt that once Orloff was rid of the frequently unconsidered and short-sighted leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast, it quickly became a leading force for the social and economic betterment of the Molotschna Mennonites. It has been noted that some of the leaders who led Orloff in this action were men whose judgment and socio-economic view was still to a large extent shaped by the Kleine Gemeinde roots. Very commendable is the view of Franz Isaac when he states as follows: "One is astonished and must ask - How is it possible that among the Mennonites again and again, the stronger party with the spiritual leadership at the helm; makes attacks on the weaker groups as if only they had a right to exist; seemingly without being in the least concerned that the Mennonites as a whole are only a tolerated group"<sup>47</sup> It was the same mild mannered pietist-Mennonitism which would swallow up the radical pietism of the 1860s through the sermons of evangelist Bernhard Harder. Under this more moderate pietism the Russian Mennonites would attain the peak of their pietist-cultural empire a few short decades later.

But by definition any form of pietism is generally conformable to the world, which was also the case here. When an opportunity to settle the landless dispute presented itself, leaders such as Franz Isaac were prepared to accept a half way compromise. Perhaps it was the wise thing to do for the sake of a battle-scarred Mennonite community. At least this way some 75 per cent of the landless could be helped to some extent and the community was saved the shame and disillusionment which would have resulted had part of its ruling socio-economic elite been exposed for what they were.

In any event the situation diffused itself within a few years. In 1871 the daughter colony Sagradowka was founded and many of the landless could be resettled there. In 1874 the land pressure was relieved for several years by the emigration of about one-third of the Russian Mennonite population. Here there was a new class which could be exploited. The unfortunate emigrants could be beaten down in price negotiations until the pickings were almost as good as the leasing of community lands for two kopeks per desjatine and renting out the same for five rubles per desjatine. Interestingly enough there is no record that there was ever any consideration given to purchasing the land of the departing emigrants from the monies in the community funds into which they had also contributed. Nor could the emigrants remain to appeal their case.

At the same time terrible privation was suffered in the new daughter settlements so that great poverty was experienced as a matter of course. Martin B. Fast, the editor of the Mennonite Rundschau, then a non-denominational paper, reports that during the course of his editorship (1903-1910), the readers of the Rundschau contributed over \$25,000.00 to be sent to Russia to aid the impoverished Mennonites on these new daughter settlements.<sup>48</sup> Even though these poor settlers initially lived in grinding poverty, the situation was defused, for now these settlers also had the hope of becoming rich which in fact many of them achieved very abundantly. It is evident therefore that the compromise reached in 1869 served to release a great deal of pressure on the part of the landless. The emancipation of the Russian slaves in 1861 also assured the Russian farmer of a good supply of cheap labour for his enterprises. Accordingly a good deal can be said in support of the compromise solution of the Orloff group.

Fourthly, the viewpoint of the separatist pietists.<sup>49</sup> As this movement was given birth during the landless affair, and at least in part as a direct consequence of the struggle, it is natural that the contribution of this group to the resolution thereof would be less prominent. At the same time they were undoubtedly very much aided by the work of such advocates as Franz Isaac and Abraham F. Thiessen.

In 1866 the Russian government granted free blocks of land in the Kuban to both the Mennonite

Brethren under the leadership of Johan Klassen and to the Friends of Jerusalem. As both groups were only barely tolerated by the majority in the Molotschna the provision of land grants was an act of mercy on the part of the Russian authorities. These free land grants provided many indigent members of the new pietist groups with the prospect of owning their own land as well as allowing them to escape the social stigmatization in the Molotschna where the new group had great difficulty being accepted. A high proportion of the latter group was also found in the Sagradowka settlement which was established in 1871 as the first Mennonite daughter colony to be founded through the fund which had been provided for in the 1869 land settlement compromise.

Much to the credit of the Mennonite Brethren church, the ministerial and many of the more prominent members filed a petition with the Minister of Crown Domains asking that the pleas of the poor not be overlooked and that the land already given by the Czar be utilized for the intended purpose.<sup>44</sup> But overall one senses that this group was perhaps more concerned about emulating the success of the Oberschulz and his friends than that any great injustice had occurred.

In view of the foregoing it is interesting to refer to the views of Peter M. Friesen regarding the landless affairs or lack thereof. For example, Franz Isaac is especially mentioned only in passing and then only with reference to the work of Isaac in educational matters. This in spite of the sacrifices and decade long work which Franz Isaac had devoted on behalf of the landless. In fact, Friesen did not deem it necessary to devote even a special sub-section in his one thousand page work to the landless dispute, and deals with the affair only in passing in a dozen or so references and footnotes.

### 8.10 Abraham F. Thiessen, Prophet and Reformer

Abraham F. Thiessen is one of the most significant figures to emerge from the struggle of the landless. As such it is helpful to consider his place in Russian Mennonite historiography. Dr. Cornelius Krahn has opened the door for a re-examination and reinterpretation of the role of this "prophet and fearless fighter" with his 1969 article in *Mennonite Life* entitled "Abraham F. Thiessen, Mennonite Revolutionary?". Dr. Krahn provides the following testimonials of Thiessen:

"Among the prophets and fearless fighters for the new dawn was A. Thiessen. No monument, book or significant article has thus far been devoted to his life. Even if we are not certain to what a degree he actually did influence the cause of justice and Christian love in a community that had almost forgotten what this ingredient was, Thiessen belonged to the few who fought uncompromisingly, suffered and was arrested, imprisoned, and exiled because some branch of the Tsarist government found them uncomfortable to say the least. It was not by accident that A. Thiessen established his home near Jansen, Nebraska, named after Cornelius Jansen, who was 'exiled by the Tsar' because he was enticing Mennonites to migrate to America.' This accusation is also found in the records pertaining to A. Thiessen. He, however denied this and wanted to be considered a champion for justice."<sup>45</sup>

In fact Abraham F. Thiessen was the only champion of the downtrodden and oppressed who was not prepared to compromise and settle for a half truth or for half of what the Czar had made provision for. This prophetic insistence on social justice cost Thiessen a great deal, in fact it cost him everything. It could be said that Thiessen devoted his life and heart for the fate of the landless Mennonites in Russia.

In stark contrast, the most prominent Russian Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen does not even credit Thiessen for having a "deep and honest piety and the genuine sincerity of his convictions" which is how he describes other advocates of emigration such as Leonard Suderman, and consul Cornelius Jansen, who appear to have had some pietist leanings. In fact Peter M. Friesen has the following to say about Abraham F. Thiessen: "In a similar way, the emigration was zealously and fanatically propagandized by Abram Thiessen from Neu-Halbstadt in Schoenau who was philosophically a complete stranger to the men just mentioned. Thiessen was a man of great capabilities, but had fallen away from Christianity entirely. He was a child of the "Kleine Gemeinde" which, because of its severe orthodoxy (excommunication and expulsion with the severest consequences because of a love offering for the Bible Society - factum est) had driven him into atheism and materialism. The "Kleine Gemeinde" was later demolished largely by him so that no trace of her is left either in Molotschna or all of Russia."<sup>46</sup>

In a footnote Peter M. Friesen continues stating that Abraham F. Thiessen was "well-known as an extremely strong representative of the landless. His vehement and inconsiderate work in opposition to Totleben (in which he used the Czar's name incorrectly) was brought to Totleben's attention by Thiessen's local political opponents. Totleben was responsible for Thiessen's administrative deportation into the province of Kaluga from where the latter eventually fled and went to America. In 1887 he returned as an American citizen, started his defense of the landless again and, after another

denunciation, had to leave Russia.”<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note further that Dr. Cornelius Krahn had the following to say about the analysis of Peter M. Friesen:

“Reference should be made to another source of information. P. M. Friesen speaks of A. Thiessen as a resident of Neu-Halbstadt and as a well-known promoter of the cause of the landless Mennonites. He also states that he was a man of great talent and a child of the Kleine Gemeinde which banned him because he had made a financial contribution to a Bible Society. This treatment according to Friesen drove him to atheism and materialism and to the destruction of the Kleine Gemeinde, of which neither branch nor stump remained in Russia. He relates that Thiessen fanatically promoted the migration to America and that he had severed all relationships to Christianity.”

“This statement would almost indicate that the “well-known” Thiessen was not too well known to P. M. Friesen who was otherwise quite well informed. It is such statements as Thiessen’s “fanatical promotion” of the migration to America and his alienation from Christianity that do not seem to find verification in other sources. That he destroyed the Kleine Gemeinde is not correct because it continued to exist in Canada, Nebraska and Kansas. In fact Thiessen lived near the Kleine Gemeinde community of Jansen, Nebraska, for the rest of his life. If there was any primary cause which Thiessen lived for, it was the fate of the landless Mennonites in Russia.”<sup>48</sup>

It is sad to see the unfounded statements of Peter M. Friesen accepted in published history. One would have expected that the separatist pietist groups would have appreciated the help which the other groups extended, notwithstanding that their avowed objective invariably was the destruction of the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups as well as the main-line Grosze Gemeinde groups. Instead a man who has devoted his life for the cause, when he could have made a very comfortable living given the talents and abilities he had, is heaped with scorn. What is even more regrettable is that so many thousands of readers of Peter M. Friesen’s work have been completely misled by his unfounded accusations. Statements such as the one made about Thiessen seem to raise serious doubts about the objectivity and methodology of Peter M. Friesen’s views with respect to any group other than his own. Because of the importance of his work to Russian-Mennonite historiography and to the question of the landless affair it is necessary to analyze the charges of Peter M. Friesen point by point.

The first charge of Peter M. Friesen is that Thiessen was driven to atheism and that he had fallen away completely from Christianity. Dr. Cornelius Krahn has already pointed out the anomaly of this charge. In addition it is well known that although Abraham F. Thiessen was excommunicated for good cause in 1866 he was later reaccepted as a member of the Kleine Gemeinde. Dr. Krahn also advises that Abraham F. Thiessen was a member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska. He has this unequivocal information from the sons of Abraham F. Thiessen.<sup>49</sup> In view of what is written in this book regarding the Kleine Gemeinde one thing can be said with all certainty, namely, that no atheist could have remained as a member of the Kleine Gemeinde.

The second charge of Peter M. Friesen is that Thiessen had been excommunicated from the Kleine Gemeinde because he had made a love offering to a Bible Society. To this statement Peter M. Friesen has majestically suspended the latin phrase *factum est* meaning the fact has been proven or established, as if this would somehow make the statement true. Let us consider the facts. Firstly, many sources clearly show that Abraham F. Thiessen was excommunicated for having mistreated his servants as was common among the Russian Mennonites but which was not tolerated among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Numerous former members of the Kleine Gemeinde were still alive and resident in Russia when Friesen published his work in 1911. Any former member of the Kleine Gemeinde would have known the details of the Thiessen case because it occasioned such grief in the Gemeinde. Failing all else Peter M. Friesen could surely have ascertained his facts by writing a letter to America or by asking any one of a number of former Kleine Gemeinder such as David Loewen or Martin B. Fast who returned to Russia for a visit. There would appear to be little excuse for a misstatement of fact such as this.

With respect to the ridiculous charge and insinuation that the Kleine Gemeinde would expel someone for making a love offering to a Bible Society, the reader is asked to refer to the chapter on books and publications in **The Golden Years** where actual correspondence is reproduced showing that the Kleine Gemeinde was selling Bibles for the Evangelical Bible Society in St. Petersburg. It is also evident that the two organizations had a long and loving association with each other, in cooperation in the work of spreading the gospel through the dissemination of Bibles and other sacred books.<sup>50</sup> Here again the reader must consider the evidence and decide for himself if the charges of Peter M. Friesen are worthy of comment. It must be noted that the reporting of such facts, *factum est.*, to

the Russian Mennonites and other Christians who read the book in good faith, certainly has given thousands of people a very misleading impression of the Kleine Gemeinde.

The third charge of Peter M. Friesen is that Thiessen demolished the Kleine Gemeinde. This is one of the oddest statements made by Peter M. Friesen for as Dr. Cornelius Krahn has pointed out the Kleine Gemeinde very much existed in America. By 1906 the Kleine Gemeinde in America had a total membership of over one thousand members among its three congregations. Nebraska 650<sup>51</sup>, and over 400 in Manitoba.<sup>52</sup> (East Reserve and Scratching River). In fact the Gemeinde Account Book of the Blumenort district shows that in the years 1907 and 1909 this one branch of the Kleine Gemeinde (which did not exist according to Peter M. Friesen) sent \$133.00 for the starving people in Russia. Quite a remarkable feat for an organization which has been demolished. The other four deacon districts no doubt made similar or even greater contributions. In addition members of the Kleine Gemeinde as individuals were helping their poorer and impoverished brethren in Russia by contributing to funds such as those run by Martin B. Fast through the Rundschau, and also by helping relatives and friends in Russia by direct contributions and other assistance.<sup>53</sup>

The fourth charge made by Peter M. Friesen is that made against Abraham F. Thiessen personally. Hopefully enough extracts of the writings of Thiessen have been included so that the reader can decide for himself whether Thiessen had "a deep and honest piety and the genuine sincerity of his convictions." Obviously little else can be said at this point because all the principles of the affair who knew Thiessen personally are long since deceased. Similarly the further charge of Peter M. Friesen that Thiessen was inconsiderate in his dealings with Totleben and that Thiessen was banished for having used the name of the Czar incorrectly, hardly seems plausible. It is evident that Thiessen was welcome in the highest offices of Russia and that he was able to converse in Russian, although not perfectly, with Ministers and other eminent officials of the Czar. It simply does not seem plausible that such an experienced advocate and delegate who had made numerous journeys to St. Petersburg and had travelled elsewhere in Russia would jeopardize his case by cursing the Czar just when victory in his case appeared eminent.

In *Die Agrarwirren* Thiessen refers to a certain Harder, who had already spent three years in confinement, who in a drunken stupor had spoken terribly about the Czar and perhaps this is the incident with which Peter M. Friesen is confused here.<sup>54</sup> It is rather certain that Abraham F. Thiessen knew exactly how to proceed as the advocate of his cause and it is absurd to suggest that he would have himself thrown into a concentration camp for something silly like misusing the name of the Czar.

In fact it is noteworthy that throughout all of Thiessen's writings he never points his finger at the Czar as being the cause of either the landless problem or the emigration. Always, always, when Thiessen is criticizing the policies of the Russian administration he makes sure to point out that the fault is on the lower officialdom who are misleading and misinforming the Czar. Otherwise the books of Thiessen would certainly not have passed the Russian censors who were very strict.

But of course Peter M. Friesen has not referred to the three books written by Abraham F. Thiessen in any event and so this information would not have helped him in making a more correct assessment of Thiessen. Compared to all this speculation, Thiessen's own explanation that he was denounced to the lower Russian officialdom by his political opponents certainly seems to be the most logical cause of his banishment to Siberia.

## 8.11 Conclusion

It seems that the role of Thiessen in the landless issue can be compared to that of Aeltester Klaas Reimer with respect to the moral and spiritual decline of the Grosze Gemeinde some 50 years earlier. If there are some facts in the history of the community which cannot be admitted without also conceding that something was rotten in the community, then simply assassinate the character of the individual who dares to speak out by innuendo and implication. In the case of Klaas Reimer the entire reason for the establishment and existence of the Kleine Gemeinde loses its underlying foundation if the principal character Klaas Reimer can be maligned as having been a stubborn and self righteous eccentric. For then the facts of the matter can safely be ignored and the integrity of the Molotschna Mennonites preserved.

Similarly in the case of Abraham F. Thiessen. If he can be maligned as an atheist and some kind of Russian revolutionary, then it can presumably also be believed that Thiessen was simply on a campaign to embarrass the Molotschna Mennonites as he had once embarrassed his Kleine Gemeinde. Consequently Thiessen can safely be dismissed as a radical and extremist whose work is not at all relevant so that the integrity of the Molotschna Mennonites can again be preserved as a superior



culture and elitist society.

The answer to these puzzles are crucial to the readers' understanding of Russian Mennonite history and of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in particular. The readers' perception of the "conflicts" in the Molotschna will depend entirely on the sources which he will chose to believe. The material presented in this section provides additional information from a viewpoint which has received only little attention.

#### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER EIGHT. THE LANDLESS STRUGGLE

1. Dr. David G. Rempel, *The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia, 1789-1914* (Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1933), 184.
2. *Ibid*, 187.
3. *Ibid*, 181.
4. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 32.
5. David G. Rempel, op. cit., 182.
6. H. Goertz, op. cit., 111.
7. *Ibid*.
8. D. G. Rempel, op. cit., 185.
9. *Ibid*, 186.
10. C. Krahn "Philipp Wiebe" ME 4, 146-947.
11. C. Krahn "Peter Schmidt", ME 4, 467.
12. D. G. Rempel, op. cit., 186.
13. *Ibid*, 188.
14. *Ibid*, 189.
15. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 29-30.
16. D. G. Rempel, op. cit., 190.
17. F. Isaac, op. cit., 31.
18. D. G. Rempel, op. cit., 191-192.
19. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 53.
20. D. G. Rempel, op. cit., 194.
21. *Ibid*, 195.
22. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 80.
23. *Ibid*, 84-85.
24. Peter Isaac, op. cit., 7.
25. Cornelius Krahn "Abraham Thiessen: A Mennonite Revolutionary?" in *Mennonite Life*; Volume XDIV, Number 2, April 1969, 73-82.
26. Abraham F. Thiessen, *Die Agrarwirren*, op. cit., 7-11.
27. *Ibid*, 5-6.
28. *Ibid*, 18.
29. Cornelius Krahn, "Abraham Thiessen, Mennonite Revolutionary?" op. cit., 73.
30. Abraham F. Thiessen, *Ein Brief*, op. cit., 14.
31. *Ibid*, 17-18.
32. *Ibid*, 20.
33. *Ibid*, 20-21.
34. *Ibid*, 21-22.
35. M. B. Fast, op. cit., 63-64.
36. C. Krahn "Abraham Thiessen" op. cit., 77.
37. M. B. Fast, op. cit., 15.
38. *Ibid*, 41.
39. *Ibid*, 15.
40. Abraham F. Thiessen, *Agrarwirren*, op. cit., 4.
41. Franz Isaac, op. cit., 41.
42. M. B. Fast, op. cit., 65.
43. The point has been made that after a few decades this group was largely absorbed by the milder and earlier 1820s form of pietism. Nevertheless, the largest group, the Mennonite Brethren church, always preserved a somewhat more emotional and baptist style of thinking even though in most other respects it very much resembled its older sister, the Kirchliche. The latter in turn represented the union of the old-line Gemeinden in an Orloff form of mild pietist-cultural Mennonitism.
44. Abraham F. Thiessen, *Agrarwirren*, op. cit., 13.
45. Cornelius Krahn "Abraham Thiessen, Mennonite Revolutionary?" op. cit. 77.
46. P. M. Friesen, op. cit., 591.
47. *Ibid*, 1027.
48. Cornelius Krahn, "Abraham Thiessen," *Ibid*, 76-77.
49. *Ibid*, 76.
50. *The Golden Years*, op. cit., 328-329.
51. M. B. Fast, op. cit., 47.
52. Johan W. Dueck, *Historie und Begebenheiten*. Unpublished manuscript Courtesy Mennonite Heritage, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
53. Deacons Account Book, unpublished Ledger, Courtesy Prairie Rose Evangelical Mennonite Church.
54. *Ibid*, 6.

# *Part Three.*

## *Expansion And Fall Of The Kleine Gemeinde 1850-1871*

### **Chapter Nine.**

#### **Book Two 1850-1866**

##### **9.00 Introduction**

The period 1850-1871 was marked by tremendous material and physical growth in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, and came to a crisis with the lamentable and yet fortuitous schism of 1866. The subsequent years from 1866-1871 were a time of soul searching and regrouping for the entire community.

Frequent reference has been made to Aeltester Peter Toews as one of the leading historians of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. His **Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Mennoniten Kleinen Gemeinde** serves as a benchmark for the study of this group'. This work holds particular value for the years 1850-1866 since it fell within the ambit of his personal recollections. Because of the time demands of his office this was also the last period for which Aeltester Toews was able to complete a concise history of his beloved Gemeinde. This portion of the *Sammlung* was simply titled as **Das Zweites Buch** as opposed to **Das Erstes Buch** which dealt with the years 1812-1849. So this chapter is entitled **Book Two** (or **Das Zweites Buch**) as a tribute to the historical work of Aeltester Toews.

This chapter in the main, consists of a translation of **Das Zweites Buch** which has been organized into sections. Brief introductory comments have been added to the documents to provide clarification where necessary. These comments will be identified by reference to the translator so as to avoid confusion as to authorship. The writings which Toews himself has collected for his *Sammlung* will be identified as such. Several items from **Das Zweites Buch** have already been reproduced in Part Two of this volume and will not be repeated here. The same will be identified though in their proper chronological sequence in order that the reader may review the material in its original context.

##### **9.01 Foreward by Aeltester Peter Toews**

"A collection of written advisements pertaining to the history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, from the year 1849 to the year 1866 when the Gemeinde divided. Collected and composed into a history by P. Toews in Blumenhoff in the years 1872 and 1873.

Was dir gefaellt das lass auch mir,  
O meiner Sonn und Zier,  
Gefallen und belieben  
Was dir zuwider lass mich nicht,  
In Werk und That verueben.

If it pleases thee, then let it be,  
The sun and glory of my soul,  
Adorning and beloved;  
That which offends you, let me not,  
Commit by work or Deed.

Ists Werk von dir so hilf zum Glueck,  
Ists Menschen Thun, so treibs zurueck,  
und aendre meine Sinnen;  
Was du nich werkst pflegt von ihm selbst,  
Im kurzen zu zerrinnen.

Is the work of thee, then grant success,  
If only human, then drive it back,  
And grant me change of heart;  
What is not from you, will of itself,  
Vanish in a time.

"If you dear reader now have before you a second book with the title, "Collection of written advisements concerning the history or record of the Kleine Gemeinde," the same will in fact live up to the name. i.e. The book will be only a collection of letters and written reports with the exception that here and there a comment will be added as a footnote for the purpose of explanation and clarification.

"Should one or the other of the readers perchance, wish to object and say that it would have been better if the writings dealing with the disputes and separation of the Gemeinde had not been collected, let them consider that in that case our history would not have been impartial. For in the final end one person would have preserved some writings, and someone else would have preserved

other writings. It will therefore be better that all the writings be properly and consecutively compiled into one collection.

"Moreover, may the reader prove what is written without bias and remember the good. May he accept the good as an example for goodness, and the evil as an earnest warning. May the precious reader also understand that by making unconsidered judgements he may come to incorrectly understand one or another matter. It would be impossible for anyone, especially for those unfamiliar with these events, to come to a full realization of these occurrences and dissensions together with all their related circumstances. Nor will there be sufficient details in this collection to allow the reader to acquire the correct conception of all the events dealt with.

"The first matter considered in this book, namely, the incident involving Peter Thiessen, as well as many other details and annotations, including the registers of the ministerial elections have been taken from the diary of minister Johan Dueck (1801-1866) who died at a time corresponding to the close of this book in the year 1866. Otherwise the material for this book has been collected largely from the papers of grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) and the papers of my father Johan Toews (1793-1873).

## 9.02 Ministerial Elections and other events, 1850-1855

"In the first book of this history we concluded the account of the Kleine Gemeinde with the calling of the new Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872) and with the death of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) in the year 1849. We will commence from where we left off in order to continue our work coherently and impartially in so far as is possible. Thus we begin in the year 1849 with the election of Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872). Also at the close of the first book we had already found that a minister election was held where Johann Dueck (1801-1866), of Muntau, was elected with a majority of 62 votes. The same preached his first sermon on July 24, 1849, in the village of Ruekenau.

"The new Aeltester immediately had to battle against strong opposition from the minister Peter Thiessen (1808-1873), from Schoenau, so that the Gemeinde felt itself compelled to hold a brotherhood meeting on his account on December 11, in Ruekenau. On December 25, Thiessen read a written declaration to the brethren regarding his conflict with the Gemeinde. The fruits that came from this address can be seen from the fact that already on December 26, Thiessen was removed from his office by the unanimous vote of the brotherhood which had gathered in Schoenau. I cannot share with the reader the contents of this written declaration, but from what has been related by those brethren who were in attendance and took part in this occurrence, it appears that he was not of one mind with the Aeltester and that he withstood the Gemeinde as well as the Aeltester.

"We quietly pass over the year 1850 except to note that the above mentioned Thiessen carried matters so far that he was voted out of the Gemeinde (July 16). Similarly one could mention a number of other individuals who for various reasons were separated from the Gemeinde and later were again re-accepted. However it would take up too much space if we were to deal with every case in detail. Therefore we will pass over many such incidents and as much as possible present to the reader only such material which is necessary for the cohesiveness of the history and account of the Gemeinde. It is noteworthy also that a Minister from Prussia, a certain Wall from Schoensee, preached the Word in the Gemeinde on September 10, 1850, from the text, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

"**Deacon and Ministerial Election on October 11, 1851.** First a deacon from among the brethren. The votes were cast as follows: Klaas Friesen, Neukirch, 25; Gerhard Kornelsen, Lichtenau, 15; Peter Friesen, Tiede, 12; Jakob Friesen, Blumstein, 11; Peter Friesen, Marianthal, 9; Kornelius Janzen, Neukirch, 8; Klaas Friesen, Lindenau, 3; Abraham Friesen, Rueckenau, 2; Jacob Wiebe, Schoenau, 2; Kornelius Doerksen, Alexanderthal, 1; Kornelius Doerksen, Junior, Alexanderthal, 1; Peter Heidebrecht, Blumstein, 1. A minister was then elected from the three deacons now available. The votes cast were as follows: Heinrich Enns, Fischau, 52; Klaas Reimer, Tiede, 7; Klaas Friesen, Neukirch, 32. Ninety-one brethren took part in this election. Heinrich Enns preached for the first time on November 11, 1851.

**Removal from office and deacon election, 1852.** "As a consequence of incorrect accounts on the part of deacon Klaas F. Reimer (1812-1874) the ministerial was called together at the home of Rev. Heinrich Enns, in Fischau, and brotherhood meetings dealing with the matter were held on January 27 and February 3. Consequently Klaas F. Reimer was removed from his office on February 10, 1852. **Deacon election, October 26, 1852** (to replace the resulting vacancy). The votes were cast as follows: Jakob Friesen, Blumstein, 29; Gerhard Kornelsen, Lichtenau, 16; Peter Friesen, Tiede, 14; Klaas Friesen, Paulsheim, 13; Kornelius Janzen, Neukirch, 9; Isaac Loewen, Schoenau, 2; Jakob Wiebe, Schoenau, 2; Abraham Friesen, Rueckenau, 2. This election was held with 87 brethren present. Eleven brethren were missing of the total of 98.

**Collection for Relief.** On January 27, 1852, it was decided to make a collection for the Holzsteinische Gemeinde which had been impoverished because of the war.

As was the case in the first book, it is again my intention to present for the history of the Gemeinde only written reports, and to select only such reports as were issued by the ministerial and which were in writing. Accordingly I shall pass over the year 1853 and from the year 1854 I will note only that pursuant to a request by the Gebietsamt, the Gemeinde consented to a voluntary collection for the nursing care of wounded soldiers (January 10). After the end of the war in 1855, our Gemeinde as well as all other Gemeinden, received a writing from his Majesty through the Fuersorge Committee.

expressing a heartfelt thank you for the care of the wounded soldiers. This letter of appreciation is included in the letter collection of the Gemeinde, which I gave over to Johan K. Friesen, Rosenhof near Morris, Manitoba.

### 9:03 Opinion Regarding the *Mennonitische Blaetter*, 1855

(Translators comment. D. Plett.) The first document included in **Book Two** is a noteworthy reminder of the ever increasing spiritual and theological differences between the pietist-cultural Mennonites in Prussia and Russia and the committed Anabaptist-Mennonite groups such as the Kleinen Gemeinde. In 1854 Jakob Mannhardt (1801-1885) of Danzig established the first German Mennonite periodical called the *Mennonitische Blaetter*. His stated goal was to "bring about a closer community among our congregations, to awaken or revive the consciousness that we belong together and of our brotherhood on a basis of faith and work and to lead to deeper bonds of union, and help to cultivate and promote the kingdom of God and its concerns everywhere in our churches"<sup>2</sup>.

It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde had originally endorsed the periodical but that they withdrew their approval only about a year later. Notwithstanding the beautifully expressed objectives of the *Mennonitische Blaetter* it appears that "the closer community" and "revival of consciousness" was actually meant to refer to a new community and kingdom of God based on tenets of the Protestant Reformers and of pietism and not on the teachings of Menno Simons. Through this "letter of opinion regarding the *Mennonitische Blaetter*" the Kleinen Gemeinde again demonstrates that it is prepared to stand firmly on the teachings of their faith. They feel that it is not necessary for them to support a periodical which does not actively promote the faith and which in some respects actually attacks and challenges the teachings of the gospel. Also worthy of note is the firm desire of the Kleine Gemeinde to spread and promote their faith demonstrated in this instance by the forwarding of relevant extracts from the writings of Menno Simons. Aeltester Toews has not indicated whether this mission effort would bear any fruit. End of translator's comment.

#### "Opinion Regarding the *Mennonitische Blaetter*, 1855

Worthy Friend Martens. You have provided to us the so-called Mennoniten Blaetter which according to their claim are to serve for our edification, but as we do not find anything therein which is constructive for us, I had requested that brother K.B. notify you of the decision that we did not wish to receive anymore of these Blaettern. Shortly thereafter I learnt from Brandt that you were unwilling to accept our verbal cancellation and much more that you desired to have our written explanation with the reasons for our decision, which I am also quite prepared to provide. Particularly because Peter in his first epistle also says: "Always be ready to answer to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you". 1 Peter 3:15

"The Dear Saviour says "Many will go out in my name and say "Lo here is Christ, etc.", according to Matthew 24:23-24 and Luke 17. But even as many claim to be Christ yet only bear the name of Christ, so also there are at the present time many who call themselves Mennonites, but who no longer have any real knowledge of the true fundamentals of the first Mennonites. Nor do they want to have such knowledge.

"This is also the situation with the publisher of these Blaetter. I suppose that according to his name he is a Mennonite, but in his writings he uses only loosely embellished words. Yes, one would have to say beautifully appareled words. But in his writings one cannot in any way find the true foundation of the beloved Saviour and his Apostles, nor of the teachings of Menno Simons.

"The beloved gentleman is either no longer acquainted with the fundamentals (of the faith) or he is one of those who goes about with deceitful words to put at naught the fundamentals of the Mennonites; For even if the people retain the outward appearance, i.e. the name as he does - otherwise he would not call his publication the *Mennonitenblaetter*, they take a position directly contrary to the teachings of Menno. At least in so far as we are familiar with these teachings, we consider it to be against the very own words of Menno Simons himself. We find the Blaetter to contain a completely foreign voice, and the dear Saviour says of his sheep that they are not to follow the voice of a stranger and rather are to flee from such a voice, John 10:8.

"We are also warned by Solomon the preacher, when he says: "In addition my son, be aware of other books, for with the making of books there is no end," particularly if such books do not remain entirely within the teachings of Christ. John says "He who transgresses and does not remain within the doctrine of Christ, has no God. But whoever remains in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the father and the son"; and further, "If someone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house neither greet him, for he who greets him, makes of himself a participant of the evil deeds" 2 John 9-11.

"I do indeed speak somewhat freely here in saying that the *Blaetter* stand in contradiction of the fundamentals of the apostles and Menno. But how must I, or how can I express myself otherwise about the matter? The Lord Jesus also says: "Whoever is not for me is against me" or "Whoever gathers not with me, scatters abroad". Thus it appears to be with these writings and the viewpoint expressed therein. The first zeal and fundamental beliefs of Menno have been very much erased among

those who still call themselves by his name. Therefore such writings, which still carry in them an appearance of Godly living, but which deny the might of these teachings, will disperse those that remain.

“In order that you, beloved Ohm Martens, would compare the view of the **Blaetter** with the view of Menno and prove for yourself as to whether I have here not correctly described the situation, we have transcribed the enclosed package of pages from the **Foundation Book** of Menno which we wish to present to you. In these extracts Menno very much distinguishes between the ministers and those who did not carry out their office in the real sense of the gospel. We in our Gemeinde are convinced that Menno here has taught very correctly.

“Accordingly we do not willingly wish to allow ourselves to be distracted from our goal by something foreign to us. Rather, we wish and do make supplication to God that he would more and more want to establish us in the truth which we have once accepted. For this reason I have been so open with you in refusing these **Blaetter**. Namely, that we do not wish to be any participants in the same. I could also have written at greater length regarding this matter, but it is not always beneficial nor would it necessarily improve matters. Perhaps we will shortly also have occasion to discuss these matters in person.

Neukirch, 1855.

With friendly greetings, I remain,  
your friend, Johan Friesen

“Comment by Peter Toews. How fitting that the correct assessment is expressed here that the dear gentleman does not wish to know anything about the fundamental beliefs of the first Mennonites. He reveals this with his own words in the *Mennonitische Blaetter* (1872. No. 9) when he says: “When serving in the medical Corps or as a train worker in times of war, if we are summoned to take up arms against the enemy forces in order to protect the sick and wounded, or to take care of the goods belonging to our fighting brothers entrusted to us, we would thereby only fulfill our Christian duty and our conscience and could have no reason to be disturbed thereby, even though the defense of the sick, wounded, or necessary provisions could not be carried out without killings, etc.”. Thus it is written in the **Mennonitischen Blaetter**. It is not stated whether he himself has written these words. When considering such a denial of the gospel on the part of one who shares our Confession of Faith, who would not be reminded of the words in 2 Peter 2: 18-22, yes, even see them as a sterner warning to his soul, when those guilty of perjury, support their denial of the faith, with the words of the beloved and absolutely nonresistant Menno. Oh let us be warned for the false swearers will not inherit the Kingdom of God, Malachi 3:5.

#### 9.04 A Reply To Switzerland, 1855

**Translator's comment.** **A Reply to Switzerland** is the most important document preserved in the **Second Book**. This lengthy epistle again underlines the outward mindedness of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde. This outlook was much in evidence in the Russian *Kleine Gemeinde* as can be seen from its wide theological base founded upon all the historical streams of the Anabaptist Mennonites. The 1848 **Epistle to the Hutterian Brethren** also evidences the *Kleine Gemeinde* affinity to that group.

The *Kleine Gemeinde* interest in the Swiss and South German Anabaptist-Mennonites is of special note because of the similarities between the faith and theology of the two groups. The Swiss Mennonites were not granted full religious tolerance until 1814<sup>4</sup> and it is said that the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith is strongest in the face of persecution. This appears to explain why the Swiss and American Mennonite churches in general continued in the normative Anabaptist-Mennonite stream for most of the 19th century. In contrast only little remained of these teachings in Russia after the emigration of the mainline Anabaptist-Mennonite groups during the 1870s. The revolution and Stalin purges resulted in a renewal of faith in the Mennonite Church of the Soviet Union.

The **Reply to Switzerland** is equally important as a vivid self portrait of the *Kleine Gemeinde* as of 1855. By briefly describing itself for the benefit of Ohm Nuszbaum the Russian *Kleinen Gemeinde* has provided an intimate self appraisal for posterity. The reader is informed that the *Kleine Gemeinde* had separated some 35 years earlier in order to once more renew the covenant with God. In human weakness but with divine assistance this little flock has preserved thus far. All courage would fail were it not for the comforting words of the Lord when he says “my strength is powerful in the weak”. No effort is made to blame the fallen conditions of the Russian Mennonite world in 1855 on other groups. The *Kleine Gemeinde* assumes its share of responsibility and will also have to account for the adversity which deviation from the faith has wrought in the form of the Crimean War. Above all, **A Reply to Switzerland** is an invaluable look at some of the teachings and internal practices of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde*. Translator's comment D. Plett.

**A Reply to Switzerland.** A writing to David Nuszbaum, of Lagaht from the Subatz Gemeinde, in the Swiss Canton of Bern, and in the District Jurisdiction of Muenster.

**Worthy Friend David Nuszbaum.**

“Quite unexpectedly, a letter from you written on the 25th day of January of this year, came

to our hand. This writing was addressed to the Mennonites living in Southern Russia of whom you had received a report which had been sent to you a number of years ago. Immediately upon the receipt of this letter we composed our reply. Because of the disturbances caused by the war here and our consequent concern that it would not reach its destination, the same was not sent away. Now that the mentioned war has ended - Thanks be to God - we shall try to see to it that this letter which we had already prepared a year and a half ago, shall come to you. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. The above mentioned war lasted from 1853 to 1855 in the Crimea, when Russia fought against the three allied powers, namely, Turkey, England and France. Many a dear reader will still have those turbulent times in memory. At the same time, they will also recognize that our people (and we included), had gone too far in yielding to the demands of the State, namely, in regards to the Podwodden. i.e. Providing drivers and vehicles.)

"We are indeed quite unacquainted with each other, both in body and in spirit. But, through the reading of your letter, we felt within us a duty to at least attempt to return a few lines to you. Particularly since we note from your letter that you are concerned as to whether we will not possibly lose the freedoms which have become ours. Your letter also speaks of nonresistance, and of not bearing arms. This is a great comfort to us and a strengthening for all who still seek to live in the truth, that is to say, truth according to the Word of God. We must admit that we greatly rejoice, as John says in his epistle, that we have been able to find those who still confess to this truth of nonresistance. Yes, and even more as we are commanded in 2 John verse 4, that we have been able to find those who still live out this truth, on account of which we also say together with Paul in his letter to the Colossians: "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you; Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints".

"As you wish to learn something about our circumstances, we will report as to a few particulars thereof in our reply. Firstly, with respect to our freedom from military service which we enjoy and have enjoyed here. Until now we have had no reason for complaint. The taxes which we must pay to the Crown are payable partially on the basis of acreage and partially on the basis of the number of individuals. As you have heard, thanks be to our gracious Monarch, Lord and Czar, these taxes are very moderate. (Comment by Aeltester Toews. The taxes levied on the Mennonites in Russia were 15 kopeks for each desjateine, and two rubles for every soul between the ages of 14 to 60, and in certain situations also a little more or somewhat less.)

"We cannot know what the war and all the great uprisings will bring with them in the future. Should something arise which would be adverse for us, we would still have to confess that by our deviation from the fundamentals of our faith we have brought this adversity upon ourselves. May the God of love through his grace continue to protect us from such an event in the future. For this reason we also feel that it is our highest obligation to beseech our beloved God, for the well-being of the gracious Father of our land, that he would redeem him from all his enemies and grant him peace, in order that we, as you say in your letter, "might also have peace within their peace".

"Further, we report to you briefly regarding our region. We perceive from your writing that you understand that we are living in Southern Russia. Russia is divided into certain parts called Governmental Districts (Provinces). If we understand it correctly then these districts are called Cantons in Switzerland. The Government Districts (Provinces) are further divided into Kreise (Districts) and Bezirke or Gebiete (Municipalities or Counties). We are living in the Government (or Province) of Taurien - to which the Crimean peninsula also belongs - in the Berdjanschen Kreise, on the left side of a river called the Molotschna. Consequently the area here is called the Molotschna Mennonite Gebiet.

"(Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. The dear reader will surely find it of interest - as either they themselves or at least their parents will have lived in the region - to have included here a brief description of the area. The name of the river Molotschna translated from Russian means "milk river" and the general area also lived up to its name. The region along the whole length of the river was very beautiful, as in the Biblical promise "where milk and honey flows". Unfortunately our people forgot to give the glory for such a blessing to the one to whom it was due. Already from the beginning here the question set out in James, Chapter 4, verses 1-4 could legitimately be asked of our people).

"The first three places mentioned in your letter, namely, Chortitz, Kronsweide, and Krongarten, are located in the adjacent Government District of Jekaterinoslav, which is named after the City of Jekaterinoslav. The other places which you have mentioned, namely, Lichtenau, Petershagen, Schoensee, Morgenau, Pordenau, Orloff, Rudnerwiede, Alexanderwohl, and Gnadenfeld, are all located in the Molotschnaer Mennonite Bezirk. (The surface area of the Molotschnaer Bezirk measures some 123,240 desjaten. **Geschichte der Mennoniten.**) The places mentioned are the names of villages where the church buildings (houses of prayer) are found. Also among this series of places which you have mentioned is the name Molotschna. This is not the name of any particular place in our Bezirk. Rather it is the name of the main river on which we live. However there is a village by the name of Molotschna on the right side of this river, but, with whom we are not related in our confession of faith. They are called the Molotschna colonists and we are called the Molotschna Mennonites.

Furthermore, those living in the last three places you have mentioned, namely, Karolswalde, Antonaffka, and Magnofka, are north of us and much further into the interior, and of whom we know only little. However during the emigration from Prussia to Russia some of our settlers had travelled through these places. The Mennonites living here in the Taurien and Jekaterinoslav Governments (Provinces) emigrated to Russia from Prussia at different times. The first settlers in the Chortitzer Bezirk settled there in 1789 while the first settlers on the Molotschna arrived only in 1804. In addition many

emigrated from Prussia and settled here some 14 or 15 years later. Only a small number of the original settlers here on the Molotschna in 1804 are still alive, but the number of Mennonites here in 50 years has greatly increased. The local Mennonite colony of our Bezirk already consists of 50 villages and the total number of souls of the Mennonites consists of 17,834. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. Currently in the year 1873, the number of villages in the Molotschna Mennonite bezirk comes to more than 66. In addition many colonies have been settled on land rented or purchased outside of the Molotschna. The total population of the Mennonites in all of Russia is now said to exceed 40,000.)

"We have here made mention of one and the other matter in order that you would thereby know to a greater degree, from where and how, and what sort of a group of Mennonites are living here. Notwithstanding, we will really have to say, what are we to make of the boasting of a great number, if the true fear of the Lord among us is more and more being lost. We are well aware that we are to be the chosen generation, a holy nation, a people of particular possession, and that the Lord has chosen us from the world. 1 Peter 2, verse 9; John 15, 16. Indeed, the Lord has said, "You are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world." We are also told how we are to let our light shine before men so that when they see our good works they will praise the father in Heaven, Matthew 5:13-15. These are important words, namely "chosen", "holy", "possession", "salt of the earth", or "light of the world". Nor is this light to be hidden or covered with a bushel.

"For this reason we often have reason to prove and examine ourselves as to whether the Lord will also have to pass a judgement over us as he once passed judgement on those doctrinally learned in the Word (Schriftgelehrten). As it is stated "they say it well but the deed is left undone". Matthew 23. If only we would not just be teachers and hearers of the Word, but that we might also be doers of the Word which has been taught and heard. For not, those who say "Lord, Lord", but those who do the will of the heavenly Father will enter into the Kingdom of God.

"We also perceive from your writing that there you are organized into many Gemeinden which we must also say about the Mennonites here. We do not know otherwise but that all the Gemeinden here still acknowledge that they have a confession of faith. You had also desired that we share with you something about the latter, and the constitution and administration of the Gemeinde. Therefore we report on our Gemeinde which apparently is also the smallest here on the Molotschna and which is only referred to as the Kleine Gemeinde. We report the following of the origin of this Gemeinde.

"The above scripture references and many others as well, that testify of the people of God, and a consideration of the events among the Mennonites here that contradicted the word of God, convicted many of the brethren here, among them also a pair of ministers. Through the testimony of their conscience and the motivation of the Holy Spirit, they were inspired to go out of the other Gemeinde in accordance with 1 Corinthians 6:17; Romans 16 and Revelation 18, in order to renew the covenant once made with God. In accordance with the fundamentals of the Holy Scripture which have been sealed through the holy baptism, and in human weakness, but with the help of the Lord, they were led to gather themselves into one flock and to found a Gemeinde upon the immovable cornerstone which is Jesus Christ. We weak servants strive to keep this humble flock or Kleine Gemeinde without spot or wrinkle in teaching, life and walk; in as much as possible.

"We present ministers are not of the first founders of this Gemeinde, since it is already over 35 years ago that this departure took place. After this departure a small number formally united themselves with this Gemeinde, as they had come to be of one mind and spirit with the same. On the other hand a number have also again withdrawn from the Gemeinde after the conflict had come to be too difficult for them. For in the little flock the members are taught and directed to the continual battle against sin. Therefore the current number of persons who are ready and qualified to partake of our communion is only a little over 200. We live scattered among the other Mennonites in almost all the villages. Because of our great distance one from the other, we find it unsuitable to have any particular house of prayer or worship. Instead we hold our assemblies here and there in the various residences, which you say is also your practice. You state that there are servants and ministers in every Gemeinde, which is also the case with us. Currently the servants of our Gemeinde are as follows; one Aeltester or Bishop as our leader, four teachers or ministers, and two deacons or those that care for the poor.

"With respect to the actual operation of the Gemeinde we report to you as follows: The fundamental principles of our faith which are composed as 20 articles - whereof we are enclosing herewith a small extract - are publicly read and discussed by the Aeltester. In this the words in Romans Chapter 10 verse 10 are used as our principle. Because Paul in the same chapter says, that faith comes from hearing the word, the question is then asked: "Whether the ministering in the faith has brought about belief in any of the maturing young people, so that they have thereby been convicted to be baptized upon the principles and beliefs which have been taught."

"If there are any who desire baptism the same then allow their fathers or other brethren in the faith to announce this to the Gemeinde. Whereupon the teachers (or ministers) examine the brethren in order to determine if this endeavour and application really comes from the hearts of the applicants. The applicants are then particularly instructed and admonished at length by the Aeltester and teachers (or ministers) to the best of their ability. This is done in order that if through baptism they should become one body with the Gemeinde - which is considered to be the body of Christ - that they would not become a stumbling block or spot of shame to the Gemeinde. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. If the reader now finds that the baptismal candidates themselves go to the ministerial to apply for

baptism, let this advise the reader that this regulation became necessary (as will be discussed later) when many members of the Gemeinde were baptized again charging that they had not been instructed in the faith before baptism. Therefore the baptismal candidates now have to appear before the Aeltester, and themselves give testimony of their repentance and faith).<sup>5</sup>

"If they then make an open and public confession before God and the Gemeinde that they recognize the Articles of Faith as they have been taught as correct, and that they desire to surrender their lives in as much as is in their power, to live and walk in accordance with the faith, and that they believe in the Son of God, then upon their request, they are baptized with water by the Aeltester. Prior to completing this act the Aeltester appeals to the assembly for the united earnest and heartfelt prayers of the Gemeinde for those new disciples, that the Lord would grant his blessing to the baptism and grant victory for virtue to these young plants or new vines, because neither he that plants nor he that waters is anything but only of God, from whom the increase must originate. Yes, that the words of God might be confirmed and fulfilled in these young hearts, that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, that is, with the fire of pure love and peace, in accordance with Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:2.

"Thereafter the Gemeinde prepares itself for the ordinance of the last Supper (Holy Communion). This preparation takes place firstly through a sermon of encouragement, and secondly by mutual instruction at brotherhood meetings and examination by the Aeltester and the teachers (ministers), as to whether the Gemeinde is also standing in unity,<sup>6</sup> and as to whether there is anything in the Gemeinde which should be brought to light or if any matter in the Gemeinde can be found which is otherwise contrary to the Word of God. Any such matters, in so far as humanly possible, are first taken out of the way or reconciled in order that we are all of one mind and of the same love and belief.

"Then we boldly proceed to the Lords Supper, also called a memorial meal, where the suffering and dying of Christ is first considered and brought to the fore. After this the especially ordained bread and wine is distributed by the Aeltester and the servants (ministers). Immediately thereafter the example of Jesus is followed, as he taught in John 13 and which he himself had also done, in that the members in the Gemeinde wash one another's feet. Brothers among themselves, and sisters, also among themselves. Just as Christ has also done. Hereafter the ones who have washed each other's feet, greet each other with the kiss of love, and extend to each other the hand of love and peace, in accordance with Romans 16:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:20.

"Whether all the members in the Gemeinde have been present at this memorial meal is evidenced to the ministers by the leftover bread which is specifically ordained for this purpose and also more accurately by the inquiries which are made. We consider this to be the sacred duty of a faithful shepherd over his flock. We have this obligation for the reason that no old leaven, that is disunity or other conviction, which does not correspond with that of the Gemeinde in mind and spirit, would take root and in time bring evil (adverse) consequences to the Gemeinde.

"For this reason every absent member is questioned so that no one, either out of indifference or through natural circumstances, would neglect this Last Supper or meal of love which is obligatory for all believers. If in the course of their inquiries of those who had neglected to attend, the ministerial finds anything which is not beneficial, such spots are then separated and purified without hesitation. If however certain matters are found to exist, i.e. offenses, which cannot exist in the Gemeinde, such offenders are then put out of the Gemeinde and shunned, in order that the whole body of Christ - which is the Gemeinde - would not be defiled, and that a bitter root shall not spring up and cause much discord. Above all, that there will be no souls who, because of the lack of watchfulness on the part of the overseers or watchmen, remain standing within the Gemeinde without a pure wedding garment; And who because of this lack of watchfulness would eventually have to be cast into the outermost darkness, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth for all eternity.

"Further, the Gemeinde meets on every Sunday and holiday. At these assemblies the Gemeinde is taught by the ministers (teachers) through sermons, the contents of which are determined by the moving of the Spirit and the needs of the Gemeinde. Through these sermons the sisters and brethren are inspired and encouraged to cling firmly to the word of God and to live and walk in a manner pleasing to God. But our eternal enemy is constantly around us with his shackles and snares seeking to lead us astray as he did our first parents. Even so, he also deceives people in our time, so that if one or the other does not constantly stay on the watch over them, they will come into temptation and a fall. Accordingly straying, transgressions, sins and offenses will occur in a Gemeinde where every member is surrounded with an evil carnal flesh, which constantly lusts against the spirit.

"Therefore reprimands and punishments must also take place, but nothing other than what we find described in the gospels and in the writings of the apostles. Such discipline is only practised according to the model of the apostles, such as addressing the person in question, admonitions in brotherly love, and finally separation. Such punishments are in accordance with the nature of the offenses, the attitude of the offenders, and according to what the seriousness of the matter would demand. No other punishments can be allowed to take place in a Gemeinde founded upon the Gospel. Whoever cannot allow himself to be punished in his spirit in accordance with the same, or cannot feel punished, must be avoided. Indeed in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, the apostle says, that we must have nothing to do with such a one until they come to repentance and remorse regarding the sins they have committed and confess the same before the Gemeinde. Whereupon they are again received through the expressed consent of the brethren and accepted as members of the Gemeinde and are comforted.



"To fully describe all these matters in one letter would be almost impossible. But in order that you can clearly understand our viewpoint and principles in the maintenance and continuation of the Gemeinde - that is to say, in so far as the redirecting and disciplining is concerned - we find it beneficial to refer you to some references in the scripture, namely; Matthew 18:15 and 18; Luke 17:3-4; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14; Titus 3:10; 1 John 5:16, 2 John 10; 1 Corinthians 13:31-32; 2 Corinthians 2; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19; Romans 15:1.

"Because it is our highest duty, and notwithstanding that ours is only a Kleine Gemeinde (little flock), we are earnestly committed to ground and to plant our Gemeinde, solely on the word of God, the gospels and the teachings of the apostles, and to continue to administer the Gemeinde accordingly. We as ministers would dearly like to be of one mind with the apostle Paul so that we could say with him, "Be followers of me as I am of Christ". However to emulate and to repeat this with the sacred Paul would demand much from such weak and frail human beings as we are who currently constitute the ministerial of this Gemeinde. In consideration of our great weakness our courage would want to fail completely. Only the comforting of the Lord raises us up, when he states "my strength is powerful in the weak".

"In order to continually become more firmly grounded in all things, and in order to protect the Gemeinde so that nothing foreign which does not stand united and in one spirit with the gospel can creep into the Gemeinde, we consider it our duty to be watchful. We must see to it and warn others, so that doctrinal books of confessions which are foreign to us and which in some respects do not agree with our fundamental beliefs or the teachings of the New Testament, are not accepted in our Gemeinde. Compare with the Gospel of John 10, and Hebrews 13:9.

"On the contrary we consider it essential to study the writings of our forefathers. We direct attention to their writings, namely, the writings of those who during the times of persecution have let their doctrine and faith shine before the world in their life and walk, and of whom many laid down their lives for their faith. We still have a number of these writings in hand, of which the most important are: **The Foundation of Christian Doctrine** by Menno Simons, the unabridged (or complete) **Martyrs Mirror** by Thilman Janz von Bracht, the book by Peter Peters and another one by Dirck Philips, and a few by George Hansen. Out of these writings we understand that their one and only goal was to endeavour to direct their teaching, life, and daily walk, in such a manner as to follow the example of Christ. Notwithstanding that they foresaw that the words of Jesus would come to be fulfilled in them, "If they have persecuted me they will persecute you also", or that they would have to flee from one city to another.

"As we understand from your writings you also state that you still have memory of a time when your great-grandparents were persecuted there in Bugerort because of their faith. It has been called to our attention and we think that perhaps you will have in your possession, some of the writings written by our and your forefathers, and also those mentioned above. We find much in these writings which describes your area. We would also be more than happy to learn more about this in a letter from you."

Regarding the persecution of the Mennonites we find in the **Martyrs Mirror** that they have been severely molested and expelled from the land of Switzerland in the 17th century. We consider this worthy of note in this letter as we understand that this took place exactly in your area. In the "small" **Martyrs Mirror** pages 155-156, we read that upon the request of the Mennonites the government of Holland wrote to those of Berne and Zurich on February 19, 1660, and pleaded on behalf of the Mennonites that they would be granted freedom of conscience. They also reminded them of what the Mennonites had done for the Reformed Church in 1655 by giving a considerable amount in alms. Also in the same year, a letter was written from Rotterdam to the Council of Berne, to the effect that the harsh orders against the Mennonites be abolished, and that they should not deny the Mennonites their rights as citizens. The letter also stated that from the time of the founding of the Dutch State this kind of people had been judged to be completely harmless to the Republic.

For this they have Prince William of Orange to thank - a good memorial - who could not be moved, either by good or evil, to deprive the Mennonites of any of their civil freedom. They also added to this letter the following postscript, which stated, "Truly we have not yet been sorry up to this day", and stated further that "the Mennonites have never had anything evil in mind under the pretext of service to God. Indeed, on the contrary they have paid their taxes, and done everything in which subjects are obliged to the authorities, gladly and willingly". Whereupon the persecution diminished to an extent but did not entirely cease, so that in 1672, many Mennonites, up to 600 to 700 at one time had to leave their fatherland Switzerland and make their way to the Palatinate.

"In the 18th century the Mennonites were again admitted into Prussia by King Frederick Wilhelm, but soon they were also attacked there. On one occasion in 1723, during the night of September 14 to 15, the soldiers inflicted much injury on them. On February 22, 1732 the King himself even ordered them to leave Prussia completely. However, on September 22 of the same year the King again gave them the freedom to reside there and to carry on with their affairs and also granted them freedom in the land where they still live to this day, although many from there have emigrated to Russia.

"Well, worthy Ohm Nuszbaum. Up until this point this letter is exactly the way it had been prepared one and one half years ago, and which we had intended to forward to you. We do not presently know of a great deal to add, and in the meantime we have also thought as you say in your letter, that you fear that your work has gone with the wind. Otherwise our explanation would have gone on to greater

length. We do wish sincerely that this letter will reach you and that we will receive a response from you regarding this letter. Now that peace has again come to be, we have more hope that this letter will reach you and therefore we will send you these humble lines.

“You will no doubt have been informed that the war here has come to an end. During the previous New Year we stood in great concern regarding this, for our conscience convinced us only too well that by our own sins we had brought upon ourselves this sharply threatening rod which had been placed over us and that we would also have to feel the touch of the same. However the rod has again been turned away from us. If only we would not become cold-blooded about this and start to think that it had turned out this way by chance. Rather, much more that we would often remind ourselves with the words of the poet, of what has been done for us and of who really is responsible, as it is stated:

Now soul, say who has done?  
Who do you thank for your well-being?  
Is it you? or human? Declare:  
Has it not been Jesus?  
Yes, Yes, this Godly Lamb,  
Your true Bridegroom,  
It is he, and he alone.  
How will you ever give due thanks? etc.

Nun Seele sag wer hats gethan?  
Wem dankst du dein genesen?  
Bist du's? Sins Menschen, sage an!  
Ist's Jesus nicht gewesen?  
Ja, Ja Dies Fromme Lamb.  
Dein treuer Braeutigam  
Der ist es, der ist es ganz allein  
Wie willst du ihm nun dankbar sein.  
u.s.w.

We now close in friendship, praising God with the words of Paul in Ephesians 6, which is also our wish: “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God, the father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Amen. The Ministerial of the Kleinen Gemeinde: Aeltester Johan Friesen, Minister Klaas Friesen, Minister Abraham Friesen, Minister Johan Dueck, Minister Heinrich Enns, Deacon Klaas Friesen, Deacon Jakob Friesen. Colony of Neukirch, December 2nd, 1856.

## 9.05 Events of 1856-1861

### Comment by Peter Toews

We have now suddenly advanced from the year 1856 to the year 1860 without having dealt with any matters in our history from the intervening three years. But the reader should not assume that no noteworthy events occurred in the history of the Gemeinde during these years as these events were in fact not outwardly nor from elsewhere: Rather these occurrences much more involved the Gemeinde itself. A minister of the Gemeinde by the name of Johan Dueck (1801-1866) has recorded considerable information about such events although not in great detail. i.e. How the Gemeinde would separate someone now in order to ward off the vices and sins which continually tried to penetrate into the Gemeinde and then soon again to welcome and reaccept a repentant sinner into the Gemeinde. We feel that enough has been said about these less significant occurrences and henceforth will not deal with such matters except when they are relevant to other events in the Gemeinde.

### Declaration to the Molotschna Mennonite Gebietsamt at Halbstadt, 1860

Comment by D.P. The full text of this letter has already been set out in chapter seven dealing with the religious conflicts in the Molotschna. The general purport of the letter was that the Kleine Gemeinde leaders had presented the evangelical teachings of the full gospel faith to these new converts of the radical pietists and had tried to counsel them. However as these were not members of the Gemeinde little more could be done other than to practice these teachings. With this letter the Aeltester Johan Friesen effectively vetoed the plans for imprisonment and banishment which the Kirchen-Konvent had in store for the secessionists. Comment by the translator. D.P.

“Comment by Aeltester Toews - These people renounced their membership and seceded from the Gemeinde which they declared in a letter to the Kirchen Aeltesten dated January 6, 1860 (and for this reason they were also known as secessionists). Their intention was to constitute their own church and renew their baptism. Consequently anyone who wished to join their church could only be accepted after having been baptized in a river. i.e. by complete immersion. The Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde was also asked for his advice and approval in order to hinder these people. This however the Aeltester politely declined as we have seen in the foregoing writing. (See section 7.04)

“The above mentioned people were then severely accused in a very stern writing to the Fuersorge Comitaet (Supervisory-Committee) in Odessa. This complaint is said to have been signed by many Aeltesten and Dienern (ministers and deacons). In this writing they unfortunately gave evidence of themselves, that they had already deviated from the truth. In the second article of their accusation they stated that “according to Matthew 13 we believe that in a Christian Gemeinde there will exist such members who do not have the true Christian faith, but that in spite of this they extend Holy Communion to all those who have been baptized upon their professed faith and who do not live in open sin. These secessionists however teach that Holy Communion should be given only to the true believers and accordingly call the rite of communion of our Gemeinde a devils service.”

Because of the fierce disputation among the Aeltesten of the different Gemeinden the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde presented an admonition (dated June 26, 1860) counseling them to make peace. The quarrel arose from a desjatine and a half of barley, and then came the matter of the secessionists and later also the Halbstaedt church dispute. After a time this gradually developed into a war, although this war was only conducted with pen and ink. End of comment by P. Toews.

Comment by D.P. **The Barley dispute.** In **Book Two** Aeltester Peter Toews has included a number of writings pertaining to the ecclesiastical struggle which became known as the barley dispute. These writings and epistles consist of the following: A letter to the Gemeinde Aeltesten from J. F. dated June 26, 1860; A Petition to Privy Councillor Lange dated June 28, 1860; A Certificate of the Resolution of Peace of August 5, 1860; Letter of Thanks to the Privy Councillor Lange dated August 6, 1860; A Letter from the Kirchengeltesten revoking the Resolution of Peace dated August 23, 1860; The Reply of Johan Friesen and Johan Harder dated August 26, 1860. All of these documents and writings are already included in chapter six which deals specifically with these ecclesiastical battles.

The role which the two Aeltesten Johan Friesen of the Kleinen Gemeinde and Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde played in the peaceful resolution of these wars stands to their everlasting good credit. It seems that Aeltester Harder was somewhat more actively involved in the resolution of the battles concerning the secessionists. As his Orloff Gemeinde also had pietist leanings, although much milder, it stands to reason that he would be better able to communicate with these secessionists and therefore would be more effective. In contrast Aeltester Friesen seems to have been the leading figure in the resolution of the protracted barley dispute. Aeltester Peter Toews says of this event that "As Aeltester Johan Friesen was repeatedly summoned to attend the conferences in order to assist in the peace negotiations, a resolution of peace was achieved through his efforts."<sup>6</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde was generally well connected in higher circles and as Aeltester Friesen was the more senior of the two leaders it also stands to reason that the Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester would have more influence with the other Aeltesten of the Kirchen-convent. Comment by D. Plett.

"On February 13, 1861 a minister election was held in Neukirch. Firstly, the votes for deacon were as follows: **Abraham Friesen, Tiege, 32; Peter Friesen, Tiege, 31; Johan Dueck, Alexanderkron, 30; Jakob Penner, Prangenau, 27; Johan Loewen, Kleefeld, 25; Kornelsen, Lichtenau, 25; Jakob Friesen, Nikolaidorf, 13; David Klassen, Margenau, 8; Cornelius Janzen, Neukirch, 5; Abraham Loewen, Alexanderwohl, 4; Peter Enns, Neukirch, 5; Jakob Barkman, Waldheim, 8; Abraham Friesen, Rueckenau, 2; Franz Kroeker, Kleefeld, 2; Cornelius Enns, Blumstein, 1; Isaak Friesen, Waldheim, 1; Peter Toews, Margenau, 1; David Loewen, Lindenau, 1.** From among the four deacons then in office the majority of votes were cast as follows: Peter Friesen, 80; Abraham Friesen, 62; Klaas Friesen, 46; Jakob Friesen, 32. The first two were elected as ministers. One hundred and ten members took part in this election.

## 9.06 A Letter to Christian Schmutz, 1861

**Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews.** A proposal had appeared in the so-called **Mennonitische Blaetter**, namely, to celebrate the coming 13 of January, 1861, as the tri-centennial of the year of death of Menno Simons, and at that time to establish a fund for the education of young men. This brings to mind among others, a poem entitled "Das Mennostift" (The Menno Foundation) the appeal of which is as follows:

Wir dichten ein Denkmal, dem streitbarn Held.	We compose a Memorial To the valiant hero.
Ein Denkmal dem lieben Getreuen, Ein Denkmal dem Dulder	The one most beloved and true To the one who endured
wie Gott es gefaellt	to the pleasure of God,
Soll unsre Gemeindegenschaft erneuen, u.s.w.	Who our brotherhood now will renew, etc.

This proposal has been opposed in the same **Blaetter** by Schmutz. The success which those of the persuasion expressed in the **Blaetter** had worked in the Mennonite community in Prussia and also in general, how they had in fact been able to emulate the "dulder" in so far as endurance is concerned, will be well known to anyone who has some knowledge of the present situation (1872-1873) of the Prussian Mennonites. Something more is said about this history on page 321 of this book (the **Sammlung**).

Translator's comment. This *letter to Christian Schmutz* provides some clarification to the *Opinion regarding the Mennonitische Blaetter* of 1855 as it is evident that the Kleine Gemeinde had not decided to eliminate the reading of the periodical, rather merely that the Gemeinde *per se* did not support the Blaetter. It should also be noted that Heinrich Enns, the author of this letter to Christian Schmutz, later served as Aeltester of what became known as the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde. He was also the instigator in the Kleine Gemeinde publication effort of the 1860s.

From the letter we perceive that a movement was underway to establish a theological school in honour of Menno Simons. This is a rather interesting development in light of the fact that in 1835 some 29 Prussian Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers confiscated the three-volume Menno Simons **Foundation Book** which had been published by the Kleine Gemeinde. At the same time the leading Russian Aeltester stated that he had not read these books and that he had no intention of so doing. In fact these leaders worked openly against these books and prohibited their sale. It will come as no surprise to the reader that the Kleine Gemeinde finds this sudden desire on the part of the same Mennonites to honour Menno Simons as somewhat ironic. Heinrich Enns agrees with the view of Schmutz that it would be far more helpful to republish more of the writings of Menno Simons rather than to build an idol and monument to his honour. In fact Enns feels that the greatest honour which could be extended to Menno Simons would be if the people who carried his name as Mennonites would simply live and practice his teachings as *nonresistant* Christians.

The comments of Heinrich Enns against the proposed theological school must be interpreted in light of the fact that for a century or two such an enterprise among the Mennonites had invariably been associated with pietist seminaries in Germany and Switzerland which graduated literally hundreds of Mennonites, trained and inspired to attack and disperse any remaining bastions of Anabaptist-Mennonite strength. Given the previous distaste for the writings of Menno Simons on the part of some of the Prussian and Russian Mennonite leaders and the great fondness for the novels of Jung-Stilling which was evident among many of these same leaders, it is perhaps not too surprising that Enns and Schmutz both assumed that the same type of educational program was planned for the proposed theological school.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites would not favour the establishment of such a facility in the Mennonite world as in their view the teachings of Jung-Stilling and other similar writers in many respects were unevangelical and based on nothing more than fantasy, spiritualism and mysticism. Certainly Menno Simons himself had the highest regard for learning and higher education, if the individual could pursue the same in humility and reverence for God. But in the view of the Anabaptist Mennonites an educational endeavour which was based and premised on the dispensation of unevangelical dogma was little improvement over the scribes (Schriftgelehrten) and pharisees of biblical times. Translator's comment.

#### Letter to Christian Schmutz, 1861

"To the Honourable Christian Schmutz, in Baden. By way of coincidence some of the brethren in our Gemeinde came into possession of a number of issues of the so-called **Mennonitischen Blaetter**, which for a number of years have been received and read by friends of our members in other Gemeinden here on the Molotschna. These **Blaetter** are only somewhat familiar to us since according to what we know about them from earlier times to the present these pages have not been formulated in accordance with the precepts and standards of the word of God; rather they are prepared in accordance with a foreign confession.

"Then completely unexpectedly and to our greatest joy, we read the altogether evangelical declaration published by you, against the proposal of an undertaking planned by certain men. This proposal is quite foreign to us and yet is very much in accord with the spirit of our time and the God of reason. But it is directly contrary to the gospel, to our Confession of Faith, and to the naked, bare, and unadorned word of God. Its purpose is the establishment of a memorial and a commemorative celebration for the long ago deceased reformer of our confession, Menno Simons and to found an educational institute for young men for the intrenching and maintenance of their teachings.

"Therefore we feel compelled and motivated in our hearts out of sincere love, and being of a mind inclined to agree with you, to send you this letter in order to impart to you our deepest joy that there are still Gemeinden in Baden that do not agree with the new legalism and works-righteousness.<sup>7</sup> Your understanding of the Holy Scripture is also in harmony with our understanding and our convictions and principles.

"In fact, we hold Menno's writings in great worth and deplore the fact that we have only so few of them available. We have only two copies of his complete writings which has been compiled into a **Foundation book** in the Dutch language. A short excerpt has been made from the same, from the beginning to pages 222, and has been printed in German. Of this edition a number of copies are also in the possession of other Gemeinden.

"We consider it to be contrary to the scriptures to celebrate a memorial to Menno, or to any human being, be he ever so honoured and holy. We also find that the establishment of a teaching institute for the training of young men for the ministry, is rejected by the word of God. Yes, and by the teachings of Menno himself. Such an Institute is even less necessary for the establishment and maintenance of Menno's teachings. For we are convinced that in the Gemeinde of God, which is founded upon the immovable cornerstone which is Jesus Christ, and whose members are the living building blocks from which are built the spiritual house and holy priesthood, there always have been and always

will be men for the building up of the Gemeinde without first having had to prepare themselves by theological studies.

“As already stated, we consider the teachings and writings of Menno as definitely useful and in fact necessary. For Menno has so clearly and simply compiled in a thorough and understandable manner, his teachings regarding various subjects. Especially regarding the ban, or expulsion of wicked and vexatious members from the Gemeinde. These teachings which have been compiled from the supreme book of fundamentals, namely the Old and New Testaments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and his apostles, can be used as our guideline. So then, with zealous hearts although in great weakness and imperfection, we strive to follow and obey the teachings of Menno. During his life Menno wrote, taught and practised these teachings under much tribulation, discomfort, and danger of life. Accordingly we trust that we shall not bear the name Mennonites after him in vain, and that like Menno we will also be found to be upright, sincere followers of Jesus, yes, that we might at all times be found to be *nonresistant* Christians.

“Unfortunately there are many today who appeal to Menno and call themselves Mennonites in his memory. Whereby the question is raised, if Menno’s simple teachings are in fact being considered, taught, believed and expressed by deed. Which you also doubt when you view the present conditions in the various Gemeinden. And consequently, such celebrations and memorials, though they be covered and clad in the most beautiful garments, will not be useful or beneficial in any way. Instead it will have to be said of the same as the Lord Jesus said of the Pharisees. “You clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of robbery and wickedness.” Luke 11:39. “And woe unto you, ye Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also; outwardly ye appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” Matthew 23:27-28.

“Noteworthy are the words regarding the Menno monument written by a certain man and not without grounds or reason. It is no wonder that he calls it a grave experience as a result of which he has become richer but that because of this beautiful picture he must feel poorer when he must observe that the Mennonite Gemeinden, which were once so dear to him and so highly esteemed by him because of their apostolic discipline and order, their unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, and the extending of the hand of brotherly aid, are now, also being torn down by the general ruination.

“We know very well that we are called to be the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the people of his possession (Phil. 2:15), and that the Lord has chosen us out of this world, and has said: Ye are the salt of the earth and the light of the World, according to Matthew 5:15. Now we are to let it shine so that it can be said of us, “When they see your good works, they can praise the father in heaven”. Much is said herewith, namely; chosen, holy, possession, salt of the earth, and light of the world. In order that this light be not hidden, or not be covered by a bushel, we have much reason to beware of all strange teachings and philosophy, however good they may seem to be in appearance. Indeed, and in order that we will not immediately be distracted from simplicity in Christ by our own meditations, 2 Corinthians 11:3, and that they will not rightly be able to say of us, as the Lord Jesus said to those learned in dogma (Schriftgelehrten), “They say it well but do it not”, Matthew 23. Our earnest striving is expended toward that end, that we would not only be hearers and teachers of the word, but also doers of what we have heard and have been taught. For we are well aware, that not all who say “Lord, Lord” will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather those who do the will of our father in heaven.

“Wherefore we are compelled by love and wish from our hearts that it were possible to discuss this matter with you personally, worthy and beloved friends. Yes that we could discuss this verbally with all the Gemeinden in your region and to make inquiries, as to whether we also agree on all articles of faith from the Holy Scripture which has once been entrusted to the saints, in accordance with Jude 3, and whether we have overcome according to and with the mind of Jesus. Nothing in the world could be dearer and cause more joy to us than to hear of you, that in spite of all the new fictitious writings which deceive the senses, that you are able to say with the Apostle John, “I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth. 3 John 4.

“A number of years ago on January 25th, in 1855, we unexpectedly received a letter from an Aeltester David Nuszbaum from the Fuboz Gemeinde in the Bern Canton, in the jurisdiction district of Muenstern in Switzerland. This caused us much joy and strengthened us to learn that Mennonites also existed in that area, who, according to the contents of the letter, still cling firmly to the regulations of the first nonresistant Christians and to the teachings of Jesus. If Aeltester Nuszbaum had not been afraid that his writings would be in vain, as he did not know where we lived in Russia, then he would have written at greater length about the practices and usages which they followed in that Gemeinde.

“Consequently, we immediately also composed a letter, which because of the great unrest and the war prevailing at that time, was posted only one and one-half years later, and which according to all indications also reached David Nuszbaum. However, we are still awaiting an answer to this writing. Perhaps it would be possible from where you are to contact this man, if he has not moved away or died. Even if you only visited him by writing if he is too far away to visit him personally, you could then examine the writing which we have sent him, in which we have in some detail described our circumstances and the principles of our Gemeinde. Perhaps you are familiar with this David

Nuszbaum, although we find nothing about a David Nuszbaum in Switzerland, in the list of all the Mennonite Gemeinde overseers, published by Aeltester Mannhart. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. A later report has revealed that Nuszbaum and his Gemeinde had rejected the practise of feet washing and avoidance).

“And so, we await an early reply from you and hope that you will make an open, earnest, and brotherly declaration regarding the circumstances and condition of your Gemeinde. We will yearningly await this letter until it has been received. Should it be, as Paul teaches, that we are baptized into one body by the spirit of God, and be of one mind, view, faith and hope, then perhaps if it is God’s will, we will not only in writing, but through God’s grace also feel compelled to discuss this matter with you personally.

“With friendly greetings we close this writing with the word of Paul from Ephesians 6:23-24. “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. Written pursuant to the mandate of and in the name of the Aeltester and fellow ministerial. Fischau, February 24, 1861. “Heinrich Enns.”

### 9.07 The Halbstadt Church Building Dispute, 1862

**Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews.** The house of prayer in Halbstadt had been built by a certain Neufeld for the Orloff and Halbstadt Gemeinde of which he was a member. Before the building was completed Neufeld went over to the Lichtenauer Gemeinde as a consequence of quarrels between the Gemeinden. He now wanted to take the ownership of the building with him over to his new Gemeinde which resulted in this dispute. P. Toews.

Translator’s comments: Aeltester Toews has included two documents in his **Second Book** which pertain to the church building dispute, namely; A Declaration to the Highly Esteemed Gebietsamt as well as the Agricultural Society, dated February 4, 1862, and A Declaration for the Mennonite Gebietsamt at Halbstadt, dated February 13th, 1862. Both of these documents are included in chapter six dealing with the ecclesiastical wars of the Molotschna Mennonites.

**Other Events of 1862.** In **Book One** of the **Sammlung** Peter Toews has recorded an interesting event of 1862 relative to David Epp the radical pietist Mennonite minister of Heuboden, Prussia. The reader will recall that in 1835 Rev. Heinrich Balzer of the Kleine Gemeinde had written to this David Epp in reply to several prior letters. In his footnote Peter Toews has noted that this David Epp must have been very badly deluded. Toews also notes that in 1862 this same David Epp emigrated to Russia where he apparently exerted tremendous pressure in order to be allowed to preach in the Kleine Gemeinde worship service. Because of his persistence he was finally allowed to preach one sermon. Peter Toews notes that had Heinrich Balzer been alive such an exercise would hardly have been necessary as in view of the great difference in the faith of Epp this was contrary to the teachings of 2 John, 9-10. The reader might also note that this David Epp was an uncle to Clas Epp, the radical millennialist who set 1889 as the date for the second coming of Christ. End of Translator’s comments.

**Events of 1863.** Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. On February 14 Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde preached in Neukirch from Isaiah 50, verses 5 to the end of the chapter. A cancellation by H. Enns to Rev. Bernhard Harder from the year 1863 rejecting support for the Menno Simons statue and stating an intention to rather have his writings republished has been omitted because of forgetfulness.

### 9.08 A Letter to Heinrich Loewen, 1863

**Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews,** “Heinrich Loewen was a son of the elder Isaac Loewen and had married a widow in Tiegenhagen. When she died (after they had lived in marriage for several years) Loewen had become the subject of reproach by the brotherhood for his loose living during his time as a widower. However he had already cast his eyes upon a young lady who did not belong to the Gemeinde, and thereby had become enamoured of the world. Nor was it possible to win him back to the Gemeinde through the admonition of his father and his friends, and instead he renounced the Gemeinde and was accepted (despite the fact that they knew about his loose behavior) into the Halbstadt Gemeinde. Here he joined in marriage with the girl. But the Lord was greatly displeased by the Halbstadt Gemeinde who had encouraged him in his deviation, by the fact that they had accepted him.

“We wish to make all people aware, that he was killed only a few weeks after his acceptance into the Halbstadt Gemeinde and after his marriage. This occurred on a Sunday after he had returned very depressed from the Halbstadt house of prayer where he had partaken in the Lord’s Supper. He was instantly killed that evening by a flash of lightning while he was sitting between two people (June 2). That he was deeply remorseful because of his departure from the Gemeinde and regarding his transgression, was evidenced by the fact that on the day of his death he had opened his Gesangbuch to sing No. 660.

“This whole story is described in detail in a book written by his father Isaac Loewen. It is also worthy of note at this point that some members of the Halbstadt Gemeinde later also recognized

that they had done wrong by encouraging Heinrich Loewen in his wrong doing. We know that B. Harder had said to one of our brethren, that he was still trembling from the shock of that stroke of lightning.

“A letter to Heinrich Loewen, in Tiegenhagen (at the time that he wanted to leave the Gemeinde) -- Beloved Friend! The heartfelt love of Jesus Christ and indeed, the fellowship which we have enjoyed until now, although in great weakness and imperfection, nevertheless experienced in true uprightness, compels me--whether the time be opportune or not, to briefly direct a small examination to your heart. I do so in accordance with my duty and also for the sake of your father and your siblings, upon whom you have inflicted a great sorrow.

“Your father has felt for you just as Jacob the blessed patriarch felt regarding his son Joseph. Genesis 43. Indeed many patriarchs of whom we have lessons and examples in the Holy Scriptures, were mindful of their paternal duties, and indefatigably have faithfully cared for their children until their death with much tribulation. Your beloved father has also constantly, although in weakness and with fear and trembling, sought his and your salvation and who perhaps will not be here to teach or instruct you much longer. Yes, I must say again with a sorrowful heart, that you will also bring him to the grave because of his grief. You will perhaps perceive from the foregoing and from the conversation which your father and I held with you, the faithfulness in which we have advised and admonished you, and that you should remain true and cling to your vows and to the truths once acknowledged by you.

Conclusions and pretexts are the devices of many false thinkers who since years past have been occupied with the preverse craftiness of angels according to 2, 2, 3. Yes, those who murmur and complain constantly and who walk after their own lusts and who speak proud words according to Jude 16. So also some now speak these arrogant words, “Are all the others, or the Gemeinde that I want to join then lost or damned?” Oh, that you would see how Satan promotes his old masterpieces and again and again puts out his poisoned hook. How shall a reasonable and intelligent human being think, or even venture to speak directly in opposition to the stern and unequivocal warnings spoken by Jesus our Saviour, Matthew 7, Luke 6 and John 12. Indeed that you for once would say “What have we to do with them that are without” according to 1 Corinthians 5.

My conscience persuades me that the Lord has every heart in his hand and that neither I, nor any right-thinking person has ever judged any person or group. Rather we allow everyone to stand in his own worth as he stands before God, and we wish for every person, as well as for ourself, eternal bliss. There are persons who claim that we are judging them by our going out and that we are thereby despising them. But an individual who is imposing such a harsh and unevangelical pronouncement upon us, thereby gives the most complete evidence that he, like Esau and many others, is tortured by an injured conscience and that he has no peace nor certain hope, and much more judges us than we him.

Which is clearly and plainly the witness of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 1:37; Romans 2:1-2 and 3; and 1 Corinthians 4:5. Fischau, on the 20th of March, 1863.

Your friend,  
“Heinrich Enns”.

### 9.09 A Writing to Peter Thiessen in Schoenau, 1864

“A Writing to Peter Thiessen in Schoenau regarding his renunciation of the Gemeinde, on account of his son A. Thiessen, who felt that he had been expelled from the Gemeinde at an improper time.

Dear friend Peter Thiessen: “In the fear of the Lord, I have reflected and given consideration to the matters that have moved you to renounce the Gemeinde. You, yes, I say you! As an old man who should have known the Gemeinde for a long time by now, you should have sought the best for your children in a very much different way than renunciation of the Gemeinde. Oh, when I consider, what the Prophet Jeremiah says through the word of the Lord of the sufficiency of the grace of the gospel and promised them to await much good. Oh, what joy you would have provided us poor weak ministers if you had advised your son to acknowledge and confess his sins as he had already caused so much vexation for a considerable time.

“The memory still lies fresh in my mind of the sorrow and grief with which the aged Isaac Loewen bemoaned and wished that his son could still have been punished, who, however, had been a disgrace and vexation to the Gemeinde for only a short time. Indeed, he almost despaired from sorrow and grief when he heard that his son had renounced the Gemeinde, even as Rachel wept over her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not. Jeremiah 31:15.

“Oh beloved friend! What do you think? Or what are we to think? Rachel wept bitterly and could not be comforted for her children, for they were not. You however, strengthen your son in his lovelessness and self-righteous spirit. Indeed you lead his and your wife, as well as your other children into more freedom of the world and you even go ahead of them in that regard. You have carried the matter to the extent that the joy which we might have been able to have in your son is converted into sadness, in so far as you persist in your decision.

“Yes, you cause us sadness and also all your close friends and the whole Gemeinde. This is very regrettable and noteworthy, and that even more so, considering that your father-in-law (Aeltester Abraham Friesen) was such a well-meaning man gifted by the spirit of God, and who by the grace of God so faithfully served the Gemeinde for so many years with the talents which he had received

from God, which you can see from his writings if you refer back to them. He was not afraid to take upon himself much scorn, derision and shame for the sake of the love of Jesus and for the sake of his fellow man. And you willfully throw it away from yourself thereby becoming a disgrace and dishonour to your dear faithful father and to your God. All because of the separation of your son. And instead of showing him the correct way, like a father should, you strengthen him in his error, and do not consider that thereby you are thrusting him deeper into his fallacy.

"Yes, my beloved friend. May I very adequately present to you with the words of the Lord, the reason for your son's expulsion (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. The reader can ascertain the reason why Thiessen was put out of the Gemeinde in the continuation of this writing. He was separated from the Gemeinde on February 9, 1864). However, it would be too much to name every particular in detail. For someone is not a stone for the temple of God, nor can the temple be built therefrom if it does not fit; If we are not of the same mind and do not have the same speech in accordance with the words of Paul, for he says in many places, "Be of the same mind, be peaceful, and speak the same thing. Yes, be ye all of the same mind". We would have forgiven him for this if he had kept it for himself and had been peaceful, and had not posed unnecessary challenges, thereby causing needless disputations which led to scandal.

"Paul admonishes us to shun such, also those who engage in unspiritual, loose, and idle prattle, and in quarrels about so-called famous art, which some purport to have and yet, still lack faith. Many brethren, together with whom he could have been edified and enriched in the fear of the Lord one to the other confessing their sins, and meditating on spiritual songs and psalms, give witness, that he argued with the skill which he presumed to have, and frequently raised questions rather than seeking the betterment of faith to God, 1 Timothy 1. All of which had the appearance of godly ways, of which Paul speaks in 2 Timothy 3:5. "These shall be shunned". Indeed, the prophet declares "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight", Isaiah 5.

"All of which went unheeded, and is still unheeded by Thiessen, so that for some time he has been in difficulties with the authorities, of which they themselves only recently had advised us in writing and have referred him over to the Gebietsamt for further disposition as a disobedient one, as he did not want to take his contract servant back into his service. Now Thiessen claimed that he was to take the labourer back into his service, and that if the servant was not obedient he should report him and they would punish the labourer. Whereupon he asked me one particular Sunday, whether he could take him back into his service under such circumstances. I answered his saying, "That if they had separated in good will and peaceably, then he could not take the labourer back in such a way".

"After several days the aforesaid writing from the Gebietsamt came to Johan Friesen, who sent it to me. Johan Dueck and I then drove to Thiessen in order to familiarize ourselves with the circumstances of the matter, and rebuked him for attempting to bring the ministerial into opposition to the Gebietsamt. Thiessen however manipulated the facts and claimed to be totally right, and said that he and his servant had separated in good will. This Peter Thiessen, who also was present, disproved, and said in the presence of Ohm Dueck and myself, "You did not separate from him in complete good will". We could hardly agree on even a single point as he asserted that he was right in every respect and did not want to listen to the Gemeinde and consider himself to be the insignificant one.

"Whereupon I said to him that he could be punished by the Gebietsamt by the following Sunday if he continued with such agitation. To this he actually replied that they would not do this, because we had earlier told him that his matter would be dealt with only on the Sunday after next. Now you and he alleged that the separation is wrong because we had told him that his matter was first to be dealt with on the Sunday after next. Instead it had now been taken up and been disposed of on the following Sunday. (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. This was the first and most enormous mistake made by the Gemeinde with respect to Thiessen, in that he was summoned before the Gemeinde on a certain Sunday, but his case was considered one Sunday earlier without his presence whereupon he was excommunicated in absentia, from which he took great occasion to be a hinderance to the Gemeinde).

"His matter however, became such a concern to us and all the brethren, that we did not deem it necessary to hear a justification. Rather we feared that the matter could become even more serious, if the situation was allowed to continue. The validity of these concerns were later completely confirmed by his demeanor and behavior.

"For how many times have we not true-heartedly counseled him, that he should submit himself, especially regarding his revengefulness and his constant assertions that he was right, and that we were always responsible to yield and condescend to him. In which regard the Lord Jesus teaches so clearly and commands, when he says, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also". Yes we are told to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us, Matthew 5. Paul says "Is there a fault among you that ye go to the law, one with another? Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather allow yourself to be defrauded"? 1 Corinthians 6. In this sense we have many times admonished and advised Thiessen in a brotherly manner. But it seemed as if he could not comprehend this in any respect. All his court actions, lawsuits and also finally the matter of the down payment with the Jews all prove that he did not have the mind and spirit of Christ. Thereby he gave us sufficient reason to expel him from the Gemeinde, without even having regard to all the other cases wherein he vexed the Gemeinde and offended and hurt many. (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. The Jew had bought flour from Thiessen, and made



a down payment for the same. When the later did not come for the flour at the appointed time Thiessen did not want to return the money to him voluntarily, but rather made use of the laws of the world).

"Much more could rightfully be set forth here but I consider it to be quite unnecessary. It has already been said that the foregoing matter is sufficient cause to apply the words of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:14. "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Thiessen now makes many objections, and says that this or that is very different, and that many untruths about him are being told, which I also admit to the extent that some are saying too much about him, and exaggerate some matters. This is certainly not good and we also fault those that do so. Nevertheless they have Thiessen as the cause but he himself is to blame for this.

Therefore, I beg you dear friend! Consider and prove everything carefully. I hope that when you have examined it with the word of the Lord, you will have to admit that we have sought to do the best for you and Abraham Thiessen even though it appears that he was expelled too soon. I have no doubt that you will eventually learn to understand it differently.

Otherwise I wish you all the best, and also forgive you for your behaviour on that evening, as you well know. I also have my weaknesses and faults, and admit to the same, which are continually before my eyes and ears, and in respect of which I daily plead for forgiveness from God. Should I have grieved you in some way I beg that you would forgive me. Fischau, on February 18, 1864.

Your friend who loves you,  
"Heinrich Enns".

## 9.10 Events and Ministerial Elections 1864-1865

"**Noteworthy events, 1864.** On February 2, a minister in the Crimea, by the name of Peter Baerg, came over to the Kleine Gemeinde from the Grosze Gemeinde. On February 16 and 23, 1864, the minister Klaas Friesen in Rosenort, was removed from his office by a majority of votes. Because of a distrust of the minister Johan Dueck (perhaps without much reason for the same), he became irreconcilable and loveless, and as a result became unworthy of his ministry.

"**Noteworthy Events, 1865.** A practise had always existed in the Gemeinde that an excommunicated member was not allowed to come into the assembly. According to the teachings of Christ such a person was to be considered as a heathen and a publican and these were not permitted to enter into the temple in Israel. Now it came to pass that Thiessen who was expelled entered the assembly in Fischau on February 14, and in spite of admonition did not want to go out voluntarily, so that the congregation was disturbed and dispersed.

"At two brotherhood meetings (and that on the 21 and the 28 of February) following this, the brethren were admonished to shun Thiessen as it had happened earlier that by chance a brother had eaten together with him. For this reason the brotherhood had been admonished already on September 6 of the year 1864 to observe the practise of shunning of Thiessen. Now however, the Gemeinde was placed into great sorrow because of Thiessen, because on repeated occasions he entered the assembly, under the pretext of innocence, instead of guilt and repentance. According to the notations of Johan Dueck this happened no less than 5 times, and that on February 14, March 28, April 25, May 16, and June 13. That was something unheard of!

"We need to remember a **ministerial election from the year 1864** for the Gemeinde living on leased land on Marcus, which was held on November 23. The majority of votes for minister fell on Isaac Friesen, with 45 votes. In addition the votes cast for minister were as follows: Peter Wiebe 3; Ab. Reimer 20; Kornelius Goossen 14; P. Toews 35; Heinrich Friesen 2; Jakob Wiebe 2; Klaas Wiebe 1; Johann Toews 1. On December 6, 1864 the Minister Isaac Friesen preached his first sermon on Marcusland. The votes for **deacon** fell on Peter Wiebe with 29 votes. The other votes were as follows: Abraham Reimer 11; Peter Toews 25; Korn. Goossen 16; Jakob Wiebe 3; Jakob Toews 1; Heinrich Friesen 2; Klaas Wiebe 4; Peter Heidebrecht 1; David Thiessen 1.

### Roots of the division, 1865

The Aeltester Johan Friesen, the ministers Peter and Abram Friesen, and the deacon Jakob Friesen, were at the place of Johan Harder, the Aeltester of the Orloff Gemeinde, on the second or third of December, 1865, because of Abraham Thiessen, who was under the ban, and his friends, who had left the Gemeinde on his account. On December 12 a brotherhood meeting was held in this regard. On the 18 and on the 28, the ministerial of the Gemeinde met together regarding Abraham Thiessen, the first time in Neukirch and the second time in Muntau. The purpose of the meeting was that the ban was to be lifted from Thiessen. A brotherhood meeting had already been held in this regard on the 19th.

Translator's comment: The roots of the 1866 division in the Kleinen Gemeinde are already evident from the contents of the 1864 writing to Peter Thiessen, in Schoenau. It is interesting to note that the leadership of the Kleine Gemeinde met with Aeltester Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde, with respect to the lamentable situation which was developing. No doubt Aeltester Harder would still have felt a debt of gratitude to Aeltester Johan Friesen and the Kleine Gemeinde for coming to the aid of Orloff during the ecclesiastical battles known as the barley dispute and the church building dispute.<sup>8</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER NINE. BOOK TWO.

1. Peter Toews, *Sammlung*, op. cit., 314-432.
2. C. Neff, "Mennonitische Blaetter," ME III, 644.
3. Proverbs 12:12. Note that the King James translation differs substantially from the Luther.
4. C. Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, op. cit., 94.
5. Reports that supposedly honest and sincere people had made a public confession of faith when they in fact had not yet been truly converted to follow the Cross, apparently also caused concern at brotherhood meetings. Some brethren are to have expressed themselves that it was perhaps best for all concerned if those who now denounced their former faith and baptism would leave the fellowship as this implied that they had made a false confession and were also baptized thereon.
6. In the Kleine Gemeinde the communion service was often referred to as "Einigkeit" or "unity" in reference to the symbolism of peace and oneness of the body of Christ and the holy community of sharing of the believers.
7. With the term "new legalism and works-righteousness". Aeltester H. Enns here is referring to the dogma whereby the reformers were able to deny the call of Jesus "to take up the cross and follow me" in favour of a grace oriented theology which accommodated a separation of faith and deeds. The radical pietists later extended this to include various legalistic practices such as particular types of and styles of conversion experiences, particular modes and styles of baptism, and particular forms of enthusiastic expressions of subjective inward emotion and piety. Anything and everything, but to actually believe and live out the teachings of Jesus.
8. It is noted that Aeltester Harder had many close relatives in the Kleine Gemeinde including an uncle, four aunts, and numerous cousins. e.g. Aeltester Heinrich Enns and minister Klaas Friesen (1793-1870) were married to his aunts. Minister Gerhard P. Goossen, delegate Cornelius Toews, and Aeltester Peter Toews were his cousins.



# Chapter Ten

## The 1866 Division

### 10.01 Introduction

Aeltester Peter Toews has outlined the 1866 division of the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde in his **Sammlung** in considerable detail. He has provided a collection of the most important documents pertaining to this event together with a few brief but invaluable comments. These writings will form the basis of this chapter. The most important documents are the following: the presentation of Rev. Heinrich Enns (1801-1881) which brought the issue to a head, the reply of Aeltester Johan Friesen and the counter declaration of Rev. Heinrich Enns. Also included are a few shorter supporting documents. The contents of these writings contain the story of the 1866 division.

It should be noted that this event must be considered and viewed in the context of its historical setting. The 1866 division was the most crucial event in the ecclesiastical history of the Kleine Gemeinde during the third quarter of the 19th Century. This point can be regarded as the high water mark after which the fortunes of the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde rapidly declined. This is true in a number of ways. Chapters six and seven indicated that the Kleine Gemeinde, as the senior ecclesiastical entity in the Molotschna, had developed a reputation as peacemaker and was involved as such in a number of serious divisions such as the barley and church building disputes. In addition the Kleine Gemeinde was very much affected by the growing material prosperity of the post-Cornies era. Against this background of a squabbling Molotschna Church community and a socio-economic elite which oppressed its own lower classes, the image of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in 1865 as a spiritually strong and materially prosperous Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde, is an impressive one indeed.

Only a year later in 1866 the Kleine Gemeinde itself was engulfed in internal strife. This division absorbed the inherent evangelical strength of the Kleine Gemeinde and checked the two-fold growth of the 1850s. The division left many members of the Kleine Gemeinde confused and discouraged. As a result the history of the remainder of the Russian period of this group was centered on essentially successful efforts to reorganize and to maintain a holding action against the socio-economic and religious turmoil of the Russian Mennonites during these fateful years.

What happened and why did such a terrible fall suddenly come about? More careful examination indicates that various problems were emerging in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde well before 1865. As noted, many individuals in the Gemeinde had become relatively prosperous and priorities had drifted away from the high ideals and vision of the founders and early leaders. "Piety creates wealth and wealth destroys piety", is a maxim which could fittingly be applied. Some had expected that the move out of the Molotschna, where the Kleine Gemeinde had lived scattered in various villages as a small percentage of the population, unto block settlements of their own, would solve the growing internal unrest and perhaps through a form of isolation enable the group to withstand the deepening socio-economic and religious problems affecting all the Russian-Mennonites. These people were to be deeply disappointed. In fact this may have contributed to the problem as the Anabaptist-Mennonite theology on which the faith of the Kleinen Gemeinde was based, had no teaching or doctrine especially applicable to such separated block settlements.

Another important factor which must be considered was the character and faith of Johan Friesen (1808-1872), who was elected as Aeltester of the Gemeinde in 1849. From an external point of view Aeltester Friesen deserves to be considered as one of the leading Russian Mennonite ecclesiastical leaders. He is credited with mediating and negotiating a peace to the unsavory barley dispute. He joined forces with Aeltester Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde in order to achieve a settlement of the church building dispute and later to save the infant Mennonite Brethren Church. But this natural alliance between the Orloff Gemeinde and the Kleinen Gemeinde also had adverse effects as the mild pietist-culturalism of the former rubbed off on the latter and particularly on Aeltester Johan Friesen.

This demonstrated the never ending difficulty of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde in maintaining a sound evangelical doctrine. If it partakes in society by "looking to the necessities of the saints", by "preaching the gospel to the uttermost corners of the earth", and by being the "messengers of peace" as prescribed by full gospel teachings, the Gemeinde cannot help but to be affected through interaction with others involved with these activities. But should the Gemeinde become isolationist

and centered on the mere preservation of its cultural and religious traditions the very reason for its existence is lost. In this instance it seems that Aeltester Johan Friesen allowed himself to be affected too much by the mild pietist-culturalism of the Orloff Gemeinde instead of referring back to the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith as the main fountain of his spiritual inspiration.

This philosophical drift was to have tremendous consequences for Aeltester Johan Friesen and the Kleinen Gemeinde. It appears that the greatest deficiency in the ministry of Aeltester Friesen was his lack of interest and study of the writings of the spiritual forefathers and his gradual departure and abandonment of these teachings. By comparison it is noted that Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) had been a tireless and devoted student and proponent of these teachings. In fact Abraham Friesen had been the driving force in the substantial publication effort which took place under his leadership. Thus the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde publication effort of the 1860s was spearheaded by his leading minister Heinrich Enns and not the Aeltester, speaks for itself. Such a spiritual decline of course left Aeltester Johan Friesen susceptible to influences from the mild pietist-culturalism of the Orloff Gemeinde which was the closest natural ally of the Kleine Gemeinde.

This indifference to the teachings of the faith on the part of Aeltester Johan Friesen was very evident in his internal pastoral care over his flock which more than offset his successes in external matters. Here his lack of sound teaching and indifferent practice eventually fostered and encouraged the malaise which was infiltrating the Kleinen Gemeinde. By contrast his predecessor, Abraham Friesen, had maintained a constant loving vigil over his flock acting immediately with effective counselling where brothers or sisters were experiencing difficulties in their spiritual lives. It seems that Aeltester Johan Friesen was lacking in these pastoral gifts and perhaps also in the loving interest and attention which the Anabaptist-Mennonite Aeltester must have for the spiritual welfare of his flock.

This lack of leadership became most evident with respect to the biblical ordinance of the ban. Here Aeltester Johan Friesen departed dramatically from the evangelical balance which his predecessors had established after much heartache and grief and through much earnest prayer and study. There seems to have been a noted decline in the practice of the ordinance under his leadership as well as an uneven and arbitrary application when it was exercised. i.e. without the spiritual love and evangelical balance to which reference is found in the writings of Aeltester Klaas Reimer, Rev. Heinrich Balzer, and Aeltester Abraham Friesen. This lack of diligence on the part of Aeltester Johan Friesen also seemed to reflect the directions in which his own spiritual destiny was headed.

Even the principle, instituted by Aeltester Klaas Reimer that an erring member who joined another Gemeinde ought not be shunned as judgment was not to be expressed respecting other Christian confessions, came into great misuse. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that during this time the practice declined to the point that the Kleine Gemeinde "allowed apostates, if they handed in a written cancellation of their membership before they were expelled, to go their own way..". Apparently this became such a popular device and contrivance that discipline by the ban became a rare happening in the Gemeinde of Aeltester Johan Friesen. In the view of Aeltester Peter Toews, this was an "attractive liberty, for many a lustful or also discipline avoiding and cross-fleeing child of God in the Church of Christ." Other reports confirm that a number of members of the Kleine Gemeinde joined the mildly pietist Orloff group during this period.<sup>2</sup>

This again underscores the continuing and relentless struggle of the Gemeinde in seeking to maintain the spiritual vision and evangelical teachings of the full gospel faith. Where these principles are lost or abandoned the practice of the same will decline and eventually cease. Had Aeltester Johan Friesen stood firmly grounded on the principles of his faith and lovingly preached and spiritually practiced these teachings before his Gemeinde as did his predecessor, no such a departure from the Gemeinde should have taken place.

A pause for reflection at this point might leave one to think that the relative secular success of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde would be its undoing. Its stand for "pure" Anabaptist-Mennonite doctrine and practice had slowly weakened. The Kleine Gemeinde was well on the way to becoming another Orloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde orientated toward a mild pietism and a material and cultural emphasis from which Balzer and other earlier Kleine Gemeinde leaders had so sharply turned away. Would the Kleine Gemeinde also come to see its essential being in the socio-economic and cultural achievements for which the Russian-Mennonites later became known? Even worse, would the Kleine Gemeinde also have to experience the *Gottterdaemmerung* and complete social upheaval of the 1917 Revolution, and subsequent civil war and famine? These are the questions which the observer could quite properly pose at this juncture.

Fortunately for the descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde other developments intervened. The under-

currents at work inside the Gemeinde and the social forces from outside the Gemeinde came to a head in 1866. These pressures resulted in a division which shattered the unity of the Kleine Gemeinde and dealt it a blow from which the Kleine Gemeinde as a movement never completely recovered. Opposition to the indifferent discipline and unspiritual leadership of Aeltester Johan Friesen grew and was consolidated in the person of Heinrich Enns (1801-1881). Enns was a capable and eloquent minister who became the leader of those members of the Kleine Gemeinde looking for strict return to the evangelical teachings of the past.

This group came into open opposition to Aeltester Friesen and his supporters over the issue of the excommunication of Abraham Thiessen. Through his life and conduct Thiessen was an obvious candidate for excommunication. However an error occurred in that after Thiessen had been notified that his matter would be dealt with on a certain Sunday, his matter was in fact heard the previous Sunday with the verdict being excommunication. Thiessen now used this procedural defect in his case as grounds to argue that his excommunication was invalid. After Thiessen had caused protracted difficulties, Aeltester Friesen finally agreed to reaccept Thiessen into the Gemeinde. This was completely unacceptable for Enns and his group who also blamed Aeltester Friesen for the malaise which was besetting the group. The reformers under the leadership of Enns also insisted that Friesen was no longer capable of his office and that he should resign. The supporters of Aeltester Johan Friesen replied by removing Enns from his ministerial office. As a result the Gemeinde broke into two almost equal parts, the one supporting Aeltester Friesen, and the other group electing Heinrich Enns as their Aeltester. The particulars of this event can be found in the following documents.

### 10.02 Declaration of Heinrich Enns

Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. "On January 3rd, 1866, a Brotherhood meeting was held in order to remove the ban from Abraham Thiessen, but this result was not achieved. And now dear Reader! The matter which had already degenerated into a state of disunity, came to a very grave turning point, which brought about a complete division in the Gemeinde that has not yet completely healed to this day (1874).

"On January 6th, 1866, the Minister Heinrich Enns read the following letter to the assembly. "For so long as I have been with this Gemeinde I have not had such grief, nor indeed have I had such great sorrow, as I experience today. If the merciful Lord had not come to my aid and strengthened me, I would surely have wasted away, in that they now say to us, as they once said to Israel, "Sing me a song of Zion"; as also King David says, "In the taverns they sing of me"; so that I must truthfully say with the prophet, "I am pained to my very soul".

"When you Ohm Johan Friesen and your wife were at our place, it particularly struck me and I felt rather concerned, that it seemed to you that the ban had been all too quickly applied to Thiessen. When you and the other Ohms were at our place before driving to Schoenau to Thiessen, the matter also seemed doubtful to me and I said to you, "We are putting ourselves to a serious test." I also read Menno Simons' testimony to you where he says "That if in his time they have not applied the ban with great earnestness and fervor and without regard to all respect of person, they would have become the scorn and shame of all the world".

"This is also the only reason why we have presently become a mockery. At the time I did not know what this was leading up to when you so tearfully lamented about those who were falling away, and that it had only become clear to you now that you had not done right in this matter about which the Gemeinde did not have any knowledge. But the matter regarding Thiessen cannot alone be given the blame for the state which we are in. Oh no! We had already fully brought this situation upon ourselves before.

"Consequently your accusations against me, although they do not originate from yourself, compel me to make this declaration before the Gemeinde. The presentation to the Gebietsamt regarding Thiessen after Peter Friesen, from Tiege, had first been at Thiessen's place, did not seem right to you either. But why did you not tell them when I read the report to you in Marianwohl, that it did not please you. (The report was still lying at Abraham Thiessen's place at the time). Thiessen suffered the first and greatest damage from this.

"You also find it wrong that I wrote your name. This caused me so much pain that I can hardly express myself. Oh! For once consider where would we have been, had we yielded in this matter? According to the Holy Scriptures Thiessen should not have kept his servant. They had us exactly in their snare and would have reproached us saying "He can bring legal process against us, and many people". He has recently also beaten his maid servant. Oh! What a burden would we have inflicted upon ourselves, if we had supported Thiessen in such an attitude concerning his unpeaceable separation from his servant, which Peter Thiessen confirmed in the presence of Ohm Dueck and myself. In Neukirch I spoke to him myself, and he admitted, saying: "If they would want to understand the matter they would but they could also understand the same detrimentally".

"The Gebietsamt knows our principles very well without our having to make a report to them

and if Thiessen would have changed there would still have been time to come to his aid. Here we would only have encouraged him in an incorrect spirit and would have become a mockery for the Gebietsamt.

"Some time ago when the Gebietsamt pressed me for something that was against my conscience, they threatened to call me before the higher authorities. I did not call on the Aeltester nor on anyone else, since I am answerable for myself. Nor has any of the martyrs ever called on anyone else. The Gemeinde is of no help for such a one who is not capable of answering for himself in matters of faith. Thiessen only wanted to use us to bring the Gebietsamt to exasperation, as you, Ohm Friesen, have confirmed many times. Thiessen stood immovable in this spirit and without any sign of sorrow, when Dueck and I were at his place prior to his expulsion.

"Whereupon Ohm Dueck said when I went to Marianwohl, "That he could also be voted out". I then said to you Ohm Johan, that you should present the matter completely without bias so that it did not depend on us, which you also did. However since much discussion took place about the matter, but no conclusion was reached, you finally said: "That as he (Thiessen) has for such a long time caused us so much vexation, and now he in addition wants to bring us into opposition to the Gebietsamt?" I suppose I will also have stated my findings about Thiessen, and consequently he was expelled from the Gemeinde.

"You also accuse me of having the greatest fault in the matter of Ohm Klaas Friesen of Rosenort. We shall have to leave this up to the Lord. If the spirit of God had not given us a completely greater inspiration I would have unknowingly and unwillingly collaborated in doing wrong. For when we sat in council for the first time regarding Ohm Klaas, I said, "We will have to consider carefully whether or not we should abandon singing by numerals, because it was like a thorn in the eye of Ohm Klaas". Whereupon Jakob Friesen from Blumstein said, "The numeral-melodies by now are favoured," and the matter was not discussed any further. Jakob Friesen, Blumstein, at one time said; "The matter with Ohm Klaas could be tolerated no longer." When we again sat in council with regard to removing him from his office, I also said as follows. "Let us overlook this for him once more". But because I saw that the matter was destined to end this way I also voted for removing him from his office. Before and after the vote mostly numeral-melodies were being sung, and because Ohm Klaas was offended by this, I talked very earnestly with all the songleaders. I said to you Ohm Johan that you should also talk with the song leaders. But, by and large, it was quite fruitless. Not that I thought that we should sing no numeral-melodies but rather that we could have refrained from using them for a time.

"In so far as the matter between Johan Dueck and Ohm Klaas is concerned, I will not say much. But Ohm Dueck and I know very well how I advised him. I also drove with him to the home of Ohm Klaas and, from a true heart I counselled him that he should help in the matter by conceding as much as he knew how and as much as he was able. In my opinion he could possibly have done more and been more accommodating. But I left this up to him, as he said that he had done as much as he knew how. In which regard I am also satisfied with Dueck, because everyone knows best the status of his relationship with God.

"You said that you really begged Ohm Klaas, that he should accommodate himself, which I also believe you. But we may have to accept fault in that on earlier occasions we have not pleaded enough with those who flattered themselves in pride, that they should discontinue the same, and that if they did not wish to discontinue, then also to ban. Now you accuse me that I did not remind you often enough. I will leave you to reconsider this for I very well know how frequently I have talked with you, and almost begged you that we wanted to do away with things, especially the quite unnecessary things.

"But the end result of all of this was that we Ohms were also blamed that we were far from being free of pride. What should one say? Yes, I was so presumptuous, although in full trust and love, that I told the other Ohms, especially Ohm Johan Dueck, whenever I heard of something which gave me concern. Because of this he once said to me: "You have not yet experienced this often enough." Which I, nevertheless, forgive him. I have also advised Peter Friesen of Tiege, in love, that he should do away with the large mirror. If you, Ohm Johan had also worked as earnestly, I am certain that the matter would not have come this far.

"Don't you agree? Did I not speak so earnestly about pride in almost all my sermons (presentations), that you had previously said, "You have spoken about pride, and named specifics, we also have to discuss these matters at the brethren meeting". You know very well how frequently I have talked with you about the Federwagen (wagons with springs), with the result that it was resolved at a general brotherhood meeting that we would prefer if they were not used. Which meant that they should gradually be done away with. However, what happened later? When I talked with you about this, you agreed with me, and yet you did not oppose those who desired the Federwagen, whereby much harm was done among the brethren and also among the ministerial. e.g. Jakob Friesen was not afraid to vex many weak brethren, which is true even to this time.

"Oh, my beloved Ohm Johan! I have frequently and earnestly pleaded with you regarding matters which were not in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. Indeed the fact that your brother is carrying on a business seems wrong to me. (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. He, namely Klaas Friesen, the deacon, was operating a small retail business). I have frequently discussed this in the presence of other Ohms, but you replied, "He has many debts". Alas, should one unrighteous act excuse the

others? How will we then have power to counsel others against going into business? Because he deliberately got into debt and by building with other peoples money he situated himself to be equal with the world.

"The petition of Heidebrecht to the Gebietsamt is likewise directly contrary to the teachings of Christ. I have frequently implored of you in the presence of the other Ohms, that you not yield in this matter, to the extent that you finally said to me that "I was far too particular". In great sadness I had to be silent. If only Heidebrecht, instead of obtaining the help of the Gebietsamt in order to obtain his money, would have said to the Brandtaeltester that he would gladly have his Brandtgeld (fire insurance settlement) if it was possible, but that at the same time he did not want to cause too much hardship for the poor. I will leave for everyone to consider the purpose for which he wanted to use his money. Perhaps there are others among us who have not even demanded their insurance money as sternly before reporting the lack of payment to the Gebietsamt.

"Alas, my beloved Ohm Johan! What a terrible light and witness of mercy we emit. Oh, I say. We who now owe so much but could repay, but do not keep our word. How disgraced would we not have to stand, if they would request that the Gebietsamt would help them collect their money from us, with which they have already threatened us. Are we in any way different from the unrighteous steward, who choked his fellow servant? I talked so much about this that Ohm Abraham Friesen, from Neukirch, exclaimed with the following words, "He would brand as more righteous those that did not pay, than those who demanded the money", because I had said that there were also some of our brethren who could not pay. Alas! I say again. One brother threatens the other with the Gebietsamt?

"Also, note how much I had discussed the Abdanken with you, and especially again in Neukirch, together with the other Ohms, when you had decided to preach at the deceased corpse. How many brothers did you not offend that time? And yet almost all the Ohms had given their consent. Jakob Friesen, Blumstein, has for some time already been in agreement with this Abdanken of which his son Abram Friesen is very well aware. Indeed, Jakob Friesen even seems to want to cast suspicion upon his deceased father, which I regret very much. Fortunately he has so plainly brought it to life before all people."

"(Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. The Abdanken (funeral oration) was not supposed to follow the customary style, namely, to comfort those left behind regarding the salvation of the deceased without regard to the conduct in life of the deceased whether the same had been good or evil. Rather it was to be an exhortation to watchfulness and virtue, for we shall have no reason to be offended, when we proclaim the word of God to such a called-together assembly. The audience is to be reminded of their mortality instead of representing to them, time and opportunity to busy themselves with the matters of this world, among which must also be mentioned the smoking of tobacco<sup>3</sup>.)

"Another matter which I wish to put to you for your consideration is the great tumult and unrest respecting the leasing and purchasing of land. Who will have the most fault in that regard? It first started with Ohm Klaas in Rosenort, where the writing lay unexecuted. When I came there I earnestly declared that I did not see good results in this. Whereupon you, Ohm Johan, even said to me, "Consider the matter very carefully." (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. Some of the poor brethren made a written request of the ministerial, to purchase additional land as a Gemeinde. The leasing of land had already commenced in 1863, and the first land was bought in 1865, and the balance during the three subsequent years.)

"When the matter progressed more and more, I also decided to take part, although I myself wanted to remain silent, but only if it was done by the whole Gemeinde and not otherwise and only for the purpose of assisting in the acquisition of land for the poor. But you frequently said, that you could clearly see this was not possible, and rather, that only a few should tackle the task. This is also what has now taken place. You yourself advised that it be done in this way, and led us and therefore you will need to consider this very carefully.

"I have spoken to many brethren who have said to me, "that the spirit of God could not possibly be the inspiration of this". I did not wish to express it in exactly that way, and replied, "The end results will show which spirit is leading, and that they should be patient". Oh, I say! You need not be surprised if it is said among the brethren that we are not united. The landless dispute in general has done much damage among us, because you were driven back and forth. The first time when we were asked to sign the Ansiedlungs Spruch (Writ of Settlement), I said to our village gathering that there was nothing in that Gemeinde statement which would be against my conscience, but that I did not wish to sign because of the tremendous unrest. And I did not sign.

"There was a great deal of discussion about this at the brotherhood meeting in Neukirch. As you and Ohm Abraham Friesen had deliberately executed the Writ of Settlement, what was I to do? As stated above, there was nothing in the Gemeinde statement which would be contrary to my conscience. Later when it was once more requested of us here, I did subscribe to the document, whereupon I was still blamed by weak brethren.

"It was the same with the matter of Thiessen. It frequently greatly troubled me that prior to his expulsion, things were not right with him and that there was a respect of person. But I did not realize until later that it had already displeased God that Thiessen had been spared contrary to his Word. Otherwise, I would not have taken up the matter so earnestly, and I was glad and very satisfied when the matter was resolved which they now consider to have been bad of me and you, Ohm



Johan, and fault us for it. However, I gladly wish to hear this for I am fully conscious that I will have to subsist in the matter before God. If I have unknowingly fallen short in word or deed, I gladly wish to admit the same, because I have perhaps talked to him the most. I could mention much more, but this should suffice. If so desired I also hope to explain myself verbally.

“For these reasons, beloved Ohm Johan, I humbly beg of you and advise you that it is the will of God, that you resign from your office and confess as you have confessed already. Perhaps we others, although very weak servants, will be able to heal somewhat, and once again sweep out that which is banned and the leaven, and the insults of those who rightfully slander us so that we may escape from the judgment of the blasphemers. There is no other way, be sure about that. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. As much as the confidence in the Aeltester had very much gone over to the side of the brethren, yet this position taken by Enns was too hasty, so that many brethren thereby also lost confidence in Enns.)

“For even if we could cover up the matter, and you would change it and make it better, it would have no success. Very few brethren would be able to place their confidence in you, should anything arise. You also expose yourself to very great danger. In as much as the God of love has already chastised you I think that you must also be able to blame yourself like Eli the prophet, in that you have been far too soft. Not that you have intentionally wanted wrong, but rather that in many things you did not hold the reins.

“Do not think that you will yet again be able to build up confidence in yourself, because, as you yourself say, you have against your conscience, earnestly and with doubled effort strengthened Thiessen’s case for almost two years. Also do please consider that the guilt has already arisen earlier and that this is why God has allowed you to come to such a great fall.

“I must say with truth, that I feel sorrow for you from the bottom of my heart, and that I cannot help you further in any way, except with a prayer, that the Lord would not chastise you beyond what you are able to bear. “Heinrich Enns”

### 10.03 Statement by Ohm Heinrich Enns

“After I had read this declaration before the entire brotherhood, I asked the Ohms as to whether this was the truth, to which Ohm Johan Friesen, the Aeltester, replied: “What you have written is the truth but I have repented for it”.

“Oh, what counsel was to be had now? Many brethren agreed with this view and declared themselves, that they wanted to forgive Aeltester Friesen in everything and would also reaccept Thiessen into the Gemeinde, unpunished. Oh! I say it again. There is no other advice here. The matter has already progressed much too far in pride and covetousness, which is the root of all evil. There has to be complete separation from all of this. I am completely resolved for this purpose in the secure hope that the merciful Lord will grant grace and strength to me, and the brethren who hold with me, and in these nearly final days to firmly maintain us in the truth until the end.

“My beloved Ohm Johan Friesen! I love you from the heart, and in the will of God I also forgive you in everything. The burden on my heart also seemed to become easier for me when you were here with the Ohms from Tiede, and with many tears lamented that matters in fact were the way I had presented them, and that already for some time matters had not been good. Whereupon you promised to enact everything I said, if only I would help along.

“But alas! As you have almost caused us to err I can no longer place my confidence in you. You state that when we have gone astray, we must again find our way back. Which is also true if only one has gone astray, but you have gone in error with the whole Gemeinde: And as you yourself say, against your own conscience. Ponder this!

With Friendly Greetings: My beloved Ohm Johan Friesen! My fervent love compels me so that I cannot fail to advise to the best of my understanding, just as I in my weakness have always given you my best counsel ever since we have been bosom friends.

“Thiessen would not have been punished had you not emphasized the following words at the brotherhood meeting in Marianwohl, namely, “However, Thiessen for such a length of time has caused so much aggravation and now in addition he wants to bring us into opposition to the Gebietsamt”. Because everyone was convinced of the truth of this statement, this had enough influence on the brethren, as well as on me, so that Thiessen was unanimously (possibly a few exceptions) expelled by the brethren.

Now the questions is, have you been moved by the zeal of the Lord or by the zeal of the flesh and your disposition? Was it the spirit of the Lord as, in complete confidence in you, we then believed that it was? How would you, or could you, then revoke your statement? If however, it was only the spirit of flesh and human nature, how was it possible that for two years you earnestly and zealously defended the matter. And with such emphatic words even recently warned the brethren about Thiessen, saying “Whoever is not yet convinced can now be persuaded”.

Oh, please consider whether it wasn’t too hasty? You yourself said that it had been done completely against your conscience. Oh, my beloved Ohm Johan Friesen! Now you ask of the whole Gemeinde that they allow Thiessen to go unpunished, and that they reaccept him as a brother, against their own conscience? Oh, I say again, you continue to place yourself in ever greater danger, and

in respect of which your conscience will not give you peace. It is not this matter alone, as the actual cause arose some time ago.

Therefore, beloved Ohm Johan Friesen! Because of the sincere love and fear of God which alone inspires me and in accordance with the responsibilities which fall on me, I hereby state that I can no longer have trust in you as Aeltester and in the Ohms who hold with you, in such a spirit, since these actions and also previous ones, stand opposed to the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless it is a very difficult and heartrending - yes painful - separation for me. However, I comfort myself in my very great weakness and imperfection, with and in God, who will further and guide my cause. In joy I cling unto God who will continue to help me in the future, during the short remainder of my life, as he has helped in the past. There are some who wish to attribute my cause to my own self-righteousness. This, however, is only known to the one who proves our hearts and lives, and on whom I depend.

Even though your father-in-law says that I am lying in the dirt, he will have much reason to reflect in case he still thinks that he is completely clean, and so that he does not soil himself. Yes, he will have reason to consider whether at times he has not harmed you in that he often judges matters one-sidedly.

I and a number of the brethren are of the same mind as the previous Aeltesten, and consider our action to be necessary, even though you and perhaps many others still do not believe that this is actually so serious. We gladly wish to build together with everyone, and in our weakness to cling firmly to the commandments of the Lord. The brethren who wish to build together with me in so far as is within our powers, shall not be an aggravation nor cause offense to you or anyone else. Yes, we want to strive with all our might to be at peace with all men, and to conduct ourselves as quiet and peaceful subjects before all men, in so far as God will grant us grace and blessing.

Your loving and well-wishing friend. "Heinrich Enns"  
Fischau, On January 4th, 1866

#### 10.04 Defence of Aeltester Johan Friesen

On January 23, 1866, Abraham Thiessen was reaccepted as a member of the Gemeinde.

*A Simple Declaration and Defence of our Beloved Aeltester in accordance with the Word of God, regarding the present Secession from our Gemeinde.*

The present secession has come about for the most part because of unfounded accusations made against our Aeltester, principally because he would not put aside his office in accordance with the advice of Heinrich Enns. Notwithstanding, that none of us is without mistakes and offenses, it seems that many brethren are unable to distinguish between what comes under forgiving or not forgiving, which is right or wrong, or which side acts against or according to the gospel. The prophet says: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil: those that make darkness out of light, and light out of darkness: Those that make sour to be sweet, and sweet to be sour. And woe unto them that think they are wise and that consider themselves to be clever, Isaiah 5:20."

We are therefore compelled by our sense of duty and by our love towards our neighbour and consider it to be of the greatest importance that we openly declare ourselves against this secession, and to testify and to prove from the word of God that this secession is completely unscriptural in order that no one can excuse himself by claiming ignorance. A secession is very serious because much sorrow and grief, indeed bewilderment and anger, is brought about, and certainly it is even more serious if such a secession is not in accordance with the holy gospel. How else can we describe or call such a separation than preaching a gospel different from what the apostles have preached unto us. Paul says, should someone do so, let him be accursed although it be an angel from Heaven. Oh Beloved! Do consider and heed the time and prove the same. For the time has come when, according to the prophecies of Jesus, they shall receive the very elect if it were possible. He says they shall show great signs, and wonders. Matthew 24:24.

Firstly, let us consider the fall of our Aeltester, and even of all of us, for we are all involved, with only the exception of a few, since this has not happened secretly, but rather openly. Nor has it been that it was a life full of vice or that it was for him a single sin unto death. Instead it has stealthily crept in over a period of time, because of failing to earnestly watch and pray, and in part because of lukewarmness. Which is not good, and we must freely acknowledge that even before when we were still all in one fellowship we stood in grave danger, we as well as Enns. In Revelation 3:15-17 the Spirit says to the angel of the Gemeinde in Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Thou sayest: I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Beloved! Note carefully what the Spirit says further. He does not say, "I advise you that you lay down your office"; rather he says: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent". Behold, that is the counsel of the Holy Spirit in the great Revelation, above which no one may presume to elevate himself 2 Corinthians 4:2-7. Nor shall anyone add or subtract anything therefrom, for at the conclusion of the prophecy it is stated: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book: If any man shall add

unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in this book," Revelation 22:18-19.

Behold my beloved. The one who so earnestly commands that this prophecy is to be allowed to stand unchanged, and to live thereby; is also the one who speaks: I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, and blessed are they who keep his commandments.

Beloved. There is no other counsel than to confess our sins and to repent. This is in agreement with the advice of Sirach 35:5 where he speaks of foresaking sin as a divine service pleasing to the Lord, and of ceasing to do wrong, as an atoning sacrifice. Alas! The words of Paul are quite fitting when he says, "You sit and judge me according to the law, and yet command me to be smitten contrary to the law". Yes, Enns judges our Aeltester according to the gospel and judges him contrary to the gospel, telling him to resign from his office, Acts 23:3.

Beloved, this is our plea to all of us who have for so long considered ourselves dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Reflect upon the matter, prove the same in the light of the Word of God with a pure and impartial heart, and without respect of person. For we have no doubt that you will see that this secession is proceeding in a direction contrary to that of the Gospel, of which we, through patiently seeking and searching the Holy Scriptures, are satisfied and persuaded. Therefore we want to declare ourselves, earnestly and in the firm hope of God's help, frankly and openly towards all men, and to work against the same.

Do truly consider the matter once more. Not so long ago we lived together in one fellowship as was our custom of old, and as time went on more and more stealthy creeping in took place. We often talked about these matters saying that this or that wasn't good, and frequently we blamed the Aeltester for it although we were all at fault, and did not take enough heed against the wrong. We wanted to bear with each other, and not consider it as deliberate wrong-doing, rather as mistakes and weaknesses.

The ban has been one of the most serious aspects in which we have become guilty through our carelessness, as will be familiar to everyone. As our indifference continued the Lord permitted and directed that we more and more come into disgrace because of our lack of tenacity and defence of the ban. We had become guilty on account of our lukewarmness, and because of our sleepiness we could not realize our blunder, so that the words of the Spirit were applicable to us; "Because thou art (hast become) lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth". But he says further on, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent."

So then, beloved! The Lord through His Spirit first put before the eyes of our beloved Aeltester all the guilt of his sins, and like David through Nathan preached repentance. You well know how deeply broken he was, how, with many tears he declared himself before all us brothers and sisters, both verbally as well as in writing. Yes, how he judged his sins and himself, like David, before the whole Gemeinde and fulfilled the words of Paul, when he says: "For if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged", 1 Corinthians 11:31. According to the teachings of Paul, we have no power to judge him, since he already judged himself. The Holy Scripture states that he cannot be punished as can be read in the case of the falling into sin of David and Peter. Nathan said to David when he had confessed his sins: "Therefore the Lord has also taken away your sins. You will not die". 2 Samuel 12:13. The Lord Jesus, who saw his fall beforehand said to Peter, "Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail you not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Luke 22:31-32.

Behold, my beloved! The Lord did not reject him, nor did he say that he was thereby unworthy of being an apostle. Rather he said that upon his conversion he should strengthen his brethren. As though he meant to say that if anyone has fallen, and he is converted, and like Peter, weeps bitterly over his guilt: That we are to strengthen and comfort such a one that his sins are forgiven. Let us interpret everything in favour of our Aeltester, and forgive even when it is not recognized as such. How much more should we not now forgive when he confesses and is broken thereby? Together with Peter, we should also look on our own weakness and strengthen him!

But alas! With great sorrow we must see and hear that there are some who show no sympathy, no mercy, no forgiveness, as though they are completely sinless and guiltless, and have no feelings. Oh, but do think about the matter. How much guilt we all carry before God, and how dearly we desire forgiveness? So that if the Lord would not forgive our great debt as a gift, we would not be able to repay this debt even if we had all eternity to do so. The Lord Jesus says, "If you do not forgive men their errors, neither will the Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses", Matthew 6:15.

Oh, beloved! In the end all will finally have to come before the judgment, where those who do not forgive will be overcome by terrible fright and anxiety. Their countenances will become flaming red, and they will be terror struck when they will see the Son of Man approaching in all His glory. They will be in great fear and their consciousness shall be lost, and they will come into despair over their sins, and their own sins will condemn them in their sight. Isaiah 13 and Ecclesiasticus 4:20. Yes, he will cast them into the prison of hell until he has paid the last farthing, Matthew 5:36.

Dear ones! Can we not forgive the small debt of our fellow servant? If he pleads with us for forgiveness? Enns himself gives testimony in a writing that Ohm Friesen has recognized his error and that he apparently no longer held anything against him, only, he could not have confidence in him anymore. How does this compare with the teachings of Christ when he says: "Not only seven times,

but seventy times seven." It is evident that there is to be no mistrust, rather, we are to forgive him as often as he asks us to. To this Enns writes that he only lacks confidence in him, but in another place he writes that these are matters of conscience to him and that he cannot concede. Therefore, we say again that they are unfounded accusations, since they are so questionable and do not at all conform with the Holy Scripture. Consequently we want to present a few points from the Holy Scripture to clearly convince the brethren that these accusations do not agree with the same.

You, who hold with Enns, will probably think that you have been sufficiently enlightened in the matter, but we do not agree with this. For you do not address yourself to the origin of this separation. Instead you base your opinion too much upon unfounded speeches, for which however the matter is much too serious. We do not wish to pass further judgement upon Enns, except as we are obligated to testify that his dealings are in conflict with the word of God, and that as he remains firmly adamant in the same, he is punishable according to the Holy Scriptures. We doubt not that whoever examines the matter thoroughly in the light of the word of God, will be sufficiently convinced thereby.

Our going apart first commenced at the time when our Aeltester sincerely exhorted all of us to act carefully in all matters, and that we should be open and express ourselves if anyone had anything against the other, and that we should talk it over and forgive one another. He said, "Much that is not good has arisen because there is not enough goodwill among the brethren". With this he began to declare his concerns about Enns regarding the dealings with Thiessen, that Enns himself had sometimes been too careless with his speech, so that they may quite rightfully accuse us. To this Enns answered that he hoped he had not uttered a single unseasoned word throughout the whole matter with Thiessen.

This was the first statement which gave us concern for James says, "For we all offend in many things. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and also able to bridle the whole body", James 3:2. But, we think that everyone who knows Enns will be familiar with his eloquence. We would have gladly forgiven him, if only he had desisted from his attitude, but since he has continued in this self-righteous sense in one thing after another, this expression is contrary to his actions, by which he has not only caused us to hear unseasoned words, but according with the Holy Scriptures his words are all wrong.

Alas, brothers! We have come to know him with amazement. What Spirit was leading him when he had this secession in mind? We could hardly believe it to be possible for such a senior minister, to whom we had for so many years given so much confidence, if we had not seen it ourselves. Before we had even heard anything of this secession, we, including Ohm Johan, went to him, and also to Loewen of Lindenau, on New Year's Eve, in the hope that we would still be able to discuss the matter. In the beginning this seemed to bear fruit in Lindenau where Esau from the Crimea was also present and made many accusations. But when Ohm Johan Friesen made his declaration, he withdrew his accusations and asked for forgiveness as he said, "he had not known or heard of it". Isaac Loewen said, "We want to hope for the best".

However, when we came to Enns, it seemed as if his mind was firmly made. He brought many accusations forward regarding our Aeltester so that we realized that if Ohm Johan Friesen would remain as our Aeltester he would possibly secede. Enns also advised him that he would achieve the best if he would lay down his office. After this Ohm Johan Friesen told him about his convictions and concerns and begged him with tears, if it would not once more be possible to reconcile everything. This moved Enns to the point that he became somewhat quieter and said, "he had taken a great load from him, and that it was much lighter in his heart, and that he would perhaps place confidence on him once more."

We drove away in full hope, but in the morning at the worship service in Tiede, he and both the Esaus, and H. Warkentin of Fischau, came into the summer room quite out of control, as if they had allowed themselves to be persuaded to do something bad the previous evening. They now withdrew their consent, and both verbally and in writing confirmed the fall of our Aeltester, and that it was impossible for him to be forgiven as Aeltester. They also brought forth many accusations. The countenance of Enns was all wrought up and filled with passion, so that we were almost terrified. By then we had lost hope that we would again have peace, but the brethren had not yet been convinced, and believed, that everything would again be made right. Consequently, we spared the brethren and did not yet publicly declare our conviction, believing instead that they would in due time convince themselves.

Only a few days later, we convened a general brotherhood meeting in order to take counsel with the brethren regarding this matter. After our Aeltester had put his sorrowful situation before the brethren and submitted himself to their judgment, Enns came forward as everybody knows, and having drawn up a written declaration, presented it before the brethren. In this statement he declared the unworthiness of Ohm Johan as Aeltester with many accusations and much reproach. Without any previous discussion regarding the matter he advised him before the whole brotherhood that for his part he would do the best and that he could see no other way for him, but that he would have to give up his office. This had such a great influence that a great discord and disorganization was immediately aroused among the brethren, so that we were literally astounded.

We experienced in fact what Peter Peters writes in his booklet, page 109, where it says: "The most lamentable of all is, that those who preach of peace, are the ones who most of all drive away peace. Jeremiah 3:8. Oh! What harm has been caused by judging too hastily, and by expressing oneself at an unsuitable time. Many sincere people have been misled by the utterances of imprudent ministers, who should annihilate and extinguish such a fire, but through their evil confession they cause it to

burn, etc. so that the whole body of Christendom is divided and torn into many groups". Thus far from Peter Peters.

Alas! We have to experience this in our times with much grief. How sad, that the good advice of our peaceable minister, P. Peters, whose writings we took so much pain to have reprinted for our common good, are not being better followed. Yes, Enns himself was the promoter of the publication of these writings. (Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. In so far as we know **Die Wandelnde Seele** and **Das Kleine Martyrer Buch** were also reprinted and published in a new edition through the inducement of Heinrich Enns.) He considered it very important that we read the same diligently for the promotion of everyone's salvation, and also to follow its' teachings. How precisely these teachings apply to him now. P. Peters warns us earnestly and lovingly for peace, as he says on page 93: "Oh messengers of the City of Peace, do warn the citizens against discord, and yourself be of one heart. Romans 10:15. Let them who envy you divide themselves, he says, but you must avoid division. The proud quarrel all the time, for which reason they fall, but the humble are victorious." Proverbs 18:6 and 1 Peter 5:6.

Behold, this is what happens to one who looks upon someone else, but forgets about himself, which is apparently happening to Enns. His accusations now testify of him as they are so groundless and contrary to the Holy Scriptures. We would think the brethren would see this for themselves if they would examine the accusations impartially to which we have always directed them. But because so many agree with it without examining it, and support Enns, and many others do not, discord and separation is being generated.

How can an Aeltester resign from his office if the brethren have not impeached him, especially when it has to do with groundless accusations? Nor can they do so without a brotherhood meeting, without discussion and the achieving of a decision. Nor can we attribute to him any sin unto death; instead he confesses his mistakes and weeps over his faults. And even if he has committed a sin unto death, this would still have been an arbitrary and unheard of action contrary to the gospel. We find no evidence that it ever so occurred in the Gemeinde of Christ, and if such arbitrary actions were ever to take place, it would have to be in an unordered manner, as P. Peters writes on page 207, "And the Apostle says: But if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not know yet as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8:2." Therefore we need to handle all matters with counsel and with consideration. If the Gemeinde must give its decision about a brother by a vote, how much more so about an Aeltester? But he could not accept this advice and all the more so because his conscience did not condemn him, rather, as the apostle says of such as him: "He rejoiced in God". Nor could we and many other brethren agree with such a vote as he had judged himself.

We could repeat a number of additional parts of the accusations in the declaration of Enns but we will not do so at this time. The charges are so unfounded and some parts have been brought up that have for the most part been made good and reconciled, and which should be forgotten according to the teachings of Paul, and for which no eye or ear witness can be produced who can prove it for him. Quite to the contrary, the whole ministerial testifies against it, and says that they are matters that have been resolved. However he will not give out the declaration and as we have not remembered the whole declaration from hearing it read once, we will allow the matter to stand for this time.

The Apostle Paul admonishes that no accusation be received against an Aeltester except before two or three witnesses, 1 Timothy 5. Therefore we are satisfied in this matter to the extent that we know that we cannot accept these accusations because they do not contain the evidence required by the apostles and in fact only the contrary. We want to put this before everyone to consider from a true heart. How can it be in accordance with the Holy Scriptures to keep hidden such an important declaration which gives the grounds for going out of the Gemeinde. For if it is true, and if it was evidence of the clear light of the gospel which had been given utterance regarding our Aeltester, would it not then be of the utmost importance to reveal this to everyone in so far as it was possible, and to convince everyone, especially those who cannot comprehend the same?

Oh! Beloved brethren, is such a thing not enough proof, that everyone can see that this is wrong? For the Lord Jesus says, "He who confesses me before men, him will I also confess before my heavenly Father," and further "He who is ashamed of me and my words, of him the Son of Man will also be ashamed, when he will come in his glory," Matthew 10 and Luke 9. Does one light a candle to be put under a bushel or under a table? By no means! Rather to be set on a candlestick, Mark 4:21.

His statement does not agree with the teachings of Jesus and is only his own judgment. Nor can we consider Enns to be blameless in these matters in which he accuses our Aeltester, for he himself gave witness to this effect at the last brotherhood meeting, that up until the withdrawal of the ban against Thiessen he had been in full agreement with us. However, his accusations go back many years and yet he says, that even the actions from earlier years are directly contrary to the Holy Scripture. In his writing he repeats that they are not only mistakes but matters of conscience in which he cannot yield.

How are we to regard this? Not long ago he was one of mind with us, he went to take the Lord's Supper with us, we washed one another's feet, and greeted each other with the kiss of love, and now they are to be matters of conscience to which he cannot concede. How can this be compared with the teachings of Jesus? When we wish to offer a sacrifice and then remember that our brother has aught against us, we ought to be reconciled beforehand. Our hearts are to be united like the bread that is made of many kernels, and like the wine of many grapes. Thus united, we are to approach the table to partake of the Lord's Supper. Matthew 5:23; 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Beloved, the outlook in the beginning was as if the only reason for his separation was the fact that we had withdrawn the ban from Thiessen. However, his declarations were for the most part about former matters in which he had for so long taken part. But now, all at once, he wishes to be blameless and to cast all the blame on our Aeltester. Indeed, he writes that it is not only the matter of Thiessen. Oh no! The fault has arisen earlier, not considering that consequently he is then also at fault. Now he writes that he was impelled, only and simply by his sincere love and his fear of God, in accordance with his incumbent duty, to renounce our Aeltester and the Ohms who hold with him in this matter; and that he does so only because our Aeltester did not follow his arbitrary advice, and completely contrary to the Holy Scripture resign from his office.

Oh, what an unheard of situation! And this is supposed to be called sincere godly fear and the duty of a minister. Oh, in that case the entire Holy Scripture and all earnest admonitions would be worthless and in vain! For according to what the apostle teaches, love has quite a different characteristic and quality, for John says: "This is love that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it", 2 John 6. In 1 John 2:4 he says: "He that says, I know him and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But who so keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." And further: "Whosoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, he does not have God." 2 John 9.

Enns writes that this is a painful and sorrowful parting for him, which is certainly possible because he rebelled against Christ and the teachings of the apostles. We cannot believe that it was painful otherwise because then he would have taken to heart the advice of the Holy Scripture, ourselves and the brethren, and would not have taken this action solely in accordance with what he himself considered good. For Paul writes to Timothy that he is to cling firmly to his teachings, saying: I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you observe these things without partiality. 1 Timothy 5:21. Enns writes that God will further his cause, "even though some consider him to be self-righteous, which however, is known only to the one who proves our hearts and lives, on which he depends." Certainly we very well know, that the Lord, who judges our hearts and lives, also knows our innermost being. This has also been revealed to us, but his actions are not nearly in accordance with the Holy Scripture and therefore they represent self-righteousness and opinion. He writes further, "That it is his joy that he holds to God." If he said that truthfully he would also be more heedful of the word of God and act accordingly.

Indeed this secession is far different from that of our predecessor Aeltester Klaas Reimer who writes that he was surrounded with much terror and dread that he would not bring something into being which was not founded on the Holy Scriptures. At all times he wanted to present himself as the least of all so that a reconciliation could take place, if only that which had been brought in contrary to the word of God, would be removed. (Comment by Peter Toews - Although the justification and recognition given to Aeltester Klaas Reimer, seems to disagree with the fact that in his own autobiography a part is not to be recognized, as the reader will have found on page 28 of the *Sammlung*, the above testimony is nevertheless in accordance with what the reader himself will find in Reimer's account. Although Reimer mentions the infirmities of others, one can in no way find that he wanted his failings or those of his children to be kept hidden, for he even listed them himself. And so the reader will find this accompanying testimony of Reimer, "that he wanted to stand there as the least of all", to be quite correct.) And yet Enns writes that he was in the same mind as our former Aeltester, and that his only desire was to build together with all the brethren, because it is essential. And yet his actions are almost all without foundation and are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, they have the appearance of holiness but the power thereof is denied, principally in that the actions are altogether contrary to the advice of the Spirit in the great Revelation, and that he is proceeding according to his own choice and opinion. Is that not denying its power? Because he in fact says: Without me you can do nothing? Paul says: Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels of which he has not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshy mind. Colossians 2:18.

Now beloved, what do you think of such a rebellion against our Aeltester, contrary to the word of God. Yes, all of this reminds us of the testimony that Jakob Friesen of Blumstein made against Enns several years ago, which we could never quite believe nor take seriously, and thought that if it were true, he would not be able to continue it in the long run. However, we must now fully believe that for a number of years he has tried to bring our Aeltester under suspicion, although it had a good appearance. As the apostle teaches, he has not been able to subsist in the long run, as has become evident to everyone. 2 Timothy 3:9. Indeed he says this in his writing, that it is not only the things concerning Thiessen but that the reason we are in this situation had already arisen earlier. Exactly this, we must now earnestly prove, why or whereby did the guilt arise earlier, and why are we in this predicament.

According to our examination the testimony of Jakob Friesen against Enns is of great importance and we now consider it necessary to declare the same. Jakob Friesen has said to us that Enns wanted to cast suspicion on our Aeltester in his mind, and consequently that he did not desire after that which was right, which was a lot to say. J.F., being unable to continue silently, called upon Enns in Mariawohl (this was before the hindrances with A.T. existed) to state openly before us Ohms that which he had already often told him. In which Friesen had previously also encouraged him too

much in the intention, he said, that when the Aeltester would ask (which often happened) as to whether we all stood in confidence, or if there was anything which had to be talked over, that Enns as a minister would say the same thing that he had said to him. But no! He replied that for his part there was nothing. J. Friesen presumed that Enns must apparently have become sorry for talking separately about the Aeltester, and therefore did not consider it necessary to present the matter again. Since Friesen, and we also gave full confidence towards him, he again talked as before, on account of which we have already incurred damage as well as blame. We did not freely declare ourselves in that regard as we did not yet recognize that spirit.

When we Ohms then came together and the Aeltester asked as before, Enns answered that for his part everything could be alright. To this Jakob Friesen could not remain silent, since Enns had expressed himself somewhat more to him (after his statement) than to us, and called him forward to speak in front of us in the same way that he had already talked to him for many years. But Enns did not want to express himself which caused not an inconsiderable anger as he talked with two tongues. Soon thereafter J.F. is to have come to Enns and asked him why he did not want to admit before the Ohms what he had so frequently said to him. The answer had been, "It is very serious when the Aeltester no longer seeks after that which is right, and what all might not have arisen therefrom?" Friesen had said, "At least then it would have been discussed openly, but now the whole Gemeinde would be torn apart." But Enns had apparently only repeated his words, "It is very serious", and compared the Aeltester with the captain of a ship, whose mates, even though they could see that the way in which the captain was controlling the ship would result in its sinking, would still not be able to openly work against the captain's orders, for then they would altogether sink that much quicker. This comparison had seemed so terrible to Friesen that he said very little and had driven away deeply sorrowed.

For if the leader rules unrighteously, then the workers are firstly and principally responsible to convince the leader that he is running aground, if he continues in that way. If he does not listen and yet is in the wrong, then everyone is free to save himself, like Lot out of Sodom. On reconsidering the above comparison as made by Enns, it seemed so perverse to Friesen that the above talk caused even more hindrance to Friesen than the previous discussions. This comparison is also completely without foundation from the Holy Scriptures, and thereby the secession is completely destroyed and now he himself has also seceded. If a secession has reason and grounds based on the Holy Scriptures, and the actions are taken in accordance therewith, then it can be very good and beneficial. Yes, it is even commanded by the apostles, who testify thereof, that righteousness cannot enjoy unrighteousness, just as light cannot have fellowship with darkness. Which can be read in 2 Corinthians 6, where it goes on to say: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Since Friesen did not have peace about the matter, he soon again drove to Enns in order to inquire if he had somehow misunderstood him. But Enns had repeated the same example in the same sense. Shortly thereafter Friesen presented this comparison to us in the presence of Enns, and he then denied (after Friesen had made his statement) that he had spoken about the Aeltester in such a way. We helped him excuse himself, that perhaps he had not meant it exactly like that.

We have added this to our declaration because these matters were brought into dispute. There would be additional similar incidences which could be referred to, so that according to our understanding and examination no one will have more blame regarding these unscriptural dealings than Enns. He writes that the actions from earlier times already were contrary to the Holy Scripture, but he had agreed to them and therefore, if they are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, he would not be blameless.

Enns also writes that our Aeltester had said, that for about two years he had acted against his own conscience, which seems to be the most serious point for many. Enns has partially withdrawn this statement but not in the sense that he had willfully acted against his own conscience but only in the sense that his conscience had often punished him and made him uneasy. Of which I hope also, that none will remain free, since our conscience will be our accuser on that day. Wisdom 4.

How good it would have been for the Gemeinde if Enns would have acknowledged his faults and transgressions, like our Aeltester has acknowledged his. We know of no other advice to give him, than the advice of the Holy Spirit, that he might buy gold from him which is tried in the fire, which is true repentance tried in the fire of love; and which is only wrought in and through the Holy Spirit, as long as we yield to him and do not resist his will. Then we could again come to stand together in love and peace, and come to be of one mind toward one another in Jesus Christ, and could praise God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in one accord. We could also partake in our pain as one body so that when the body is wounded all members suffer with it. In fact if one member in the body suffers, it is impossible that another member can escape the suffering. Rather as the Apostle says, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it," 1 Corinthians 12:26. Oh, how much could not have been prevented! Everyone will be well aware it is not a small vexation which has been brought into existence. Oh, the notable peace! How is it that it is rejected by so many? Although it is so beautiful, so lovely, and always at one with God. Ephesians 2:14. The Lord Jesus says well: "It must need be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!" Matthew 18:7.

Until now Enns has remained standing with an unchanged attitude. Therefore we hereby bear witness in accordance with the Holy Scripture that he is incapable of properly serving in a priestly office in the Gemeinde of Christ, because he is punishable and cannot and does not judge himself.

Paul says that a bishop must be blameless. 1 Timothy 3:2. Consequently we for our part cannot acknowledge him as a minister.

For a considerable time we have declined from declaring ourselves so firmly, for he acts zealously but not well, as Paul says, and tries to make the brethren fall away from us, so that they should be zealous for him, Galatians 4:17. But the longer this continues the more evil will arise therefrom, if we do not definitely declare ourselves. Therefore we have done so according to the ability given us by God. May the Lord bless his work and grant that it bear much fruit, even a hundredfold, unto eternal life, for us and for all those who may come to fear him. AMEN— Issued by your humble and weak servants in the name of the Gemeinde. Johan Friesen, Aeltester; Lehrer Abraham Friesen, Peter Friesen and Abraham Friesen\*; Deacons Klaas Friesen and Jakob Friesen.

Comment by P. Toews. \*The Minister Johann Dueck had died in February of 1866.

### 10.05 Renunciation of Office of Ohm Heinrich Enns

“Dear Heinrich Enns.

“Beloved friend, you have given me and those ministers who hold with me, but not the Gemeinde, a written renunciation in this matter. You have also expressed yourself quite lovelessly and arrogantly in your actions, and have also conducted yourself entirely contrary to the Word of God, and the doctrine of the Apostles, thereby occasioning much vexation and division. Furthermore you are now engaged in establishing a separate Gemeinde, regarding which we ministers, together with the brethren can no longer be silent. In fact we are increasingly convinced that your actions are and must be recognized as being contrary to the Scripture and therefore we, for ourselves and also the brethren, withdraw from you your office as minister.\*

We do so for the following reasons: I believe that you will remember that I and both ministers from Tiede were at your place on the evening of the day before New Years, when I talked with you in a completely loving way in an attempt to restore matters in love and trust. Our discussion gave us hope that we would again be able to come to an understanding and trust with each other, and in saying farewell you mentioned that a burden had been removed from your heart, and that you might be able to achieve confidence once more after all.

But then what happened? Instead of what we had hoped for, you with three other brethren came into the summer room of Abram Friesen, in Tiede, on New Years' morning in such a passion and with such a determined countenance, so that we were quite amazed. This agrees with what Thiessen has always said about you, which we had previously not wanted to believe. However, because you have now confronted and treated us in such a passion, we must give him complete recognition in this regard. It would not be too much to say about you, that you emitted such loud cries that it was an embarrassment and shame that your cries could be heard far and wide by so many. We ministers are now ear and eye-witnesses of similar actions and therefore this cannot be denied by anyone.

Subsequently, you openly arose at the brotherhood meeting of January 3rd, and brought forth accusations, uncovered mistakes and accused of offenses from years ago, and finally you also counselled me to lay down my office. This is completely contrary to the Holy Scripture, according to Revelation Chapter 3, for the spirit does not advise the angel of the Gemeinde to lay down his office but that he would buy of him gold tried in the fire. Which is a clear sign that you have thought yourself to be big and strong, and that you have fallen into self-love and self-righteousness, and held yourself superior to the spirit in Revelation. 2 Corinthians 12:7. It appears that you are far removed from self-denial and a broken spirit notwithstanding that the Lord dethrones the mighty ones who raise and exalt themselves, and exalts the lowly. Luke 15.

In your writing to me you mention that you have acted because of your incumbent duty. But you cannot confirm this with the word of God in the sense that it was your obligation and duty. Certainly no one has been more involved in this matter than you. On the other hand, we have not noticed that you have achieved any insight into the matter, nor any grief or begging for forgiveness. Instead you arrogantly reject all those who do not agree with your arbitrary proceedings, which have no other basis, on your part and on the part of the brethren which hold with you, than self-love, hatred, and domineering one over the other. Everyone wants to teach and criticize the other but no one wants to be taught, nor to examine himself and no one will consider the other person to be greater than himself, like the apostle has repeatedly taught and exhorted. At the brotherhood meeting where you brought up accusations from years ago, you yourself said that you had been in complete agreement with everything until the removal of the ban from Thiessen. This shows that you had a part in everything that had happened and taken place prior to that time. But now you wish to consider yourself completely blameless in everything, and wish to place the blame on others.

You also write to me and say that I will eventually acknowledge that you are right. However, I do not believe that I will. I wish that no one would justify you in your undertaking in this sense, but would far more admonish everyone as Aeltester Peter Peters says: “Let them divide each other, them that envy you, for the proud always quarrel, and therefore they fall, but the humble are victorious.”

We hope that all this will be grounds sufficient for you, that we cannot recognize you as any minister (Lehrer) in accordance with the Holy Scripture. We have declared this to the brethren in somewhat more detail, as they are not totally familiar with the matter. Regarding which you can also inform yourself.

Oh, how much you could have prevented, so that we could have attained peace. If only you had also acknowledged your fault, and that we could have completely forgiven each other, in order to



make a fresh start. Then peace, love and unity could have been restored among the brethren. As for you, we know no other advice than to direct you towards the way of repentance and penitence.

From us weak servants of the Gospel, Johan Friesen, Aeltester; Lehrer Abraham Friesen, Peter Friesen, Abraham Friesen; Deacon Klaas Friesen, Jakob Friesen, 1866.

Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. The removal from office of Enns was also done (apparently according to the prescribed regulations) officially through the Gebietsamt by the following letter: "To the Honourable Gebietsamt in Halbstadt. Report No. 2753. I report to you that the Minister Heinrich Enns, in Fischau, has been removed from his office as minister on June 19, 1866. Johan Friesen, Aeltester." "Number 5709. The Fischau Schulzenamt. The above referenced report is referred to you by the Gebietsamt, in order that Heinrich Enns, of your village, be put on the list of taxable owners of village farms. Gebietsamt at Halbstadt. June 27, 1866. Gebiets-Beisitzer Friesen.

### 10.06 Declaration by the Brethren

"Comment by Aeltester Peter Toews. The reader might wish to know that the Gemeinde by this time was no longer living together in one locality and that by now the Gemeinde was living in three different locations in addition to the Molotschna, namely, the Crimea, Markus, and Borosenko (now Blumenhoff). Many stood at the cross-roads, as it were, regarding this separation, not knowing with which party they should now hold, for the secession of Enns was too unexpected and too arbitrary for them. And no less acceptable was the intention of the Aeltester, who until then had always admonished the Gemeinde to observe avoidance towards the disciplined person. Because of the arbitrary conduct of one individual the worship services had often been dispersed and now this same person was to be reaccepted into the Gemeinde as unpunished! This required much consideration and especially those that lived farther away, could not come to a speedy conclusion regarding everything. Finally, various writings and especially statements like the above, allowed the matter to come to a decision for those who had not yet been able to review the matter at length, whereupon, a declaration was addressed to the Aeltester by many brethren, as follows:

#### Declaration by the brethren.

"Beloved Ohms and brethren. We have received the report of June 14, and have perceived therefrom the actions which have been taken, and the expressions which have been made regarding Ohm Enns and the brethren who do not agree with you. The same has given us much grief regarding you dear Ohms and brethren. We, however, as weak and wretched human beings, want to accept this and allow it to work for our best, and as a consequence of which we feel inwardly even more called upon to prove the conduct of our life, and to compare it with your statements, as to whether we might really be those who you think us to be. Namely, that we have no other grounds than self-love, hate and domineering one over the other, etc., etc., in order that we might not be falsely comforted with the words of our Saviour, when he says: Blessed are ye, when men shall speak all manner of evil against you falsely. Yes, we poor and wretched sinners must confess, with regret, our own blunders and transgressions and admit that everyone of us will have contributed a small portion of this sad defeat of our Gemeinde. But our merciful and unchangeable God does not want the death of a sinner and causes his spirit to go out daily to call us, in order to allow us to be led back to the path of life.

"Therefore we are unable to resist this voice, and beg of you to forgive us when we do not go along with the decisions concerning Ohm Enns, and prefer to recognize and retain him as one of our ministers (Lehrer). This is according to the convictions of our conscience. For that reason we give the matter over to you, but also above all to the one who alone is the ruler of our conscience. We beg your forgiveness, should we have offended you, which could very easily happen, especially in this occasion as we have not been left without temptation and have had to experience and still suffer from many an attack from our enemy, the Evil One. But with the help of God we wish to endeavour more and more to seek what is best for our souls, as well as your souls, and think the best of you. Finally we also ask that you forgive us for everything, and that you do not interpret these lines for evil for they come from hearts that are deeply concerned about the salvation of the soul. AMEN.

Comment by P. Toews: "We hope that the reader will be able to understand and realize that we could not include nearly all writings and letters relating to this matter in this our description for there would be far too many which have been written back and forth between the four regions in which the Gemeinde now lived. We therefore restrict ourselves only to those which are necessary to the coherence of the account of this event."

### 10.07 Counter Declaration by Heinrich Enns

With friendly greetings, Ohm Johan Friesen.

Compelled by a fearful heart, yes a saddened mind, I cannot abstain nor be silent any longer and resist my spirit. Out of sincere love I must again draw your attention to the actions that you have already carried out, as I perceive from your letter of June 19, so as to delve into the matter a little more deeply and to reconsider the same. For it transposes me into sorrow that you and those who hold with you, submit yourselves to such arbitrary and vindictive actions.

For this reason I had almost lost the courage, love and good hope towards you and yours, needed in order to reply to your letter, although Peter gives earnest admonition to do so, 1 Peter 3. Perhaps, none of you will have a desire to do so. (Comment by Aeltester P. Toews. It was not the case that

the Aeltester was involved in giving further declarations, since he returned the above writing having added the following words. "As we cannot consider that this your writing is written according to the spirit of Paul as he teaches in Romans 14, 19 to 15, 2, we cannot accept this letter and also wish to have no further exchange of writings with you in this spirit. July 17, 1866. "Aeltester Johann Friesen")

Many well meaning brethren, who have your welfare just as much at heart as their own, also urge me out of Christian and sympathetic love, not to conceal the truth, be it in season or out of season. 2 Timothy 4. For it is becoming increasingly more evident that this is the time about which Christ and the Apostles prophesized: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine," verse 3. Menno Simons has everywhere justified himself when they unjustly accused him of authoring and allowing to be issued so many suspicious writings, which is what his accusers called them. If I understand correctly you yourself are to have said of my writings, "Writings are poison," which is what someone previously said to me when I read something from the writings of our former Aeltesten to them.

The time is approaching when we do not know what we will encounter, and therefore I cannot avoid justifying myself, although I do so in meekness and in fear and with many faults and weaknesses. Especially when I think of our mutual association and companionship, and because of your loveless letter which is contrary to the truth.

You write **firstly**: That in my actions I have conducted and expressed myself in a completely unloving and arbitrary manner. Oh, my beloved Ohm Johan. How is it even possible that you stoop down so far as to say and write things like that. You cannot convince anyone that I have committed unloving actions except for human weaknesses, that disagree with the Word of God. You think and presume but if only the facts might not be the other way around. Therefore I would advise you that you would be much safer if you left the matter up to Him who knows all the thoughts of men, according to 4 Ezra 16, and who will judge over the matter, Hebrews 4:12.

I ask you to recall when we were together the first time regarding this matter at Ohm Johan Dueck's in Alexanderkron and the disunity was among us. Were the first things you and your ministers said to me not completely unloving and without grounds? Did not Jakob Friesen say that Heinrich Friesen from Landskron, would sooner be a sectarian than Abraham Friesen? Abraham Friesen confirmed this and said, "That he certainly is." You said that Wilhelm Thiessen had also been expelled from the Gemeinde and that I was to blame for it, and that in the case of Ohm Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, I also was the most to blame, and many things similar. Alas, there I sat with you in great sorrow and fear, as one who was to be expelled. Yet, I had not spoken a single improper or unloving word to you, only that I had declared myself to be somewhat contrary minded. In any event I had three witnesses with me when I was at Wilhelm Thiessen's who can testify that we confronted them meekly and compelled by love, for their own well-being according to the teachings of the Lord, Matthew 18:16. I hope that he himself will acknowledge this and also that he said, "He did not want to leave the Gemeinde," to which you did not respond. You also brought up what your brother Abraham Friesen had said, namely, that I had been in a real frenzy when I had talked to him in Halbstadt. When I publicly asked him what unsalted words I had spoken, he and the others answered not a word. Therefore I beg of you for the sake of the Lord, do consider who of us two will have spoken and acted the most unlovingly.

**Secondly**, you wrote to me that the occasion would still be very much in my memory, when you were at my place together with the Ohms from Tiede, and talked to me quite lovingly. Which is also true. For it seemed to me that at the time you were in great sorrow and you begged me that I should once more grant confidence in you, and you said, "I was right regarding all the matters which I put before you." The other two Ohms were also witnesses of this, although they remained silent at the time. This made me feel a great deal easier, since I had already been burdened about the matter for a considerable time and hardly knew which way to turn. I also said to you, "Since tomorrow is New Years' day, I intend to come to Tiede in order to discuss the matter further." That night I was able to sleep only a little, and thought this way and that. But to myself I could not think of any other way or means, if I should be right and you be wrong. I certainly could not agree with you in the case of the individual who was expelled.

Therefore you would do much better if you gave up your office, in order to keep the Gemeinde together. This was also my honest intention when I talked to you on the morning of New Years' day, although with fear and trembling. It was far from facial distortion and fleshly passion which caused you to be so much amazed, and I hope that at the time it was not really the case, since you were still in the midst of perplexity. It also seemed as if you accepted what the brethren confronted you with. Alas, what could I wish more dearly and better for you, than that you would still be of the same mind as then, and that being of the same mind you would submit yourself to the whole Gemeinde, as I hoped you would for then it could all have turned out better.

But sad to say, in such a short time you changed your mind, and in the matter in which you said I was right, you now say I am wrong. Apparently this is a leading of God, which you have completely confirmed by your subsequent actions. When you, with your brother and the Ohms from Tiede were at my place, I begged you to consider how upset you appeared to be. With such stern threatening words you demanded of me that within so short a scheduled time, we should submit our written resignation or else you would pronounce judgment upon us and first of all on me. I even asked for a small postponement but your brother expressed himself so firmly that this matter could not be postponed any longer and had already taken far too long. Abraham Friesen from Tiede, also expressed

himself in words which astonished me very much, which I would earlier never have expected of him as he will well know. Beloved, I think that one could not easily find anyone who could conduct himself in a more unloving way than you did at that time. Similarly at the meeting referred to above.

**Thirdly**, you write that you must agree that I had come to Thiessen with great exclamations of which you yourself are ear and eye-witness. Oh, my beloved! Please give consideration to what is moving you to write such things and to your state of mind that you do so. I only hope that I have not uttered any loud ill-mannered words, whether at Thiessen's or at your place. Which neither you nor he can prove of me. Although we do not all speak equally loudly, since everyone has received a gift of speaking and other mannerisms particular to himself, I am possibly one of those who speak loudly. Even if someone might have heard something of these discussions from a distance they would only have heard the truth which will not be harmful to anyone, and certainly not to Thiessen.

**Fourthly**, you write that I went forward at the brotherhood meeting and presented mistakes and offenses from years gone by. This is entirely untrue, as everything that I brought forward in my presentation can be seen in reviewing my declaration. Only matters of conscience which are also contrary to the Word of God were presented. I also advised you to lay down your office which was done out of honest love and good faith, yes, and was based on the Holy Scripture. As has already been said several times this occurred for your good and the good of the Gemeinde and not out of boastfulness, pride, strength, self-love and self-righteousness, as you attribute it to me. Oh, no. Wherefore you would do much better and be safer if you gave it over to the one who knows us both from afar. Romans 2:16.

**Fifthly**, you suggest that the spirit of the Gemeinde does not advise that its offices be laid down, and that I am exalting myself. Here I wish to plead with you and beg you to weigh and to consider, whom do you seek to honour by bringing these verses forward in such a sense? For hereby you are making pillows under the arms of the sinners and kerchiefs upon their heads. Ezekiel 13:18. Consider for once, would a rejected sinner allow you to punish him? Would he not much rather confront you and say: The Spirit in Revelation does not counsel punishment, but rather to buy gold of him. And if it is so, then the former actions are wrong.

Oh, my beloved, I ask you to reconsider. Had this been necessary, then the spirit in Revelation would have described it like the Apostle Paul, for surely they stand in one mind and spirit and do not contradict each other. The Spirit admonishes regarding the whole, and warns against false doctrine, hypocrisy, indifference and negligence in Christendom. In contrast he exhorts people to be steadfast, which can clearly be seen in the seven epistles sent out in Revelation 2 and 3. Although Revelation contains a deeper meaning hidden in its different parts, many interpret this according to their own pleasure, as you also have done, and do not consider that by so doing they violate and nullify the other passages. How sad that they merely raise questions, instead of betterment towards God in faith. 1 Timothy 4.

Indeed, it seems as if you have forgotten what you have many times presented to us. For Paul, who also spoke by virtue of the spirit of God, Acts 13:9, and 1 Corinthians 7:4, says to Timothy that he may receive an accusation against an Aeltester, but only if it is given by two or three witnesses. From this we can conclude that after an infraction has taken place, an Aeltester is to be dealt with according to the same law and ordinances as a brother, which has been commanded by the Lord Jesus and the apostle. Paul has described in detail what an Aeltester must be like, for instance, he must be blameless, and have a good report from them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3.

Oh my beloved Ohm Johan Friesen. To write this is very difficult for me, which you probably do not believe. When I look at myself I am so full of mistakes and failings and without doubt have great reason to make supplication to the Lord to give me an eye-salve. But you compel me to do this and for the sake of Zion I cannot remain silent. Isaiah 2. Not long ago, you also confessed that an Aeltester must be blameless and now you are looking for a way out. Oh, what has happened to the report from those which remain outside? One now hears much that is very different. However, I do not wish to present everything to you that is troubling my heart. I suppose that you yourself will know how you have acted, regarding which you have brought yourself under suspicion in many matters. However, I do not wish to hold anything against you and want to forgive you with all my heart.

**Sixthly**, you write that I am far removed from self-denial and having a broken spirit, regarding which I am still very much lacking. I must therefore plead with the giver of all perfect gifts to humble and try me further, and to pray with David, Examine me, Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart. Psalm 26.

Therefore my beloved, believe me. If you would have had the right attitude of self-denial and brokenness of spirit, you, with a few brethren or possibly more than half of the brethren, would truly not have judged me. Has not your thinking been changed to vindictiveness? The Pharisee and learned one in the scripture by the name of Gamaliel, who was a member of the worldly council, had a far different insight. When some of the Jewish men commanded the apostles and especially the apostle Peter, not to teach, and when they did not obey, they accused him again. Gamaliel then said: You men of Israel, take heed to yourself regarding these people, and release them. For if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught. But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. Acts 5.

We are also in the firm hope that if it is the will of God, you will not be able to overthrow it. You can oppress and afflict us, but you cannot sink us. All in all considered, it is also better for

your fellow brethren to whom more cause for reconsideration will be made necessary, than if we had superficially built together, in the state of mind that you are now in. Your judgment of me will not afflict me in my short life, since to all of us, "it is a very small thing that we be judged of you or of men's judgment", as it also was for the apostle Paul. "Yea, not my own self for I know nothing by myself yet I am not hereby justified: But He that judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have the praise of God." 1 Corinthians 4:5.

**Seventhly**, you write that I cannot prove that your actions were done arrogantly and from pride and that it is my duty according to the Holy Scripture to undertake such a thing. Oh my dear Ohm Johan, how many grounds of verification do I have out of the Holy Scripture, to demonstrate to you, and in respect of which you have to remain silent, and which confirm my position? Which you and your fellow ministers already very well know. In addition to everything else, the case of the Gebiet-samt being used to collect money, is completely contrary to the doctrine of the holy gospel. Matthew 7; Luke 6:31; 1 Corinthians 13:5.

**Eighthly**, you write that nobody is more involved in this matter than I, which is not the case. Under the circumstances prevailing at the time, there were other brethren who could no longer acquiesce to such unscriptural actions being taken on the part of the Gemeinde in good conscience. Even if I would have been the only one involved it would still have been my joy, although in weakness: "To draw near to God, and I have put my trust in the Lord God," Psalm 73:28. David says further: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And so I do not ask for heaven and earth. Even though my body and soul faileth, you at all times God, are still the comfort of my heart and my portion for ever." Psalm 73.

**Ninthly**, you write that I do not have insight in anything? I cannot understand what you mean by this. I know very well, and gladly confess, that I do not have much or deep insight. But through the grace and mercy of God I have seen that the way that matters formerly stood in our Gemeinde could not continue before God. Nor is it true that I supposedly did not have any grief over the matter since week after week I was compelled to go around very sorrowfully, during which time I very much longed for comfort. The Lord has accepted my soul with a heart of love so that it did not perish. Isaiah 38:17. Yes, and he has not yet allowed me, who was in such despair and was lying in deep water, to sink, although the water comes in unto my soul. Psalm 69. Nor is it true that I did not beg you for forgiveness, for when you and the three Ohms were at my place and threatened me, I begged you to forgive me of everything, which you were willing to do. But should I have offended you in anything, of which I am not conscious because of my only too little understanding or which I am unable to remember, I ask you to please draw it to my attention again, and I will beg your forgiveness again. I hope that I have not offended you knowingly or deliberately. I also hope that I have forgiven you of all these unfounded accusations, and I do wish to forgive you.

**Tenthly**, you write about my arbitrary actions and that I reject others as arrogant. Oh, my beloved, what shall I say to that. I am astonished that you attribute such matters to me. Here one could well apply the proverb, "what I do myself, I suspect of others also," for it is generally known that your actions have been carried out completely arbitrarily and proudly, and could well be considered as overbearing. In respect to which the Aeltester Peter Peters, in the tract booklet regarding the invitation to the *Heavenly Wedding* in Chapter 25 page 257, gives us cause to reconsider when he says: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. If the minister has this attitude of continual mourning, and has an intense desire to be better and more pious, more godly, more humble and pure; And if due to human frailties he has done wrong, and he laments to God in grief over this fact and pleads for grace, to him will be imparted comfort and quickening. If in such a humble spirit, he exhorts his sheep with tears, that they should walk the way of the lowly and the poor in spirit, he pastures his sheep only on the best pasture, all of which serves for peace. However, if on the contrary, the shepherd exalts himself, is proud, does not even maintain a close watch regarding himself, and disregards small infractions, he falls into great sin and becomes a slanderer to another, destroys his people, breaks love apart, awakes strife, etc." Thus far from Peter Peters. The latter must above all things be held in abhorrence, if unity and peace are to come.

You write further about teaching and blaming others and about those who do not allow themselves to be taught, which I well believe you if we would have allowed ourselves to be taught in this matter. But we would rather have honour with God than with men. Here also we would rather be taught by him, namely from his word, than by you. For in this matter you wanted to teach us according to your own will and good pleasure, against which Paul earnestly warns Timothy: Charging that he observe these things without prejudice and that he not do anything from kindness. Do not lay hands suddenly on anyone and also do not make yourself a participant in the sins of another. Keep thyself pure. 1 Timothy 5:21-22.

You write about regarding others better than ourselves, which in the appropriate circumstances is also very good, indeed is very necessary in many instances. But this is not applicable here in the sense that you wish it to be observed and done. Yes, completely against the Holy Scripture. The world would gladly observe this as did also some of the Israelites who said: The priests cannot err in law, and the wise men cannot go wrong in their counselling, and the prophets cannot teach wrongly. Jeremiah 18:18.

Further, you write once more, that I have brought up accusations from years ago. Although I have already given an answer to this before, I will do so again, as you reprove me once more. Oh,

my dear Ohm Johan, for once do reconsider and try to decide, if it wasn't exactly the opposite. How unjustly you accuse me that I was the most to blame in the matter of Abraham Friesen, and regarding Ohm Klaas Friesen of Rosenort; And also in the matter of the Friedricsthaler being so factious. Yes, regarding many things more. Oh look at all the things which I have had to endure from you, even though it was not the truth. I would perhaps not have had the courage and strength to carry this out, if you had not accused me in such an unfair and unloving manner. For at first I did not accuse you. Later I confronted you with the truth and not merely my own supposition, which you also admitted. With the help of God who knows everything, I firmly intend to cling unto the truth until the end although in weakness.

I do not understand what you mean when you write further that I supposedly was to have said at the brethren meeting that I was in agreement with everything up to the removal of the excommunication from Thiessen. I do not know in what sense I would have said this for the other points which were also against my conscience, and which have been mentioned above, were clearly stated to you before all the ministers on the morning before the brotherhood meeting, at which time I also stated that I could not agree to the same. All this can be verified by reviewing my declaration which I read to all of you. When I asked you if all of this was true, you replied with a clear "yes". Now, reconsider. Had I taken a gamble and granted my trust to you, I would have been deceived by believing you, and the other brethren as well.

I gladly admit that I have taken part in a number of matters and that I could have done the same better and more considerately, and for this I am sorry enough. But what do you think? Should I still knowingly and willfully continue to participate in matters which are against the word of God? Should I not obey God more than man? In pure grace he has convinced me and has directed me thus far. The Lord God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel and reproves us saying. You have done this long enough, you princes of Israel, cease from your misdeeds and oppression and do what is right and good, and take away your evictions from my people, saith the Lord God.

Similar accusations from former times are still fresh in my memory, when they from whom I had gone out said to me, "See, you have participated in everything and now you think you can leave everything behind you? You should have worked in earnest with us and helped us to improve." My Beloved, you know very well that there was little danger of that, as they did not really wish to be different. The results here also show and have shown, that you did not want anything different, and therefore my previous, only too imperfect endeavours, could not bring forth any fruit.

That I wrote you that you would eventually concede that I was right was done with good intentions and love, in order that you might reconsider. I still continue to hope for this, although you do not presently believe so, and do not wish that anyone would acknowledge that I was correct in my undertaking. Quite to the contrary, I do not believe that your wish will in fact be carried to fulfillment by those who are right thinking.

You write that you have explained yourself in somewhat greater detail to the brethren regarding which I can make my own inquiries. If you have made the same unfounded, unloving and prejudicial declarations as you did in this writing, it would not be necessary for me to make any further inquiries. For they are actually only wells without water and clouds which are driven about by the wind. Indeed arrogant words without substance. 2 Peter 2.

Finally, you mention that I might have acquiesced in order that we could have attained unto peace. In fact you can interpret this proverb by reference to the foregoing and to the teaching of the Lord Jesus our Saviour when he says: Do not suppose that I have come to send peace on earth. For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household. Matthew 10.

One must also consider what Peter Peters writes: "And if an improvement is to take place, then the leaders must earnestly strive to be blameless examples to the flock in order that their whole life will say, be my followers." Further he writes: "Among many only the outward peace is secured." Whereas the outward peace has for the most part already vanished from among us. Therefore, even if we had stayed together and you had stood in the mind and conducted such dealings as you now have, we would not have attained any peace other than an outward one and even that has been poor enough among us for some time. I repeat once more the words of Ezekiel in Chapter 16:40, concerning the children of Israel. Do you suppose that with the attitude you presently have, that you would have been able to restore love, peace, and righteousness serving unity? This would have been impossible according to the Holy Scripture and also seemed to be impossible according to the teachings of experience.

You also write that if only I could have confessed my guilt. What do you really mean? Would a person who is striving in weakness to live uprightly by the grace of God and in righteousness, still think he is guiltless, and even worse, not wish to acknowledge his guilt at all? Such a one can not have tasted very much of the joy of the Lord or perhaps not at all; Nor of the great mercy and the gracious Word of God. As concerning myself I have much need of confessing my guilt daily. Indeed, I must confess with David that I do not want to conceal my misdeeds and transgressions. Psalm 32. Also with James: For we all offend in many things. James 3. But therefore I say again, that if I have unknowingly or inconsiderately done wrong in this matter or in former affairs, to you or to anyone else, I will gladly beg forgiveness to the full extent taught in the word of God if you will only point it out to me.

"Indeed I would gladly follow the advice which you gave me in conclusion: To repent and to reconcile myself with everyone and in my weakness to pursue peace and sanctification. Yes, to do in accordance with the teaching of Paul: If it is possible as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Romans 12:18. This is my earnest striving and endeavour to press onward toward the high prize of the heavenward call in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14. Which I, a weak and yet well meaning friend toward you, wish you from the heart. Fischau, July 31, 1866. "Heinrich Enns"

### 10.08 Reply to the Dismissal

Those brethren who did not acknowledge the re-acceptance of A. Thiessen nor the dismissal from office of Enns, presented the Aeltester and Ministers with the following declaration:

"A declaration to Aeltester Johan Friesen and his ministers and deacons: We the undersigned, feel led to inform you that we can by no means acknowledge the dismissal sent to our dear minister Heinrich Enns, in Fischau, that took place in June 19, of this year, for the following reasons:

Firstly, you dearest Aeltester and you ministers have strictly commanded Enns, and us brethren to renounce your fellowship. But for the sake of conscience we cannot agree with the unscriptural dealings and the non-observance of some of the fundamental principles of our faith, and with all our hearts we rather prefer to remain true to our Mennonite confession of faith, and to remain faithful to the precious word of God in all points.

Although some more than others, we still had a good expectation that you would finally realize the highly sorrowful condition of the Gemeinde and the lukewarmness and laxness in the practice of our faith. We must freely admit that almost all of us had fallen away in this because of your indifference in truly following and practising your calling as an ambassador in the place of Christ, 1 Corinthians 5:20. We have also fallen because of our own fault and hoped that with the help of God you would again seek to build up that which was fallen, and really seek and to care for that which was lost, like a shepherd who truly follows the example of Jesus Christ. Beloved Aeltester, this is a difficult decision for us to make, but you have persisted in your former mind, causing all hope for a radical improvement to fade more and more. In accordance with your stated wish which you expressed to Ohm Enns verbally as well as in writing on several occasions, we have therefore renounced your fellowship and your charge as pastors of our soul. Accordingly you have no right from the word of God or otherwise, to discharge the minister Enns from his office, after he has by conviction of his conscience and pursuant to your wishes, been forced to renounce your fellowship as ministers.

Secondly, since the minister Enns was elected as minister by the whole Gemeinde and the dismissal from his ministerial office was only executed by a part of the former members of the Gemeinde. Amos 5:10, is referred to. Thirdly, we do not find anything in what Enns preaches that is contrary to the scripture or to our Mennonite Faith. Fourthly, since we cannot find anything with regard to his walk and his actions during his service as a minister of the Gemeinde, other than frailty and shortcomings which cannot be considered as wrongdoing, we find nothing which would make him unsuitable for his further service to us.

Fifthly, with regard to the accusations against the minister Heinrich Enns which were contained in the above mentioned letter of June 19 of this year, we refer you, and especially you dear Aeltester, to Matthew 7:3 and to Sirach 18:21 from which we have cause why we cannot recognize the dismissal of the minister Enns from his ministerial office, whether imposed by you or by anyone else. We also entrust ourselves to the minister Enns hoping that he will hold fast to the Word which is true, and that he will be able to teach, so that he will be mighty in exhorting by sound doctrine and to punish the gainsayers, according to Titus 1:9. It is our total resolute intention, henceforth to strive in all earnestness, not only to confess our faith as we find it set out in our Mennonite confessions of faith, quietly and peaceably as obedient subjects, indeed as pious Christians, but rather to live our confession of faith correctly, and wish our deeds to show and to prove that we are disciples of Christ. Therefore we also beseech God, that he might inspire in us both the desire and the doing of that which is good and to make us all increasingly able to do so.

In presenting to you this our simple declaration we commend ourselves to your goodwill, adding the remark that if so requested we are ready at all times to provide a more detailed explanation as to why we are compelled to withdraw from your fellowship and soul ministry. Approved at a general brotherhood meeting in Prangenu, on July 10, 1866. This declaration was signed by about 50 brethren and by the beginning of 1867 was recognized by close to 70 brethren.

### 10.09 Reflections

Translator's note: This concludes the account of the 1866 division in the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde as recorded and assembled by Aeltester Peter Toews. Numerous other writings are extant regarding this event and of these special mention should be made of two letters written by Aeltester Johan Friesen in February of 1866. These letters indicate that he had recognized many of the failures of his leadership and also manifest his sincere desire and earnest efforts to make up these deficiencies and to achieve a reconciliation. But the most essential facts and views are contained within the letters set forth above and therefore these excellent epistles of Aeltester Johan Friesen have not been included.

It is most important not to consider the 1866 division with the view of affixing blame and responsibility on someone. Leaders such as Aeltester Peter Toews are the first to point out that Heinrich

Enns, leader of the reform group was equally to blame because of his early and unequivocal decision that Aeltester Friesen had no choice but to resign. Peter Toews has also noted that the Kleinen Gemeinde difficulties of the 1860s were not at all comparable to the significance of those causing the original separation of the group in 1812.<sup>5</sup> Although the 1866 division no doubt ensured that the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde would never become a large and thriving movement, this does not necessarily mean that the group was unsuccessful in the full gospel sense, for the ultimate or spiritual victory of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde has invariably been realized in the face of worldly or secular defeat and frequently in physical death. In fact it seems that the 1866 division resulted in a renewal of both groups of the reorganized and reconstituted Kleine Gemeinde which emerged from its wake and not merely among the reformers. This spiritual renewal would be an essential ingredient in the physical and spiritual battle which the Kleine Gemeinde would face in the following decade.

The writings of the schism itself show that the study of the writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith is still alive and well among the group notwithstanding the apparent indifference of Aeltester Johan Friesen. This is demonstrated by a depth of sound evangelical doctrine in the Gemeinde which in turn is reflected in the faith and perseverance of the laity throughout the trials and tribulations to come. The end result of the 1866 schism was that the Kleine Gemeinde was reorganized and was reconstituted as two Gemeinden which were pared to the bone and trimmed of excess fat. In 1874 these groups were granted the inspiration and courage to depart from the "land of milk and honey". The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde of the Molotschna was no more. In this sense the 1866 division would be interpreted as a benevolent act of God purifying his people so that humbled and chastened they heard and answered the call to leave Russia although at a staggering financial and personal loss.<sup>6</sup>

One final reference to the 1866 division should be made, namely, the excommunication of Abraham F. Thiessen which sparked that event in the first instance. Thiessen has all too often been blamed as the instigator of all the woes of the Kleine Gemeinde and then promptly forgotten. Evangelical discipline has also been practiced in this manner far too often. i.e. Remove the offender from the scene in order to ostracize and isolate him. Accordingly it is useful to consider the results of an excommunication in order to determine whether the evangelical objective was being served.

The case of Abraham F. Thiessen is an excellent example. It seems that the excommunication brought Thiessen to a state of sincere remorse for his wrongs. The separation from his brothers and sisters in Christ stirred a strong desire within him to be united with the body of Christ. This is evident from the following poem and lament which Thiessen wrote during the time of his excommunication:

#### Ein Klage lied.

Mit Wehmut und betrübter Seele  
 Muß ich von euch geschieden sein (Kl. Gem.)  
 Doch freut's mich, wenn ich's recht besehe,  
 Wenn ich in trüben Stunden wein',  
 Daß Gott mit mir's so schlecht nicht meinet,  
 Er führt auch Schwache in sein Haus.  
 Und wenn das trübe Herz schon weinet  
 Heißt's doch: "Er stößt ja niemand aus!"  
 Er hat uns alle ja erlöset  
 Auch jeder Heid' gehört zur Zahl.  
 Er läßt durch seine Knechte rufen  
 Die Schlechtesten zum Abendmahl  
 Wie tut's mir weh, von Euch zu scheiden,  
 O viel geliebte Bruderschaft  
 Wo ich bis jetzt, auch oft mit Freuden  
 Als einer der Geringsten war.  
 Doch euer Wille heißt mich gehen  
 Drum muß, bis ich wo bleiben kann,  
 Ich jetzt als Ausgestoßener stehen  
 Wenn Einsicht es nicht ändern kann!  
 Ich hab aus Jugend Leichtsinns Schwäche  
 Gar manches unter euch versehn  
 Verzeiht es mir, und ich verspreche  
 Das soll auch meiner seits geschehn.  
 Ist's wirklich möglich denk ich immer,  
 Wenn ich das ganze Werk durchdenk  
 Läßt sich's nicht ändern? Nein nur schlimmer  
 Wird's, wenn die Fehler aufgedeckt!

Doch aber ach! Wie soll ich's fassen,  
 Was soll ich denken, wie's verstehen?  
 Hat denn der Herr es zugelassen,  
 Wo soll ich bleiben, wie entgehn?  
 Ich füge mich nach dessen Willen,  
 Bei dem so viel Erbarmen ist  
 Er kann die stärksten Stürme stillen  
 Wenn Menschen Rat verschwunden ist!  
 Er hat noch immer da geholfen  
 Wo seine Hilf uns nützlich war,  
 Und hat noch nie was werden lassen,  
 Was Er nicht schon voraus ersah.

Drum will ich mich auf Ihn verlassen  
 Wie ich es glaube und versteh'—  
 Und was mein Glaube nicht kann fassen,  
 Es gehe mir auch wie es geh'—  
 Das kann ich niemals anerkennen  
 Wenn Gottes Wort es uns nicht lehrt;  
 Wie sollt ich dennoch das bekennen  
 Wenn Gotteswort es uns nicht lehrt!  
 Drum will ich leben wie ich glaube,  
 Daß ich damit vor Gott besteh',  
 Doch das Abgeschieden bleiben  
 Von Euch, tut meiner Seele weh'.  
 Jedoch es ist schon so geschehen,  
 Wie Zeit und Schickung es erlaubt.

Nun will ich es noch ferner prüfen  
Weil ich bis jetzt, es nicht erkenn'

Ob euch der Herr es hat geheissen  
Nach seinem Evangelium. Matth. 18.

Abraham Thiessen

In view of the personal involvement of Abraham F. Thiessen in the 1866 division it is of interest to consider his views regarding the same. In a letter to the Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers gathered for a conference in Alexanderwohl in 1872, Thiessen refers to the Kleine Gemeinde division as an example of what can happen to a community when Christian submission and love are lacking. Thiessen states as follows:

"It has been demonstrated by our Kleinen Gemeinde that it is a very lamentable situation to build a new house from spiritual remnants. For here the builders disputed regarding the building stones and could not reach agreement whether they were to be hard or very hard, etc., so that finally they formed four new houses, from the same kind of stone but with the difference that one was hard, another was very hard and the third medium hard. The fourth had no viewpoint in that regard and was only concerned that each stone had its proper place in the construction. The advice of the former Aeltester, "not to create any division, but to utilize all the stones in a new house" was not followed. He had stated that it was not the building material which was different, rather the mortar, namely love. The love, which was to hold the stones together, was not strong enough and therefore it was necessary to seek for a purer love. This was also my view at that time and still is. But certain zealots opposed this position as if their entire salvation was dependent thereon. These agitators have long since been unmasked and brought to shame, and time will teach that without a greater brotherly love and love for all mankind all our efforts will be in vain."<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing provides a needed and very valuable perspective on the 1866 division. Here was a man who had every reason to be bitter against the Kleine Gemeinde. He had been excommunicated and shamed before his closest brothers and sisters. He had suffered the humiliation of the ban and shunning. Nevertheless his poem clearly manifests that he has been brought to a new examination of his spiritual state and that honest remorse and repentance has been wrought. Thiessen recognized that his reacceptance after his excommunication was the spark which fueled the 1866 division, but his suggestion that all parties were at least somewhat lacking in love towards each other is certainly not without merit. For love was to be the ultimate manifestation of Christian discipleship.

#### 10.10 The End of the Second Book

Alas, Lord. Keep us from evil  
And gather your flock anew,  
Under the staff of your Word  
Where it shall again be one  
Oh that your love, the bond of perfection  
Would preserve us from all strife  
And bring us united unto your Spirit. Amen.

Ach Herr! Hilf solchem Uebel ab,  
Versamle deine Heerde,  
Dasz unter deines Wortes stab  
Sie wieder einig werde.  
Dasz das Band der Vollkommenheit,  
Die Liebe, uns aus allem Streit  
In deinem Geiste bringe. Amen.

In Jesu Namen ist der Anfang schon gemacht,  
das Mittel auch. Der Schlusz werd auch  
durch ihm vollbracht. Amen. P. Toews<sup>9</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER TEN, THE 1866 DIVISION

1. Peter Toews, *By their fruits ye shall know them* (C.W. Friesen, Roblin, 1983), 35.
2. P. M. Friesen, *op.cit.*, 109.
3. In his 1845 *Einfache Erklarung* Aeltester Abraham Friesen also rejected the form of funeral oration which was becoming popular at the time, as being an invention of the Roman Catholic Church, which should not be adopted by the Mennonites. Possibly a comparison to the Last Rites?
4. See *The Golden Years*, 325-327, for a discussion of this series of publications. It should be noted that in 1973 a fourth edition of *Das Kleine Martyrer Spiegel* was published in Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, by Henry R. Plett (1896-1976) who had served as the first Vorsteher of the Kleingemeinde Mennonite Quellen Colony. It is noteworthy that Plett was a great-grandson of Aeltester Heinrich Enns (1801-1881) who had instigated the publication of the second edition of this book in 1860.
5. Peter Toews, *By Their Fruits*, *op.cit.*, 41.
6. For the descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde this "accident of history" was a fortunate one indeed. Where the Kleine Gemeinde never constituted more than three per cent of the Molotschna Mennonite colony the present descendants would appear to make up almost ten percent of the present Russian Mennonite population of Canada. A similar number live scattered throughout the United States and Central America.
7. M. B. Fast, *op.cit.*, 16-17.
8. Abraham F. Thiessen, *Ein Brief nur fuer die Mennoniten*, 24.
9. The original spelling of the poetry quoted in this book has been retained, i.e. the correct usage and custom of the time.





# Chapter Eleven

## Physical Expansion

### 11.01 Introduction

The preceding chapters have dealt with the socio-economic difficulties of the Molotschna Mennonites as well as the religious spirits which were sweeping over the Russian steppes. These forces exerted great influence on all the Russian Mennonite groups and the Kleine Gemeinde was no exception. Another factor was the growing material prosperity and well-being of the land-owning segment among the Russian Mennonites after 1850 which was greatly enhanced by a tremendous economic expansion during the 1860s. This in turn was reflected in the movement out of the Molotschna of the greatest part of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The pioneering and resettlement entailed by such a colonization movement became one of the most important aspects of Kleine Gemeinde life after 1863. The account of Kleine Gemeinde church developments is interrupted at this point in order to consider this factor.

### 11.02 Expansion in the Molotschna

It is necessary to review some earlier socio-economic developments in the Molotschna and the application of the same to the outward expansion of the Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860s. In a previous chapter dealing with agriculture<sup>1</sup> it became evident that several factors had combined by the middle of the 19th century to provide the *Vollwirt* (literally a full owner) with a growing income and increasing prosperity within his society. The *Vollwirt* was one of the fortunate minority who owned a full farm of 175 acres (65 desiatines) in the village plan. The opening of the seaport Berdjansk in 1830 resulted in an increasing emphasis on wheat production which was now easily accessible to world markets where the quality Molotschna wheat brought top dollar. Through the sometimes harshly implemented reforms of Johan Cornies the Molotschna *Vollwirt* had become vastly more efficient and productive. With the emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861, cheap land became available for purchase outside of the Mennonite mother settlements.<sup>2</sup> At the same time an inexhaustible supply of inexpensive Russian labour became available to the Mennonite farmers when the peasants were released from the estates where they had lived in feudal servitude for so many centuries.

The Kleine Gemeinde had always stressed farming as a blessed occupation and seemingly its membership consisted of a higher than average of the full farmer *Vollwirt* class. The internal efforts of the Kleine Gemeinde to resettle its landless and to assist its poor to become established in their own calling has already been dealt with earlier.<sup>3</sup> This gave the group a relative degree of wealth at a time when two-thirds of the Russian Mennonite population consisted of landless tenant farmers, labourers and servants. In addition a number of Kleine Gemeinde farmers had allowed their enterprises to grow beyond that of the average *Vollwirt*. In 1865 there is a report of a well-to-do Kleine Gemeinde farmer Abraham Rempel (1798-1878)<sup>4</sup> of Margenau who was chastised at a brotherhood meeting for striking his herdsman. Another Kleine Gemeinde farmer Cornelius S. Plett is reported to be renting Crown land in addition to his full farm in the village of Kleefeld and is to have had a wheat crop of 270 acres in 1871<sup>5</sup>. At about the same time still another prosperous Kleine Gemeinde farmer Johan Warkentin was already living on his own "chutor"<sup>6</sup> at a time when these private farm estates were still relatively unknown among the Russian Mennonites.<sup>7</sup>

With the availability of such resources a number of forces combined to create a tremendous Kleine Gemeinde expansion and movement out of the Molotschna during the 1860s. These factors included the commitment of the Gemeinde to provide land for its own landless, a perceived opportunity for advancement and expansion on the part of some ambitious farmers, the availability of large parcels of good quality land, and the desire of some of the Kleine Gemeinde to settle together in their own villages. This resulted in the establishment of a number of new Kleine Gemeinde settlements outside of the Molotschna. These pioneer colonies included Markuslandt, Crimea, Borosenko, Friedensfeld and others.

### 11.03 Markuslandt

The first Kleine Gemeinde colony, known as Markuslandt, was established in 1863. The settle-

ment consisted of a large block of land which was leased from the noblewoman Markus and hence the name. As the land was leased it was also referred to simply as "Pachtland", meaning rented land. The Markuslandt settlement, which later became known as Andreasfeld<sup>8</sup> was located approximately ten miles east across the Dnieper river from the village of Einlage located in the Chortitz or Old Colony settlement.<sup>9</sup> i.e. Near the small market city of Alexandrovsk, in the district of Alexandrovsk, Province of Ekaterinoslav, approximately 100 werst (i.e. 67 miles) from the Molotschna colony.<sup>10</sup>

The Markuslandt settlement was originally established to help the "landless" of the Gemeinde to attain their own property and farms. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that a number of the poorer brethren of the Gemeinde had submitted a petition to the ministerial requesting that the Gemeinde as a community purchase land for this purpose. This request was approved after considerable discussion and debate with the first land being rented in 1863.<sup>11</sup>

Available sources indicate that Isaac Harms (1811-1891)<sup>12</sup> was one of the driving forces behind the Kleine Gemeinde commitment to provide land for its "landless" and in establishing the Markuslandt settlement in particular. Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) has referred to the tremendous sacrifices which Harms was prepared to make in order to assist the poorer brethren in the Gemeinde.<sup>13</sup> After his proposal was adopted by the Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood, Harms also took the lead in locating and leasing a suitable parcel of land. In a letter to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* of July 9, 1913, Aeltester Peter Toews reminisced about the journey which Isaac Harms undertook in this regard:

"It will also be fifty years this summer since the time that I, with the permission of my parents, was able to make my first journey of significance. My parents may also have expected that the trip would have a healing effect for me as my physical strength had very much deteriorated from my first salvation experience.<sup>14</sup> This trip was made together with the aged Isaac Harms and his son Cornelius. The latter is still alive today, resident in California, as an eighty year old man with white hair."

"The journey was undertaken for the purpose of seeking land. We made our first inspection of the land near Snamenka on the Dnieper which had just recently been designated for the settlement of Fürstenlandt. As we drove through Snamenka we marvelled at the well-tended vineyards of the Russians, which were not yet to be found among the German people in the Molotschna at that time. I have always loved gardening and trees, and my thoughts still frequently return to the many fruits in my father's garden in Fischau. The exact location of the many different fruit trees remains a very fond memory for me.

"We now continued on our journey. At Nikopol we took the middle crossing over the Dnieper, and then on to the Old Colony. Here we stopped at the Vorsteher of the farmers in Schoenberge, who was the leader of the settlement on Furstenlandt, where we found a hospitable retreat for the night. While the aged father Harms received his night lodging in the guest room of our friendly host, the young Harms and myself, proceeded to do likewise on the hay in the Scheune (hay shed). We had a very good sleep and did not even dream of all the things which we would experience in the next fifty years.

"In order that my report does not restrict itself solely to the interest of a small number of friends, I will go on to mention that we now continued our journey. At Einlage we again crossed over the Dnieper and drove to the so-called Markuslandt, where we arrived at the home of the nobleman. After various negotiations between Harms and the nobleman a lease agreement was made which provided for the rental of the land for an initial term of six years. The village of Friedrichstahl was settled that very same fall, and the later well-known Andreasfeld was settled the next spring.

"I was also among the founders of Andreasfeld. After I had first entered into marriage with Anna Warkentin of Blumstein in the fall of 1863, we moved from Fischau, where I had been born and raised, immediately after Pentecost in 1864; and together with a number of others we moved to the settlement of Markuslandt where our village received the name of Andreasfeld. Our sojourn here would only be for several years after which the Borosenko land was bought near Nikopol where we moved together with our parents and where we then lived until the emigration of 1875. But my father Johan Toews had already died in the year 1873.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned by Aeltester Toews the Markuslandt settlement was laid out in two separate villages one of which was known as Andreasfeld and the other as Friedrichsthal (or Friedrichsfeld). In another writing Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that he and his family moved to Andreasfeld on the Tuesday of Pentecost in 1864. He also notes that on August 13, 1864, his parents Johan Toewses sold their Wirtshaft in Fischau and moved to the Pachtlandt settlement where they resided in Friedrichsthal near their children Cornelius Toewses.<sup>16</sup>

The pioneering in the new settlement as well as the organization of a new Kleine Gemeinde congregation proceeded rapidly. On November 23, 1864, a ministerial election was held in which 123 brethren voted. Isaac Friesen was elected as the new minister of the congregation and Peter Wiebe

as deacon. No doubt a good number of the brethren from the Molotschna also voted in this election as it is doubtful that the Markuslandt population ever reached even half of this number of families. Educational facilities were provided. Molotschna school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-1892) moved from Hierschau where he had been teaching, to Friedrichsthal, Markuslandt, where they resided until 1869. As was common among school teachers at the time Cornelius Frisen also did some farming in addition to teaching as the family made their home on a property of 50 desiatines.<sup>17</sup>

Little is known of the difficulties and hardships which these families encountered in establishing the new colony. As the settlement was on rented land most of the families only remained there for a few years after which they moved on to the more promising Borosenko settlement. Consequently very little has been recorded about the experiences at Markuslandt. Presumably these years included all the privations common to such a pioneering enterprise. Klass R. Reimer (1837-1906), the grandson of the Aeltester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), has described the homes of the pioneers as follows: "our first living quarters in the new settlement was a "zemlin". This was a dugout affair with its lower portion dug out below the ground level to economize on matters. I acquired the money to build this "zemlin" by selling a smoked ham which we sorely needed at home. You can well imagine the kind of dwelling that the proceeds of this would provide for".<sup>18</sup> Another interesting episode is related by Johan F. Toews (1858-1931), the son of delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), who recalls that his parents moved from the village of Hierschau to Markuslandt together with a number of other families. Here his father and uncle Cornelius Goossen (also his father's cousin) built themselves an earth hut, referred to in Russian as "semljanko". It then came to pass one night that wolves ascended upon the earth covered roof of "our poor dwelling" where they commenced with their spiteful pawing and mournful howling. In the midst of all this, father and uncle armed themselves with pitchforks in order to disperse the beasts.<sup>19</sup>

The circumstances of establishing such a new colony must be carefully distinguished from the pioneering in Manitoba some 10 years later. At the Markuslandt colony, as well as the other Kleinen Gemeinde expansion settlements in the Nikopol area, the pioneers had the tremendous advantage of having a hospitable and prosperous mother colony only 67 miles away. Materials, equipment, livestock and other necessities could be hauled to the new colony without any difficulty. In addition building supplies and other requirements would have been readily available in the city of Alexandrowsk or in the Chortitz colony only a few miles distant. The climate was pleasant and accomodating and the soil and crop conditions were good. Marketing opportunities for grain and other products would have been excellent given the nearby trade and shipping centre of Alexandrowsk on the Dnieper river. Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) for example was able to earn a good income by manufacturing wagons and plows which he sold in the nearby colonies.

By comparison the Manitoba Mennonite pioneer some ten years later had to literally wrest his livelihood from a harsh and barren prairie land with his naked hands. Here there was no hospitable home base 60 miles distant from which plentiful and inexpensive supplies could be obtained from helpful friends and relatives. The settlers were completely on their own. Everything had to be purchased at an exorbitant price on a limited market. Very few had sufficient funds in any event so that shelter, equipment, and other necessities often had to be crudely designed and constructed under the most primitive conditions.

By comparison the Markuslandt settlers were seemingly able to make rapid headway. Klaas Reimer (1837-1906) has noted in his *Memoirs* that material conditions very quickly improved in the new settlement.

"However, better times were at hand and in the new settlement we began to prosper both materially and spiritually. After we had farmed for 4 years at Markuslandt, after I had labored with God's help for 4 years I made a visit back to the old colony taking with me three new wagons which I had built in my little smithy. I was able to sell these at the fair in the old colony. On top of that I received 100 rubles in Russian money as down payment on plows which I contracted to make after I returned home. In addition I was able to sell my house and one acre lot in the old village for no less than 800 rubles. How I thanked God for his blessings as I visited each of my creditors and squared all my debts."

"I might say that when this trip which I have mentioned took place it was so muddy that I was hardly able to get through on the trail even with my empty wagon. Despite the road conditions, I still say it was the best trip I ever made."

"As a result of this trip I felt deep spiritual enjoyment as if with paying these debts I had paid the debts of my sins. I felt as though a heavy load had been lifted from my back. My debts had previously caused me a great deal of misery just to think that other people should suffer through my defaulting on my payments. In a way it made me feel like a thief and this

in turn made me even more miserable because I felt that as a thief I could never enter Heaven.”<sup>20</sup>

The Markuslandt settlement also included a number of well established farmers who had disposed of their farms and properties in the Molotschna for a good price. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that his parents Johan Toewses had sold their Wirtshaft in Fischau for 3000 rubles silver to Heinrich Wiens of Schoenau. Apparently they were ready to retire as they only took up a small farm of 33 and one-third desiatines of land in Friedrichsthal. The annual rental was 1 ruble and 15 kopeks silver per desiatine.<sup>21</sup> Johan Toews (1826-1895) a brother to Aeltester Peter Toews, sold his Wirtshaft in Alexanderkron for 2600 rubles silver and moved onto the leased land in Markus.<sup>22</sup>

Another example of a family in somewhat more fortunate circumstances was that of Jakob Wiebe (1827-1901) who had originally farmed together with his father Jakob Wiebe (1799-1856) in the village of Schoenau. As part of his remuneration his father assisted him in the purchase of a treadmill and house in the vilage of Prangenau some 20 miles east where they lived for several years. “Then they sold their house and rented a large tract of land together with several families not far from the Old Colony, about 70 miles north of the home place and settled there. They also took the treadmill with them, which they operated there in conjunction with farming. The new settlement was called Markus. Here again they lived several years after which they sold the mill and moved to another location, about 50 miles southwest (Borosenko).”<sup>23</sup> This Jakob Wiebe was an enterprising farmer who later settled in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba, where he owned a double farm and one of two threshing machines in the village in 1883.<sup>24</sup> Most of the family heads listed in the 1864 Markuslandt ministerial election are known to have been successful farmers.

The Markuslandt settlement was not without its trials and tribulations. The religious strife of the Molotschna colony and the internal struggle of the 1866 division of the Kleinen Gemeinde did not leave the Markuslandt settlement untouched. Letters of the time refer to such difficulties and problems. Nevertheless pioneers such as Klaas Reimer (1837-1906) had fond memories of the material progress which they were able to achieve at the Markuslandt colony. And far more important he recalled the half a dozen years on the settlement as a time of tremendous spiritual blessing and growth: “In the new settlement we enjoyed an abundance of blessings both materially and spiritually. Even with the burden imposed on me by having a sick wife, I spent many a blessed hour. Even yet I long for the blessedness which I experienced at that time. It seems to be that without a cross of some kind there is often little real peace and happiness of the soul. When one is called upon to bear a cross or to pass through some tribulation, this leads him to pray more which in turn leads to spiritual peace and satisfaction.” In 1869 the Klaas Reimer family also joined the movement to the new Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Borosenko where they settled in the village of Steinbach.

However, the Kleine Gemeinde Markuslandt settlement was to be only a short term establishment. By 1866 some families were already moving to the new Kleine Gemeinde settlement at Borosenko some 50 miles south-west where they were able to purchase their own parcels of land and where economic prospects were better. In addition some of the church problems at Markus may have had a bearing on the decision of some to leave the leasehold colony. Others no doubt found the Markuslandt settlement too open and exposed to the influences of the nearby city of Alexandrovsk.

It seems that the families who left Markus sold their farms and properties to pietist-Mennonites who were departing from the nearby Chortitz colony. This in turn may have been a major factor inducing the remaining families to sell and move away as well. Most of the Kleine Gemeinde people had left the area by 1870 in which year a Mennonite Brethren church was organized and established in Andreasfeld. This church consisted of 12 families and 60 members<sup>25</sup> and met in the church/school building located in the village. It is even possible that this building was constructed by the Kleine Gemeinde as a similar structure was built in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, in 1872. It was in this building that the first annual conference of the Mennonite Brethren church was held in 1872. This group at that time consisted of 600 members in three congregations, namely; Kuban, Molotschna, and Einlage (Chortitz colony). Because of its prominent leaders the Andreasfeld group was the actual centre of the Einlage congregation until 1903.<sup>26</sup>

#### 11.04 Crimea, 1864

In 1864 a second Kleine Gemeinde congregation was established in the Crimea, about 160 miles (250 werst) due south of the village of Blumenhoff in the Borosenko settlement which was to be founded in the following year.<sup>27</sup> The Crimea was a peninsula on the north coast of the Black Sea, connected with the mainland by the Isthmus of Perekop which was only three miles wide. The Crimea provided great diversity of landscape and topography with prairies in the north, mountains with meadows and

woods in the centre, and a resort area in the south.<sup>28</sup>

This congregation differed from the one at Markuslandt in that initially at least, the Gemeinde in the Crimea included many new converts who joined the Kleinen Gemeinde as a group. Mennonites had first settled in the Crimea shortly after the Crimean war which ended in 1856. They became familiar with the region through the transportation services which had been provided for the Russian army and preferred the Crimea to other more remote potential settlement areas such as the Amur in Siberia. In 1860 several possible locations were explored in the Crimea and by 1862 four villages had been established which were later followed by others. Settlement was on rented land as well as on purchased land.

The Mennonite settlers in the Crimea originally came from the Molotschna and the first and most important church was the Karassan Mennonite church which was founded in 1862 and which originated with the Grosze Gemeinde congregations in the Molotschna.<sup>29</sup> Annenfeld near Simferopol, in the Crimea, was originally a Mohammedan village which was purchased by a group of settlers from the Molotschna in 1860. This group was under the leadership of Jakob Wiebe (1836-1921). Apparently the group had expected to make rapid material progress in the favourable climatic conditions of the Crimea. But great difficulties were encountered.

"Instead they encountered great disappointments and severe setbacks. Instead of ideal climate, they experienced scorching winds and severe droughts. Besides this they experienced deadly spider plagues and severe livestock epidemics. Wiebe, although a trained coachman, lost eighteen horses during the first year. The settlers were unaccustomed to the farming methods in the Crimea and many became very poor. One of the Mennonite group despaired and committed suicide."<sup>30</sup>

Naturally such experiences were cause for deep soul searching and spiritual introspection and as a result a spontaneous revival took place in the village. In this time of crisis the godly admonition of his mother had become dear to the leader Jakob Wiebe. For some time he had also been a servant in the home of one of the leading brethren of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna and now Wiebe remembered the holy life and modest piety of his former employer.<sup>31</sup> It might be noted here that in certain circles the Kleine Gemeinde has been held in disrespect for its emphasis on the daily discipleship of its members instead of a dramatic formal foreign mission program such as was emphasized by some of the other Russian Mennonite groups. But in this instance it is again evident that the Kleine Gemeinde program of a "sainthood of the laity" could be equally effective.

As a result of this spiritual renewal the Annenfeld group seemingly decided to withdraw from the Grosze Gemeinde group in the Crimea. Because of the favourable experiences and impressions which the members of the Annenfeld group had of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna, and particularly those of Jakob A. Wiebe, a decision was made to seek a more formal association with the same. Thus it is noted that "soon after their conversion (sic) Wiebe's group established some contact with a Crimean Kleine Gemeinde church and in 1864, Elder (Aeltester) Johann Friesen visited the Wiebe group of converts and offered to organize them as a local church."<sup>32</sup>

It would appear that a small Kleine Gemeinde group already existed in the Crimea at this time. It is noted that the later Crimea congregation included a good number of members with Kleine Gemeinde roots in the Molotschna. Therefore it is quite likely that the initial settlers in the Annenfeld area also included members of the Kleinen Gemeinde who had settled there individually. In any event it is known that the spiritual awakening was affecting others in the area. This included the Grosze Gemeinde minister Peter Baerg (1818-1901) who lived in the village of Schwesterthal which lay some 17 werst distant from Annenfeld. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that Peter Baerg became a member of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1864, most likely together with a number of other families. These together with any Kleine Gemeinde families already living in the area formed the nucleus of a small congregation.

The first spiritual leader of this group was Peter Baerg (1818-1901) who was a man of resolute courage and steadfast spirit. In time he became one of the more prominent leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde. In a letter to the Grosze Gemeinde ministers in the Molotschna, Baerg explained the reasons for his departure from the Grosze Gemeinde group in the Crimea. He noted that spiritual conditions in the Crimean settlements were very low and that his repeated attempts to admonish and to direct his charges towards a deeper spiritual life were merely ignored. He notes that the people did not live according to the word of God and that each and everyone lived according to their own desires notwithstanding his often tearful pleas.<sup>33</sup>

After he had persevered for some two years minister Baerg became very discouraged. Through soul searching he perceived that it was possible that the Gemeinde of Christ could be constituted according to the teachings of Christ and the commandments of God. But this was impossible in the

Mennonite settlements in the Crimea where he considered the conditions to be comparable with those prevailing prior to the flood in the time of Noah. The lifestyle was such that each individual went his own way and the ways of God were forgotten. Everyone tried to outdo the other and whoever could achieve the most materially was given the honour. In these circumstances Baerg and his small group eventually felt they had no choice but to separate from the Grosze Gemeinde and joined the Kleine Gemeinde. From his writings it is evident that Peter Baerg had a sound comprehension of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice.<sup>34</sup>

It was this Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Crimea to which Jakob A. Wiebe and his fellow Annenfelders directed themselves for spiritual fellowship and brotherhood. Contact was also made with the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial in the Molotschna and as a result Aeltester Johan Friesen visited the small group there which was now converted to God where he also preached on many occasions. Eventually Wiebe and his followers decided that they wanted to join the Kleine Gemeinde and requested that Aeltester Friesen accept them into his Gemeinde. As they felt that they had not been truly converted<sup>35</sup> at the time of their baptism in the Grosze Gemeinde the Annenfelders also requested that they first be rebaptized. However, Aeltester Johan Friesen felt that this was contrary to Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching and to the rules of the Kleine Gemeinde and tried to explain that true faith and regeneration could also come after baptism which was only a sign of an honest desire to be converted to God. Although their request for rebaptism was not granted to the Annenfelders they did join the Kleine Gemeinde in 1864. The failure to resolve the doubts as to their conversion and need for rebaptism was to have disastrous consequences for the Crimean congregation.

In order to understand these developments a brief review of the spiritual history of the Molotschna colony is necessary. Spiritual conditions in large segments of the Russian Mennonite church had been very low from the outset. Materialism and secularization was soon prevalent. From the very beginning certain leaders openly rejected and opposed the evangelical teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Consequently the Russian Mennonites became very susceptible to outside influences and in particular to the various waves of German pietism which swept over the Russian steppes during the 19th century.

This was especially the case with the teachings of radical pietism which had emanated from Germany during the 1840s and 1850s. Pietism had begun as an often wholesome emphasis on the inward spiritual life of the Christian within a rigid and dogmatic Lutheran church. Now these teachings became totally centered on the inward spiritual life and had been divorced from sound doctrine. As a result radical pietism was often based largely on individual revelations and consequently the movement was known for its spiritualism and mysticism. This resulted in a very judgmental attitude towards any other group which had not shared exactly the same revelation.

Many of these groups insisted that an instantaneous emotional conversion was the only valid form of rebirth. It appears that the Annenfelders had also become subject to such influences as they were troubled because this had not been their experience at the time of their original baptism in the Grosze Gemeinde. This in turn resulted in doubts as to the validity of their baptism as many of these radical pietist groups insisted that baptism was a necessary requirement for salvation<sup>36</sup> and was only valid after such an emotional and instantaneous conversion experience.

Unfortunately these difficulties occurred at a time when the Kleine Gemeinde stood under the leadership of Aeltester Johan Friesen who had flirted with the mild pietism of Orloff and who was rapidly drifting in that direction. Instead of insuring that the Annenfelders had a proper understanding of the evangelical faith so that their doubts as to conversion and baptism could be resolved, he simply brushed off their concerns with the remark that he too had experienced such doubts in his early Christian life and that in time such concerns would go away. With this Johan Friesen again demonstrated his lack of sound leadership and teaching. To attempt to absorb such a group of new converts who were still living in doubts as to their spiritual condition was obviously a very grave error.

Furthermore it appears that Aeltester Friesen was in error in holding that it was against the teaching of the Kleine Gemeinde to rebaptize in cases where no faith or conversion had existed at the time of the original baptism. In fact it seems that earlier leaders such as Aeltester Abraham Friesen equated baptism without even a kernel of honest faith with the baptism of an infant, as the sealing of an empty letter which was a total waste of water. Consequently it appears that Johan Friesen erred in not granting the request of the Annenfeld group for rebaptism. Provided of course that he had first satisfied himself through earnest and loving pastoral work that these new converts had truly accepted the cross of Christ as understood by the Anabaptist-Mennonites. The indifference of Aeltester Johan Friesen to the teachings and practice of the full gospel faith was to have severe consequences for the

Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in all its four congregations and not merely in the Crimea.

The addition of the Annenfeld group in 1864 completed the organization of the Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Crimea. The group was joined by additional Kleine Gemeinde settlers from the Molotschna as well as additional converts from the surrounding area. One example is Abraham S. Kornelsen (1806-1888) who had lived in the village of Kunntuengefeld (Contenniusfeld) where son Abraham E. Kornelsen was born in 1845. In 1860 the family moved to the Crimea. In 1866 son Abraham E. Kornelsen married Maria Wiens and in 1868 the young couple joined the Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea. This family had close ties with the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna through the Eidse, Kornelsen, and Schellenberg families. Another example is the family of Jakob Wiens (1813-1893). Mrs. Wiens was a daughter of Franz Wall. In 1846 the Jakob Wiens family was resident in Schoenau and later in Friedensdorf. In 1860 the Jakob Wiens family moved to the Crimea. Here daughter Maria Wiens was married to Abraham E. Kornelsen (1846-1893). It is not known whether the Jakob Wiens family had any connections with the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna.<sup>37</sup> By 1869 the congregation apparently included some two dozen families. The organization of the Crimean ministerial was completed when Jakob A. Wiebe was elected as a minister by his Annenfeld group with a majority of 7 votes.<sup>38</sup> In 1869 Wiebe was elected as Aeltester by his Crimean congregation. The later difficulties and division of the Crimean congregation will be dealt with in chapter twelve.

It should be mentioned that the minister Peter Baerg remained as the courageous and steadfast leader of the Kleine Gemeinde Crimean congregation after the defection of Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe and some 16 followers in 1869. The known families who remained loyal to the faith of the fathers were the following: Gerhard Friesen (1852-1922) from Schoenfeld, Crimea; Peter Baerg (1818-1901) and Heinrich Esau (1830-1899) from Annenfeld; Cornelius Cornelzen (1835-1896) and his brother Abraham Cornelzen (1845-1893) from Hoffnungsberg, Crimea; Johan Esau (died 1906) of Annenfeld, Crimea. It would appear that two families are missing from the listing since another source indicates the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde congregation in 1874 consisted of 8 families.

### 11.05 Borosenko

In 1865 the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna founded another colony known as Borosenko. In his *Memoirs* John B. Toews (1865-1967) recalled that the property was purchased from a Russian land owner by the name of Borosenko and hence the name.<sup>39</sup> The new settlement was located about 20 miles north-west of Nikopol and about 70 miles west of the Molotschna mother colony. Markuslandt was located some 50 miles away just east of the Chortitz colony. Borosenko was the largest and most successful of the new Kleine Gemeinde settlements of the 1860s.

The petition of some of the landless of the Kleine Gemeinde asking the ministerial to assist them by purchasing land for the poor has already been referred to in connection with the Markuslandt settlement. Although the decision to assist the poor seems to have been made as a matter of course the means by which this was to be accomplished apparently caused considerable controversy. Many in the Gemeinde felt that land should be purchased only by the Gemeinde and others felt just as strongly that this was best done by private individuals. In the end some land was purchased as a community which required that all the members of that group of the Gemeinde also sign the necessary deeds and legal documents. Other land was purchased by private individuals who then resold smaller portions to their brethren. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that the first land was purchased in 1865 and that the balance was purchased in the three following years.

It appears that the Borosenko settlement was the first and major land complex to be purchased on a community basis. J. J. Hildebrand in his *Zeittafel* has recorded that "in 1865 to 1866 120 families of the Kleinen Gemeinde in the Molotschna purchased "Borosenko" consisting of 6137 desiatines of land for a total purchase price of 184,110.00 rubles and settled there in six villages."<sup>40</sup> This came to about 18,000 acres or about 150 acres per family. Some sources indicate that 120 families moved to Borosenko in masse from the Molotschna in 1865.<sup>41</sup> However, Aeltester David P. Reimer has noted that a good part of the Kleine Gemeinde had moved to Borosenko by 1867.<sup>42</sup> Thus it would appear that Borosenko was settled slowly over a period of several years. Also many of the Borosenko settlers came via Markuslandt where they had moved in 1863. All reports indicate that six Kleine Gemeinde villages were established in the Borosenko settlement. Five of these villages can be positively identified as: Blumenhoff, Heuboden, Rosenfeld, Steinbach and Anafeld.

The first of these villages is believed to have been Steinbach as it is the only village in the area shown on a military map of 1866.<sup>43</sup> The village itself was located in a scenic setting near the banks of the Bazavluk river. The Steinbach village included the following settlers: Gerhard Siemens (1834-1908);



Franz Kroeker (1827-1905); Peter Toews (1838-1882); David Thiessen (1834-1906); Johan Reimer (1848-1918); Abraham F. Reimer (1808-1892); Klaas Brandt (1845-1901); Heinrich Brandt (1838-1909); Cornelius Fast (1840-1927); Klaas Reimer (1837-1906); Peter Reimer (1845-1915); Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916); Peter Buller (1836-1902); Peter Brandt Friesen (1838-1900); and Jacob Klassen. It should be noted that the settlers listed in the various Kleine Gemeinde settlements in this chapter will be mainly those who later emigrated to Manitoba under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews. However now and again a member of the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde who emigrated to Nebraska can also be identified. The distinction between the Heubodner and Blumenhoff Gemeinden will not necessarily be noted in these lists.

Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) related an interesting experience from the village of Steinbach. As his parents were poor he had to seek employment with others in nearby settlements. Being away from home he missed his family greatly so that sometimes in winter he would skate home for the evening on the nearby Baszavluk river. On such occasions there was always the danger of the Russian wolves which were comparable in size to the Canadian timber wolves. He was very scared of these wolves but felt relatively safe as long as he was skating along the river. Before arriving home he had the extra danger that he had to run across a field for about a werst before he arrived at his home. Apparently the joy experienced by being united with his family had been well worth the experience. Peter R. Reimer later became a prosperous farmer and leading minister of the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba. It appears that Cornelius Fast (1840-1927) was the school teacher in the village of Steinbach, Borosenko.

The village of Blumenhoff at the south end of the settlement near the Solenaya river was the most important of the Borosenko villages and in time the entire Borosenko settlement was sometimes referred to as Blumenhoff. "The village of Blumenhoff was the central point of the Kleine Gemeinde group originally under the leadership of Aeltester Heinrich Enns. In 1870 Peter Toews of Blumenhoff was elected as the Aeltester of this group which also had a congregation in the Molotschna as well as in the Crimea. Blumenhoff also became the home of a number of prominent Kleine Gemeinde farmers and secular leaders.

The Blumenhoff villagers who later emigrated to Manitoba under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews included the following: Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876); Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884); Heinrich Reimer (1845-1900); Peter Toews (1841-1922); Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887); Johan Loewen (1823-1881); Peter Hiebert (1946-1917); Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900); Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935); Carolina Friesen, the widow of Rev. Klaas Friesen (1793-1870); Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908); Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-1899); Johan P. Friesen (1847-1920); deacon Peter Wiebe (1835-1902); Abraham R. Reimer (1841-1891); Wilhelm Giesbrecht (1849-1917); his mother the widow Gerhard Giesbrecht. The Blumenhoff villagers who moved to the United States included the following: Johan Goossen; the widow Johan Toews (1793-1873) (the mother of Aeltester Peter Toews); Johan P. Goossen; Peter Heidebrecht and Johan Hiebert.

Johan W. Dueck (1865-1932) was a young lad when his family moved to Blumenhoff where his father Peter L. Dueck took up the position of village school teacher. Johan W. Dueck recalled that the village of Blumenhoff was situated near the Solenaya river in which his father and neighbours sometimes went fishing for crabs. The Solenaya river at this point had high reddish banks which was redstone. The road to Nikopol was to the south over the river and over a large mountain which could be seen some distance away. Johan W. Dueck seems to have remembered his childhood in Blumenhoff as a very enjoyable one. The trips to Nikopol which was the post office and trading centre were remembered as special highlights.

Johan W. Dueck describes the village itself as consisting of one long row with a second shorter row built at right angles to the main street at the lower end near a depression or slough. In total the village included as many houses and establishments (farms) as a two rowed village meaning that it could have included up to thirty families. The Peter L. Dueck family lived in a small house at the lower end of the village. The young lad remembered that he had a good distance to walk to the school which was located near the centre of the village. On his way he passed by a treadmill which he describes as being about 25 to 30 feet high which was driven by three or four horses. This treadmill was owned by a Johan Wiebe who is believed to have settled in Steinbach, Manitoba in 1874.

The importance of the village of Blumenhoff is demonstrated by the fact that in 1872 the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde built a beautiful house of worship in the village which also included a school and teacherage. This structure was made of kilned bricks and the roof was covered with kilned brick plates. The school room and teacherage were in the rear of the building and the assembly area for worship was in front across the entire width of the building. The decision to proceed with

the construction of this school and house of worship was only made after considerable debate and deliberation. The decision to proceed was finally made on June 5, 1872. In charge of the project were Franz Froese and Johan Goossen representing the Gemeinde and Cornelius S. Plett as the "elected representative" of the local village assembly.<sup>45</sup> From this it appears that Cornelius S. Plett was also the village Schulz or mayor. The construction of this facility was partially funded by loans provided by Rev. Abraham Klassen and Johan L. Dueck of the Molotschna, and by Cornelius S. Plett of Blumenhoff.<sup>46</sup>

The village of Heuboden was also located along the banks of the Solenaya river only several miles east of the village of Blumenhoff. Heuboden was the central village of what was known as the Heubodner Gemejnede as Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen and several other members of the Heubodner ministerial lived there. e.g. Cornelius L. Friesen, Jakob W. Friesen, and Jakob Kroeker. Other families resident in Heuboden included the following: Johan Janzen (1840-1905); Isaac Loewen (1850-1925); Klaas Wiebe (1842-1925); Johan Klassen (1838-); Jacob Friesen (1820-1888); Jakob Friesen (1845-); Johan Friesen (1849-1909); Abraham Friesen (1854-); David Hiebert (1853-1903); Franz Froese (1825-1913); Johan Harms (1839-1884); Peter Harms (1849-); Gerhard Harms (1849-); Peter H. Dueck (1837-1931); Martin Warkentin (1824-); Heinrich Friesen (1851-1910) and Abraham Reimer.

It was here in Heuboden that a dispute arose between the "large" Jakob F. Friesen who was a brother to the Aeltester Johan Friesen, and the "small" Jakob W. Friesen, who was a son of the former Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849). The disagreement arose with respect to the purchase of a supply of lumber needed for building purposes in the village and contributed to the decision of Abraham L. Friesen and his supporters to leave the "Friesens" Gemeinde to form their own congregation which then became known as the Heubodner Gemeinde.<sup>47</sup>

Another villager Heinrich Ratzlaw has noted that in 1866 his mother sold the family farm (Wirtschaft) in the Molotschna for 5000 rubles and moved to Borosenko where they settled in Heuboden. Here his mother retired living in a small house located in the son's yard. Heinrich Ratzlaw later served as the treasurer of one of the large emigration groups in 1874. He also served as the first Schulz of the Rosenort settlement near Morris, Manitoba.<sup>48</sup> Another leading farmer in this village was David Klassen who in 1873 served as the delegate to America of the Heubodner Gemeinde. His son Abraham B. Klassen (1850-1935) later recalled that the family farm in Margenau was sold in 1866 when the family moved to Borosenko. He notes that when he married in 1870 his father promised him a farm of 70 acres of land in order to induce him to remain in Borosenko. Here he and his young bride moved into the first pioneer home of his father who had apparently built a new home. He also notes that his father David Klassen was an excellent gardener and that he had laid out a beautiful orchard as soon as the family settled in Heuboden.<sup>49</sup>

Rosenfeld was the fourth of the more important Borosenko villages. It was located some five miles almost due north-west of Heuboden. The villagers here included the following: Peter W. Toews (1831-1922); Isaac Loewen (1845-1926); Franz Wiens (1802-1881); Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908); Peter Penner (1816-1884); Abraham Penner (1847-1918); Martin Penner (1849-1928); Cornelius Penner (1854-1899); Peter K. Barkman (1828-1917); Jakob T. Barkman (1838-1935); Peter Brandt (1848-1930); Peter H. Unger (1841-1896); Peter Enns (1822-1896); Heinrich Wiebe (1851-1876); Johan Esau (1832-1904); Johan Friesen (1852-1920); Dietrich S. Friesen (1849-1901); Heinrich Friesen (1836-1900); Minister Peter Kroeker (1840-1915) and deacon Klaas Friesen, and Aeltester Johan Friesen as well as his brother, the minister Abraham Friesen.

John B. Toews (1865-1967) has recorded that his father Peter W. Toews sold the family farm in Margenau in 1867 and that the family moved to Borosenko in the same year. The family settled in Rosenfeld where Johan B. Toews also received his elementary education. He has recorded that he started going to school at the age of six and that the teaching instruction was in German, but the higher classes had to learn the Russian language. He also remembered that the settlement included an excellent selection of fine homes in a very nice and fertile country.<sup>50</sup> The diary of Diedrich S. Friesen the village school teacher has been extensively referred to in an earlier chapter.

Annafeld was a somewhat smaller village and according to John R. Dueck (1863-1937) it consisted of only eight farms laid out from north to south along the banks of the Bazevluk river. John R. Dueck (1863-1937) also remembers that the children of the villagers attended school in the neighbouring village of Steinbach which was to the south-west of Annafeld.<sup>51</sup> Therefore some doubt exists as to the actual location of this village as it is not identified in a map of the Borosenko area prepared by William Schroeder, the Mennonite cartographer. The families resident in this village include the following: Gerhard Siemens (1805-1877); Jakob Wiebe (1829-1901) who had originally settled on

Markuslandt; Jakob Enns (1843-1917); Cornelius Friesen (1810-1892) who had been the school teacher in Friedrichsthal, Markuslandt; Cornelius Goossen (1839-1916); Martin Klassen (1822-); Abraham L. Dueck (1841-1899), the father to Johan R. Dueck (1863-1937) and later Aeltester of the East Reserve Gemeinde in Manitoba; and Klaas Friesen (1838-1922).

Another source adds further details regarding the inhabitants of Annafeld. Abraham L. Dueck, one of the younger farmers in the village, apparently served as the village representative of the Brandordnung as his papers include a record of the Annafeld farmers and their respective assessments as of June, 1874. These were as follows:

	Inventory	Feed (Futter und Nahrung)
Jakob Enns	200	-
Korn Friesen	200	200
Anna Friesen	75	-
Maria Friesen	75	-
Korn Goossen	300	-
Klaas Friesen	200	-
Martin Klassen	500	200
Elisabeth Klassen	75	-
Gerhard Siemens	200	-
Abraham Dueck	300	-
Jakob Friesen	100	-
Jakob Wiebe	200	-

It is probable that Abraham L. Dueck acted as the Schulz of the village as his records also include a detailed listing of baptismal, marriage and birth dates for all the residents.<sup>52</sup>

Some doubt exists as to the identity of the sixth Kleine Gemeinde village in Borosenko. A number of Kleine Gemeinde families lived in Nikolaithal. It seems that somewhat later Nikolaithal became the capital of the Nilolaithal Bezirk or district government which included the Borosenko area. The Kleine Gemeinde families living in this village included David Unger (1830-) and Heinrich Esau (1830-1899). Son Johan K. Esau (b. 1867) has recorded that his father had been an Anwohner making his living as a tradesman. When the opportunity to purchase land arose, his parents moved to the village of Nikolaithal in the district of Borosenko where they lived for several years. Then in 1869 the Heinrich Esaus moved to the village of Annenfeld in the Crimea where they lived until the emigration to Manitoba. Son Johan K. Esau recalls that a treadmill was later constructed on their former yard and that on a trip back to Borosenko he somehow managed to fall into the mill centre.<sup>53</sup> In a letter of March 15, 1869 Peter Toews mentions that Johan Klassens and Ungers from Nikolaithal have joined the Kleine Gemeinde. Therefore it would seem that Nikolaithal was originally settled by people from the nearby Chortitz colony.

Neuanlage was another Kleine Gemeinde village in the Borosenko area. This village included the following families: Johan Koop (1831-1897); Peter W. Loewen (1853-1917); Cornelius Eidse (1840-1914); David Klassen, Junior (1845-1919); and Jakob Toews (1836-1920). Of these Johan Koop was a leading and progressive farmer who operated on a large scale. Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that in time more and more families moved to the Borosenko area where they settled on adjacent and nearby parcels of property. The term Borosenko was frequently used to refer to this entire Kleine Gemeinde area north of Nikopol and therefore it is difficult to establish whether Neuanlage, or one of the other settlements nearby was the sixth village referred to as being part of the original Borosenko settlement.

In a previous chapter it has already been noted that the diary of Kleine Gemeinde teacher Diedrich S. Friesen also refers to the Borosenko villages of Felsenbach, Ebenfeld, and Schoendorf, which were daughter settlements of the Chortitz colony. It should also be noted that the listings of Kleine Gemeinde families in this chapter would be missing some 30 families of the Heubodner Gemeinde.

### 11.06 Friedensfeld, 1866

In 1866 a group of Kleine Gemeinde families from the Molotschna purchased 5400 acres of land some 30 miles north of Nikopol on the Dnieper river. Here they established a village which they called Friedensfeld or literally "field of peace".<sup>55</sup> This was the fourth Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde settlement outside of the Molotschna. Although one report indicates that the land was purchased only in the fall of 1867, the same writer also reports that the settlers moved to their new destination in the early summer of 1866. Although it only had one row of establishments the village was a good size as it was quite a long village.<sup>56</sup> Many of the Friedensfeld families were closely related indicating that the groups had been pre-arranged in the Molotschna mother settlement. The first Kleine Ge-

meinde minister in Friedensfeld was Jakob Barkman (1824-1875) who was elected in 1873. The failure to provide the new settlement with a strong spiritual leader from the outset no doubt contributed to the losses which the Kleine Gemeinde would encounter here.

The Friedensfeld villagers during the early years included the following: Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887); Bernhard L. Dueck (1837-1896); Jakob Barkman (1824-1875); Peter Braun; Peter H. Penner (1839-1916); Peter Penner (1826-1894); Jakob Penner; Jakob Loewen (1826-1901); Johan Hiebert (1843-1923); Gerhard Friesen; Heinrich Friesen; Maria Plett, the widow of Isaac L. Plett (1844-1871); Jakob Jantz; Peter Fast; Philip Isaac; Helena Thielmann, the widow of Jakob Thielman (1810-1862); Jakob J. Thielman (1841-1894) and Martin Thielman (1848-1889). All of the foregoing families are known to have had strong Kleine Gemeinde connections except for Jakob Jantz and Peter Fast whose background was in the Orloff Gemeinde.<sup>57</sup>

Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887) a Kleine Gemeinde school teacher in the village of Gnadenthal in the Molotschna became the first known teacher in Friedensfeld. His son Johan W. Dueck recalled that they had moved to this village when he was a young boy probably some time around 1868. The family had taken up residence near the centre of the village next door to the establishment of Isaac L. Plett. School was held in the "Kleine stube" in the home of Peter L. Dueck. This residence had one and one-half foot thick walls of mortared clay and a roof covered with straw. On the other side of the street lay a small stream which contained fish and crabs.<sup>58</sup>

The next teacher in the village was a certain Fast who was remembered as being a very harsh disciplinarian who was known to have beaten his students so severely that they had to recover in bed for a week. One of these students to undergo such a chastisement was Johan G. Barkman, later a mayor of the pioneer village of Steinbach, Manitoba. In 1872 Peter L. Dueck moved to the village of Blumenhoff 15 miles away where he again took up the position of school teacher. Peter L. Dueck was the son of Kleine Gemeinde minister Johan Dueck (1801-1866). His brother Bernhard L. Dueck was a farmer and also owned a dye-works and was in good circumstances financially.

A sister to these brothers by the name of Helena was married to Jakob Penner. Jakob Penner became very prosperous and according to one report was one of the wealthiest land operators in Russia. Because of several crop failures just after a major expansion, which included the purchase of several thousand desiatines of land and the hiring of thousands of workers, Jakob Penner went bankrupt and died shortly thereafter.<sup>59</sup> Jakob Penner was the son of Peter Penner and also had several siblings living in Friedensfeld, namely, brother Peter Penner (1826-1894), brother-in-law Peter H. Penner (1839-1916), and brother-in-law Jakob Loewen (1926-1901). Several members of the family of the Peter Penner (1826-1894) also lived in Friedensfeld, namely, Franz Peters, Peter Funk, and Philip Isaacs.

The family of the venerable grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) was also well represented in the Friedensfeld settlement. This included son-in-law Peter Penner (1826-1894) and son Jakob Loewen. Jakob Loewen had moved to the Molotschna village of Waldheim in 1842 where he farmed until 1867 when the family moved to Friedensfeld where they were moderately well-to-do also owning a grist mill. Through visiting the Kleine Gemeinde settlement in the Crimea this family had been influenced by the pietism of Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe and joined his small Krimmer Mennonite Brethren church in 1870.<sup>60</sup> Johan Hiebert (1843-1923) was the son-in-law of Jakob Loewen. The Friedensfeld settlement also included two other grandchildren of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), namely, Isaac L. Plett and his sister and brother-in-law Jakob J. Thielman (1841-1894).<sup>61</sup>

The family of Jakob Thielmann (1810-1862) was another prominent family in Friedensfeld. Jakob Thielmann (1810-1862) as well as at least one brother Johan Thielmann (1809-1848) were members of the Kleine Gemeinde. In 1857 the Jakob Thielmann (1810-1862) family had moved from the village of Neukirch to the new village of Alexanderkron to take up a full village farm. In 1867 his widow and her family moved to the new Friedensfeld settlement. This included son Jakob Thielmann (1841-1894) and also son Martin Thielmann who became a very prominent leader in the settlement serving as its Schulz, school teacher, and also as presiding judge and area administrator of the local Wollost or district government.<sup>62</sup> Sister Agatha Thielmann was married to Bernhard L. Dueck (1837-1896).

In spite of its name as a "field of peace" the Friedensfeld settlement suffered from religious controversy from the very outset. Although the settlement was founded by the Kleine Gemeinde three Mennonite Brethren families were allowed "in a spirit of trust" to settle on the land along with the others.<sup>63</sup> These three families were: Bernard L. Dueck who was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde until shortly before or after the move to Friedensfeld; and Peter Fast and Jakob Jantz who had been members of the Orloff Gemeinde. As the Kleine Gemeinde had been drifting towards the mild pietism

of Orloff and as converts influenced by radical pietism had seemingly been absorbed without difficulty in the Crimean congregation, it may have been the feeling that this would not cause any problems. Certainly there was always hope that these families could be renewed and re-inspired in the full gospel faith.

Whatever the case, this arrangement turned out to be a fatal mistake. Apparently the spirit of trust was not honoured as the pietist Mennonites in the new settlement immediately embarked upon a fierce campaign of spiritual proselytization. This aspect of life in the Friedensfeld settlement will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter. The Thielmann family which already had pietist leanings while in the Molotschna joined the new group. In 1869 the group was joined by two additional Mennonite Brethren families from the Einlage congregation.<sup>64</sup> A number of families apparently joined the new group when their booming enterprises and interest in music and other cultural aspirations were too much impeded by what they regarded as the narrow and restrictive Kleine Gemeinde faith and practice. Other Kleine Gemeinde families who preferred not to leave their fine homes and farms joined in 1874, when their brethren decided to take the pilgrims staff to America.

The pietist Mennonites in Friedensfeld held meetings in the semlin of Jakob Jantz almost from the start. After 1868 these meetings were held in the home of Bernhard L. Dueck who also became the deacon of the group. In 1875 the group was organized as the fourth Mennonite Brethren congregation in Russia. However the adopting of the easier and yet Christian way of separatist pietism did not bring with it only blessedness and ease. Regrettably the new congregation had to endure many difficult battles. Peter M. Friesen describes the situation as follows:

The little congregation had to endure many difficult battles. Friedensfeld did not live up to its lovely name; tragic disputes and hostility caused by purely external issues and questions of honor shook the life of the church to its foundations. Close relatives and members regarded each other in a most hostile manner. The church council was drawn into the strife to its great harm. It appeared that events would take a course similar to the happenings at Blumenau. It is not a Sunday's work to establish a "colony of brothers." If God does not grant special grace through strong men who do not vacillate, then the "Meadow of Flowers" (Blumenau) becomes an "Acre of Thorns," and the "Field of Peace" (Friedensfeld) becomes a "Battlefield." Yet the Lord could help, but not without chastisement. Strong, rich members went out of the church, and God made those "poor and small" who had been mighty and wealthy, so that he might test them and save them. So this church also experienced the fulfillment of the promise of the Savior that "the powers of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

As such the experience in Friedensfeld is of continuing interest to the Kleine Gemeinde story as it illustrates that the path of those who turned away from the faith of the fathers and was not always strewn with roses either. Many were able to achieve the material and cultural aspirations which they had hoped for but also had to pay a price in terms of materialism and years of acrimony in their new communities. Certainly those who are turned against the Kleine Gemeinde because of the 1866 division should bear in mind the tragic experiences of the pietists in Friedensfeld which seemed to be normative of all the new separatist pietist (Mennonite) congregations in Russia during the 1860s.

### 11.07 Gruenfeld, 1867

Gruenfeld was a Kleine Gemeinde settlement which was founded in 1867. It was located approximately 15 miles north of the Borosenko villages of Blumenhoff and Heuboden, where a tract of land had been purchased by seven Kleine Gemeinde families from the Molotschna.<sup>65</sup> They were also joined by a number of families from the Markuslandt settlement. Gruenfeld had the distinction of belonging partially to the Russians and partially to the Mennonites. The Russian part of the village was called Gerwerf and the Mennonite part was called Gruenfeld.<sup>66</sup> In some writings Gruenfeld is also referred to as part of the Borosenko settlement.

The Gruenfeld villagers included the following: Abraham Isaac (1852-1938), Cornelius Toews (1836-1908); Johan Toews (1826-1895); Jakob Regehr (1832-1906); Cornelius Loewen (1827-1893); Johan Isaac (1836-1920); Abraham Loewen (1833-1886); Johan Toews (1853-1915); Gerhard Goossen (1836-1872); Heinrich Wohlgemuth (1849-1899); Johan Broski (1838-1912); and Gerhard Giesbrecht (1846-1907). It is worthy of note that several employees of farmers in the Gruenfeld and Borosenko area joined the Kleine Gemeinde during these years. This included Johan Broski, Gottlieb Janke, and Julius Redinzel who had previously been Lutherans.<sup>67</sup> Heinrich Wohlgemuth was another new member who originated from the Mennonite settlements in Poland. He had been employed by Cornelius Loewen in Gruenfeld, as well as by his future father-in-law Cornelius S. Plett in Blumehoff, Borosenko. This illustrates that even during these troubled years the Kleine Gemeinde still continued much of its original evangelical zeal.

One of the prominent families in the village of Gruenfeld was that of John Isaac (1809-1864). This family had come from the Molotschna in 1867. In his *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* Peter Isaac relates how his father Johan Isaac (1809-1864) had bought a farm in Schoenau in 1852, where he prospered and was able to pay off all his debts in a few years. The family also acquired a mill for grinding grain. In 1862 the family had the misfortune that their house burned down. John Isaac died in 1864. Shortly thereafter the oldest brother Johan Isaac took over the farm. A few years later in 1867 the family made the decision to move to the settlement of Gruenfeld.<sup>68</sup>

Also represented in the Gruenfeld settlement were the sons of the venerable grandfather Isaac Loewen. Cornelius Loewen has recorded that he sold his *Wirtschaft* in the Molotschna for 3400 rubles in 1867.<sup>69</sup> His brother Abraham had moved from Hirschau in the Molotschna to Gruenfeld in February of 1867.<sup>70</sup> Also in Gruenfeld were the sons of Johan Toews (1793-1873), namely, Cornelius Toews (1836-1908) and Johan Toews (1826-1895), as well as his son Johan Toews (1953-1915) Jr.. Both of these families had originally settled in Markuslandt where they had farmed for a number of years. Jacob Regehr (1832-1906) a son-in-law to Johan Toews (1793-1873), also lived in Gruenfeld.

On January 6th, 1868, a ministerial election was held in Gruenfeld where Cornelius Toews was elected as minister. He never took up the office for reasons which will be discussed in chapter twelve. The Gruenfeld village was well served by the minister Gerhard P. Goossen and the deacon Abraham Loewen both of whom were elected in the Molotschna in 1866. It seems that in most church matters Gruenfeld was considered to be a part of the Gemeinde centered in Borosenko or Blumenhoff. Abraham Isaac has recorded that it was here in the village of Gruenfeld that he taught school as a young unmarried man under the watchful supervision of Gerhard Goossen, a veteran school teacher from the Molotschna. John F. Toews (1858-1931) has recalled that he was taught Russian by Abraham Isaac in the village school in Gruenfeld. The Russian language was taught as a compulsory subject which indicated the Kleine Gemeinde emphasis on language study.<sup>71</sup>

### 11.08 Hochfeld and Other Settlements

Hochfeld was a smaller Kleine Gemeinde settlement which was situated a number of miles north of Gruenfeld. Apparently there were no more Mennonite villages behind Hochfeld although the road continued further up to some Russian villages including Stollach from where many of the Kleine Gemeinde farmers in the Borosenko area hired the large number of reapers which they required during the harvest season.<sup>72</sup> Hochfeld has been described as a "chutor" (in North America known as a farm) owned by Johan Warkentin, a prosperous Kleine Gemeinde farmer, originally from the village of Blumstein. It is not known exactly when Warkentin purchased this estate but in 1872 he sold his property in the village of Blumenhoff, Borosenko, to his brother-in-laws Cornelius S. Plett and Johan Loewen who in turn had sold their farms in the Molotschna village of Kleefeld at about this time.<sup>73</sup>

The Hochfeld villagers included the following: Johan Warkentin (1817-1886); his sons Johan L. Warkentin (1845-1908) and Isaac L. Warkentin (1845-1929); brother-in-law David Loewen (1836-1915) who was the youngest son of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) and who had been farming on the family *Wirtschaft* in Lindenau into the early 1870s; and Peter Isaac (1846-1923) who was the son-in-law of Johan Warkentin, Senior. Thus it seems that the Hochfeld settlement consisted of Johan Warkentin, his immediate family, and a good number of Russian workers. The small settlement also had its own school as it is reported of one of the Johan Warkentin daughters that she had also learned to speak Russian in school.<sup>74</sup>

Other families had moved out of the Molotschna individually so that by 1874 there were a number of Kleine Gemeinde families resident in the Zagradowka settlement, in the province of Kherson. The Zagradowka settlement was the first daughter colony of the Molotschna and had been established in 1871 for the purpose of resettling some of the "landless" of the mother colony. The following Kleine Gemeinde families are known to have lived in Zagradowka: Jakob Friesen (1822-1875); Jakob Friesen (1850-1921); Heinrich Fast (1826-1890) all of the Zagradowka village of Nikolaithal; and Heinrich Friesen (1850-1933) of Tiege in Zagradowka. Another Kleine Gemeinde family, namely Peter Loewen (1825-1887) a son of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), lived on the estate Sawitzki behind (presumably west of) the Borosenko village of Steinbach where they were farming a parcel of rented land.<sup>75</sup>

### 11.09 Conclusion

It goes without saying that the outward and physical expansion of the Kleine Gemeinde outlined above could only occur at the expense of the congregation in the Molotschna. By 1869 this congrega-

tion, which probably included some 150 families before the colonization movement commenced, had declined to some 50 families as only 52 brethren took part in a ministerial election of the Molotschna congregation in 1869.<sup>76</sup> By 1874 this congregation had declined even further with only some two dozen families.

The following are the known families in the Molotschna congregation as of 1874: Peter Friesen (1842-1904) Mariafeld; Gerhard Warkentin (1848-1900) Fischau; Abraham Klassen, Prangenau; Johan L. Dueck (1833-1894) Alexanderkron; Jakob L. Dueck (1839-1893) Gnadenthal; Johan Hiebert (1816-1890) Alexanderwohl; Johan Enns (1850-1917) Fischau; Heinrich Warkentin (1833-1888) Lichtenau; Gerhard Cornelisen (1816-1894) Lichtenau; Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884) Lichtenau; Ephraim Ballan (1822- ) Lichtenau; Heinrich Enns (1807-1881) Fischau; Cornelius Friesen (1832-1911) Lichtfelde; Dietrich Isaac (1831- ) Fischau; Gerhard Doerksen (1825-1882) Fishau; Martin Rempel (died 1874); and his son Johan (born 1851) both of Morgenau.

Aeltester Peter Tocws has noted that by the 1870s the Borosenko settlement had replaced the Molotschna as the heart of the Kleine Gemeinde. Nevertheless the Molotschna congregation remained an important and vital one. The ministerial consisted of Johan L. Dueck (1833-1894), the son of Kleine Gemeinde minister Johan Dueck (1801-1866), who was elected as a deacon in 1869. The minister was Abraham Klassen of Prangenau who was also elected in 1869. Abraham Klassen had joined the Kleine Gemeinde in the 1860s and became a prominent and influential leader. He was one of four ministers during the 1860s who had not grown up in a Kleine Gemeinde home, indicating that the full gospel teachings of the group still attracted those who were seriously searching for spiritual fulfillment. The reader will already be familiar with Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884) the Kleine Gemeinde school teacher in Lichtenau.

It is difficult to come to a definite conclusion regarding the movement out of the Molotschna by the Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860s. On the one hand it certainly represented a flexing of Kleine Gemeinde financial muscle as the entire endeavour was completed without any hint of financial assistance from the Molotschna colony. As has already been noted such financial assistance by the Molotschna colony was first provided in 1871 to the Zagradowka settlement, where only four Kleine Gemeinde families are known to have taken part. Nor did the Kleine Gemeinde attempt to emulate the Mennonite Brethren and TEMPLER Churches who had been able to obtain free land grants in the Kuban (distant Caucasus district) in order to resettle their landless on their own settlements. Indeed the records show that the Kleine Gemeinde purchased all of their land parcels completely from their own resources. In addition these settlements were located on relatively expensive lands within 60 or 80 miles of the mother colony. It seems that as a result of the outward expansion almost every member of the Kleine Gemeinde had an opportunity to become a land owning farmer. This was a tremendous achievement at a time when two-thirds of the Russian-Mennonite population remained in the landless class. But there was also a negative side. At the time of the emigration the bottom fell out of the property market especially in the new settlements. Thus the families who had remained in the Molotschna were generally able to make a more advantageous sale of their property. Consequently many of the Borosenko families probably had little left after they had sold their properties and paid their debts and felt fortunate if they were at least able to pay their own travelling costs.

The outward movement also had advantages and disadvantages in a spiritual sense. Those families who had hoped that the relocation to their own closed settlements would isolate them from the socio-economic strife and religious turmoil of the time were to be bitterly disappointed. Nevertheless the move from the comforts of the prosperous Molotschna to the rigors and privations of pioneer life must have served to spiritually awaken many in the new settlements. The relative success of this endeavour no doubt prepared many for a far more rigorous pioneering experience in America a decade later.

The outward expansion also seemed to make the Kleine Gemeinde quite susceptible to the waves of radical pietism rampant during the period, at least in the Crimea and in Friedensfeld. However, even here the Kleine Gemeinde losses seem to be a relatively modest fifteen per cent or so which was no doubt well below average. In fact, all of the Mennonite groups experienced losses in membership to the radical pietists at this time, even the popular Orloff congregation was not immune. In fact given that the Kleine Gemeinde still held strictly to the unpopular and unfashionable teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, it is surprising that the losses were not much greater. No doubt this was a testimony to the fact that the individual Kleine Gemeinder of this time was still firmly grounded on the teachings and doctrines of his faith. The easier and more compromising, and yet still Christian pietist way, held little attraction to those who remained true to spiritual covenants they had once

made with their Lord.

## FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER ELEVEN, PHYSICAL EXPANSION

1. See Chapter 7, **The Golden Years** op. cit., 100-109.
2. John C. Reimer, ed. **Reimer Familienregister**. (Book Committee, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1958), 53.
3. See **The Golden Years**, section 18.05.
4. Peter L. Dueck, 1865-1866 Church Calender, op. cit.
5. Plett Picture Book, op. cit., 18.
6. In Russia anyone on his own land away from the Mennonite colonies was referred to as an estate owner. An estate was referred to as a "Chutor".
7. Abraham W. Klassen, op. cit.
8. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 460.
9. *Ibid*, 484.
10. History and Events, 39.
11. Toews, **Sammlung**, 369.
12. Isaac Harms (1811-1891) was the son of Johan Harms (b1771). See Family No. 11, **The Golden Years**, op. cit., 154. His wife was Anna Sawatzky (1809-1877) the daughter of Cornelius Sawatzky (1781-1840). See family No. 20 in **The Golden Years**, *ibid*, 155.
13. See Section 1.11 where Klaas R. Reimer describes the Markuslandt settlement. 10 d. See History and Events, op. cit., 13.
14. See History and Events, op. cit., 13.
15. Aeltester Toews then continues with the following comment, "Many of our friends in Russia, Asia nor excluded, and America may now wish to know the identity of the writer. After 1866 I became known here and there in Russia as a minister through my travelling and writing. A certain writing dealing with the supposed worth of a baptism without faith (unconverted) which circulated widely without its later corrections, later made a certain minister cognizant of me, who then became further acquainted with me through our personal discussion . . . This statement refers to Toews's 1869 **Epistle on Baptism** set forth in Section 12.09.
16. John Toews, **Das Washsame Auge Gottes**, (Unpublished manuscript), 79, 83.
17. Helena Janke, op. cit., 4.
18. John C. Reimer, op. cit., 53.
19. John F. Fast, op. cit., 2.
20. John C. Reimer, op. cit.
21. Johan Toews, **Das Wachsame Auge Gottes**, op. cit. 83.
22. *Ibid*, 72.
23. Peter Isaac, op. cit., 19.
24. See Roy Loewen, op. cit., for additional information about Jacob Wiebe.
25. P.H. Berg, "Andreasfeld Mennonite Brethren Church", MEI, 121.
26. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 483-484.
27. History and Events, 39.
28. C. Krahn, "Crimea", MEI, 740.
29. *Ibid*, 741.
30. David V. Wiebe, **Grace Meadow** (M.B. Publishing House, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1967), 21.
31. *Ibid*, 25.
32. *Ibid*.
33. David L. Plett, Collection of Writings, Unpublished manuscript. Courtesy of Isaac K. Plett, Landmark, Manitoba.
34. *Ibid*.
35. One queries at this point whether the Annenfelder were talking about a violent radical pietist style conversion or the quiet, peaceful full gospel submission to Christ of the nonresistant Christians. Terminology appears to have been part of the problem.
36. A carry over from Lutheran theology.
37. G.U. Kornelsen, **Familienregister der Nachkommen von Abraham E. und Maria Kornelsen**, (Box 424, Belitz, British Honduras, C.A.), 1969, 3-5.
38. History and Events, 40.
39. John B. Toews, **Memoirs of John Barkman Toews**, (Prairieview Press, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1961), 5.
40. J.J. Hildebrand, op. cit., 222.
41. David P. Reimer and P.J.B. Reimer, eds.; **The Sesqucentennial Jubilee Evangelical Mennonite Conference 1812-1962** (Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1962.)
42. *Ibid*, 96.
43. Telephone Interview with Bill Schroeder, Winnipeg, in 1983.
44. History and Events, 39.
45. Peter Toews, **Diary 1872-1878**, op. cit.
46. Plett Picture Book, 18.
47. Abraham Klassen, **Remembrances**.
48. Heinrich Ratzlaw, **Memoirs**.
49. Abraham W. Klassen, op. cit., 2-8.
50. John B. Toews, op. cit., 5 and 9.
51. Peter U. Dueck, et. al; **Abraham L. and Elisabeth Dueck** (Family Committee, Kleeefeld, 1965), 23.



52. I am indebted to Henry Fast for referring me to this information. These particular documents are from the collection of Diedrich Dueck, Belize, C. A.
53. John K. Esau, **Ein Familien Register, Um Fast eine Zeit, Von 1740 bis 1930**. Unpublished journal, courtesy of A. Schmidt. Also an English translation, page 4.
54. This corroborates the statement of Adam Giesinger that the Kleine Gemeinde also had some followers from the Chortitza Colony. See Giesinger, **op. cit.**
55. P.M. Friesen, **op. cit.** 500; See also A. Braun, "Friedensfeld", ME11, 400.
56. John W. Dueck, **History and Events**, 93.
57. John A. Toews, **A History of the M.B. Church**, **op. cit.** 62; and P.M. Friesen, **op. cit.**, 507.
58. **History and Events**, 93.
59. The size of Jacob Penners' enterprise is illustrated by the fact that in 1894 the widow Jacob Penner sold 5600 desiatines of land. In addition she divided 2400 desiatines among eight children. (I am indebted to Henry Fast for this information). The descendants of Jacob Penner later included an Attorney-General of the Province of Manitoba.
60. Sol Loewen, **Jacob Loewen Family** (Tabor College, Kansas, 1983), 17
61. Plett Picture Book, 41-51.
62. P.M. Friesen, **op. cit.**, 545.
63. **Ibid.**, 507.
64. **Ibid.**
65. Rev. Abram Isaac, **Remembrances at 80**, Unpublished manuscript.
66. **History and Events**, 103.
67. Roy Loewen, **op. cit.**, 37, 301-302, 268-269.
68. Peter Isaac, **op. cit.**, 16-17.
69. Cornelius Loewen, **Diary Extracts**. I am indebted to Margaret Kroeker (Mennonite Geneology, Winnipeg, Manitoba) for referring me to these writings.
70. **History and Events**, 40.
71. John F. Toews, **op. cit.** 3 Cornelius P. Janzen Collection.
72. **History and Events**, 104.
73. **Plett Picture Book**, 18.
74. **Ibid.**, 22.
75. **History and Events**, 104-105.
76. **Ibid.**, 49-50.

# Chapter Twelve.

## Issues And Events 1866-1871

### 12.01 Introduction

This chapter will deal with the issues and events experienced by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde for the period 1866-1871. These years are characterized as a period of rebuilding and reorganization in the midst of demoralization which the 1866 division left in its wake. Notwithstanding much adversity and serious setbacks, the reconstitution of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was essentially completed by 1871.

The material will be dealt with in chronological order and will consist of selected writings and letters together with brief explanatory comments. The selection itself is based on **Anhang Number One** which was a summary of the history of the Kleine Gemeinde for the years 1866-1874 written by Aeltester Peter Toews in 1874. **Anhang Number One** was published in the book **History and Events** in 1981<sup>1</sup> and the reader will find it necessary to refer to the same as none of the letters, petitions, and election lists included there will be repeated here. i.e. To an extent this treatment will be a supplement to the material included in **Anhang Number One**.

The result of the 1866 division was that the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde reorganized and reconstituted itself as two separate Gemeinden whose membership was founded in all four regions in which there was a congregation. Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872) was supported by the ministers Abraham Friesen, Peter Friesen, and Abraham L. Friesen, and by the deacons Klaas Friesen and Jakob Friesen. Hence the name "Friesens" Gemeinde apparently came to be applied to the group which will also be the terminology used here. The ministers Abraham Friesen (1807-1891) and the deacon Klaas Friesen (1818-1871) were the brothers of the Aeltester. The minister Peter Friesen (1815-1892) and the deacon Jakob Friesen (1808-1889) were the sons of the former Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) and the cousins of the Aeltester Johan Friesen. Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) was the son of deacon Jakob Friesen.

The ministerial of the "Friesens" Gemeinde also included the minister Isaac Friesen and the deacon Peter Wiebe (1835-1902) both elected in the Markusland Gemeinde in 1864. On November 23, 1866, the "Friesens" Gemeinde held a deacon and ministerial election with the following results: Votes for deacon were cast as follows: Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908) - 36 votes; Jakob Dueck - five votes; Jakob Klassen - two votes; and Isaak Friesen - one vote. The votes cast for minister were: Gerhard Schellenberg - 41 votes; and Klaas Friesen - three votes. Forty-four brethren took part in this election.<sup>2</sup> It is noted that Gerhard Schellenberg and his family came over to the Kleine Gemeinde in 1864.

The organizational requirements of the Enns Reform group were considerably more extensive as the group originally only included the two senior ministers, Heinrich Enns in the Molotschna, and Peter Baerg in the Crimea. Consequently a ministerial election was held in Fischau on October 10, 1866, with the result that Heinrich Enns was elected as the Aeltester, Peter Toews and Gerhard Goossen were elected as ministers and Abraham Loewen as deacon. A more complete report on these elections will be found in **History and Events**. This completed the initial reorganization of the Enns Reform Gemeinde as well as the "Friesens" Gemeinde.

### 12.02 Peter Toews, Epistle for Intercession, 1866

Although most regrettable, the events of the 1866 division must be understood in the context of a troubled and perplexing period of socio-economic unrest and religious turmoil which has already been dealt with in previous chapters. Notwithstanding these difficulties the Kleinen Gemeinde did not cease functioning. In fact many of the most admirable evangelical characteristics of the group continued unabated throughout the time of reorganization. For example: the landless were resettled, the poor and needy were fed and clothed, and Bibles and devotional books were being sold and distributed. Although a reconciliation could not be achieved the correspondence on both sides speaks of forgiveness and of an earnest and heartfelt desire to do what was right. In this respect it could also be noted that even the business affairs of the two groups were reorganized by mutual agreement and in Christian love, so that the debts to the Gemeinde of an individual would be transferred and owed to whichever group he belonged to.

Certainly daily life and routine in the Kleine Gemeinde was interrupted for a time. But life con-

tinued and a livelihood had to be sought and earned. The tragedies and joys of life also remained. It seems that after the initial shock of the division most members of the Gemeinde resolutely pressed forward and sought to rebuild afresh. Indeed it seems as if the 1866 division resulted in a spiritual renewal and rededication in both branches of the Gemeinde. The following **Epistle for Intercession** by Peter Toews should serve to illustrate the spiritual condition and attitude prevalent at this time. Peter Toews had been elected as a minister on October 10, 1866, at the young age of 25. In this letter he beseeches his fellow brethren to make prayerful intercession for him as he undertakes his new ministerial duties in fear and reverence.

**“Epistle for Intercession, 1866 — Blumenhoff, October 1866.** To the beloved brothers and sisters in Christ in the Molotschna, in the Crimea, and at Markus (land).

“You are well aware of the sorrowful and heavy heart with which I covenanted with you and the Lord to enter into the service for which I was elected by the majority of votes. Namely, as a minister of the Gemeinde of God to be an example to the believers in teaching and practice; in love, spirit, faith, and in chastity; and overall to modestly present a model for all good works.

“Indeed, I would say together with David, that my soul was very sore vexed and my legs were trembling, for I find nothing wholesome in myself for this service. If it merely consisted of presenting a sermon on Sunday I would wish to carry out these duties in some way, even if only in great imperfection, but as stated above, this encompasses the presentation of a sermon not merely on Sunday, rather every day and everywhere, with all my words, works, and gesticulations. This seems almost impossible to me.

At that time after the brothers and sisters from near and far had taken their leave from me. I embarked upon my return journey home with a sorrowful and fearful heart not knowing how and what would come of the matter for me. On the one hand I felt within myself my very great impoverishment and my sinful flesh and blood which are my greatest enemies. On the other hand, I felt my very definite calling and the vast fields ripe for the harvest.

Thereupon I became deeply anxious and fearful and my heart trembled within my body. I must groan and lament: “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and knowm me. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? For should I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning sun, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light around me. Yes, even the darkness hideth naught from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”

I must cry out with the poet: “Dem Heiligen Geist, Herr gib du mir, der mich in meinem Leben fuehr naeh deinem Wohlgefallen, denn ich dein Knecht, bin viel zu schlecht, und auch zu schwach in Allem, denn ich ganz un vermoegend bin, das ich aus eigner Kraft und Sinn, sollt gutes thun and denken, drum Herr der Kraft der alles schafft, Du wollst mir Gnade schenken, auf das mir ja dein Goettlich Wort, stets leit und fuehrn an allem Ort, das ich maeg wise werden, und das dein Geist mir Zeugnis leist, so lang ich leb auf Erden.” Yes, I was generally unable to find any comfort and often seriously thought to myself, that if only I might have had the Testament or the Psalms of David, along with me on the wagon in order that I might have sought my solace therein.

Then I finally arrived at my home, where at least I had the promise of the joy of being reunited and the love of my wife and children, which I had already anticipated with such great longing. Instead I had to experience what the Lord says through the prophet Isaiah 55, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” Here my pride and joy, my only child lay prostrated and on the death bed, and also died after having preached repentance to me for two days and two nights, suffering in all parts of the body. It was not the death of the child, rather the sorrow and loneliness of my wife and the acknowledgement of my sins in the suffering of the innocent child which grieved me so.

Alas, here I could no longer contain myself and often had to weep and lament and pray together with David; “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from all my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. For I wish to teach Your ways unto the transgressors: in order that the sinners shall be converted unto Thee.” Indeed, for the first time the weightiness of my calling now fell heavily upon my heart, after the Lord had so earnestly revealed my previous transgressions and sins to me through the suffering of my innocent child. “O Gnaden Wink! O Liebeszug! Ach koent ihn meine Seele genug empfinden, und erwaegen, u.s.w.”

In this my grief I was unable to contain myself and felt compelled to write unto all my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. By virtue of the sufficiency of God I am of the firm resolve that in the future I will conduct myself more blamelessly in my daily walk than has been the case in the past and I will seek to demonstrate my faith through my works. And you my beloved brethren, do pray to God for me that my faith would not cease, and rather that the Lord might strengthen me and

preserve me with the comfort of his spirit, and that the spirit might teach me what I should say. Yes Lord! "Offenbar mir deinen Willen, gib Kraft im Guten fort zu gehen, Schaff ein reines Herz ihn zu erfüllen, und Demuths Geist vor dir zu stehn", lehr mich recht Schwach, und Fester stehn, und unterweis mich deine Wege, das ich mag ohne Strackheit gehn."

Yes, I feel and know very well that if like Jonah, I would try to escape and if I would make up my mind not to want to preach the name of the Lord, I would certainly not have any peace in my heart. Instead I would have to say together with Paul: "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel!" Even though I might excuse myself together with Moses because I have a heavy tongue, and with Isaiah because of impure lips, and with Jeremiah because I consider myself to be far too young for this service, not merely in years but far more in the knowledge of the holy scripture, for unfortunately I have not studied the same zealously enough, nevertheless I presently wish to comfort myself with the words of the Lord when he says, "it is not you that speaks but rather the spirit of the father speaking through you!"

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. Anxiety and fear anew falls upon me when I read what Paul said "Remember your teachers who have spoken unto you the word of God; behold the end to which they come and follow their faith." Accordingly it cannot be denied that if in accordance with the will and command of the Lord I am to teach and punish other people, then I must first myself be unpunishable: As Paul says, "But I benumb my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached unto others, I myself should be a castaway."

As I can now perceive that no choice is left available to me but to do what the Lord commands and to go where He sends me, I jointly bid that all of you brothers and sisters would earnestly pray for me, that the Lord would stand by me and truly prepare me for this service. For of myself I am nothing and my prayer is often so weak that I must lament with the poet: *Der Lippen Magre Weider, der Opfer-Rauch vom Mund steigt auf faellt kraftlos wieder, denn ihm fehlt Macht und Grund.*" Oh indeed, the Lord promises to hear the prayers where two or three are gathered in his name. How much more will the Lord now hear us if all united together, we beseech him for his support. It is promised that the prayer of the righteous accomplishes much if it is earnest.

After extending a heartfelt greeting to all of you, and after once more asking all of you for your intercession with God, I pray together with the poet: *Gedenke Herr an dein Erbarmen, das weder End noch Anfang kennt, Ach schau in Gnaden auf mich Armen! Der sich nach deinem Namen nennt, Gedenke nich der Kindheit Sunden, und was die Jugend hat verschult, hab aber Herr mit mir Geduld, und lasz fuer Recht mich Gnade finden. Noch eins Herr, will ich von dir bitten: Bewahre mich durch deine Macht, will Gift und Gall der Feind ausschuetten, so hab auf meine Seele Acht. Lasz schlecht und recht sie stets behueten, sei Gnaddig deinem Israel, und rette deines Volkes Seel, von alle ihrer Feinde Wuethen.*" Your brother who loves you all dearly. "Peter Toews."

### 12.03 Peter Toews. Epistle to Wiebe in the Crimea, 1867.

The story of the founding of the Crimean congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde has already been told in the previous chapter. By all appearances a strong and vigorous congregation had been established. By 1867 another minister was needed by the Crimean group and a ministerial election was held on December 3, 1867. The result was that Jakob A. Wiebe, the leader of the small Annenfeld group was now elected to assist minister Peter Baerg in the spiritual supervision of the flock. The ministerial from Borosenko and the Molotschna attended this ministerial election. Upon his return to Borosenko Peter Toews wrote a pastoral letter of spiritual encouragement to Jakob A. Wiebe, the new minister.

An Epistle to Wiebe in the Crimea, immediately after his calling as a minister, and also to the other brothers and sisters: Blumenhoff, in December, 1867. Grace and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. With greetings from your loving brother Peter Toews.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Together with the apostle I feel compelled from the heart to say to you that I cannot thank God enough for your love and faith which has very much refreshed my heart. I especially remember the moving and tearful parting from you.

Now beloved. At that time, I believe it was the 7th of December, we drove until we were over the bridge, and after we had eaten breakfast in Gerschick we parted from the beloved Molotschna brethren, and early in the morning of the 10th we arrived at the banks of the Dnieper. Here we had to wait until a vessel had broken through the ice until we were able to cross over. This did not occur until after sunset and it was eleven o'clock in the evening before we arrived at home, where we found all our loved ones to be well. Even the aged father, who I had thought was not well while I was with you there, was still alive.

Once we were safely at home we related all the news to the beloved brothers and sisters, and considered the blessing which the Lord had bestowed upon all of us, and to the Molotschnaer as well as to you. My obligations also admonished me that I had already delayed for too long my writing to you. For who knows what purpose it will serve?

We were very concerned with respect to the results of the matter there, which occasioned no little grief for us. But with the help of God we have come to the point that the brethren wish to forget all that has been put behind us and to seek for that which lies ahead. May the Lord also add his blessing thereto. Oh, if all of us might only more and more comprehend and confess how God in Christ Jesus loves us so much and how compassionate and gracious He is over us, for then each and

everyone of us would always gladly endeavour to be the least of all, and to be the debtor, and no one would demand a greater settlement of debt from his neighbour than what he is able to repay.

Christ has given us far more than one thousand ruble, and not that alone, for if we are reconciled with Him He will give us everything and the inheritance of eternal blessedness together with Him. "Wo Freude die Fuelle, wo liebliche Stille, wo Wollust wo jauchzen, wo Herrlichkeit wohnt, wo heiliges Leben wird Ewig belohnt." No enticement, no matter how sweet, will be able to subvert the pure and yet mighty bread of life in heaven and thereby disturb the peace of the family. No voice, no voice of faith, and even if it were the voice of an angel, will there be able to detract us from the sheperds voice of Jesus.

This voice calls to us saying, "he who does not follow Me and turn about as the little children cannot..." and "he who does not take up his cross"... and "he who does not deny... the lusts of his eyes and the desires of his flesh," and "he who does not follow Me " cannot be My disciple. No love of the world can restrain us and give us reason to offend or to hurt even one of the least of the brethren in Christ. Together with Paul we must put aside even the things which seem pure and blessed to us, and rather pursue the matters which are blessed to many and not merely to us alone.

Now my beloved siblings. When we remember the love which you have demonstrated to us it occurs to us that even though this was and is such a fervent love it does not even compare with the love which Christ has demonstrated to us. Which more and more brings us to that which is spoken by John: "As God has loved us, so let us also love him, for we cannot love God in any other way but that we love one another and love each and every one as God hath first loved us." He gave His own life for our sakes and did not keep back any of His richness in glory for Himself, and rather wishes to bestow the same upon us.

We are to follow his example. Nor should we love our own lives and even less so the mere indication of love, be it in what it may: For otherwise the judgement will be issued that "what was not done for the least of these was also not done for me."

— the remainder of the letter is omitted —  
"Peter Toews"

#### 12.04 Cornelius Toews, Resignation of Ministerial Office, 1968.

The foregoing letters indicate that the concerns of the Annenfeld group had finally been dealt with and satisfied. With another strong spiritual leader added to the ministerial, the Kleine Gemeinde was looking forward to great things in the Crimean congregation.

However, the difficulties of reorganization left in the wake of the 1866 division were not yet overcome in some of the other congregations. It seemed that Aeltester Johan Friesen was unable to make right the misleading and misjudgements of the past. In 1868/1869 all of the members of his Gemeinde, except for ten families, withdrew from his spiritual leadership. Seemingly he continued in his past spiritual leanings away from the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and in favour of the mild Orloff pietism. Many of the families who departed from the leadership of Aeltester Johan Friesen in 1868/1869 joined together with the Blumenhoff Gemeinde. This will be dealt with in sections 12.06 and 12.07. Another thirty or so families formed their own Gemeinde under the leadership of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen of Heuboden. Consequently this group became known as the Heubodner Gemeinde<sup>9</sup>.

The Gemeinde under Aeltester Heinrich Enns also experienced its share of difficulties. Many in this Gemeinde were somewhat lacking in confidence of Aeltester Enns as in their view he had acted too resolutely in demanding the immediate resignation of Aeltester Johan Friesen in 1866. These misgivings were brought to a head by an issue which arose out of a ministerial election held in the settlement of Gruenfeld, north of Borosenko, on January 6th, 1868. Here Cornelius Toews, the brother of Aeltester Peter Toews, was elected first as a deacon and then as a minister with 18 out of 24 votes. This occasioned considerable dissatisfaction as Cornelius Toews had at one time been under the ban. The ministerial had now retroactively revoked the ban from Toews and a number of others on the basis that it had been applied in error. This intention in itself was completely correct and something which has far too often been overlooked where pride and righteousness has prevented a full admission of error on the part of the Gemeinde where an excommunication was not carried out in an evangelical manner.

Of course such a decision could only be made by the brotherhood and here the ministerial had proported to remove the ban without first referring the same to the brotherhood. This was an obvious mistake on the part of Aeltester Enns and caused the confidence in him to decline even more. As a result he indicated that he would resign his office for the well-being of the Gemeinde. Although he waived somewhat in this decision, the brotherhood decided at a meeting held in Kleeefeld in the Molotschna on August 14, 1869, that he should abide by the declaration previously made. Consequently the Gemeinde was again without an Aeltester, a deficiency which would not be rectified until

the election of Peter Toews in 1870.

In the meantime Cornelius Toews had voluntarily resigned his ministerial office because of the commotion which his election had caused. The resolution of this matter was a momentous task. A letter by Peter Toews of 1868 sets forth the basic facts of the matter and the theological issues involved. The text of this letter is to be found in **History and Events**. However the letter of resignation of Cornelius Toews provides the reader with a valuable added insight into the whole affair as well as into the general conditions of the Gemeinde at this time and therefore the same is included here:

“Declaration by Cornelius Toews to the brethren in the Molotschna in March of 1868: Grace and the Christlike peace with His humble and patient manner and a friendly greeting be with you. AMEN.

Beloved brethren in the Lord. I hope that my simple and insignificant declaration may contribute something to the reinstatement of brotherly love and unity. I understand that to a considerable degree the Gemeinde has been brought into this sorrowful circumstance through the ministerial election in so far as it concerns my own person. Oh brethren, it grieves and humbles me so much and I consider myself so unworthy, that the Gemeinde should have come into such disunity on my account. But for the will of Jesus and for the sake of the salvation of my soul and the souls of many others, and in so far as the Lord will impart grace and power unto me, and so far as I remain cognizant of the same and my conscience testifies thereof, I gladly wish to declare myself in that regard:

In his sermons (presentations) and at brotherhood meetings, brother Toews had frequently encouraged each and everyone to prepare themselves for the forthcoming election and that in consequence of this preparation we, and especially Ohm Enns and Goossen, might await the same. In so far as I knew this also occurred to the great joy of us all. Shortly after the arrival of brother Wiebe together with a number of brethren from the Crimea a brotherhood meeting was held. According to the testimony and presentations of our beloved Aeltester no consequential ramifications for our brotherhood could be perceived at this point, and the meeting proceeded to an election.

I felt no deficiency or inferiority to other members for this election, neither from within myself nor from the brethren. In this state I proceeded to this most important dealing as one of the least of the brethren in great weakness and unworthiness, and in prayer and supplication to God and in submission to his most holy will. Without having perceived any discussion from the part of the brethren I awaited the wise decree of God, who to my greatest consternation and sorrow soon made the same evident and ordained me, poor miserable sinner, to such a vital work and almost unbearable service on the eve of the world.

This brought forth no little grief in my weak flesh so that in my great incompetence and sorrow I revealed my life's journey. How before and after my baptism I must needs confess with Menno that it was shameful to declare. Ephesians 5:12. In secret I have carried on in my loneliness and certainly not in reverence for God but rather for man. Nor did I obtain any acknowledgement and remorse for the same until after I had been married for approximately two years, when on a certain opportunity through 3 or 4 elderly and experienced brethren, I was inwardly convicted and punished for the same and received great fear and distress so that I fell upon my face and pleaded with God for forgiveness of all my sins, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, and received peace and forgiveness in my conscience over the matter. During the examination I confessed this in exactly the same way, which I had not done during the ban that had been instituted against me more than two years prior, as it had not become a concern to me before. As already mentioned, the consequence was that the spirit of the grace of Christ seized my heart and convicted me and inspired me unto pure penitence.

Indeed, everything which I find about me is grace, for my thoughts, words, and deeds convince me that I am a miserable sinner, and that nothing good dwells in me, that is to say, in my flesh. For I was conceived in sin and was brought forth by sinful flesh. Through Adam the evil seed was scattered about in my heart and from which much misery has grown up and was poisoned by the same, which was inclined to all evil. My composition and inspiration from the years of youth was evil so that together with David I was convinced to plead, “Ah Lord, do not remember me after the sins of my youth, but deal with me according to your compassion and the goodness of your will.”

Beloved it moves me deeply and I carry great remorse that my earlier years were expended so needlessly, godlessly and sinfully. In fact, through baptism I submitted myself in oneness with Christ, although only in a very limited faith, as a soul to the guardianship of the Gemeinde, which is taught by all those who maintain the same in all truth and in accordance with the will of God that the lambs shall be pastured. I am unable to be thankful enough for all the bountiful grace and compassion which I have experienced and still experience through Jesus Christ. At the time of my baptism I thought of the salvation giving redemption of Jesus Christ, but had not yet reached nearly all knowledge. Many an experience until antiquity remained to be received from Christ in submission, and in which I must still daily grow and increase. “Zwar es hat might deine Gnad, groben Sunden laengst entrissen. Ich hab auch nach deinen Rath, schoen zu wandeln mich beflissen, da vielleicht ein anderer wohl, mich fuer fromm schon halten soll, Aber dein Genaues Light Zeig mir tiefer mein Verderben, und wie ich nach meiner Pflicht, musz mit selbst und allen sterben, und in wahrer Heiligkeit, vor dir leben allezeit.” In this way the eye of God always remained watchfully upon me miserable sinner with his hand extended out towards me and as already mentioned in many ways seeking to draw me to himself, in no way wishing the death of a sinner and to allow me to go forth until my own ruina-

tion, but that the sinner come unto repentance and live. 2 Peter 3:9.

Nor will I here seek to withhold anything else regarding which you may otherwise have second thoughts, and instead will gladly disclose the same. For apparently something from the same has also contributed to the sorrowful situation of the Gemeinde at present. Namely, that in the year 1857 I was presented before the Gemeinde, because of a frivolous and careless life and an overly hasty confession, and considered worthy of the ban by the same, and also dealt with accordingly. Ever since the beginning of my Christian life I have not been able to regard the ban in any other way but that the entire brotherhood including the elderly and experienced would have applied this life giving medium of salvation for the sake of my salvation as well as theirs. As a consequence I could not again be received as a brother in the Gemeinde until I had confessed my sins, even though I had already rued for the same, and also acknowledged that these dealings regarding me had been right and that they had been applied to me in an apostolic manner, and that I had rightfully deserved this medium in accordance with the scripture. I also continued to perceive and regard this action as correct for a time thereafter, until I discovered through the grace of God that only he who gives the son freedom is truly free.

My beloved, you are mindful of my previous life as I am also, and must confess with David, that although I am reconciled with God through Christ nevertheless I daily carry my sins before me. The more that I draw away from the world and all that lies therein and seek to die to the same, and the more and more I seek to submit myself to God and his words, will, order and teaching and strive to live in Christ alone, the more strength I find to be mindful of the covenant which on bended knee I once made with God although in great weakness of faith. I often fall and waiver, but always the spirit helps me onward once again and thereby directs me evermore and deeper unto the fallen nature of my flesh.

I trust that all of this will have served for my best. With respect to the election I can thus far testify that at the time I was standing in firm trust towards God and the brethren, and that I received this call as the protection and leading of God, which I confessed in the presence of a number of you and continue to confess. Notwithstanding my previous sins, but after I had committed myself to the grace of the Lord in body and in soul, I was ready to serve the Lord according to my insignificant gifts and in so far as the Lord would give me strength and support and in my great weakness.

But if the Lord wishes to demonstrate something else to all of us from this and if after more mature consideration this seems the best for the general well-being, and after everything has been considered in love, I will gladly submit myself to the counsel of the brethren. For the situation which subsists at present seems very lamentable to me, so that I hardly know what counsel is to be had. I have submitted myself to God and the brethren in the matter of the election as can be seen from the foregoing declaration, and want to entrust myself to the Lord and the Gemeinde for now and always. Shortly after my calling the Gemeinde had considered all matters as well as my declaration and made a decision regarding the same. Far be it from me that I should throw myself upon this service without being called, and to offend and anger my brethren, which is how it seems to appear at present. I would far rather remain as one of the least of the brethren than to take this almost unbearable burden upon myself.

Now my beloved. Do accept this my simple declaration and the confession from the history of my life, which I have briefly endeavoured to present to you, from me in love and for my best as well as yours. Should I through carelessness and weakness, have omitted something which may have contributed to the present condition of the Gemeinde then do think the best of me and share the same with me. Beloved brethren I know of no other counsel regarding this entire matter but that we make haste to the one who has gone before us with his meek and humble manner, and who has dealt with mankind in such a patient and loving manner, as he also deals with us. Yes, that we might trueheartedly and earnestly beseech the Savior and not lose our trust so quickly, and rather apply the love which will provide us with counsel and advice for every need, if the same is rightly applied to us. We can entertain no doubts but that, by so doing we should once more be able to deal with the matter and to place all the disunity under siege. Let us discuss this one with the other and write to one another with full confidence and with a truly sympathetic heart which is bettered by love. I would hope that we would still continue to be mindful of the previous division so that none of us would allow the walls of division separating one from the other to become too great and to be made too quickly.

Oh brethren, pray without ceasing, also for myself. Thus far from your weak fellow brother. In March, 1868. Gruenfeld. "Cornelius Toews" To all the brethren.

### **12.05 Peter Toews, An Epistle to the Molotschna Brethren, 1869.**

Far too often history is presented entirely from the viewpoint of the political governing process and consequently the rich social history of a people is entirely overlooked. This is also true in the case of the Kleine Gemeinde as far too little is known of their daily joys and sorrows. From the recollections of those who were young lads at this time it is evident that even the traumatic 1860's were nostalgically remembered as good years, and so they were in many ways. Financial trouble, family tension, alcoholism, and other social diseases of the time were more or less unknown in the Kleine Gemeinde. The stability thereby represented coupled with the rich cultural and social activities of a pastoral village life made the life experience of the average individual relatively serene.<sup>4</sup>

To this must be added the aspect of an earnest doctrinally based, spiritual life on the part of the average Kleine Gemeinder. For not only is the political or ecclesiastical life of a people often overly emphasized but even here the attention is frequently directed merely to the dramatic and invariably towards that which is negative. Regretably this is also the case in the present history. For this reason the reader will find included here an epistle by Peter Toews which could be described as a pure pastoral letter. This letter illustrates the joys and victories of spiritual life even in the midst of frequent adversity. This letter should demonstrate that the Kleine Gemeinde continued to be a viable and strong movement notwithstanding the 1866 division and the general socio-economic and religious turmoil of the 1860s. Although this epistle does refer to the pressure which some members were bringing to bear on Aeltester Heinrich Enns to once more take up the duties of his office, the basic tone is one of pastoral admonition and encouragement. Here we also find a first reference to the possibility of a reconciliation with part of the former Gemeinde of Aeltester Johan Friesen. This epistle will serve to create a more balanced and complete picture of the Kleine Gemeinde for the period under review.

**“An Epistle to the Molotschna Brethren.** Blumenhoff. January 30, 1869.

As a friendly greeting I wish all my brothers and sisters the grace, compassion, and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. These are also the words of the highly enlightened apostle Paul who uses this blessing in all of his letters and it is truly a noble greeting. But it is not the greeting but rather the actual receiving of the grace and friendliness of our Lord Jesus Christ and the ascertainable presence of His Holy spirit which is important. Indeed in his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that peace and mercy shall be upon as many as walk according to the rule of the new creature.”

“Whoever does not yet go about under this rule, not yet having experienced that the Lord is truly friendly, and whoever has not yet experienced grace as a miserable sinner, and whosoever has never yet received the blessed feeling of the precious peace of God in his heart; only such a one can coldly and without any blessing allow such a greeting to pass by his heart. Such a greeting will be a joy for all those who are concerned to possess the peace of God in their hearts day and night, and particularly those who in the days of their enlightenment have had to suffer through a great warfare, and who have thereafter experienced in their hearts the grace and friendship of our Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise those who have experienced that in the battle with sin, world, devil, flesh and blood, all around them, they have sometimes grown weary, and that the strength of their first love is no longer as powerful and fiery. Those who are bowed in remorse and shame will also discover that the first zeal is going lost and likewise those who are overcome by the discipline of the spirit.

“For those who are faithful such a greeting transmitted by loving hearts cannot and will not prepare anything but blessing and joy. As such I can no longer postpone to undertake this little writing to you. Particularly as the beloved Saviour says that everything that you would that the people do unto you, do ye also unto them. Therefore I am saying and writing unto you with the apostle Paul: ‘Finally beloved brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith.’ And that the righteous God, who allows no one to be tempted over their ability, would strengthen and keep us as well as you from evil, and that we might edify each other unto the spiritual house and unto the holy priesthood.

“Which we also wish unto you that your hearts might be directed unto the love of God and the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that you would not only believe in the Lord Jesus but also wish to do everything which is in his word. For we are his creation, fashioned in Christ Jesus unto all good works. The apostle says: In peace hath God called us, for he is not a God of disorder, but of peace. The apostle admonishes us in this sense, nay not merely admonishes for he also says: Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

“We are all deficient in the honour we should have with God. And especially we, your insignificant and unworthy servants, who as you know are afflicted with many offences and mistakes. For which purpose we were together recently in order that we might forgive and promise to forget each other’s misdeeds, of which you are also witnesses as I mentioned to you in parting.

“We are now advised by the brethren that the beloved Braun is once more making matters difficult for the beloved Ohm Enns, namely, when he calls upon him by a writing to once more teach, punish and admonish when he had wanted to lay down the exercise of his office of his own will and for the best of the Gemeinde. This was also the conclusion of the brotherhood meeting in Kleefeld on the 14th day of August, namely, that Ohm Enns should only remain with his previously made declaration to desist from the exercise of his office. For the trust of the brethren in his Aeltestership had already started to diminish, and he had already weakened himself not merely by that which was involved in the election but already previously, as you know. Without heed to this and moved by sympathy, the brotherhood on August 14th, far rather wanted to declare him to be incompetent than as unworthy, whereby he might still serve someone with baptism. But as he seemingly did not want to place himself before the fissure in our lamentable situation the conclusion already mentioned and known was reached, namely, that he would wish to remain with the declaration already made by him and that for the best of the Gemeinde he would henceforth refrain from serving in his office as Aeltester.

“He has honoured this until the present time, but if Braun is now again making such requests



of him I am once more concerned about this. To be sure, beloved brethren, if you are unable to grant us your confidence as quickly and as fully as others then it is our obligation to await the same with patience and longsuffering. What then is now your view with respect to the above. If our reconciliation of the 10th of January really was a 'yes,' with you as well as with us, as I had earnestly taken it to be, then I bid that you prove the letter of Braun and share with us your views and your counsel regarding the same. Beloved, as the Corinthians blamed Paul in their letters, I do not really want to be specific unless I am personally present. But interpret everything according to love for love thinks no evil."

"Now we also report to you in order to obtain your counsel that the ministers, Abraham Friesen, Gerhard Schellenberg, Isaac Friesen and Peter Wiebe, together with one part of the Gemeinde previously belonging to Aeltester Johan Friesen are minded to unite with us, for which purpose and upon their call for so doing we met with the mentioned brethren in Gruenfeld on the 28th of January. After mutual discussion of various viewpoints we found that we were of one mind in our faith and that we also wanted to be of one mind in our service of God. It is now our heartfelt concern to institute a brotherhood meeting for all of the same and to see how and if the confidence which had disappeared because of the division can once more be established.

"In respect to all of which I look forward to your early reply. Together with my wife I greet each one of you for the best. Your loving brother, Peter Toews."

## 12.06 Epistle for Reconciliation. April 12, 1869

The state of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the years from 1866 to 1870 can be compared to that of a broken and battle scarred regiment of the praetorian guard whose veteran ranks have momentarily broken under the fierce onslaught of a savage enemy. Here and there a gallant captain musters his forces to stand against the swarming tides, and here and there a squad of courageous swordsmen fight to the last man, so that pockets of resistance steadfastly hold out against the enemy. Eventually a few of these brave battle groups managed to stabilize and turn the tide of battle and once more strike forth against the enemy, and in time it also happens that the battle lines of these legions of the faithful can once more be joined together. What a joyous victory for the battle scarred heroes of the faith in the unceasing spiritual warfare of the evangelical Gemeinde.

This is what happened in March of 1869 when a good part of the Gemeinde formerly belonging to the Aeltester Johan Friesen, under the leadership of the senior minister Abraham Friesen (the brother to Aeltester Johan Friesen), was reconciled and reunited with the Gemeinde which was formerly under the leadership of Aeltester Heinrich Enns. In a letter written early in the year 1869, the Borosenko ministerial describes the negotiations which have taken place regarding such a union and also calls upon the brethren from all three congregations to assemble in the central village of Blumenhoff. Here a conference is to take place the object of which is to achieve the hoped for reconciliation. This epistle also outlines the issues which must be dealt with and requests the prayerful consideration of all the brethren for the same.

"**An Epistle to the Gemeinde on the Molotschna and in the Crimea in Annenfeld regarding the forthcoming reconciliation:** April 2, 1869. We wish peace and compassion to all our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, whom God has chosen for salvation from the beginning, and who have now been enlightened through his Holy Ghost and called unto the fellowship of his son through the gospel. We also wish you grace from God our Heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for our sins in order that he might deliver us from the present wicked world in accordance with the will of his father. To whom be praise and honour, now and unto eternity. AMEN.

"Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. After we had written to you in the Molotschna as well as you in the Crimea regarding the forthcoming reconciliation and union with the ministers mentioned and with one part of the Gemeinde previously belonging to Aeltester Johan Friesen, we have received various replies respecting the same and we wish to thank God for your love demonstrated towards us. We had declared in our writing that we thought it necessary that the Gemeinde be called together for the sake of such a joining together, namely, that a general brotherhood meeting would have to be constituted. Which would seem to be the most suitable here as the others are also obliged to impartially declare themselves with respect to our brotherhood and to revoke the improper dealings. Everyone among us who feels responsible to the other would certainly want to do so before such an amalgamation can take place."

"Therefore my beloved brethren, do carefully consider the matter in the fear of God and have the love towards us that you advise as to the time that so many of you would be able to get away simultaneously in order to come here. We are aware that the division has awakened a not insignificant sorrow in all God-loving souls, but we believe that each and everyone will want to take part in the joy when such a division can once more be reconciled in the Lord even though if only in part. Therefore our duty and the love of Christ compels me to bid that you would not fault me for asking that you yourself appoint a suitable time for which to come here for this most serious matter.

"Not that we are seeking an honour therein or think ourselves to be better and more righteous, neither for the sake of your differing viewpoints nor for us alone, but rather for the fear of the will

of the Lord. We believe that this matter should be considered in your presence and with the benefit of your brotherly counsel in order to fully conclude the same. Even though you in the Molotschna as well as you in the Crimea have already written somewhat to us in this regard, the matter is of too great a magnitude for the present as well as the future of this union, for us to proceed without your views being stated and considered at the same time.

"Respecting our plea for brotherly counsel you brethren in the Molotschna have replied with the following words: "The referenced reconciliation with the mentioned ministers and brethren is a doubtful exercise and we ask that you seriously prove the matter from the word of God and that you consider the same carefully. According to our hearts we would gladly assemble together with penitent dispositions in the spirit of the apostle Peter in order to offer the spiritual sacrifice which is acceptable to God. We hold great reservations regarding the three mentioned ministers continuing as such.

"My beloved, it is necessary that we truly humble ourselves unitedly from the heart and implore of God in a childlike manner that he would truly fill us with his spirit in order that all our forthcoming undertakings might serve for the advancement of the salvation of all our souls. Together with this writing from you we also received one from the beloved brother Wiebe in the Crimea, who was present with you at exactly that time. After the beloved brother had reported many matters to us regarding the Aeltester elections, he also said the following with respect to the reconciliation: 'Of your joining together I can say little more than that I wish that we could all become united and live together with one another in love and peace in the fellowship of the holy spirit. Nevertheless this is a serious undertaking.' And in a later writing the beloved brother makes the following remark in closing 'If it is possible to join together perhaps they can all remain as ministers'.

"In the consequence of the same and in quiet solitude we have sought to commit ourselves to the leading of God, for it is our earnest desire that we would gladly follow the will of the Lord in this matter. We also wish to allow the same to lead and to guide as our hearts and the hearts of the other ministers and brethren are directed. Should it please the Lord that we scattered stones of Zion would once more extend the hand of brotherhood to each other, then we wish to do so from the heart and with joy. We wish to proceed with great patience and forbearance in this matter in order that only His holy will might be done and that His glorious and prayer-worthy name would thereby be glorified and sanctified. This prayer is made in a purified heartfelt fear of God for we do not again want to take overly hasty steps.

"According to our viewpoints the matter can only be possible and considered as being for good, and carried to completion after all of us, including you from the Molotschna, and you from the Crimea, as well as we, have attained the same views and minds with respect to the joining together: And only after the beloved brethren Wiebe and Baerg have come here and personally satisfied themselves with respect to our circumstances as well as theirs. Should your coming here from the Crimea as well as from the Molotschna not be possible simultaneously, even if only by a number of individuals, then we do not want to proceed with the amalgamation.

We are afraid that should we proceed too hastily in this matter, which after all is dependent upon all of us, we would thereby only plant new dissatisfaction, accusations, and party spirit in the Gemeinde. And we, your unworthy and weak servants, would properly bear the greatest part of the blame should this be the case. Therefore we should all give the matter our heartfelt participation and should not be indifferent to the same. We also hope that then the Lord will help us further in this so that we need not again incriminate ourselves against Him because of judging and condemnation.

"Now then beloved, this in short is our declaration regarding the forthcoming reconciliation which we put before all of you, for an unprejudiced examination (proving). We would add the comment with respect to this joining together that we would have the least concern regarding the continuation of office of the beloved minister Schellenberg and after the reconciliation we would want to recognize him as our beloved minister. There are somewhat more reservations regarding the beloved Isaac Friesen. Nevertheless we believe it to be within his powers to remove these concerns and for which the beloved Savior would impart his help. But with respect to the beloved Ohm Abraham Friesen it is the view or present wish of the brethren here that for the best of the Gemeinde the beloved Ohm A. Friesen would himself declare unto the end and place himself into the status in which our beloved former Aeltester Heinrich Enns presently finds himself.

"We also hope that if we are otherwise all engaged in a true reconciliation of the heart, that the Lord will reveal his holy will to all of us as well as to them. For he can direct all hearts like the rivulets of water if only we would unitedly beseech him for his aid. Yes, after it has been found to be right in his eyes he will also direct our hearts unto reconciliation and gloriously lead henceforth. Although we must consider everything very carefully it is not our will which is to be done but the will of the Lord. It is the obligation of each one of us to prove God's will in the word and therefore we should also serve and come to each other's aid in love, in counsel and deed, in the way which Christ has loved us.

"We do not want to impose the weaknesses with which we are all afflicted on anyone, so that we would no longer know each other in the flesh. As well we, your unworthy servants all of whom have only recently been chosen by you, would gladly have less to say in this regard than the beloved elderly brethren who at many opportunities, more than we during our absence, were occasioned to declare themselves against the separation both verbally as well as in writing.

“We also consider it to be for the best if we come to each other’s assistance in such cases even though we also see it as being beneficial and Scriptural that each Gemeinde (congregation) can independently serve itself with baptism and holy communion, without one part thereby accepting responsibility to stand by the other part in all the hindrances which may arise from time to time. This is particularly so, as we live so far apart from each other. Nevertheless if we otherwise remain true to the once recognized and accepted truth we can still continue to be one Gemeinde bound together in the Lord. If it is possible for us to leave each other in another way, may we never allow ourselves to be offended and would that we might rather present ourselves obligingly and in our weakness to serve each and every one according to the talents which the Lord has lent to us.

“Soon we will also be able to fulfill the wishes of the beloved brother Wiebe if our circumstances will not hinder us. But should this be seen more as a weakness than as a Christian duty by some brethren, we bid that whoever this might be, would forgive us for our weaknesses and that for this time we will have to make our leanings known with this insignificant writing. The apostle provides us with an instruction saying that he has never been a burden to anyone and therefore we do not want to be too insistent regarding the summons to come here in order that we might not create a burden for anyone. In that case we would rather be patient if they are also willing to set up our proposed conference as soon as it would be the will of the Lord and he would so direct. Perhaps it would be more suitable in the Molotschna as the central point of the Gemeinde.

Therefore we ask that you receive this writing from us in all love and that you utilize the opportunity which we believe should be presented by Easter in order to discuss among yourselves when you as a fellowship might be able to come here, in order that if it be the will of the Lord, the reconciliation can come into being. Hopefully we as well as the others will await the same with patience, and from our part feel obligated to truly utilize this time to make ourselves known according to the Spirit.

“We commit this even more to you beloved brother Wiebe for an earnest examination, because you have so lovingly counseled us in favour of a reconciliation before you even had an opportunity to personally satisfy yourself of everything. Regarding the ordination which we had committed to the beloved Ohm Baerg, we also hope that you will now be much more at peace with your conscience through the comfort and conviction of the will of God and that you will feel ordained, and therefore also recognize your obligations. And that you might now amend your stated wishes in so far that instead of you awaiting a visit from us over Easter, you will not allow us to await for the same from you for too long a time. With heartfelt longing we have waited for a visit from you from one time until the next. Might the Lord also finally direct your path to us.

“Indeed we hope that you, having once been called as a servant by God and his Gemeinde, would come to us with the full blessing of the Lord who is your God as well as ours, and in the complete fulfillment of your office, and if it be the will of the Lord, that you serve all of us here with baptism and holy communion.

“And now my beloved brothers and sisters, in the confidence that you will interpret everything favourably to our best, let us conclude this writing with the apostle: Stand firmly in brotherly love . . . praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; And for me that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel”. If it be the will of the Lord that sooner or later we shall see each other, as we have expressed our wish here in this writing, we hope through the grace of the Lord you will also find us to be as we would hope to find you, just as you were in our presence. Namely that you fear God from your complete heart, and that you stand united with us in one spirit and in one soul, and that you are helping us in the fight for the truth of the gospel. In which we and all beloved brothers and sisters would fulfill the destiny for which we have been chosen by the God of all grace unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus. Yes, may he fill you with all manner of spiritual wisdom and carefulness, and keep you from all evil, and that you might be found fruitful in all good works, and that you might walk blamelessly and that on the last day you would also appear blameless before the judgement seat of Christ.

“All the beloved siblings who have been elected unto salvation together with you greet you. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace be with you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen. Presented to the brethren in Friedensfeld on April 2, 1869. And subscribed to in the name of all the brethren here, by your very insignificant ministers and fellow pilgrims unto eternity who love you from the heart. Peter Toews, Gerhard Goossen and A. Loewen.”

## 12.07 The Deed of Reconciliation, 1869

As a consequence of a conference held in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, on May 6, 1869, and a conference held in Kleefeld, Molotschna, on May 19, 1869 the hoped for unity was achieved. This reconciliation represented a major retrenchment and strengthening of the Kleine Gemeinde and also demonstrated that the worst of the doubts and demoralization left in the wake of the 1866 division had finally been overcome. This amalgamation also represented the last major ecclesiastical restructuring of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia so that the group was now represented by the Blumenhoff Gemeinde and the considerably smaller Heubodner Gemeinde in the Nikopol area and the Crimean and Molotschna Gemeinden which were closely allied with the Gemeinde centered in Blumenhoff.

Borosenko. The two conferences referred to also endorsed a **Deed of Union** which set forth the spirit in which this spiritual reconstruction and rebuilding was being constituted.

“The following copy represents the conclusion of the brotherhood and reconciliation of the 6th of May here in Blumenhoff and the 19th in the Molotschna and which has been authorized by the subscription of all of the members of the Gemeinde.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Upon this cornerstone, to which we have come as if it were the living stone which has actually been rejected by mankind, but which in fact is chosen and precious unto God, we want to establish ourselves as the living stones of the spiritual building and to offer unto the holy priesthood spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable unto God through Jesus Christ. Yea, after it was known how the stones of the sanctuary lay dispersed upon all the streets. Lamentations of Jeremiah.

“In the grace of God and together with you who are also the habitation and the building of God, and after the Lord has allowed our reconciliation to come to pass, we henceforth want to constitute and erect upon this sacred, precious, cornerstone and sure foundation which is Jesus Christ. Indeed upon our most holy faith to which we have been chosen and engaged and for which we have been given testimony of a good confession before many witnesses. We strive to hold fast to this good confession before God and many witnesses and wish to hold to this confession of hope and not waiver, for the one who has promised the same is true; nor do we want to forego our assemblies as some are encouraging, and rather to admonish one another and this so much more so, because ever more we see the day approaching, Ephesians 10. For they who believe will not flee.

“As there shall be only sanctified vessels in this building, in the temple of the Lord, and as the Lord requires and wishes that the judgement will be laid to the line and righteousness unto the plummet, we also seek to engage ourselves unto holiness, and to live as also he is holy and to maintain in purity and free of all offensive members the Gemeinde of the Lord by virtue of the true evangelical and apostolic ban and excommunication in accordance with our most holy confession of faith. Unto the Lord be praise and glory for his wonderful counsel and for his leading in glorious ways. This has taken place of the Lord and is a wonder unto our eyes. For this is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be joyful and glad in it. It is only by virtue of the goodness of the Lord that we are not extinguished. His patience and goodness leads us unto repentance, in that he says: I will go and return unto my place until they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face; for if affliction befalls them they will early seek for me. And say Come, let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn us, and he will also heal us; he hath smitten us, and he will bind us up.

“And now that he has bound up our wounds, we subscribe that we wish to remain true to our Jesus, and continually to pray for each other, and also wherever it be only possible to seek to win others. Jesus, let it thus be done. AMEN. Blumenhoff, the 6th day of May, 1869.”

### 12.08 Gerhard Goossen. An Epistle on Baptism, 1869

The peace and unity achieved and established by the reconciliation of May 6th, 1869, would have to be disturbed at least once more before the Kleine Gemeinde sojourn in Russia would be concluded. Only a few weeks after the reconciliation, correspondence was received from Peter Baerg, the senior minister in the Crimea, that Jakob A. Wiebe was now undergoing serious spiritual doubts especially with reference to his conversion and baptism. This notwithstanding that earlier in January of 1869 he had been elected as the Aeltester of his Crimean Kleine Gemeinde congregation and that he had provided vital assistance to the congregations in the Molotschna and Borosenko in their successful efforts to establish a reconciliation. In fact it happened that on September 21, 1869, Jakob A. Wiebe had himself rebaptized by immersion in a stream together with some 20 persons. Shortly thereafter he seceded from the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in order to form his own Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Gemeinde.

The secession of Jakob Wiebe and his group cannot be regarded as a major calamity nor a serious challenge to the existence of the Kleine Gemeinde. But the eventual loss of some 12 to 20 families was a near fatal blow to the congregation in the Crimea which was held together only through the steadfast and valiant leadership of Peter Baerg. The secession certainly represented an unwelcome adversity at a time when the bonds of Christian love were finally starting to heal the wounds of the 1866 division.

This brings to mind the question as to why a seemingly devoted disciple of the cross and earnest proponent of the evangelical faith would do such an instantaneous about-face in his spiritual life. Why would a young and promising leader of the Kleine Gemeinde suddenly decide to depart from the faith of his fathers in favour of a more gratifying and easier, albeit still Christian pietist way? What fatal flaw in his character made him so susceptible to the winds of radical pietism which were sweeping over the steppes. Was it something in his background? His parents had emigrated from Prussia only in 1825 and could have been influenced by the various brands of pietism which had already become strongly established there. Perhaps these influences were somehow transmitted to the young

Jakob A. Wiebe so that he was never quite satisfied with the doctrinally based, earnest and evangelical faith of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Perhaps he was turned against orthodoxy in the Mennonite world by his father-in-law David Friesen, the Molotschna Oberschulz who became famous, or infamous, for his strong actions against both the landless majority and the radical pietist minority in the Molotschna. In his own writings Wiebe certainly indicates that he and other members of his Annenfeld group had visions of immediate wealth and prosperity. It appears that this predilection was also present in his spiritual expectations. What a tremendous responsibility for himself, his followers and for the descendants of the group to depart from sound evangelical doctrine and to abandon the full gospel faith.

In fairness to Wiebe and his followers it must be said that the group did not completely reject Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching as did some of the other radical pietist groups. Thus it is said that although the group "stressed deep religious experiences (it) . . . never advocated or practiced excesses."<sup>5</sup> They initially rejected the millenium teachings such as the fiction of Jung-stilling which became so popular among the Russia Mennonites during the 19th century. They continued the Anabaptist-Mennonite emphasis of simplicity in Christ although according to their own writings this came to be too much centered on a legalistic practice of "nonessentials that change with the times".<sup>6</sup> They also continued to observe the Anabaptist Mennonite concept of unity and oneness in communion.<sup>7</sup> But no reference is made to the Anabaptist Mennonite teaching of the discipleship of love so that this admirable piety is perhaps more closely related to the strict practices of the puritans, Baptists and other more devout groups of Calvinist background.

Nevertheless, Jakob A. Wiebe had taken the first giant step away from the full gospel faith to the more gratifying teachings of radical pietism. Where historical or mild pietism had frequently added a wholesome inward spiritual life to a rigid and scholastic doctrinal confession, the radical pietists completely rejected the Lutheran Church. In the resulting doctrinal void it was possible to adopt a biblical hermeneutics whereby the entire scripture could be understood in terms of one verse or concept. To the radical German pietists, Luthers formulation of "salvation by grace alone" came to be the only valid understanding of the relationship of God to man. Consequently the entire Bible could now be understood from a Pauline/Augustine perspective. Freedom from the burden of an extensive theological structure allowed each group to adopt ancillary teachings according to individual emotional needs and as revealed by individual revelation. This of course resulted in an infinite variety of beliefs and practices.

Although the radical pietists frequently referred to the fundamentals of the Christian faith such as: the formulation of "salvation by grace alone" referred to above, the literal truth of the bible, and the universality of the Christian church often expressed as an avowed non-denominationalism; the student of history quickly discovers that in practice the resulting spiritualism and mysticism of the radical pietist movement made it the most judgemental, intolerant, and fragmented of all Christian confessions.

Regretably these characteristics also become painfully evident in the case of Jakob A. Wiebe in 1869. For Jakob A. Wiebe adopted a number of typical radical pietist attitudes as a result of which he now completely rejected his former brethren. These essentials included the following: The view that only a sudden and emotional conversion experience was a valid one; that such a "recognized" conversion was only valid if the believer experienced "assurance of salvation" which meant the attaining of a constant emotion or feeling of oneness or rightness with God and the insistent expression of the same; and finally that such a salvation was not truly assured until the individual believer had been baptized in the particular mode or the custom of each given group. Invariably the required mode was some form of immersion as practiced by the German Baptists.

The Kleine Gemeinde leaders in Borosenko and elsewhere continued to express feelings of sincere Christian love regarding the concerns of Jakob A. Wiebe. The regrettable decisions made by Wiebe caused heartfelt grief for they truly loved him as a steadfast brother and fellow spiritual shepherd. It seems that even during the secession the Kleine Gemeinde leaders offered and suggested every conceivable concession in theology and practice, no doubt hoping that if Wiebe could be dissuaded from his rash actions, even if only temporarily, he would in time again realize and appreciate the truth of the full gospel faith.

But all the love, pleading, and admonitions were to no avail. The course of the beloved brother Jakob A. Wiebe had been set. The terrible evidence of his apostasy now became evident when he denied the validity of the full gospel salvation of the Kleine Gemeinde. Naturally, this deeply hurt his former brethren. And even more so, when he adopted the position that only his particular immer-

sion mode of baptism was valid so that he now regarded his former Kleine Gemeinde as being unsaved heathen. Here again the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde were able to maintain feelings of brotherly love and charity for their former brethren would be regarded by many Christians as being definitive evidence of the manifold grace of God and the presence of his spirit.

This disposition and submission to the leading of God in history becomes very evident in the following epistle of Gerhard Goossen (1836-1872). In fact the loving pleas and warm brotherly views expressed therein firmly attest to the spiritual warmth of the Kleine Gemeinde and its determination to maintain a disposition of love even to those who denied its most fundamental and cherished faith and very salvation.

Letter by Ohm Gerhard Goossen, Gruenfeld, to Ohm Jakob A. Wiebe, September 1869.

"Beloved brother Wiebe: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the abundant comfort of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and preserve you in your first zeal of love. This I wish unto you from the depth of my heart and also plead: Oh, Jesus, shepherd of the faithful flock; Ah, do help us that no one might be torn from you, that we might daily rejoice in our faith, and that we be eternally aware of (false) assurance.

"Beloved Wiebe, unprofitable and miserable servant that I am, in consideration of my total insignificance I find myself to be far too unworthy and too imperfect to allow this writing to be directed to you. But because of the great love which I carry in my heart for you and the Savior and for all those who love him as well, I cannot do otherwise but to pour out my heart before you, and to express myself to you.

"Both of you beloved, both you and the beloved brother Baerg have brought great sorrow through your writing: To me, and I can quite honestly say, also to all of our brothers and sisters. Some time ago we had already received a short writing from Brother Baerg in which we had to read to our great sorrow that you beloved Wiebe were changing in your views regarding baptism. As love is to think no evil I continued to hope for the best until now that the writing from you and from brother Enns has finally persuaded me to abandon my hopes. But for God everything is possible, he directs the hearts of men like the brooklets of water and can also direct your heart. Yes, brother, he can and will also do so, if only we want him to do so. But brother, our beloved Savior has told us so and therefore we also know that Satan will use his great cunning and might because he knows that he has only little time left within which to bring everything unto ruination, and if possible also to lead astray the very elect.

When I consider the source and origin of the spirit and inspiration through which you beloved brother have come to the point that you wanted to renew your baptism, I must extend my heartfelt sympathy to you and to all those who share your views. I must exclaim with the words of the apostle and say, 'I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: For there is none other, except for the ones that trouble you, and that would pervert you from the gospel of Christ.' In truth beloved Wiebe, I find this to be very amazing, that I must hear and comprehend this about you. For I believed that in you I had such a truly gallant warrior and courageous combatant on the road of salvation. I have frequently rejoiced and given thanks unto the Lord that he had given you such an untarnished faith. I have always believed that brother Wiebe, he is such a truly loyal brother, for he is completely honest and without falseness and hypocrisy. And I am still unable to abandon these good perceptions which I hold of you.

"How then can it be that these things must occur between you and your brethren who are bound together with you in deepest love? These are the questions which swell up within me so that I hardly know what to think or what I should say. All you beloved brothers and sisters there weigh heavily upon my heart. I have truly loved all of you from the depth of my heart, far more than I have been able to demonstrate to you. Now it shall actually be possible that the evil one is to succeed in disrupting the bonds of love? Ah, but no! He should not be allowed to succeed in this. Oh, but let us stand fast in our watch.

"Beloved brother, you write how you have noted so many impurities among us and how so many among us are so passive, and still appear to be filled more with the affairs of the world than that which alone is beneficial. With a sorrowful heart I must readily admit that the condition of our Gemeinde is still far too impure, and even regarding myself it often seems as if the first zeal is no longer evident. But my beloved, should all this our deficiency and failures, our lukewarmness and indolence, not much more inspire you towards a heartfelt sympathy for us and direct and compel you, with complete earnestness and with the gifts which have been provided, as if you were a herald chosen by God and the Gemeinde, to truly work against the same and to zealously position yourself before the fissure? Instead you are becoming weak and without trust towards the whole.

You know as well as I do that there are still among us many devoted souls who are as honestly inspired with respect to their Savior as you and as I would have proportioned and still claim to be. They have experienced sins forgiven and the spirit of God has granted them witness of being the children of God. They no longer wish to live in the lusts of the flesh for the time they still have remaining, and with complete earnestness they rather wish to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Beloved Wiebe, you are quite familiar with this, for you have experienced these souls, you found yourself united with them in spirit, as you also were with me, as insignificant as I am; and I have

experienced the love which you have shown towards me and through which my heart has experienced yours. Indeed when I recall the bygone times and hours I must exclaim with the words, 'Oh how blessed were those times.' Without a second baptism, and for myself I can say with truth, without having felt any need for the same. Oh, that it might be possible that you would still be able to change your apparently very firmly fixed conception and opinion, and with the apostle Paul you would also allow the grace of God to be all sufficient for you.<sup>9</sup>

"I bid you beloved Wiebe, in case you do not wish to abandon your newly acquired understanding regarding baptism, or if you believe that you cannot do so, then do be so good as to first come here in order that we can personally discuss the matter before you should embark upon such a momentous step and once more allow yourself to be baptized. Had I been able to follow my inward inspiration I would have been there a long time ago, and if I had any indication that this might become possible I would allow no circumstance to stand in my way. I would save no expenses or privation in order to visit you all for whom I have such heartfelt love. But I am presently unable, as it pleases the Lord to keep my beloved wife in her sick bed.

"Both of you, my beloved brother Wiebe as well as you brother Enz, I could refute much of what you set forth in your writings. I could also convince you through a presentation from the Holy Scripture as well as from the testimonies of our venerable pious forefathers. But I will allow this to remain undone as the views which you have expressed in your writings make me afraid that you would not yet receive the same and possibly that you might not even submit the same to at least one unbiased examination. The beloved brother Peter Toews will present much of this in his writing and submit the same to you for your examination from which you will be able to perceive the principles of his understanding of baptism, which are mine as well. If it will be the will of the Lord I will forward to you my views and convictions of the evangelical teachings of baptism in water as well as baptism with water in accordance with the talents which the Lord has given to me.

"I am totally convinced in my soul that no second baptism is required of me by my Lord. Nor of you brother Wiebe, nor of any of those who are with you. If you would make an unbiased examination of the matter you will also find that no second baptism is required of you for your salvation. If you would be able to forgive me for saying so, I would wish to add that I am of the opinion that if anyone develops scruples with respect to his baptism, that this generally arises because such a soul has renounced the service of the world and of Satan, and has seized upon discipleship to Christ thereby finding the essence of salvation. Satan sees this and would gladly recover these souls into his clutches, but he does not even try to bring these souls back into their former sins: Rather he now attempts to bring these souls upon something whereby the power of the blood of Jesus is inhibited which he finds to be possible through the second baptism of those who have already once been baptized upon their own desire and confession of sins.

"Yes, my beloved. Is it really so? If you could still be unprejudiced in the matter you would agree that you have come to experience the matter the same as me, that when such a value is placed upon baptism and the mode of baptism as if everything is alone dependent thereon, this becomes the essence of the discipleship of such a faith. But in the process the crucifying of the old Adam and the denying of self and the world is forgotten, as we have had more than abundant opportunity to observe.

"Oh my beloved, do desist from your intentions, for through this you are more and more departing from the narrow path of simplicity in Christ. And one necessity leads to another. As soon as you have been rebaptized you are already standing in association with the entire family or church of Baptists, which you have perhaps not even considered to this point. You receive visitors and accept foreign books for examination and likewise in one matter after another. In the end your faith will be completely detracted from simplicity in Christ. The unfolding of history will evidence what I have stated here.

"Now I will conclude for this time. If you would receive it from me in love I will declare my principles and conviction to you in more detail. But for this time I ask of you that you read and examine the declaration of the beloved brother Peter Toews with an unprejudiced heart. I really do not have time for now to write in greater detail. Receive a heartfelt greeting from your loving fellow pilgrim. 'Gerhard Goossen' " Copied by transcription, December 24, 1869, Abraham M. Friesen.

## 12.09 Peter Toews, An Epistle on Baptism, 1869

The two Epistles on Baptism written to Jakob A. Wiebe by Gerhard Goossen and Peter Toews are more important to the general Kleine Gemeinde story than the Crimean secession itself. For these writings demonstrate that an evangelical balance of sound doctrine, inward spiritual warmth, and brotherly love existed in the Kleine Gemeinde at this time. The same stands in sharp contrast to the winds of intolerance which were seeking to poison inter-Mennonite spiritual life during this time.

In contrast to the letter of Gerhard Goossen, which is a warm and loving spiritual appeal, the epistle of Peter Toews is a brilliant work of evangelical scholarship. In his Epistle Peter Toews is replying to a defense of immersion baptism set out in various correspondence by Jakob A. Wiebe as well as in a declaration by Cornelius Ens the layman who was chosen to perform the rebaptism of Jakob A. Wiebe. The presentation of Wiebe and Ens is largely a repeat of the usual Baptist arguments.

Reference is made to the Apostle John and a few other instances where baptism in water took place. Much is made of the symbolism of the act of immersion as a burial, etc. Added to this is the suggestion that a few of the Martyrs may have baptized by immersion and that some subsequent Mennonite groups did so baptize.

In his *Epistle* Peter Toews carefully summarizes the evangelical teaching on baptism and that the faith of the believer and not the mode is important. He concludes that there is no biblical or Mennonite source or authority which supports Wiebe's position that every baptism other than his own particular form of immersion is invalid and that his form of baptism is a condition of salvation. The entire presentation of Peter Toews is a sound theological work which is certainly the equal of the writings of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Aeltester George Hansen, and other venerable forefathers of the faith.

#### **Declaration to the Brethren in the so-called Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea**

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, beloved brethren. Beloved brother Wiebe, I have read your letter with great sorrow and perceive therefrom your declared understanding for the changing of your baptism, for the reason that the same had not occurred in a stream according to Scripture.

Oh how lamentable this appears to me. Indeed I can hardly believe that you no longer consider to be a baptism that for which we have so many testimonies of our forefathers, the martyrs who went to their end amidst great privation and tribulation and for whom the world held no attraction and who for the sake of Christ did not consider their own lives to be precious. They rather offered their lives unto God and their Savior in the fire and death as a sweet smelling sacrifice. Even these holy and bloody witnesses to the truth practiced their baptism with water, namely by pouring (affusion), which is demonstrated to us in numerous places in the so-called *Martyrs Mirror* by Thielman Jan von Bracht, as for example where it states that the servant of the word (minister) baptized him by pouring a dish of water over his head, and in another place where the servant of the word allowed water to be brought to him and then baptized the believers. In a third case the persecutor of a believer insisted that he had been baptized in such and such a house, etc.

Even the question of Peter in the time of the apostles "Can any man forbid water, etc.," also testifies for baptism by affusion. In like manner all of our venerable forefathers since the time of Menno Simons came to one mind that affusion also constituted a baptism. This is what Dirk Philips, who was a contemporary, fellow Aeltester and beloved brother of Menno, writes in his so-called *Confession or Handbook of Christian Doctrine* on page 18 of baptism saying "With his blood Christ has also sprinkled (aspersion), washed, and cleansed his Gemeinde from all their sin, and has poured the water of the spirit over them of which baptism is a sacramental sign."

George Hansen a later servant and Aeltester to the children of the Gemeinde of Philips said as follows, in a reply, in his so-called *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* at pages 230-231, "Just as the pouring out of the Holy Ghost over the apostles through Christ is called a baptism of the Holy Spirit, we also believe and confess that the baptism must take place in the Lord, but not by immersion in water in the manner that the Lord Jesus dipped the bread in his dish which he gave to Judas Iscariot. Indeed no, for just as the Holy Ghost was poured out over the apostles, in like manner the water must be poured over those who wish to be baptized in the name of Jesus".

In his *Biblische Namen und Chronik Buch* page 536, Peter Jan Twisk writes, "John did not actually baptize in the water but with water as the following texts demonstrate, Matthew 3:6,11; Mark 1:5,8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26,31,33; Acts 1:5, 11:16; and 19:4". On page 408 of *The Wandering Soul* John Phillip Schobali writes likewise, "the large (or high) worship service where the water of baptism was poured out over them cannot be described", and again where he writes, "thereupon the baptismal water was poured out over them as young plants on the banks of a stream", page 411. One might also mention Herman Schijn, the Aeltester of the Taufgesinnten Gemeinde at Amsterdam and the writer of the history of the ancient Mennonites of Holland which can be relied upon, which not only speaks for fact that affusion was a valid baptism but also that it was practiced in that manner.

All of these lived in a time when they publicly confessed their faith and baptism before judge and Pope. Far be it from them, that had the mode of immersion been such a holy duty to them as brother Ens writes, that they would have drawn back or been inhibited because of a clashing with the world, i.e. the fear of the cross. Indeed no. They did not shy away from the cross of Jesus in this manner, rather they sacrificed estate and property, and gave their very lives, before they would concede in even the least important teaching.

Alas, where am I to commence should I not wish to recognize your baptism as a valid baptism? And how do you reason beloved brother, now that you do not consider it to be a baptism? Where does this leave you with your baptism? For it is certain that you have not been immersed as you have been baptized by pouring. Indeed what if I also thought this way and said that it was no baptism? Would I then not also have to say together with Asaph, "I had also almost said the same, but behold by doing so I would condemn all the generation of your children," Psalms 73:15.

Oh beloved brother, without regard that you will think that I am merely inflating myself if I am not of one mind with you in this matter, I will become even more intimate and earnest. I plead



with you, yes, I beg of you that you give the matter careful thought and consideration. Perhaps you will revoke your judgement and perhaps you might still change your mind, when you give thought to the earnestness of those holy testimonies of blood and to their zeal for the house of the Lord and also to their baptism. Are they to have erred so terribly? Are they to have been the ones who allowed their bodies to burn without the love? But oh! I repeat my plea once more. Do at least retract to the point that you would at least recognize affusion as a valid baptism.

Does it not also seem to you, as if you are offending one of the least of the Lord without Scriptural grounds? And that you are perplexing the conscience of many? And disturbing the Gemeinde? Why should you have to require the same of me and others? That I should renew my baptism because, as you say, I had so often lamented of myself, which is also true. And even though I can present myself before God together with the poet and say, "It is sufficient that you have found grace for your soul; the fury of God is not within me", etc., I must nevertheless daily concern myself for my sins and in great weakness lament; that I have supplicated to the Lord not only three times together with Paul but in fact numerous times, that this so great a weakness, even if not completely, would at least more and more depart from me. I know all too well that I need only to allow His grace to be sufficient for me. For it shall always remain that "Of myself I am nothing but sin; but in you, oh God, and through you, righteousness is imparted to me".

But no second baptism will avail to help me in any way, for this weakness would overtake me nevertheless. Rather even when I feel as I do now, that the chastisement of the Lord is coming upon me, because I seem to be losing the first inspiration and love for the Savior, I would nonetheless again have to hear, confess, and repent. Indeed, I think that I would far more have to lament since I would have abused baptism, through seeking my liberty and reconciliation with God therein, when in fact baptism shall constitute a covenant with God and not the removing of filth from the flesh.

Finally even if those men, or even if only one of them who had baptized one and another of us, would have been spiritually dead together with the angel of the Gemeinde at Sardis, although they had the name that they lived, what harm would this occasion to us, if only we were being led in all truth by the Holy Spirit. Surely none of us would have such unbelief that we only have our hope in Christ for this life. Instead we also believe that just as Christ has arisen from the dead, likewise He will also awaken us through his majesty on that day and reward us according to our works, either for good or for evil.

Indeed, the fear of eternal death which is a fruit of faith was in us a long time prior to our baptism. Is this not true, beloved brother? Surely we thought much further at the time of our baptism than merely "now let us eat and drink for tomorrow we will die". Why would we not want to or be able to allow the earnest practice of the acclamation of Paul to be sufficient for us when he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord", 1 Corinthians 15. Or even if one or another has first received the water, namely baptism, and has thereafter received the Holy Spirit so that as in John 5 the three witnesses, spirit, water, and blood, were not all present at the baptism; why should he not allow this to be sufficient for him together with the believers in Samaria where this was also the case, Acts 8, if only he is now wholly led of the Holy Ghost?

I have now written something with respect to baptism, but I do not hold that the Savior and also many others have not been baptized in water. For to do so would be contrary to the Holy Scriptures. Rather it is for immersion that I fail to find any scriptural basis. If one wishes to compare the dipping under of Naaman with baptism then one can also understand many other matters in this way where Paul refers to various baptisms of which many instances would much more bring to mind a sprinkling rather than dipping. The word dipping (tauchen) only appears twice in the New Testament and even then does not refer to baptism but rather to the dipping of a morsel in a dish and of the dipping of the tip of the finger in water. In contrast the word sprinkle (bespringen) which the apostle mentions many times, especially in Hebrews, where he also speaks of baptism in chapter 9 verse 10, truly has the examples of the old covenant in mind, such as the many washings and sprinklings. For example, the preservation of eight souls from the deluge and the passing through the waters by the children of Israel are referred to as a baptism. 1 Peter 3; 1 Corinthians 10.

I stated that I did not want to argue contrary to the Holy Scripture that baptism has not taken place in water. Rather I merely seek to demonstrate to all those who are somewhat innocent that affusion was also a valid baptism. Indeed, that in fact many, many, including those who were holy bearers of the cross of Jesus Christ, considered pouring or affusion (or sprinkling for those who prefer this term) to be a valid baptism. And beloved brother Wiebe would you not also want to retract to the point where you could allow pouring to stand as a valid baptism. Especially when we may also conclude that Cornelius and his household, Acts Chapter 10, and similarly the jailer, were not baptized in a stream.

Nor will I argue that there never was a time when there was a preference for the immersion of the body during baptism, and I would also allow the same to stand as a baptism. But to hold that the pouring with water, namely sprinkling, is no baptism, degenerate, contrary to Scripture, and for naught and that a rebaptism is therefore necessary, I cannot understand in that way. Rather I fear much more that through this judgement the Gemeinde, even if only lukewarm and one of the least Gemeinden of the Lord, has been offended without there being reason for so doing, and that the unfortunate pronouncement of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 17 might be applicable.

No one should understand me as if I did not believe that one should first repent, and first have

faith, and first be inspired by the spirit of God, before one is baptized. And for so long as the spirit of the Lord will in fact lead me, I will allow it to be my earnest responsibility in the future, to first direct the growing youths towards righteousness-working repentance before they are baptized upon their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Enough regarding baptism for this time. I will also write a few words to you beloved brother as I have great concern that you might all be truly unprejudiced and circumspect, and that you would not too quickly give up the fellowship one with the other. Rather I would encourage you that he who would prevail might be more and more holy. I would also provide the brotherly counsel that none of you would now suddenly decide to move away from there because of this unless you already stood in agreement to do so. For we do not have good examples of such a moving about from past experience, which is neither praiseworthy nor the will of God.

Oh, may we pray to the Lord that he might grant us the gifts to examine the spirits for there are many which would that they could direct us away from our goal. Some of them come with humility and spirituality, but are inflated and without substance since they say you shall not touch this or that. Others again come with the freedom of the flesh as if we might utilize the liberty of Christ as a cover for evil. In short all around us we hear the echo, here is Christ and there is Christ. Many in fact say that Christ is in the chamber of their hearts. And for this reason John says "Prove the spirits whether they be from God" which we must also give careful consideration in these times of ours.

"I also bid you, finally, that you might forgive me for having written to you at such length. I might not have written anything at all if you beloved brother had not declared baptism with water, namely by pouring, as being so completely worthless. In accordance with my conviction I merely wanted to demonstrate from the writings of our venerable forefathers that when they received the covenants through faith, they also confessed and practiced baptism in this manner. Do not understand what I have written about the fear of death as being a fear from faith as if I thereby wish to justify the general faith of the world, for even the devil believes and trembles: Rather I merely wanted to remind you and to draw to your attention that we had had somewhat more knowledge and faith than do innocent children when they are baptized. We have also had more faith than those Corinthians who did not believe in a resurrection but who were nevertheless baptized."

Otherwise I endeavour to look to you for the best and hope that you will receive this insignificant and yet well meant writing from me in love; And should I have been wanting in anything that you would not forget me in my error and far rather that you would seek to teach me of something better. Perhaps opportunity will yet present itself that we shall be able to discuss many matters in person as I very much prefer to discuss such matters orally with you, beloved brother Wiebe, rather than to report of the same with pen and ink. I still have so much left to write about and have not declared nearly all of my concerns. For example, with respect to your letter, beloved brother Wiebe, when you advise that the brother Johan Dueck should consider and follow the inspiration of his beloved wife. As there are many brothers and sisters including she whom I do not know so intimately and as you perhaps have more conviction with respect to the inspiration of her spirit, I will leave this with you for you to reflect on in the fear of God."

"Finally I bid you once more, I ask of all you beloved brothers and sisters, that you would truly be circumspect and that you would not too quickly or at inconvenient season, abandon the fellowship one to the other. You are all aware of the lessons which we as well as you have already learned from other lamentable experiences".

"Therefore beloved brethren, be patient and strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is nigh. May the God of patience and peace direct your hearts and minds towards tolerance and the love of Christ and provide that you might be as one with him through the salve of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Which I wish you with heartfelt greeting. Your most insignificant brother. "Peter Toews" Blumenhoff, the 31st of August, 1869.

"Copied by Abraham M. Friesen in Kleefeld on December 28, 1869. Comment by Abraham Friesen. The above warning was written by Peter Toews to Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe, presently resident in Kansas, at the time that he was struggling with the second baptism. But inspite of his warning he had himself baptized in a stream by Cornelius Ens a brother or fellow Gemeinde member. To complete the foregoing I would also say with the poet in song number 157;

5. Hilft's auch, dasz man sein Geschlechte bis aus Jakob's Lenden zählt, wenn sein Glaub' und Werke fehlt? So geht's mit dem Christenrechte; denn ein Christ soll ohne Schein seinem Meister ähnlich sein.
6. Der irrt gröblich in Gedanken, der auf äußerliche Tauf' Seinen Glauben lehnet auf; denn soll nicht sein Hoffen wanken, so muß Christi Tod und Pein sein des Glaubens Gründungsstein.
7. Da erlangt das Zeichen Leben, wenn man das vorgebild't, eifrig mit der That erfüllt; denn ein Christ muß sich bestreben, stets zu wandeln Christi Bahn, auszerdem bleibt alles Wahn.
8. Ruft ihr: hier des Herren Tempel, hier sein Feuer, Volk und Heerd! Merkt! wer sein Gebot nicht ehrt, dem steht Sodom zum Exempel, und die bloß nur: Herr, Herr! schrei'n, gehen nicht zum Himmel ein.

Copy of "Abraham M. Friesen", Kleefeld, Molotschna, 1869

## 12.10 The Crimean Division. Some Historical Reflections

Although the separation of the major portion of the Crimean congregation of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde represented a serious setback it is important to place the same in its proper historical

perspective. When viewed in light of the socio-economic religious turmoil of the 1860s, it is evident that this separation was not a fundamental challenge to the existence of the Kleine Gemeinde. In fact such an examination reveals that compared to other Mennonite groups at the time the Kleine Gemeinde was a relatively stable and established institution. Even the popular Orloff Gemeinde lost a good number of members during the troubled 1860s.

A very liberal estimate of all Kleine Gemeinde losses during the 1860s would come to about 60 families or 120 members. This would include an estimated 15 families lost to the mild pietism of the Orloff Gemeinde prior to and during the 1866 division; An estimated 15 families lost to the radical pietists in the Nikopol/Alexandrowsk areas. An estimated 15 families lost to the somewhat different radical pietism of Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe in the Crimea.<sup>10</sup> Allowance should also be made for some 30 deaths or 15 families at the overly conservative ratio of 2 to 1. This would be total of 120 members or 60 families lost. These losses were at least partially made good by admissions of new members from other Mennonite groups estimated at about 30 families or 60 members. At the time of emigration in 1874 the Kleine Gemeinde had about 200 families or 400 members. This would mean that out of admissions of some 520 members about 120 members had been lost representing a loss ratio of only some 23 per cent of total membership during the period 1860 to 1874.

These figures will become more meaningful when compared to the record of one of the radical pietist Mennonite groups in the Molotschna. The infant Mennonite Brethren church is the only one for which comparable information is presently available. The statistics of this group indicate that a total of 465 members had been baptized from the time of the founding of this group in 1860 until 1872. However, the group had only 200 members (or some 100 families according to the assumed ratio) in 1872.<sup>11</sup> The foregoing would indicate a loss ratio of nearly 60 per cent, or more than twice that of the Kleine Gemeinde for a comparable period. Of course these figures also reflect the good number of landless members of the infant M.B. church who moved to the Kuban settlement when free land grants became available there in 1862. These statistics also demonstrate the unrest of the time as well as the instability of the still fledgling secessionists conventicles during these years.

In view of the foregoing it is proper and valid to reflect with respect to the suggestions of some historians that divisions and instability are inherent in the teaching and practice of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. The noted Russian-Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen refers to quarrels and dissensions within the Mennonite world as being the "Anabaptist" or "Mennonite disease."<sup>12</sup> A similar charge is made by historian Frank H. Epp who expresses the view that the "internal divisiveness, such as usually accompanied narrowness of viewpoint and legalistic discipline, also plagued the Kleine Gemeinde."<sup>13</sup> With this Epp is apparently referring to the 1866 division, the 1869 Crimean secession, and related reorganizational adjustments. In reviewing this thesis it should be noted that the essence of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde was an attempt to emulate the faith and practice of historic Christianity. Even the Apostolic church had battled with differences and divisions over doctrine, reform and revival movements, and apostasy from the faith. Accordingly it was to be expected that a Gemeinde founded and constituted on the same principles and faith would not be immune from such mortal shortcomings.

In purely secular terms the member of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde certainly had a far greater exposure to the risk of human conflict than did his counterpart within the framework of the pietist congregation which served its individual members largely as a convenient conventicle for the shared enjoyment of the inward realization of the faith. By comparison the Gemeinde represented the united faith and the combined socio-economic and spiritual expression of all its members. This resulted in an infinitely greater combination of human interrelationships which could give rise to tension and conflict. i.e. In this sense the thesis of Peter M. Friesen and Frank H. Epp is valid as where individuals congregate purely for the purpose of rejoicing and worshipping together there is little reason for dispute compared to the case where the brethren have also given their covenants to share and intertwine their socio-economic fortunes as well.

But in practice it seems that the very opposite holds true: that it is in fact the pietist conventicle which is far more prone and inclined to divisiveness and internal dissension. For the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde earnestly and firmly adhering to the full gospel faith is cemented together by the love of the brethren and a rich lode of sound doctrine and practice. This teaching and tradition seemingly more than offsets the greater exposure to human conflict. The reader might recall that even at the height of the 1866 division the worst of this conflict was represented by the exchange of a number of sternly worded notes between the opposing factions. When the group supporting Aeltester Johan Friesen really decided to get tough with the reform minister Heinrich Enns they resolved to

remove Enns from his ministerial office. In reply the reform group stated that they could not recognize this action and that they would continue to regard Heinrich Enns as their beloved spiritual overseer. Even at that the letters of the division are filled with expressions of brotherly love and declarations of forgiveness and hope for reconciliation. Above all these writings are filled with references to the sound evangelical teachings of the faith and the fact that both sides continued to cling firmly to the same, no doubt, kept the animosity to the level of a rather heated theological debate.

Even during the Crimean division where Aeltester Jacob A. Wiebe had declared the Kleine Gemeinde faith and salvation to be for naught, the official position of the Kleine Gemeinde is probably best represented by Peter Toews who sadly states of the Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe simply, that he would have to render his own account before God. In the Bergthaler Gemeinde, insulated as it was from all the social unrest and spiritual ferment of the Molotschna colony, divisiveness and internal dissension was in fact almost unknown.

Certainly the fledgling conventicles of the radical pietist Mennonite groups in Russia had a far greater incident of division, schism and dissension than either the Kleine Gemeinde or the Bergthaler Gemeinde. From the work of the historian Peter M. Friesen it is evident that every separatist congregation had to experience years of bitter strife, hatred, and acrimony before a relative stability was achieved. This has already been discussed in the case of the Friedensfeld settlement north of Nikopol. Even worse the bannings, counter bannings, book burnings, family acrimony, mutual character assassinations, and hatred, and divisions and mutual denials of salvations over minor differences in interpretation and practice made the Kleine Gemeinde division look like a Sunday School picnic by comparison. It seems that this difference in the mode of expression of natural human disunity finds its roots in the fact that the radical German pietism which affected the Russian Mennonites during the 19th century was largely divorced from sound evangelical doctrine based as it was to a considerable degree on individualistic revelations and mysticism.

Consequently it was inevitable that these groups would be torn apart by minor theological differences at least initially. e.g. The Templers and Clasz Epp both accepted the novel *Heimweh* by Jungstilling as a second Bible. Nevertheless the one group insisted that the safe haven from the coming tribulation would be in Asia while the other group insisted that this haven would be in Jerusalem. Another example would be the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren who believed that baptism was essential for salvation but that such a baptism was only constituted by their particular mode. Consequently they were unable to join the Mennonite Brethren who shared the same principle but insisted on a different mode of immersion baptism. Although there would be no end of examples, mention could be made of the unlovely three cornered pietist dispute between the Templer Gemeinde, the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde, and the Bruedergemeinde which resulted in such acrimony that the minister Lange was eventually imprisoned because of the bitter battle among these groups.

Certainly charges of inherent divisiveness and internal dissension within the Kleine Gemeinde should be carefully examined and weighed before being given too much credence. The 1866 division proved that given the unrest and turmoil of the time, the Kleine Gemeinde was as subject to internal conflict as any other group. But these difficulties and struggles should not be used to divert attention from the fact that for the most of its 60 year sojourn in Russia the Kleine Gemeinde was indeed the model of socio-economic unity, the messenger of peace, and the protector of the oppressed in the Molotschna.

### 12.11 Aeltester Election, 1870.

The process of reorganization of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in the wake of the 1866 division was largely completed in 1870. The reconciliation of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde and a part of the Gemeinde formerly under Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872) in 1869 has already been dealt with in section 12.06 and 12.07. At more or less the same time the remainder of the Gemeinde of Aeltester Johan Friesen organized and constituted itself as a separate Gemeinde electing Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) as their new Aeltester. Abraham L. Friesen was the grandson of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. On May 4th, 1869 Aeltester Johan Harder of the Orloff Gemeinde ordained the new Aeltester. This group became known as the Heubodner Gemeinde since several members of its ministerial lived in this village.

This left the Aeltester Johan Friesen (1808-1872) with only a few families in his group. On March 17, 1871, Elisabeth Friesen, the wife of Aeltester Johan Friesen died. She had been the daughter of David Klassen (1813-1900) who would be the 1873 delegate to America of the Heubodner Gemeinde. The inclination of Aeltester Johan Friesen towards the mild pietism of the Orloff Gemeinde has already

been referred to. It now also happened that he married a widow Anna Wiebe from the Orloff Gemeinde. She was a sister to Franz Isaac the Orloff minister and historian.<sup>14</sup> The couple was married by Peter Friesen, a brother to the groom, who had previously left the Kleinen Gemeinde and joined the Orloff Gemeinde where he had become a minister. This caused the remaining families who held to Aeltester Johan Friesen to lose confidence in him, with the result that they asked for admission into the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde. This request was granted in November and December of 1871. Aeltester Johan Friesen died on February 22, 1872 at his home in Rosenfeld, Borosenko.<sup>15</sup>

The larger Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde finally decided to elect its own Aelteseter and held an election on September 10, 1870. The election was decisively in favour of Peter Toews with 65 out of 77 votes cast. The new Aeltester was ordained by Peter Baerg who was now the senior member of the ministerial. Peter Toews was elected as Aeltester by the Blumenhoff Gemeinde in Borosenko as well as by the Gemeinde in the Molotschna and in the Crimea. This was in contrast to the case of Jakob A. Wiebe in the Crimea in 1869 who had been elected as Aeltester only by his small Crimean congregation. With this the process of reorganization and rebuilding of the Kleine Gemeinde was essentially complete.

## 12.12 Peter Toews, An Epistle to Abraham Klassen

It is also necessary to consider some of the more routine functions of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde. Certainly the highest priority of the spiritual overseers of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde was to pasture their flock. In so doing it was essential to take time to reflect and to dwell on various spiritual matters and concerns. These reflections were frequently composed in an epistle of encouragement or advice written to a fellow member of the ministerial. This is the nature of the 1870 "Epistle to Abraham Klassen in the Molotschna" in which Peter Toews discusses various aspects of discipleship. This letter serves as a valuable corollary to "The Epistle to the Molotschna Brethren" of 1869 in which Peter Toews discusses the joys of experiencing the grace of the Lord.

"Beloved brother Abraham Klassen

Blumenhoff, the 13th day of July 1870

"First of all I wish you and your beloved wife and all the beloved brothers and sisters, the peace of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as a friendly greeting. I have been anxiously awaiting a writing from you as it has been a long time since you last wrote at the time of your return journey home. I frequently reflect with respect to the journeys which we made together this spring, in particular it often occurs to me how in these travels we would frequently talk a great deal about the power of the will (Gewalthaetigen Willen). It is frequently of concern to me that I am still not sufficiently denying myself in everything, and daily taking up the cross and following the Lord Jesus. Indeed we are not taking the words sufficiently to heart when the beloved Savior says: For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. And he who does not daily take up my cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

"Most certainly it is true that Christ died for our sins and this is also how the entire present Christendom comforts itself. But the words spoken to Adam and Eve, "Ye shall not eat the fruit thereof" have not thereby been revoked. Likewise the Word of God says unto us: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." And only those are truly his disciples who do the will of his father. Christ has again made free the way to salvation which is in store with the cherub up yonder. Each and everyone may now freely go to eat from the Tree of Life. Nevertheless this is not possible in any way other than as he says: Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. Namely, Christ must first win a presence in us so that we again become a likeness of the example of which and for which we are created. And then we must do enough for our part so that through the spirit which he has granted unto us we may put to death the affairs of the flesh, and then we shall live."

"Oh how badly so many people err in this when they believe that they have been called unto freedom and who thereupon walk the way of the flesh contrary to the word of God and His will. "Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." For the freedom to which we are called is not a freedom of the flesh, rather only that the way unto eternal life has been made for us, that we may possess the same through faith. Not by virtue of or through any law but through grace alone. At the same time the Lord has allowed the condition to remain that we are to be holy as He is holy for without holiness no man shall see the Lord. We are to press through the narrow gate and to crucify our lusts and desires and if we do not do so then we are enemies of the cross of Christ, which Paul says with weeping. This daily crucifying and discipleship is very necessary, my beloved. When the Apostle Paul is referring to the enemies of the cross he mentions that their belly is their God, and that their glory is in their shame? We also learn the same from the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, and how the honour of the rich man came to shame. Is it not horrifying when we then examine ourselves and find that in many matters we also are still the enemies of the cross?"

"And in truth, given that we daily fill our belly according to our wish and hearts desire and clothe ourself magnificently and in soft finery, will we by so doing also forget the impoverished Lazarus? If so, then we are surely taking out our good things in advance. The Lord through the prophets also

said thus of the iniquity of Sodom, "Pride and abundance in fulness, but she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy". Now my beloved, let us for once consider all aspects of our fallen nature, and also our lusts and desires which we are to crucify. Can we still see the narrow way which leads to life? And on which we are to carry our cross daily? Who would then not have to cry out together with me in misery? Ach, Ach ich fuehl die Last der Sunden; Wie komme ich durch die Enge Thuer, nimmt Jesus nicht die Schuld von mir, laeszt er mich nicht erst Gnade finden, traegt er nicht nicht auf seinen Ruecken, zeugt er mich nicht mit Trost, und spricht: Komme her, ich will dich schon erquicken, so bleib ich lahm und laufe nicht."

Indeed my beloved. In as much as Christ suffered for us in the flesh let us arm ourselves in the same sense, that we crucify our flesh and our lusts and desires for which all the grace and the succour of our loving God will assist us. Yes, pray for me, for it is my comfort to have a good conscience before God and man, namely, so that I might walk at all times as if on that day, and as if before the countenance of God, and therefore that my light may shine. May the Lord grant this prayer. Amen.

Now I will also add a brief report that I was at home for a few days after returning from my journey to the Crimea. And then together with Jakob Regehr, I drove to the Jakob Loewen's near Orechov regarding the sickness of Mrs. Klaas Friesen. As he agreed to accept her she was brought there, and now Friesens together with their entire family, including Anna their servant girl, have already been there for an entire month. On the fifth of this month we received a letter by the post that we could already come for them and that they were healed. Whereupon Abraham Friesen of Rosenfeld, brought them home on the 9th, healthy and glad, so to say. With the condition that he, Loewen, had added certain instructions regarding their liquid intake. Nevertheless, Anna became sick there. According to what Loewen has said she will get the Auszehrung.

The expenses regarding the sickness of the Friesens, which will come to about 70 rubles, that is to say, these last expenses, are to be paid by the Gemeinde, and accordingly we immediately paid for the costs over there. But we have decided to do this for them not as a loan but rather for free for throughout all this sickness they have been placed into a situation of which the deacons cannot remain unaware. Accordingly we held a collection for which purpose we reminded the brethren of the words of Paul, "And each and everyone according to the gifts of his hand, so that it might be a blessing and not of covetousness."

"And I did not want to forget to also mention that, if it is the will of the Lord, that perhaps we will soon have to allow the election for an Aeltester over us to proceed for there are a number who are pressing us as they wish to be baptized. Should you have a concern over us regarding the same then do not delay, but notify us in time. Or preferably visit us personally and take part in this yourself. Finally a greeting to all of you from myself and my wife, and a commitment unto God and the word of His Grace. From your loving brother who loves you all from the heart. "Peter Toews". One more postscript. An encouragement unto prayer for the blessing of the Lord for the Aeltester election cannot be held back".

### 12.13 Isaac Plett. An Epistle to a Brother, 1870

Certainly the daily life of the Anabaptist-Mennonites in Russia was not always easy and completely peaceful. During the early 1860s radical pietists were frequently persecuted and harassed so that many were anxious to move out of the mother colonies. On the other hand, there were the campaigns of spiritual terror which some of the radical pietist groups mounted against the older more established Mennonite groups. These were some of the more regrettable aspects of Mennonite society during the 1860s and early 1870s.

The spiritualism and mysticism of the new Mennonite groups had initially held little attraction for the members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde who were generally well grounded in the fundamentals of their own faith. As late as 1863 Aeltester Johan Friesen wrote that none of their members were to be found among the secessionists. Notwithstanding the view of the radical pietists that the communion service of the Kleine Gemeinde was a "devil's service" the position of the Kleine Gemeinde towards the secessionists has been described as "neutral but friendly."<sup>16</sup> This meant for example, that at the official level at the KirchenKonvent the Kleine Gemeinde was prepared to take a low key, but firm stance against the application of force against the secessionists and their forcible removal from the colonies.<sup>17</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde took this position even though it meant that it again had to stand alone, or allied only with Johan Harder (1811-1876) of Orloff, against the entire Molotschna Mennonite establishment. Thus it can be seen that some difficulties in communication with the secessionists were present right from the start.

At the same time it must be pointed out that the secessionists would not have been one of the most attractive groups for someone from the Kleine Gemeinde to join during the early 1860s. The "formal dancing, accompanied by wild music and the beating of drums"<sup>18</sup> would have seemed shocking to the sincere Kleine Gemeinde who were more used to a worship service consisting of silent prayer and reflective meditation, reverend singing of the songs of the faith from the Gesangbuch and well prepared sermons. At the same time the early secessionists were apparently plagued by schism and

counter-schism, excommunications, book burning, familial and character disputes which made the 1866 division in the Kleine Gemeinde seem like a moot debate of theologians by comparison.<sup>19</sup> Instead it appears that the departing members of the Kleine Gemeinde during the late 1850s and early 1860s were attracted more by the mild cultural pietism of the Orloff Gemeinde or even by the greater latitude and less intense spiritual life of the one of the Grosze Gemeinden.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the 1860s this pattern of inter-Mennonite relationships had changed to some extent. Firstly, some of the radical groups, such as the Mennonite Brethren, were able to eradicate the worst of the spiritualistic and pietistic excesses. No doubt, discouraged by the division of 1866 and the consequential reorganizational difficulties, some members of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Alexandrowsk and Nikopol areas now became converted to the pietism of the Mennonite Brethren. This was particularly the case in the village of Friedensfeld which has already been discussed in the previous chapter. It also seems that some families were no longer prepared to submit to the Gemeinde in their secular or socio-economic lives and found it easier to simply leave the Kleine Gemeinde after they had become involved with disputes with their village assemblies or neighbours. These families were augmented when the booming enterprises and cultural aspirations of some Kleine Gemeinde farmers brought them into conflict with the full gospel teachings against the accumulation of wealth. Others no doubt, simply found the balmy breeze of pietism easier to contend with and more attractive than the burdensome theology of the Kleine Gemeinde. In 1869 a group under the leadership of Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe left the Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Crimea in favour of a form of radical pietism.

This new conversion was invariably evidenced by the insistence of those who had now suddenly discovered that their former spiritual homes were "the dwelling place of the devil", that salvation could be obtained only by a certain form of emotional and instantaneous conversion and only through a certain form of immersion baptism. In addition the theology of the radical pietists was invariably also such that any servants of the old "devil's worship" were immediately to be converted to the new "ultimate" expression of truth at any costs and by any means.

The spiritual terror which sometimes resulted from this attitude is comparable to the physical persecution experienced by the early Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs. No doubt many a sincere Anabaptist-Mennonite parent was thrown into unceasing mourning and weeping over the children who had now departed from the full gospel faith of the fathers. Where had they failed? And even worse, the newly enlightened offspring now insisted that the parents were unsaved and doomed for eternal hell because they had not followed the correct "pietist" plan of salvation. As the parents aged and became feeble minded they were eventually forced to experience the "Seelenangst", or anxiety and compulsive worry caused by the constant assertions and suggestions of the newly enlightened children that the salvation of the parent was for naught. No doubt many an aged and venerable saint by now senile and terror stricken by such claims, finally submitted to this spiritual terror in feeble desperation.

But parents were not the only targets of such spiritual terrorism. Anyone who was weak or somewhat discouraged with his faith was a potential victim. For example those who experienced difficulties in submission to the Gemeinde in various aspects of their secular lives, e.g. a boundary problem or other economic dispute with a brother, could sometimes be persuaded to simply reject a Gemeinde which in any event was a "devil's service", instead of meekly and humbly resolving the dispute.

Naturally sick people were also potential victims especially if they were on their death bed. The **Letter to a Brother** by Isaac L. Plett illustrates this sort of situation. Isaac L. Plett was one of the young aggressive farmers in the village of Friedensfeld north of Nikopol. It seems that typhus raged through this village in 1870 striking the wife of Peter L. Dueck, the school teacher. Inspired by the types of suggestions above referred to, this young mother and wife had to experience a terrible "Seelenangst" on her death-bed. Fortunately the grace and love of God was again sufficient so that finally on October 10, 1870, Mrs. Dueck was peacefully able to depart for her heavenly abode. The tragedy of such a situation and the earnest faith which is required to overcome such terror is poignantly described in the following letter by Isaac L. Plett to his younger brother Cornelius L. Plett at that time living in the Molotschna village of Kleefeld.

"Dear brother Cornelius Plett and your beloved wife: Firstly from the bottom of our hearts greetings. As we live so far from you and do not know if we will ever again have the opportunity in this life to fellowship in person, I am compelled by love to visit you with this small writing, for I also find it very comforting and dear when we are able to learn something of your experiences. This, of course, is possible when one has opportunity to write. Let us remember and direct each other upward so that we do not lose the crown of life. The Lord

is still merciful, patient, and full of grace and goodness. Indeed God does not want the death of a sinner, but rather that everyone be converted in love. Yes, the Lord wakes and calls us in many ways so that we are not to fall into slumber.

Sharply we were called again as we had to witness the parting from here of the wife of Peter Dueck. It has been a great exhortation for me. I shudder when I recall how she had to struggle and fight with Satan. At times it looked as if she was writhing in Hell and yet at the last she became more peaceful and talked calmly and expressed her concern for her beloved children. She then seemed to sleep somewhat and we went home to bed. But, in an hour we were again called, shortly after which, she died. We have the firm hope that her soul departed for eternal bliss.

Yes, let us not forget to pray for each other that the Lord does not remove his hand of grace from us. We have great reason to stand in God who is our shelter, and to attire ourself with the sword of the Spirit, for Satan so cunningly circles to see who he can ensnare. Through the passing away of Mrs. Dueck, our opponents here believe they have found a great example that the right rebirth is lacking. Indeed, they have stated that if one of them were to die they would gladly part from here. Nevertheless one must not be alarmed by them as it must stand that we are not to believe every spirit and that we are to prove the spirits to see if they are from God. Also by their fruits can they be known. Yes, we wish to strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness with all diligence. So much depends on attaining eternal salvation.

I must now conclude this imperfect writing. However, I will at least note that thanks be to God we are well and healthy in body and that we wish you the same. Write to us soon of your circumstances and experiences or visit us in person if it is possible. Lastly again a heartfelt greeting from us. Also a greeting to our dear father and all the other friends who ask about us.

Isaak Plett, Friedensfeld. October 28, 1870<sup>1,27</sup>

The foregoing illustrates the difficulties which can arise when one Christian group is intolerant of another. Certainly each Christian confession must ultimately be convinced of the truth of its faith. But tragic consequences occur when any means other than meek and humble brotherly love is used to impose the same upon other Christians or non-Christians. This was demonstrated in the evangelization efforts of the inquisition against the Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrs of the 16th century. This was also demonstrated by the evangelization efforts of physical force and imprisonment employed against Klaas Reimer and his small flock as well as against social outcasts such as Franz Thiessen and others. This was also demonstrated in the evangelization efforts by spiritual terror employed in some instances by the radical pietists in Russia. And most regrettable of all, it seems that only too often those who have been converted by unevangelical means can do little better than to mirror those who evangelized them. e.g. Many parts of Europe were Christianized by the sword and consequently also adopted a Christianity of the sword.

It is difficult to understand why radical pietism was frequently so intolerant of Anabaptist-Mennonite groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde, whose official position was that they did not judge other confessions. Only rarely can evidence be found that the members of the Kleine Gemeinde departed from this position which required a demonstrated love against these maligners. One such instance apparently occurred when one of the brethren announced at a brotherhood meeting that he too had now suddenly discovered the truth, that he had not been "truly" converted at the time of his baptism and that he now had to depart from the fallen brotherhood in order to be rebaptized. To this another more steadfast, but no doubt very frustrated brother, is to have replied that if it was truly the case that the departing brother had deceived his brotherhood and family by publically confessing his faith and salvation for his baptism when in fact this was not the truth, that then it was probably high time that he withdraw from the Gemeinde and not return until he had truly made his peace with God. No doubt such a statement was immediately regretted and confessed.

Nevertheless, the fact that the radical pietist groups deemed the full gospel teaching of conversion and salvation to be invalid and worthless, will have deeply hurt the Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Russia. No doubt the situation was very much aggravated when these maligners also happened to be parents, children, brothers, sisters, or former neighbours and friends. Particularly when the same had never taken the time to make the effort to study the evangelical faith of their forefathers prior to denouncing and condemning the same. If only some of these zealous souls might have realized that even the novels of Jung-stilling did not contain all the truths of Christendom. Although difficult to understand in the modern era of toleration and mutual respect between various Christian confessions, such iconoclastic views were no doubt at the root of suspicion and mistrust between the same groups in Manitoba only several decades later. Hopefully the lessons of history can teach the importance of brotherly toleration and mutual support.



## 12.14 Isaac Loewen. Epistle to a Granddaughter

Throughout the post 1866 reconstruction period the individual member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde continued to express his discipleship through the medium of the Gemeinde which was his spiritual and socio-economic womb. The multitude of letters extant from this period demonstrate that the individual Kleine Gemeinder constantly confessed and practiced a sincere discipleship within this experiential embryo. It is evident that the brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde cared for each others spiritual and economic needs. One individual who steadfastly demonstrated this concern was the venerable grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873). Indeed, here was an earnest Christian who influenced literally tens of thousands of people for the good of the Kingdom firstly through the ministry of his daily life, and also through his 13 married children and their almost innumerable descendants.

Accordingly it is most fitting to conclude this chapter on the period 1866-1871 with the "Epistle to a Granddaughter" written by the aged grandfather Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) in 1871, two years before his death. This letter is one of spiritual comfort to his granddaughter Maria L. Plett (1850-1934) at that time living with her parents in the Molotschna village of Kleefeld. Maria L. Plett later married Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) and eventually was to become the mother of two leading Aeltesten of the East Reserve Kleinegemeinde in Manitoba. This Epistle demonstrates that in spite of adversity and tribulation the holy Grail was successfully passed on to a new generation who would follow the lamb in the relentless battle of the peaceable earthly Kingdom of Christ.

Beloved Granddaughter Maria Plett

"Although I do not know at the present time how soon it may be before an opportunity will avail itself to forward a letter along to you in the Molotschna, I will nevertheless attempt to compose a letter on the chance that an opportunity will arise in the future whereby I can forward the same to you. At times I find that writing is very tiresome for me, partially because of eyes which have already grown very dim and in part due to a faltering intelligence. Because of the compulsion of love I will nevertheless try to write a short reply as requested by your letter of December 3, and let its form and rhyme be as it may. I am prepared to err for you granddaughter, for I know that in childlike love you will receive this from your aged and feeble grandfather for the good and that you will forgive me, no matter how imperfect and insignificant it may be."

"And first of all I will say something about the solemn vows which you have now made with your beloved God, and which you have promised to keep through the holy baptism. You mention that you are unable to fulfill this covenant from your own strength and that you have in mind to follow the advice of the apostle James when you are lacking in wisdom, James 1:5. Yes, it is of all things most necessary to practice this, in accordance with the inwardly feeling which, I perceive from your precious writing, you find within yourself."

"In the writings which Peter Peters writes for the instruction of the young people, certain converted youths say: "But beloved messenger help us pray, yes, remember us in your prayers. We want to consider your beneficial instruction and at all times submit ourselves in obedience unto the word of God, in the hope that the Lord will help us to complete a blessed journey toward the heavenly wedding unto which we have been summoned".

"Now the Messenger replies: You certainly do not want to go about this most solemn matter lightheartedly. For a true conversion is a wonderful matter and I say unto you: that there is great joy in heaven, Luke 15:7, over one sinner who is converted, and if this results in rejoicing in heaven then the same also becomes yours to enjoy. Give thanks in great gratitude unto the father who hath made you worthy to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, Colossians 1:12, and who leads you from out of the darkness into the kingdom of his beloved son. I beseech you, receive this unto your heart and remain within the words and teaching of Christ for Jesus our Lord shall make us free from the slavery of sin, John 8:36, so that you might be true followers and disciples of Christ. Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, 1 Corinthians 16:13, and give account of yourselves like men. For the devil will seek to controvert you, 1 Peter 5:8, in order to draw you away. Continue steadfastly in prayer, Ephesians 6:18, and continue therein with thankfulness and be of good courage, for the remuneration will be great".

"May the God of peace, who once brought forth from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal testament, make you fit unto all good works in order that his will might be done, and to do what is pleasing unto him through Jesus Christ". Thus far from Peter Peters.

"Now beloved daughter. Do take the aforesaid to heart and preserve that which hath been promised in your disposition and thoughts, and do not fail to give heed unto them. Yes, take to heart that which the beloved Paul said unto the Philippians and admonished them.

Da Freud der Fuell allezeit  
Wird sein fuer deinem Thron,  
Aus Gnaden sein bereit,  
Durch Christus deinen Sohn.

Where the fullness of joy eternally  
Shall before your throne  
Be prepared through grace  
Through Jesus your son.

Further from the book by Peter Peters: "Mag Gottes Lieb euch nicht bewegen, Zu treten auf

sein heiligen Pfad; So ueberregt wieder dagegen, Sein Strenggerecht, bedenket das. Das grosze Lohn das er wird geben, All die ihm dienen ganz aufricht. Bewegt euch dieses nicht zum Leben, So seid ihr gewisz der Suede Knecht!''.

And further Peter Peter says "Consider the manner in which good friends here on earth come together and also must part again, and commit each other unto the grace of God until that time when there shall be no more parting. It is very certain that although good friends come together here in this period, they must again part from each other in recognition that this is not the place which has been prepared for them where they shall dwell eternally. Rather the same will follow in perfection later when the great King of Kings will come to gather His precious jewels, and to impart the eternal inheritance unto his chosen ones: Where they shall never more part and where in perfect joy they shall behold the majesty of God, just as He is, together with the heavenly hosts: And where their hearts will now be bound together by the bond of perfection, which is love".

"And in parting amidst many tears and in prayer to God they embrace each other with the kiss of peace. And then, because of necessity and not their desire, they part having committed each other to the gracious keeping of God, in order that if they would not once again see each other in person, that they would then find each other in the eternal fatherland of peace. I wish that all of Christendom might confess this meeting, in order that they would all prepare themselves and venture forth in the way of piety, with a perfect faith and love, yes, and the hope of their eternal salvation. May the gracious father through his beloved son and through the leading of the Holy Spirit grant this unto us. Amen'' Thus far from Peter Peters.

Now beloved. I wish from my heart that our benevolent God and father would also allow us to experience the above. Beloved Maria, may you receive these few lines together with a greeting in good health and forgive that which is deficient, and at all times think of me for the best, and I will do likewise. Write to me if you have opportunity as this would be very welcome with me. And remain committed unto God and His grace. Thus far from your loving grandfather Isaac Loewen.

Blumenhoff, the 8th of October, 1871.<sup>12</sup>

(Note: Numerous scripture references in this letter have been omitted).

## 12.15 Conclusion

This concludes the history of the Kleine Gemeinde for the years of 1866 to 1871. This six year period was characterized by discouragement and confusion in the wake of the 1866 division. In the midst of social strife and religious turmoil the Kleine Gemeinde rebuilt and reorganized, a process which was substantially completed with the election of Aeltester Peter Toews in 1870. At this point the Kleine Gemeinde had been reconstituted into two separate but fellowshipping Gemeinden, namely, the smaller Heubodner Gemeinde centred in Borosenko, under the leadership of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen and the larger Blumenhoff Gemeinde also centered in Borosenko, under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews. The Blumenhoff Gemeinde also had a sister congregation in the Molotschna under the leadership of the minister Abraham Klassen as well as a smaller congregation in the Crimea led by the senior minister Peter Baerg. It was this humbled and chastened Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde which would have to rise to the challenge of the spiritual onslaughts and physical sacrifices which lay ahead.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER TWELVE. ISSUES AND EVENTS.

1. Peter Toews, **History and Events**, op. cit.
2. Rev. Cornelius L. Friesen, **Wahlliste der Lehrer und Aeltesten der Kleinen Gemeinde von ano 1801 und ferner**, Unpublished Journal, Jefferson County, Nebraska, Election No. 21. I am indebted to Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba for this material.
3. **History and Events**, op. cit., 49-56.
4. The richness of the cultural life and social fabric of a cohesive and mutually supportive Mennonite community such as the Kleine Gemeinde has not yet been fully recognized. The social events of such a group were indicative of the Mennonite love for community and fellowship, for example, worship services, weddings, funerals, brotherhood meetings, school and village meetings, teachers' conferences, visiting, travel, auction sales, quilting bees, hog slaughtering, threshing; and other community gatherings to help neighbours in need. Much intellectual and literary stimulation was provided by activities such as the writing of sermons, diaries, poetry, family records, genealogies, songs, stories, and the transcription of same. These interests were exchanged through preaching, story telling, visiting, singing, etc. Artistic endeavours of a middle class Mennonite group such as the Kleine Gemeinde included the following: folklore, calligraphy, woodcarving, furniture and cabinet making, quilt making, embroidery, knitting, spinning, baking, weaving, sewing, dressmaking, basket weaving, ropemaking, toy making, gardening, iron work, tool and utensil making, harness making, brewing, distilling, horticulture and animal husbandry. Invariably an older retired couple would each specialize in several of their favourite arts and crafts as they now had time and the financial resources to more actively pursue their intellectual and artistic interests.
5. David V. Wiebe, op. cit., 159.
6. **Ibid**, 61

7. **Ibid**, 59.
- 8.
9. Gerhard Goossen here is referring to the legalism of many Christian confessions of teaching that something in addition to faith was required for salvation, e.g. The radical priests required a dramatic conversion experience and a baptism by a particular mode and ritualistic forms of spiritual enthusiasm. Other groups such as the Tongue Speakers (Pentecostals) made that a legalistic requirement for salvation.
10. Another estimated 15 families who were not prepared to abandon fine homes and farms for a life of poverty and penury in a wild and distant America, were lost at the time of emigration in 1874.
11. John A. Toews, **op. cit.**, 70.
12. Peter M. Friesen, **op. cit.**, 18.
13. Frank H. Epp. **op. cit.**, 164.
14. Peter Isaac, **op. cit.**, 7.
15. History and Events, **op. cit.**, 53-54.
16. P.M. Friesen, **op. cit.**, 254.
17. **History and Events**, **op. cit.**, 11-12.
18. P.M. Friesen, **op. cit.**, 279.
19. *Ibid*, 201-572.
20. *Ibid*, 109.
21. Plett Picture Book, **op. cit.**, 41.
22. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Martin P. Penner, Ridgewood, Manitoba. The other letters in this chapter (except Section 12.08 and 12.09) are from the P. Toews collection.

# *Part Four.*

## *Conscription and Crisis*

### **Chapter Thirteen.**

### **Nonresistance, Millennialism and Nationalism**

#### **13.00 Introduction**

The matter of compulsory military service became a vital issue during the 1870s resulting in a crisis of untold proportion for the Russian Mennonites. The various groups and power blocks now realigned themselves on the basis of theological and philosophical issues such as nonresistance, millennialism and nationalism. In the section, "Conflicts in the Molotschna" the various factions had battled each other in the hope of gain or advantage within Mennonite society, but now each group individually had to take action in response to an external threat. In a sense this was the most important of the Molotschna battles of paper and ink as the result was that many of the Anabaptist-Mennonites, including the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, left the shores of Russia forever.

The topic will be dealt with in three parts. Firstly, a review of the socio-economic-religious model of Russian Mennonite society which has been developed in this work in the light of the military service issue. Secondly, a general presentation of the chronological sequence of events to serve as a guide and reference for the reader. Thirdly, a survey of several writings representative of the position and attitude of the pietist-cultural Mennonites who decided to remain in Russia. Chapter fourteen will consider the position of the Mennonites who decided to leave Russia as a result of the military service issue.

#### **13.01 The Emigration Movement and the Religious-socio-economic Model**

Firstly, a brief review of the socio-economic and religious situation in the Molotschna Mennonite colony. The writings of Aeltester Klaas Reimer indicate that two factions were present from the very first founding of the Molotschna colony. Those who held firmly to the faith of the fathers have been referred to as the Anabaptist-Mennonites. The Kleine Gemeinde represented a leading force in this group. The majority of the Molotschna Mennonites had become spiritually and theologically indifferent although they still considered themselves to be good Mennonites and maintained numerous Mennonite religious traditions and practices. Nevertheless, they no longer regarded the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings and teachings as authoritative or as a source of spiritual renewal. This group was represented by Aeltester Jakob Enns and his Grosze Flemish Gemeinde and was basically opposed to any socio-economic and cultural changes.

In 1824 the so-called progressive Orloff Gemeinde was formed under the leadership of Aeltester Bernhard Fast. This group shared the view of the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings held by the Grosze Gemeinde, but went a step further by resorting to the teachings of a mild pietism as a source of spiritual renewal. This group was prepared to compromise and to conform with the world and under the leadership of Johan Cornies developed a "progress at any cost" philosophy. The history of the Molotschna colony during the first half of the 19th century is dominated by the unceasing battle between the Grosze Gemeinde and the Orloff Gemeinde.

Thus a mild form of pietism had entered the Mennonite fold in an organized way by the 1820s. Over the years various other and differing forms of pietism came to be represented on the Molotschna. e.g. In 1833 another Prussian Gemeinde under the leadership of Aeltester Lange arrived in the Molotschna and settled the village of Gnadenfeld. This group had already adopted many of the teachings of radical pietism in Prussia. Then in the 1850s and 1860s a more radical form of pietism swept over the German settlements in Russia resulting in the formation of separatist pietist groups in the Molotschna as discussed in chapter seven. All of these groups, the cultural Mennonites of the Grosze Gemeinde,

the pietist-cultural Mennonites of the Orloff and Gnadefeld Gemeinden, or the separatist pietists, shared one characteristic, namely, that they had rejected the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings and yet continued to insist and to think of themselves as the best and the true Mennonites. No doubt this attitude was to some extent influenced by the advantages and privileges which came with the closed form of block settlement such as was enjoyed in Russia.

This socio-religious model is also helpful in understanding the conflicts discussed in Part Two. Thus the barley and church building disputes represented a quest for power between Aeltester Bernhard Fast and his Orloff Gemeinde, and Oberschulz Friesen together with the Kirchen-Konvent representing the other five Gemeinden. As the Kleine Gemeinde was respected by the government authorities as a neutral force for peace, it was called in to negotiate and settle the matter. However, in 1860 the Orloff Gemeinde acquired a new leader in the person of Aeltester Johan Harder, who was a far more capable and spiritually minded man so that during the religious wars brought on by the infiltration of radical pietism, Orloff was able to act in alliance with the Kleine Gemeinde as a peace making force.

In fact Orloff now took up the dominant role as a force for moderation and peace in the Molotschna. This is exemplified by the leading role which Orloff men such as minister Franz Isaac, estate owner Phillip Wiebe, and Aeltester Johan Harder played during the socio-economic struggle. This issue also revealed the readiness for compromise of the mild Orloff pietism. e.g. In 1868 Franz Isaac was prepared to accept a compromise settlement from the forces of the Oberschulz while Abraham F. Thiessen was not prepared to accept as satisfactory anything less than what lawfully was the property of the "landless." Even during the emigration movement of the 1870s the pietist-cultural Mennonitism of Orloff seemed to represent the broad middle ground between the radical pietist Mennonites on the one hand and the cultural Mennonites on the other hand.

With the departure of the Anabaptist-Mennonites through the emigration of the 1870s and through the forceful preaching of the Mennonite evangelist Bernhard Harder, this middle ground came to be representative of all the Russian Mennonites. Eventually the radical pietist movement became more stabilized and more tempered while at the same time the often petty distinctions between the Gemeinden of the Kirchen-Konvent gradually disappeared. Thus by the end of the 19th century the latter groups were collectively known as the Kirchliche Mennonites while the most important of the radical pietist groups, the Mennonite Brethren, was a slightly more aggressive younger sister to the Kirchliche. In the end both groups had largely adopted the milder pietist-cultural Mennonitism of Johan Cornies and the Orloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde.

It is impossible for any model of social dynamics to be completely accurate in reflecting the forces at work in the community. A model at best is an oversimplification which can be helpful in understanding the dynamics of a society. Thus there are certain instances where the characterizations seemingly do not hold true in the case of the emigration movement. A case in point is the Gemeinde of Aeltester J. Toews which had only recently emigrated from Prussia and had settled on the Volga River in Russia. The group had emigrated because of the institution of a similar military law in Prussia. Surprisingly this group opposed the emigration to America. However, the group had adopted the Jung-Stilling eschatology which held that Russia would be the safe haven of the church in the end times and therefore they were naturally reluctant to leave.

Leonard Suderman and Consul Cornelius Jansen were two prominent leaders in the emigration movement who only recently emigrated from Prussia where they had come under the influence of pietist-cultural Mennonitism. Notwithstanding, they felt strongly enough with respect to the principle of nonresistance that they were prepared to become leaders in the movement favouring emigration even at considerable personal cost to themselves.

Nevertheless a further differentiation was made during the emigration in terms of the destination of the emigrants. It appears that many of the leaders and groups which were already somewhat influenced by the pietistic cultural Mennonitism discussed above decided to settle in the United States where settlement opportunities were much better in terms of land, lower prices for cattle, horses, building supplies, machinery, and all the other necessities which the new settlers would need to establish themselves. The fact that the Molotschna Mennonites mostly emigrated to the materially more accommodating - but spiritually less hospitable - United States, illustrates that they had been much more influenced by pietism than the other emigrants.

Another advantage to settling in the United States was a more favourable climate, more in line with what the emigrants had enjoyed in Southern Russia. In short a generally much more favourable outlook could be anticipated by those who settled in the United States. On the other hand those who

placed greater emphasis on definite assurances of freedom to be able to practice the principle of non-resistance made the more difficult decision to settle in Manitoba. In socio-economic terms this decision was remarkable in light of the obstacles and additional expenses required of the Manitoba settlers.

Economics was another factor which played a decisive role in the emigration movement. To some extent it could be expected that the poor people would be swayed in favour of emigration by the lure of free homesteads. But on the other hand "the emigration was not seriously considered by many of the poorer groups for the simple reason that they thought they could not afford the costs of transportation to America and did not have the means for a new start in a new country."<sup>1</sup> This factor was very much aggravated by the fact that the building regulations of the Mennonite settlements in Russia required that everyone must be a model farmer with large and expensively built buildings. Consequently many of the farmers had to incur considerable debt. But when it came to the selling of their farms the emigrants quickly discovered that their beloved brethren who were remaining in Russia had no intention of paying anywhere like a fair price for their property. Thus a Wirtshaft valued at 6000 rubles in normal times might only be worth 1000 rubles in the newer settlements or perhaps 2000 rubles in the Molotschna. If this emigrant had previously had 1000 rubles in debt he would now have only barely enough to pay the transportation costs for his family. Under these circumstances it is doubtful that too many Anwohner were able to contemplate emigration unless they belonged to one of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinden which paid for the transportation costs of its poor.

Some earlier attempts to analyse the emigration movement in terms of economics alone were too simplistic. Under this theory it was held that the poor Mennonites had left Russia during the 1870s. In terms of economic standing the Bergthaler Colony alone represented the median for the Russian Mennonites in that approximately one-third of its families were full farmers.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the Kleine Gemeinde and the Alexanderwohl groups were above average on the Russian-Mennonite socio-economic scale. Likewise those who emigrated individually from the Molotschna or the Chortitz Colony. As the Furstenlaender lived on rented land it has sometimes been stated that they were less well off financially.<sup>3</sup> All in all it seems most likely that the 1870s emigrants represented a good cross section of Russian Mennonite society in terms of their socio-economic status. Although the economic factor may have been a relatively neutral one, it is an important influence in any emigration and as such cannot be ignored.

### 13.03 The Mennonite Petition of 1871

The second part of this chapter consists of a chronological review of the delegations and petitions which led up to the final emigration from Russia.<sup>4</sup> One of the most authoritative sources is *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* by the Orloff minister Franz Isaac who was also one of the delegates of the Molotschnaer Mennonites. It seems that the Russian Mennonites first learned of the impending implementation of compulsory military service from the newspapers during the latter part of 1870. After several special meetings a conference of the Molotschnaer, Chortitzer and Bergthaler representatives was held in Alexanderwohl on January 11, 1871, where it was decided to send a delegation to St. Petersburg with respect to this new law. The delegates appointed for the Molotschna colony were: Aeltester Leonard Suderman, the ministers Peter Goerz and Frank Isaac, and the Gebietsamt secretary Herman Jansen. The delegates from the Chortitz Colony were Aeltester Gerhard Dueck and minister Heinrich Epp.

The Molotschna delegates left for St. Petersburg on February 1, 1871, and returned to their homes on March 15, the same year. While in St. Petersburg the delegation had numerous audiences with various Russian government officials. These included: Ettinger, the President of the Supervisory Committee; Governor-General von Kotzsebut; Senator Eugene von Hahn; Senator von Gerngrosz, Assistant to the Minister; Baron von Medem, and others. By now many of these names will be familiar to the reader. e.g. Senator Eugene von Hahn was the former President of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa.

While in St. Petersburg the delegates were also requested to submit a summary of the Mennonite beliefs with respect to nonresistance. This statement of faith is important to an understanding of the entire matter concerning compulsory military service and accordingly the text of this submission is included here:

Submission with respect to the question of the nonresistance of the Mennonites:

Our blessed Savior Jesus Christ is our great King of Peace. This is how he was portrayed for us through the Old Testament, Isaiah 9:6, and also by the holy angels at His birth, Luke 2:14. He came to earth to found a Kingdom, which is a Kingdom of Peace, Isaiah 9:7; Psalms 72:7; St. John 18:36; Isaiah 26:3-4. His messengers are messengers of peace, Isaiah 52:7; Naham 2:1; Romans 10:15,

and have the vital mission to spread the gospel of peace. All of those whom these messengers succeed in winning for that glorious kingdom of peace are children of peace, in whom the serious and penetrating change of the heart and life takes place, of which the word of truth says to us: That they turn from the darkness to the light, to receive the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance together with those who have been sanctified. Acts 26:18.

The children of peace lay aside the former life and conduct of the old man, Ephesians 4:22, with his evil works of the flesh of which the Apostle Paul makes us aware. Galatians 5:19-21. They know that the former self is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, Romans 6:6. And they put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him, Colossians 3:10. The new man is created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness, Ephesians 4:24, and as a consequence has the fruits of the Spirit, which are: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Galatians 5:22.

Love is the first and greatest of the fruits of a living faith through which the crucial change of heart and life is evidenced. Love impels the children of peace to be obedient to their glorious king and prince of peace, who has given them this new commandment of love, St. John 13:34. In Matthew Chapter 5, the godly law of the Old Testament has definitely been distinguished for them, which makes them aware of the nature of the composition of the covenant of the Old Testament, and which calls to the attention of the children of peace their assignment in the Kingdom of God, which can subsist only in the exercise of love. Mark 12:31.

The true Godly destination of man in time and eternity is communion with God, his most selfish object for living is to do the Will of God. In order to make man cognizant and to prepare man unto this end, God has revealed His will in his Holy Word. By the Word man is directed towards the great kingdom of peace instituted by Jesus and his disciples, and which consists of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Romans 14:17. Of which the great prince of peace himself says "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you", Luke 17:21.

God hath chosen the lowly of this world, who are rich in faith and the inheritors of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love him. Sometimes the waging of war also occurred in the Old Testament according to the unequivocal commandment of God, as for example in Samuel, Chapter 15. Nevertheless in the composition of the covenant of the New Testament our Lord Jesus Christ has clearly declared in the manner which we believe and confess together with our forefathers, as follows:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your father in heaven, Matthew 5:43-45. And again, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil", Matthew 5:39. Which words clearly teach that the individual is not to seek revenge against his enemies, but rather to love, suffer, and endure for the entire teaching of Jesus is full of love against friend and enemy.

"Likewise the teaching of Paul, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good:" Romans 12:17-21. We are to follow the example of our Savior, who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, He threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. 1 Peter 2:23.

"From these words we can see that all revenge is forbidden to us. Therefore we also cannot bear any sword, weapons, or arms against our enemies. Paul says, For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4. The Lord Jesus commanded Peter to replace his sword into its sheath and therefore we are unable to venture forth to fend off our enemies, or to drive away force by force, and we would rather prefer to suffer and endure.

We do not only avoid the sword of warfare, for our heart and mouth shall not effect revenge, either. We are to follow the Lamb wherever it goes, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that we are thereunto called, if we wish to inherit the blessing. 1 Peter 3:9."

"In accordance with this conviction which is grounded on the Word of God, our fathers have always held themselves distant from every service of arms and of any partaking in the same. They have always been counted for the lowly ones in the land, and for the sake of their freedom of conscience they have not only sacrificed temporal advantages but have also frequently forsaken house, home, and fatherland, in order not to become disloyal to their confession of faith. They have done so in a firm trust on the promises of their Savior: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:9 and 5.

"The Lord has manifested Himself in these words although only after very ponderous sifting and much suffering on the part of our ancestors. Then without any effort on their part, and in fact to their surprise, the Lord opened a sanctuary for them in Russia, whose exalted rulers he filled with kindness and grace towards them; and by blessing us, their children, in our temporal affairs He has also crowned the obedience to the faith of our fathers."

“We also have full confidence, provided that the Lord does not again want us to undergo a sifting and purifying, that he will direct the heart of our beloved paternal father, Czar, and Lord and his Highest Government, so that we will not in any way be oppressed or prejudiced in our freedom of faith and conscience. His Holy Will be done! Amen.” “Petersburg on March 2, 1871”

The Aeltesten: Gerhard Dueck, Leonard Suderman. Ministers Franz Isaac, Peter Goerz, Heinrich Epp. Gemeinde Member. Herman Janzen.”<sup>5</sup>

This submission is reminiscent of the writings of the early Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Méno Simons, Dirk Philips or the Hollandsch minister Peter Peters. A very pure full gospel stand is taken. No force is acceptable even if only by virtue of a verbal command. The theological contents of this submission would compare very well with the admonitions of Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Klaas Reimer to Aeltester Jakob Enns and the Grosze Gemeinde. No doubt some of the Russian Government administrators such as Senator von Hahn or Privy Councillor von Lange who had worked mightily during the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, to resolve some of the disputes in the Molotschna, must have been somewhat surprised at the sudden concern for evangelical principles on the part of the Mennonites.

Perhaps one or more of the Mennonite delegates might even have thought quietly to himself, “Oh, our presentation now would be so much more effective had we heeded the letter of Aeltester Johan Friesen of June 26, 1860, where the entire Kleine Gemeinde ministerial admonished the Kirchen-Konvent to cease all their infighting and pleaded that they return to the principles of the forefathers before the Russian Government lost all respect for the Mennonites”. It is also noted that in May of 1870 Abraham F. Thiessen had his first meeting with the Minister Selenoi regarding the almost 300 Mennonite families who had been defrauded of their land. This affair continued until January of 1873 when Thiessen was able to unequivocally prove his case to Minister Selenoi. Without question such dealings much have greatly diminished the benefit of this otherwise excellent submission. In any event it seems that the delegates received sufficient assurance from the various officials in order to calm their concerns.

### 13.04 The Events of 1872

More disturbing news arrived after a year so that another conference was held in Alexanderwohl on January 11, 1872. Here the Aeltesten Johan Harder, Franz Goerz, Jakob Wiebe, Isaac Peters, Jakob Toews and the minister Franz Isaac were authorized to undertake another delegation to St. Petersburg. In the capital the delegates were advised that the Commission drafting the new laws had unanimously decided that the Mennonites would have to serve in the medical corp, and if possible without arms. Senator Gerngroz also advised that it was futile to appeal the decision until it had been considered and approved by the Privy Council in the fall of that year.

The January conference in Alexanderwohl was also attended by some representatives who felt very strongly about the full gospel teaching of nonresistance. One of these was Consul Cornelius Jansen, the grain dealer and wealthy farmer from Berdjansk. The reader will recall that he was married to the daughter of Peter von Riesen who had been a strong supporter of his Kleine Gemeinde brethren. Dietrich Gaeddert, a minister of the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde where the conferences were held, has recorded that at this meeting Jansen admonished the assembled representatives to seek forgiveness from the Russian Government for having violated their faith by transporting goods for the military during the Crimean War, and then to surrender such cherished privileges as the right to make brandy and beer in exchange for a guaranteed freedom of faith. Needless to say the majority of the conference considered the position of Jansen to be absurd. Thus a separation of opinions and interests became painfully evident.<sup>6</sup>

However, the representatives of the Government took the speech so seriously that the entire delegation was now suspected of such leanings, which was totally unacceptable to those delegates of a pietist-cultural persuasion. They immediately disassociated themselves from this position verbally and also with a written declaration which is included here:

“To the Senator Lord von Gerngroz:

Your Excellence! We the undersigned representatives of the Mennonite Gemeinden in Taurien, Jekaterinoslaw, and Samaria, feel compelled by our conscience that prior to leaving the residence we should repeat the declaration already made orally to your Excellency. The Gemeinden which we represent have at all times remained free of the strivings to make propaganda in favour of the emigration, to withdraw from the previously performed duties of podvodden transportation, or to seek the right to proselytize in the Russian Empire. We also declare that the one who has made such a representation in one isolated instance has been corrected with no uncertainty.

It would grieve us deeply if the highest authorities would come to a conclusion as to the attitudes



of the entire people from the agitation of one individual. We love our fatherland and wish to remain in the same. We also wish to remain under the supreme protection of His Majesty, the beloved father of our land, Czar, Lord and Monarch, whose administration truly and sincerely makes provision for us. In accordance with the words of the Holy Scripture we wish to seek what is best for our nation, in so far as is possible for our part.

Even though the impending military reform has awakened unrest and concern in our conscience, regarding whether the same will bring us into breach of our confession of faith, we have never had any intention to utilize any means of retaining the freedom of religion which has been guaranteed for us by the highest authority until this time, other than the avenues provided to us by law, the petition and the regulations. We hope assuredly that the wisdom and benevolence of the supreme authority will find means and a way, through which our religious confession may be spared with respect to not partaking in warfare.

May your Excellence be good enough not to allow the above declaration to remain unconsidered, and rather that you might accept the same as the expression of the loyal Mennonites settled in the Russian empire, and as the personal assurance of our high regard and reverence for his Highest Excellency with which we completely commit ourselves to your benevolence. The representatives of the Mennonites in the Province of Tauria. The Aeltesten Joh. Harder, Fr. Goerz, Is. Peters, Jak. Toews, and the Minister Fr. Isaac. The representatives of the Mennonites in the Province of Jekaterinoslaw. Aeltester Peter Klassen, and Minister Heinrich Epp. The representatives of the Mennonites in the Province of Samaria. Minister Joh. Epp and Jakob Toews. Petersburg, February 14th, 1872.”

This is an excellent example of the attitude which would eventually result in a complete divergence of thinking between the two groups of Mennonites in Russia. The reader will note that the petition now refers to freedom from partaking in warfare and not to the principle of nonresistance which is completely rejected by this declaration.

The delegation of September 1872 had accomplished little other than to realize again that the enactment of such a major code of laws was a lengthy drawn-out procedure. Again various meetings were held and conducted among the Molotschna Mennonites during the spring and summer. On June 23, 1872, a conference was held and initially the assembly was unable to agree on whether to send a delegation to America or to meet again with the Russian authorities.<sup>8</sup> It seems that the Governor-General von Kotzebue had requested that a delegation travel to Kertsch where the delegates were to have an audience with the Czar. However, such an audience or personal meeting with the Czar was never actually granted.

Accordingly, another delegation from the Molotschna was authorized on August 30, 1872, to travel to St. Petersburg in order to make inquiries and representations with respect to the cause of the Mennonites. Franz Isaac has recorded that the delegation arrived in St. Petersburg on September 22, 1872. Here the delegation met with Baron von Medem who advised the men that the passage of the new military laws had been delayed so that winter might be over before an appeal could be made. Finally a meeting was arranged with the Minister Wolujew who reassured and comforted the delegates and requested that they trust him. A further meeting was also held with Count Haydn, the President of the Commission drafting the new military code. Here again they were advised that it would be January, 1873, before the project was complete, and that it was premature to appeal before the new law had been finalized. Accordingly the deputation returned home.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that this third delegation of September 1872, was the only one in which representatives from more or less all of the Mennonite groups in Russia took part. According to Franz Isaac the Molotschna delegates this time were Aeltester Bernhard Peters, and the Ministers, P. Goerz and Franz Isaac. In “Anhang Number One” to his *Sammlung*, Aeltester Peter Toews of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde has recorded that in addition to the Molotschna delegates the following were present: Jakob Friesen from Berdjansk; Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe and Jakob Wiebe from Bergthal; Gerhard Dahl and David Epp from Chortitza, and Jakob Wiebe from the Krimmer Mennonite Church, Karassan, Crimea. In addition Aeltester Toews reports that the two Hofers from the Bruderhof near Orochow, Diedrich and David Hamm from the Volga, and Tobias Unruh and Jakob Stuky from Volhynia, as well as the Molotschna delegates stayed in the residence together.<sup>10</sup>

The Kleine Gemeinde delegates Aeltester Peter Toews, Blumenhof Gemeinde, Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, Heubodner Gemeinde, both of the Borosenko settlement near Nikopol, and minister Abraham Klassen of the Molotschna congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde, were well enough known and respected in the capital to obtain their own audience with the Minister Wolujew. While in St. Petersburg the Kleine Gemeinde representatives also spoke to Senator von Hahn, who was an old friend of the Kleine Gemeinde from his earlier service as Chairman of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. They also spoke with the Baron von Magendorf, the General-Adjutant of the Czar. However, the Kleine Gemeinde were able to accomplish little except to acquaint themselves more fully with

the matter and to perceive that only a minority still supported the principle of nonresistance and that the majority now merely wished to be freed from the obligations of military service. The Kleine Gemeinde also prepared a petition which sets out their viewpoint the text of which is contained in the book **History and Events**.

But the delegates had barely arrived home when word was received that the Czar was now vacationing at his residence in the Crimea and that a delegation from the Molotschna was on its way in the hope of being able to obtain an audience with the Czar. Although Franz Isaac does not mention this delegation it is described by both the Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter Toews as well as the Bergthal Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe. Again no actual meeting with the Czar was granted.

### 13.05 The Events of 1873

Finally news came from Pastor Hans in St. Petersburg, that the new military code was finished. Accordingly a fourth delegation to St. Petersburg was constituted in February 1873. The delegates were the Aeltesten Gerhard Dueck and Bernhard Peters, and the ministers Peter Goerz and Heinrich Epp, and the Gemeinde member Heinrich Heese. This delegation directed itself to Count von Hadyn who referred them on to the Grand Duke Constantine Nikolajevitsch, President of the Privy Council. The latter agreed to grant an audience but when the delegates informed him that they would not serve under the military code the Grand Duke quickly concluded the meeting. This delegation also submitted another petition similar in content to the petition of March 2nd, 1871, although somewhat milder in its exposition of nonresistance.

According to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of the Bergthal Gemeinde it was at this time, in early 1873, that the thread, which had united his group with the pietist-cultural Mennonites, tore. It seems that the independent and resourceful Bergthaler also decided to present their own petition setting out their view of nonresistance. This created an uproar with the other delegates who were no doubt embarrassed by the Bergthaler position. At the subsequent meeting in Alexanderwohl, a final parting took place, after which the Bergthaler definitely decided in favour of emigration."

In the fall of 1873 another delegation left the Molotschna for St. Petersburg with the hope of being able to obtain a personal audience with the Czar in order to present to him the concerns of the Mennonites. This delegation was equally unsuccessful so that even the petition which the delegates submitted had to be left with the Adjutant of Duke Schuvalov. Here follows the text of this petition which was dated December 23, 1873.

"Your Imperial Majesty!  
Most gracious Tsar and Lord!

"With distressed hearts, yet full of confidence in a benevolent and gracious reception of our most submissive plea, we respectfully approach the steps of the throne of your Imperial Majesty.

"Our forefathers, called into the empire by the highest government, furnished with an imperial charter, which promised us complete freedom of religion and conscience, and exemption from military and civil service in perpetuity, found a haven here for themselves and their descendants. Thanks to the protection of your Majesty and especially of your predecessors, this has continued to the present.

"However, because of the intended introduction of universal military service, which, as we understand, is to be enacted into law in the immediate future, our hearts are deeply troubled that we should lose a significant part of our confession of faith, the article concerning nonresistance. We have presented our concerns not only to the imperial commission appointed to implement the proposed law, but have also had the honor at the beginning of this year to present them in the form of a petition to His Imperial Highness Konstantin Nicholaievitsch, the President of the Imperial Council.

"The issue is so serious and important for us—it constitutes a question of life and death for the continuation of our brotherhood—that we feel compelled in our hearts to turn to the beloved father of our land, our Tsar and lord. In complete submission and deepest respect, but in childlike faith in the fatherly heart of your Majesty, who has an open ear for the cry of pain of the lowliest children in the land, we lay before your Imperial Majesty yourself our urgent plea for preservation of the freedom of conscience which we have enjoyed until the present.

"In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who through our fathers has given us the gospel of peace, who through His holy word commands us to follow in His footsteps in love, in the way of suffering and endurance, but not of war and that which is associated with it, we implore your Majesty most graciously to free us from military obligation, and we shall not cease to pray to our God and Lord to pour out the fullness of His blessing on the dear head of His anointed, and on the illustrious imperial household, and to protect our beloved fatherland from all war and misfortune, so that its well-being under the blessed and wise government

of its beloved monarch may develop and be enduringly established evermore in peace.

“In deepest respect, submission and faithfulness

Your Majesty’s

Most obedient

Representatives of the Mennonite Churches.”

The petition was signed by Gerhard Dueck, Bernhard Peters, H. Epp. P. Goerz, and H. Heese.<sup>14</sup>

### 13.06 The Events of 1874

On January 1, 1874, the 157 paragraphs of the military code which affected the Mennonites officially became law. Pastor Theodor Hans of the Evangelical Moravian Church in St. Petersburg, who was acting as a contact, was now able to notify the Molotschna Mennonites that the Czar had appointed General Edward von Tottleben as a special emissary to the Mennonites in order to make representation to them with respect to the new military laws. Tottleben did not waste much time getting about his new assignment and on April 20, 1874, he called a meeting of all the Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers in Halbstadt, Molotschna, where he made a compromise proposal to the assembly. He repeated the same appeal in Chortitz on April 25, 1874.

His basic message was that the Czar loved his Mennonite subjects and that he would make a special compromise for the sake of their conscience so that they could fulfill their military obligations in the forestry service where the youth would remain under the supervision of the Mennonites. He pleaded that the Mennonites should abandon their thoughts of emigration as it was foolhardy of them to abandon all the material progress and blessings which their fathers had built up in Russia. It would be foolish to forsake all of this for an uncertain future in America where the freedom from military service was not even guaranteed as it was in Russia. The freedom of conscience which the Mennonites had enjoyed in the past stood as security for the continuation of this protection in the future. In fairness to the other citizens of Russia some service had to be rendered by the Mennonites.<sup>17</sup>

Needless to say this presentation was the assurance which the main line pietist-cultural Mennonites needed in order to satisfy their last reservations about remaining in Russia. Their trust in the Russian Czar had again been restored. The basic particulars of this compromise are set out in a petition of April 1874, in which the representatives of these Mennonite groups indicated their acceptance of this proposal.

“To His High Excellency the Adjutant General von Tottleben

“Your High Excellency: During the days when you were here, you repeatedly and with unalterable determination, assured us and many of our brothers that in the future, as heretofore, we would without change enjoy the favor and grace of His Majesty, our most gracious Tsar and lord. This was demonstrated anew in that His Majesty, through the extraordinary dispatching of Your High Excellency, granted us the grace to follow the basic teachings of our confession of faith while fulfilling the universal personal military obligation by allowing us to perform a non-military service outside the department of the war ministry, so that we would not in any way be brought into relationship with the military system.

“Most humbly we lay at the feet of His Majesty our deeply felt thanks for the most gracious consideration shown us because of the basic precepts of our faith, and our resulting obligation of conscience. In the name of the greater part of our brothers in the faith, we declare ourselves ready to accept personal service. Since we are insufficiently acquainted with the discharging of this service obligation, we request, in a most humble statement and after mature examination, that we be permitted to express which of the kinds of service permitted us we would prefer as being most desirable for our circumstances. At the same time, we feel compelled personally to express our warmest thanks to Your High Excellency for this condescension to us in truly fatherly friendship, and we add the most humble plea that before His Majesty you be the interpreter of our most humble petition, and that you specifically recommend the following points:

“1) That, should a change be made in the military law in the future, so that as a result we would lose the most gracious privileges now granted us, we be permitted freely to emigrate.

“2) That our schools, which the gracious monarch of the Russian Empire has thus far allowed to remain under our free administration, might remain thus and enjoy the rights of other comparable schools in the empire, in connection with which, out of a feeling of duty toward our dear fatherland, we obligate ourselves to devote all possible attention and care to the learning of the language of the land.

“3) That, through placing our young men in a few places and in closed groups, it be made possible properly to supervise them, to provide them with the necessary nurture, and to practice church discipline according to our confession of faith and our church regulations.

“With deeply-felt wishes and heartfelt prayer: God keep and protect His Majesty our most gracious Tsar and lord, Her Majesty the Tsarina, His Imperial Highness the heir-apparent

and the whole Imperial Household for many, many more years! We remain  
Your high Excellency's  
most obedient servants

Signed on April 22, 1874, by the religious and civil leaders of the Molotschna districts.  
Those of Chortitza added their endorsement when Totleben visited them.<sup>14</sup>

It might be noted that in a further petition presented to General Totleben in St. Petersburg on November 25, 1875, the Mennonite representatives for those who were remaining in Russia presented their choice of alternative service from among the options which were open to them. The general nature of this further petition is that they would prefer to do alternative service in the forestry camps which could then be run by the Mennonites themselves. The contents of the petition indicate that the influence of those who are campaigning in favour of the emigration is still very evident as the Mennonites who wish to remain present the need to calm the general Mennonite populous as an important ground for requiring a quick decision and approval of their submission. Two other major points are the continued right to emigrate so that the family fathers need not feel that by remaining in Russia they are forever binding their descendants in case the laws pertaining to military service should ever be changed in the future. Furthermore, a concern is expressed that the provision of education for the youth be allowed to remain in the hands of the Mennonites as it had in the past. The petition concludes with the expression of anticipation that a speedy acceptance of the petition will be an important factor to help stop the flow of Mennonites out of Russia which was still going strong in 1875. The full text of this petition is contained in the work of historian Peter M. Friesen.<sup>15</sup>

This concludes a chronological survey of the interaction between the Russian government and the Mennonites in Russia during the implementation of universal military service in the 1870s.

A brief note might be added that in 1874 special meetings were held with the Kleine Gemeinde and some other groups which were already committed to emigration. Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that General von Totleben met with himself and two other representatives of the Kleine Gemeinde, namely Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), and Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876), on April 29, 1874. The result of the meeting was that Totleben assured the delegates that their emigration passes which had been held up for some time would be forwarded. At this time the Kleine Gemeinde also presented a petition of thanks for the Czar the text of which is contained in the book, **History and Events**.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of the Bergthaler, the Czar himself met with Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe in October of 1874. Aeltester Wiebe's report of this memorable meeting will be set forth in the following chapter. It seems that the highest Russian authorities had hoped that the personal prestige of the Czar would be sufficient to sway the Bergthaler from their planned emigration. As the Bergthaler were the largest organized group planning to emigrate from Russia the success of such a tactic would have crippled the emigration movement.

### 13.07 The Position of the Pietist Cultural Mennonites

It is evident that the single most significant outside influence on the Russian Mennonites during the 19th century had been that of pietism. Pietism came in numerous shades and configurations from the mild pietism of Johan Cornies and Orloff, the Moravian pietism of Gnadenfeld, the free grace of Lutheran Pastor Wuest, the radical pietism of the secessionists, the eastward chiasm of Klaas Epp or the Templers, etc.. The next part of this chapter deals with the philosophical position of some of the groups who strongly favoured a decision to remain in Russia, namely, the pietist cultural Mennonites represented by the Orloff Gemeinde, the Moravian Brethren and the separatist pietist Mennonites.

The point has already been made that the issue required that each sector of Mennonite society had to decide for itself what its position with respect to this external threat would be. How did each group assess the commitment of the Russian Government to abide by the new arrangement? How did each group assess Russian society itself? Thus, for example Orberschulz Friesen and his friends were quite happy when for a reasonable fee, one of their political opponents might suddenly disappear from the local scene. Did they ever stop to consider that the same mechanism and the same social philosophy could just as happily apply itself to other victims? There was no middle ground as a decision had to be made, either emigrate by 1881 or remain in Russia forever!

The Orloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde was one of the influential forces favouring the acceptance of a compromise with the Russian Government over the issue of military and alternative services. This group contained many influential and leading families such as, Philip Wiebe, the Cornies families and others.<sup>17</sup> Other groups prepared to accept the compromise set forth in the petition of April 24, 1874, were the following: The Rudnerwiede Gemeinde, the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde, Margenau-Schoensee

Gemeinde and the Pordenau Gemeinde. The latter two congregations had once made up part of the Grosze Gemeinde.<sup>18</sup> Most of the Chortitza Gemeinde also remained in Russia.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the ideology of the pietist-cultural Mennonites who remained in Russia seems to have been a nationalistic patriotism for Russia combined with a glorification of German culture. For an excellent example of this attitude the reader is referred back to the writings of school teacher Heinrich Hesse which are quoted in chapter nine in **The Golden Years**. Hesse aggressively promoted this sort of thinking in the schools and elsewhere. In time certain aspects of this philosophy such as the emulation of German culture almost became an article of faith and social status among some of the Mennonites who stayed in Russia.

A letter written by an Aeltester Jakob Wiebe of the Krimmer Mennonite Church, Karasan, Crimea, provides a good deal of insight into the pietist cultural Mennonite view of the implementation of the universal military draft and the consequent emigration movement. This Aeltester Jakob Wiebe was a brother to Philip Wiebe the influential son-in-law of Johan Cornies. As such he had important connections on the Molotschna and can be considered as being representative of the leading and more influential figures involved in the decision-making at the time. The reader should note that this Jakob Wiebe was no relation to Jakob A. Wiebe, the Aeltester of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren of Anafeld, Crimea, who had seceded from the Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Crimea in 1869.

In this letter dated February 27, 1876, Aeltester Jakob Wiebe is writing to Aeltester Johan Wiebe located near the Samara Mennonite settlement on the Volga River, north-east of the Molotschna colony. The purpose of the letter is to counsel and advise the latter against the emigration to America. The appeal of Aeltester Jakob Wiebe in this letter, like that of Hesse, is largely based on patriotism to the fatherland. However, Wiebe is less expressive in voicing this view. Furthermore the Mennonites must heed the commands of the Czar, who is the lawful authority duly appointed by God, and remain in Russia. This is the holy duty of the Mennonites who are to be the salt of the earth in Russia. Those who are leaving are fortune hunters and traitors to the faith, who are blinded by their pride and ignorance and who are being misled and swindled by selfish and evil leaders. Here follows the letter by Aeltester Jakob Wiebe:

A letter from church Elder Jakob Wiebe of the Krimmer Mennonite Church. (From the original):  
Karassan, February 27, 1876

"To the venerable Elder Johann Wiebe, Schoenau near Samara.

Much beloved brother in Christ Jesus!

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

" . . . That our achievements have been recognized in military law is to our greatest benefit. This, especially, gives our non-resistance a firm basis in Russia. Nor can our non-resistance be at all endangered through this; on the contrary, it is now particularly protected by the same. This law absolves us from everything related to carrying arms whereas other nationalities and denominations have been bound to it. What our service will be called and how one is to regard this? What do we care? Those are side issues. We have been legally recognized as nonresistant Mennonites and that according to military law. This recognition separates our service from the military administration and gives it a distinction which has to do with peaceful pursuits throughout.

"I can not agree at all with those who suspect something unwholesome for us everywhere. I believe, rather, that the laws concerning us have been thoroughly thought through for our benefit and that they have taken our non-resistance into consideration even more than we ourselves are able to comprehend or evaluate. Indirectly not to come into contact with any military affairs is impossible because His Majesty the Tsar has to authorize all laws and ordinances no matter of how peaceable a nature they may be. Still he is and remains the highest military commander in Russia and the anointed person to whom we must render obedience and honor according to God's explicit command. And this is how it is in every country, no matter what its system of government.

"Russia has done everything it could for us - at least much more and in a wiser manner than one could ever have hoped. It has readily gone along with our concerns about non-resistance and our Confession of Faith as a whole. Naturally, in the interest of governmental justice, it could not take every desired convenience and many an idiosyncrasy that was voiced into account no matter what our wishes might have been. After all, should this country favor us unjustly now, then it might well show injustice in opposition to us at some other occasion. As long as we are so near to the heart of our Tsar and Tsarina that their gracious effusion over our people brings tears to our eyes—then things will go well with us in this land which has been so singularly blessed by God. To leave this country (at the very moment when God, through our gracious ruler, has provided a way of escape from our difficulty) would mean grieving our conscience (if we are to be Christian in every respect) and would be a crime against mankind as well as our own flesh and blood—and unjustifiable before God. What would Menno Simons not have given for such an asylum in his years as a fugitive? Oh, we Mennonites ought to be better acquainted with history. A knowledge of the past can make the

present bearable for us and unlock the future concerning some things. Do not think, however, my beloved brothers that my confidence is dictated by a concern for carnal comfort! No, if I had wanted to pay attention to the flesh I would have left Russia long ago. My situation here is an extremely difficult one. My congregation is scattered in four different areas which are over 50 versts removed from one another. I have to preach every Sunday and holy day. The shortest journey always takes about three days and my farming operation has to sacrifice one carriage for this task. Besides this I am poor and support a large family. My situation, then, is not exactly enviable, as you can see; it could not have become worse on the other side of the ocean. If I had wanted to think in human terms I would have taken advantage of the migration in order to escape these difficult circumstances since I was promised free transportation and support over there. What's more, I would have been able to show an aura of holiness and martyrdom before the world, whereas in contrast (since I decided to follow truth), I have fallen prey to many a slandermonger. But I have a conscience and I stand before God; I must obey and give account to Him, not the foolish world! I consider it my duty to remain where God has placed me. It will not be enjoyable to send our young men into service but we are in the world and there one finds much that is not enjoyable or easy. Many a person may feel conscience-bound to go; I feel conscience bound to stay—as long as Russia does more (for us) than any other country I will continue to regard this as an unmistakable sign for taking up our position exactly here, and that it is entirely God's will that we be here. We are to be the salt of the world: Russia is also part of the world and salt is needed here as much as anywhere else. I am saying this to show that we are on firm, biblical ground when we remain (here) under circumstances as we have them now and in the face of such a clear sign from the Lord of the church. If we were to leave a land where people are sincerely accommodating and desirous of keeping us at all costs, it would be counter to God's decrees for us, even if it were possible. (Where we are driven away we (obviously) cannot stay—we would finally have to leave the earth . . .) But we are to be in the world. People always talk about what we have all lost through the abrogation of our Charter of Privileges! This I cannot see at all, rather, I believe we gained much more than we lost. The achievements which our brotherhood has gained in Russia are unequalled in our history. With the addition of this law concerning our responsibility, this great empire, including the Tsar at its head, concedes that the article concerning non-resistance in our Confession of Faith is biblical. Earlier we were tolerated as a sect, now, however, we have become a recognized religious party whose unique confession of faith is totally secured by law. The door to religious freedom has been opened in Russia. Those living a few years longer will witness great things in this country which the Lord of the Church has destined for greatness. Lightning is flashing everywhere already, many a circumstance will bring hardship to us too, but we are moving toward the Kingdom of God and this shall be our comfort during the perilous times of our life. Our prayer in these last days must resound more and more fervently and loudly before heaven: 'May your Kingdom come!' and, it will come. Brothers, it shall come soon—despite the devil, the world or hell! And then, if God wills, we will no longer be limited to a certain place but will see one another face to face. O brothers, what a hope! What consequences will all of this have for our brotherhood in the future? Who can presume to answer that now! I know one thing alone: if we have the real essence and strength and spirit of non-resistance in us—then Russia is least likely to force us into arms. And if we lose this real essence there is not a state in existence, be the laws what they may, which will be able to keep us non-resistant. Not even America with its scum of humanity.

'Russia has spoken and done her part. Now it is up to us to do our part, among other things, especially to provide good Christian schools. I am not particularly thinking of higher schools, but rather, better ones, schools where the child is trained to become a real Christian, humble, rational, practical and unprejudiced person; not like certain know-it-alls, to put it mildly, who have learned everything, but do not know how to practice it in daily life and consequently also have nothing for eternity. This was also entirely the viewpoint of his eminent excellency.

'The emigration, unfortunately, continues. Up to 100 families, it is said, are preparing themselves for spring, including my gray-haired parents-in-law. In the beginning some religious considerations may have contributed towards this cause but that is no longer the case. At this time there is only the attraction of friendship, the (hopefully) golden mountains, curiosity and, most of all, the fear of sending their sons into service. Mostly the people leaving are those who have no understanding of non-resistance or Christianity. Then pride also plays a part, and that particularly with the more prominent ones: 'Now the Russians are serving us; later, however, we are to serve them!' they say—and that they cannot accept. These are all ignoble and unjustified motives which consequently allow nothing good to be hoped for. In a word, the migration was poisoned right at its roots and continues to poison itself even further. This becomes increasingly clear now and is evidence that it was started at the wrong time and without God. Still others begged the police for written permission, which was obviously denied, to shoot down bad people who might show up in the village at night. They wanted to do this through the eight-fold guard which prior to their departure they had furnished with loaded rifles. This was detected by neighbors who became suspicious of their behavior. Nevertheless, these individuals emigrated because of non-resistance, a fact they did not fail to impress upon anyone who was in the least inclined to listen. If there is any integrity in that kind of action, then there are no lies in the world. No, the foundation must be dug much deeper than that; otherwise, nothing will help—no migrating and no remaining. The devil then has an easy time bringing us down no matter where we are . . .

“Whether I have answered all of your questions, dear brothers, I don’t know; much less whether it was done correctly. Who, after all, is able to judge his own case? Of this much, however, I can assure you: what I have reported is my very deepest conviction and I have had no gain in mind except the welfare of my brothers . . .

Please accept hearty greetings from all of us. Your brother in Christ, Jakob Wiebe, Elder of the Krimmer Mennonites.”<sup>19</sup>

This is the view of the compulsory military service issue of a prominent leader of the pietist-cultural Mennonites in 1876. By now the full gospel principle of nonresistance is barely mentioned except to state that a pure application is impossible in any event. The main thrust is in terms of freedom from military service. The new military code will legally enshrine and protect forever this freedom which is a great evangelical step forward. In the view of Aeltester Jakob Wiebe, Karassan, Crimea, the Mennonites who are leaving the country lack a ‘true’ understanding of the evangelical principles of nonresistance. In his view most of the people who are leaving have no understanding of Christianity. The Kingdom of God will soon come and in the meantime the Mennonites had best stay in Russia and not in America with its scum of humanity!

### 13.08 The Position of the Evangelical (Moravian) Brethren

Another viewpoint had a remarkable influence on the resolve of many of the Russian Mennonites to accept the compromise settlement offered by the Russian Government and to remain where they were. This position found its expression not from within Mennonite ranks but from an external source in the person of Pastor Theodor Hans of the Evangelical (Moravian) Brethren congregation in St. Petersburg. This was a church which held to the teachings and faith of pietism but with a special emphasis on a theology of the great commission. Because of the special influence and role which Pastor Theodor Hans played in the events related to the issue of military service it is necessary to briefly examine the philosophical basis of the viewpoints which he represented.

The Mennonite delegates had become acquainted with Pastor Hans in St. Petersburg in 1872. Pastor Hans was quite willing to assist the Mennonites in their cause and being resident in St. Petersburg he eventually became a contact point for the Molotschna Mennonite delegates. His knowledge of St. Petersburg and local political figures was no doubt a tremendous asset and benefit for the various delegations whom he befriended. However, the authors of *Exiled by Czar* have noted that as a member of this Evangelical Brethren Church the primary motives of Pastor Hans were not to help the Mennonites with the maintenance of nonresistance.<sup>20</sup> In fact Pastor Hans was a vigorous opponent of the emigration which probably also explains why so many doors were open to him in St. Petersburg.

It is helpful to consider the theology of the Evangelical Brethren (Moravian) Church in order to determine why Pastor Hans had such an interest in his Mennonite brethren and why his views were so influential. The theology of the Evangelical (Moravian) Brethren church was centered on the teaching of free grace with a special emphasis on a dramatic conversion experience, the necessity of continual emotional assurance and uplift, and the need for a single-minded propagation of these beliefs. Conversely, the Moravian Brethren church did not stress the teachings of Jesus nor the centrality of his spiritual earthly realm of peace. In many respects the teachings of the Moravian brethren were not unlike those of the 19th century American Evangelical movement.

These movements accepted the doctrine of a separation between church and state as enunciated by the Protestant reformers which provided that the church and state were instituted and ordained by God and that the dictates of the state were superior to the teachings of Christ. Thus the economic and political aims of the state were invariably accepted as those of the church.

The Anabaptist Mennonites agreed that the Christian society (the church) and the world (the state) were two entirely separate bodies, but they denied that the teachings of Christ and his apostles were subject to the dictates of the state. These laws were to be given full and willing compliance, but only in so far as they could be fulfilled without infringing upon the teachings of the gospel.

The Protestant reformers also adopted the rather legalistic view that sins performed in the service of the state were not attributable to the individual Christian and that the Christian in fact owed a duty to perform all the acts which were commanded by the State. It is evident that those who adopted this legalistic view of the Christian and the state would not be unduly concerned about the question of military service. The important concern was to save as many souls as possible and not a full gospel conversion to Christ and a commitment to His spiritual earthly kingdom. It is evident from the foregoing that someone like Pastor Hans would certainly not make any effort to influence the Russian Mennonites to preserve and strengthen their position on evangelical nonresistance.

Once accepted, such a legalistic dualism was unfortunately susceptible to all the crusades and

movements which affected the worldly society. e.g. nationalism, militarism, class struggle, persecution of minorities, etc. It seems that a Christian society accepting such a legalistic teaching is especially susceptible to emotional movements such as nationalism and in particular the support of military action to achieve the ends of nationalism. Thus during World War I the Canadian social gospel movement "heralded the war as part of the great moral crusade towards the building of the Kingdom."<sup>21</sup> The reader is referred to the writings of Molotschna Mennonite school teacher Heinrich Hesse for an example of where the influence of Wuerttemberg pietism had resulted in a vehement support for the Imperial Wars of Russia during the 19th Century.<sup>22</sup> This type of legalistic gospel has frequently resulted in the haunting spectre of "born again evangelicals" in opposing countries to a war vehemently and aggressively killing each other in the name of God and Savior.

The message of Pastor Hans to the Mennonite leaders in Russia was understandably far more subdued and reasoned. Like Aeltester Jakob Wiebe he points out that pure nonresistance is impossible and that the compromise offered by the Russian Government was already far more favourable than that offered by the Prussian Government to the Mennonites there. The agitation of those supporting the move out of Russia is tainted with the carnal zeal and the servitude of man and clothed with a false spirituality. The Russian Mennonites have fulfilled their evangelical mission through their homes and farms and in their restraint from manifest sins and vices. This holy calling continues. There is also a godly discipline to be learned from compulsory military service. Those Mennonites who are leaving will someday have to give an account for themselves. Pastor Hans concludes, "Mennonites save yourselves!" Here follows the text of the letter of Pastor Hans to the Mennonite leaders:

a) "To the elders and assemblies of the Mennonite communities in the province of Taurida and Samara.

"You and your congregations have been placed before a very serious decision due to the law concerning compulsory military duty. The implications of this law you and your authoritative bodies have clearly articulated. Your verbalized and written expressions against subordination to compulsory military service have been received by all the proper authorities with the assurance that the government is deeply concerned not to offend your conscience and to keep you and your communities in this country.

"The enclosed conciliatory proposal from the Commission for Compulsory Duty testifies to the Government's serious efforts to come to an understanding with you. The privileges of almost all other alien colonists regarding exemption from military service are completely suspended. However, because of the Commission's proposal, every Mennonite subject in the country is guaranteed a rather significant exemption. They are excused from military participation at the front, and from carrying weapons. (Instead they are appointed for the enlistment in the hospital service, military workshop service, etc.

"The situation into which you have been placed is a far more favorable one than that of your brethren in Germany, who are also compelled to serve on the transportation and baggage vehicles in the field. (There, unfortunately, they are also expected to carry arms even though for defensive purposes only.) What the government is suggesting for you in the present proposal is actually nothing which would make you party to the evils of war. Medical corps services and maintenance of military places of work (as long as these do not include weapons factories, etc.) are sooner suited for alleviating the evils of war and for that cause a Christian may extend his hand.

"It appears, however, questionable to you, dear brothers (regardless of the nature of your compulsory service), that you should relate in any way whatsoever to a law which deals with military involvement and taking up of arms. You believe that (even though indirectly) you are still thereby acknowledging war as justifiable. No more, actually, and no more directly than when you pay for your personal duty with a recruitment tax, which apparently does not cause you anxiety as is evidenced by the conditions ('Privilegien') under which you settled in Russia.

"One thing I wish not to overlook, however. It gives you a deep concern to see your young men (exactly in those years which often are so determinative for the rest of life) torn from your midst and submitted to a totally strange influence in a very mixed environment. This concern I share with you also on behalf of our own young men from Sarepta. In the face of this, however, I must declare to you and myself:

1) That our trust in the fatherly protection of God will not deceive us if it moves us to earnest prayer for our youth.

2) That a much greater blessing is gained precisely in the disciplined cultivation of ethical-religious principles (which we are trying to impress upon our children) than in external protection and in an exclusion from every source of temptation.

3) That a momentary and temporary straying from the path of godliness (painful as it may be) does not necessarily imply a continuous apostasy from the spiritual heritage of our fathers.

4) That precisely the consciousness that our young men will need to be exposed to alien influences must necessarily have a lasting and sanctifying effect upon our training methods from earliest youth. I cannot maintain that these considerations will be able to allay all our fears but they will serve to quieten us by God's grace (since the necessity has arisen that our personal wishes must be sacrificed). I cannot help, dear brothers, seriously to ask you to consider, that perhaps in the gracious considera-



tions which our government has allowed regarding your point of view, there is to be recognized the hand of God for your people. This hand may be pointing in the direction that you should not automatically decline all government service assignments and that you should not take advantage of the right to emigrate.

“I know that concerning the latter there is presently, in your circles, a great deal of serious and urgent promotion but it is not being done in the proper way—in the Spirit of God and to His glory. A number of domestic as well as foreign newspapers are reporting more and more concerning this agitation. Much of this agitation seems to me to be tainted with carnal zeal and servitude of man. Such things are very unbecoming in a religious community such as you are; they do not stand you in good stead. Cherished brothers, oppose such dangerous promotions (which taint your calling before God and mankind) in the Spirit of Christ and in the discipline of solemn, sensible deliberation before God. Don’t be taken in by the deception of such agitators who are clothed with a false spirituality. As faithful elders, protect your congregations as much as possible from confusing and agitating influences and trust in the assistance and leading of the Spirit of Truth who makes you free indeed.

“Dear brothers! You are expecting to leave your homeland again and to find citizenship elsewhere. I don’t want to emphasize the sacrifices and hardships that will necessarily follow such a decision. If that were necessary for the sake of truth and the honor of God it would have been sinful for anyone to burden your hearts. One would have to say: ‘Go in peace: The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord’ (Judg. 18:6). In reality, however, I cannot find that it is your duty to leave. I do not want to address myself to the fact that His Imperial Majesty’s government had declared its interest to keep you in this country, and that your departure would give it deep concern. This is, however, true—even if certain public writings have voiced other opinions—it is, nevertheless true. Permit me, however, to direct you to another point of view. By God’s grace you have chosen to be a widespread blessed example to our country. You have been exemplary in the physical affairs of life such as your thriving, well-supplied homes and farms, your successful agriculture, animal husbandry, etc., your orderly communal and congregational life. Not only that but much more! God has placed you into your environment in order to be a real and living testimony to the blessings of God which come to a community which sincerely promotes moral values and the fear of God, disciplined restraint from all manifest sins and vices, concerned training of young people in the fear of God and the traditions of the fathers, prevention of all that might harm the common good or loosen the bonds of orderliness. Your calling lies in this noblest, ethical-religious sphere—it is a missionary calling. The great significance of this calling will not be disparaged by anyone who recognized the urgent need for such an example in our country and among its people. And even if in all honesty you admit, my brothers, that not all those in your circles are concerned about this calling—that the winds of emancipation are being felt amongst the youth of your communities as well—that the old, simple and genuine ways of your fathers are occasionally threatened by the spirit of our times—then you may rest assured that you nevertheless have a holy calling from God and you are still fulfilling it!

“Brethren! that comes from the Lord but it also makes you responsible to God, responsible to the calling which He has given you as it concerns this country. You cannot leave this country just like that—not without having God sever you inwardly and incontrovertibly from that calling. Exactly this turns the question of an obligation to emigrate for conscience sake into the question of having the right to emigrate for conscience sake. It is from this standpoint that I implore you to test this matter before God. Save yourselves, I beg you, from a viewpoint which would imply that your migration constitutes a divine judgment for this land which necessitates your leaving! If others evaluate the circumstances in that way then let them justify themselves if they can. You, however, must not give occasion for such thoughts—they would seriously threaten your innocence and sincerity before God and man.

“It is possible that the truth may be exactly reversed? That in the circumstances of your submission to compulsory military service there may be a godly discipline to be learned which you would not do well to overlook? (Is it possible) that, much rather, you should humbly accept this discipline and believe that the God of all mercy will respect your obedience and allow you and all your congregations to harvest the peaceable fruit of righteousness, to be strengthened in the Spirit and also to strengthen that which is in danger of dying?

Your Theodor Hans”

St. Petersburg, January 15, 1873<sup>23</sup>

The message that it was a Christian duty to remain in Russia and to fulfill the evangelical mission was a siren call for the Mennonites and especially to those in the Vollwirt class who did not want to give up the comforts to which they had aspired in Russia. The work of Hans was aided by the general impression that he was the sincere friend of the Mennonites. The authors of **Exiled by the Czar** have pointed out that the contents of the history books of the Russian Mennonites evidence the success of Pastor Hans.<sup>24</sup> The fact that some two-thirds of the Mennonites decided that they could remain in Russia in spite of the changed social and political climate speaks for the success of his work.

### 13.09 The Position of the Radical Pietist Mennonites

It seems that the groups with the greatest pietist leanings had the least inclination to emigrate.<sup>25</sup> There was almost no interest in emigration among the Mennonite Brethren who were still in an organiza-

tion state at the time.<sup>26</sup> Peter M. Friesen reports that it was not until 1879 that the first Mennonite Brethren Elder together with some ministers and church members, left for America. Even then the move was severely criticized by many of the Mennonite Brethren and as well the destination was the materially more accommodating United States. The so-called Friends of Jerusalem or Templers were ready to emigrate but in accordance with their particular millennial teaching the destination was Palestine where they expected to meet their Lord.<sup>27</sup>

The Gnadenfeld Gemeinde which had emigrated to the Molotschna in 1833 under the leadership of Wilhelm Lange was strongly against the emigration or perhaps one should say more positively, was strongly in favour of accepting the compromise solution offered by Totleben. This group had already adopted the teachings of pietism while in Prussia and seems to fit on the socio-economic-religious model beside the Orloff group, although with more pronounced and radical pietist leanings. Under the leadership of Aeltester Lennzman the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde had aligned itself with the forces of Oberschulz Friesen during the ecclesiastical wars discussed in Part Two.

The authors of the book **Exiled by the Czar** explain that the Gnadenfeld group was especially influenced by one of their missionaries who had travelled around the world and who was convinced that the haven in Russia could not be equalled anywhere in the world.

“Opposition also came from the Gnadenfeld congregation. Heinrich Dirks, at that time missionary in the Dutch East Indies, and as such highly respected by his fellow-brethren at home, did much to discourage emigration. His letters were copied and circulated widely. Dirks maintained that after the loss of all privileges, after the loss of the German language and the inherited customs and ways of living, even after giving up the principle of nonresistance, it would still be possible for the Mennonites to serve and worship God and Christ in the right way. He warned against any premature undertaking. All over the world the Mennonites would not find any place which could compare with Russia. Since Dirks had seen more of the world than most of the colonists, his warnings, no doubt, must have made notable impressions.”<sup>28</sup>

Heinrich Dirks was typical of the radical millennialists who opposed emigration because their understanding of Christian truth held that Russia would be a safe haven for true believers during the tribulation which was expected to commence at anytime.

One of the leading proponents of the radial pietist Mennonites in Russia was Peter M. Friesen, who has frequently been mentioned in this work. In fact Peter M. Friesen is generally regarded as being one of the most significant intellectuals and thinkers of the Russian Mennonites and his thesis that pietism represented the true fulfillment of the Mennonite faith has been widely accepted among later historians. In addition the historical work of Peter M. Friesen was completed in 1910, some thirty years after the fact, so that he had the luxury of writing with the benefit of reflection, hindsight and experience. Therefore the highest regard can be accorded to his view and philosophy relative to compulsory military service.

In his invaluable historical work, Peter M. Friesen has set out his views pertaining to the conscription issue and the emigration movement which are included here:

“As late as 1874 an opponent to the emigration explained its significance as follows: the most extreme element, incapable of a God-willed and God-permitted closer association with Russian society, using the pretense of the inviolability of the religious conscience which the Russian law guaranteed to the Mennonites (naturally only in so far as “religious conscience” does not constitute propaganda in Russia!), and which also hinders its fellow Mennonites in this association, moves away. The Mennonite sheepstall, which is far too low, too narrow, and too confined, is set in motion and ventilated. Those who have left for America have the greatest aversion to culture, but there they come under the influence of culture before they really know or want it; we, here, receive impetus for new life from this fresh air. The spiritual tension which will exist between there and here, will give birth to religious warmth. That is indeed how things developed. They experienced an unexpected religious freedom over there and in turn influenced the Mennonites of Russia. Much of what earlier was characteristic of the “Brethren Church” and perhaps of Gnadenfeld and Ohrloff, became the common experience of Mennonites in both Russia and America. These men: Sudermann, Peters, etc., understood and desired nothing of Russia except its abundantly fertile soil and its Tsar as an eminent abstraction who was real for them only in the sense of being the author and protector of the “Great Charter of Privileges.” Naturally, they were prepared to give the required legal “tribute, tax and toll” and perhaps, in case of an emergency, a “charitable donation” for their altogether strange and distant fellow countrymen. They do not, nor were they capable of appreciating the Tsar’s enormous efforts on behalf of his people—particularly also, in the creation of the new military law and all that it entails, which, in the lengthy footnote above, we have described as a relatively evangelical step forward. Nor did they even think of meeting the needs or sympathizing with the trials of this people. They were not only extreme Mennonites; they were also “Germans” in the measure and manner of that German-Russian, gray-haired Lutheran pastor who assured the author that he could not be a truly evangelical preacher if he were convinced that the gospel could be preached and the Christian

life nurtured equally well in the Russian, as in the German language! The pious, rather well-educated (but exclusively German educated) Elder Sudermann said to Governor-General Kozebue from New-Russia: "Those of our young people who attend Russian institutions of higher learning are lost." This incident took place during negotiations between the Supervisory Commission and the Governor-General at Odessa in 1869 on the occasion of the "Alexander stipends" which were established by the Mennonites at the instigation of the above mentioned authorities. The stipends (two from the Molotschna and one from Chortitza) were to assist young Mennonites who were seeking education at Russian secondary schools. Subsequent developments have proven the beloved, honorable bishop to be in error. American Mennonite brothers admit that it is far more difficult to keep their young men within the brotherhood in America than it was in Russia. At least this has been personally expressed to the author by several American Mennonite ministers and elders who have returned to Russia as visitors and by a number of Russian Mennonite ministers and elders who travelled over there and have returned. The number of those who either during or as a result of studies in Russian state institutions have left the Mennonite fold (through mixed marriages with Greek-Orthodox women, in consequence of which their children may not become Mennonite) is very small. This has occurred in greater number among those who did not go on to study; and this has been the case for several decades here and there. Actually this is a relatively small percentage when compared to the total number of Mennonites in Russia. The "Mennonitism" of our men who have been educated in Russian secondary schools and universities is just as genuine as that of the average among our people in general. The same can confidently be said of their piety: the educated ones compare most favorably with the average of the Mennonites who experienced nothing but a Mennonite village school training along their educational path. For those good brothers Sudermann, Jansen, Peters and company, the concept of Mennonite and German was at that time, strange to say, synonymous. In Christ, however, there is to be neither Jew nor Greek nor Scythian! Of the Russian language they understood only a very tiny little piece and that only of the profane market dialect. Of the Russian literature or indeed its ethical value or theological treasures they knew about as much as we do about the literature of the Armenians or Georgians. Concerning the history of Russia they knew pitifully little from German history books. Until that time, these books contained little except the history of Russian wars and court life, and stated that Cossacks, priests and Siberia were to be found in Russia, as well as some dreadful things called "Panslavism" and "Nihilism". When these otherwise honorable men came into contact with real Russian society, apart from the market crowds (to the extent that they could make themselves understood with their meager Russian) they encountered, aside from the low class of people, the pretentious element of that era's merchant or the partially-educated element of that era's minor official (Both of these types were at that time largely tainted with the once noble liberalism and reform spirit of the 40s and the 60s which had in case of many adherents begun to deteriorate into a vulgar and immoral nihilism.) "Nihilism" and "Panslavism" (in the form of the coercive national and religious Russianization) garnished with Cossack, priest and Siberia in the background—that was all there was to the Russia of those dear brothers and bishops. If Peters, Gaeddert, Sudermann and company, according to their understanding of things, were to be honest men, they would have to leave (the country) in order to preserve their spiritual heritage for their offspring. They were honest men, and they left. Thank God that they left! It was good for them, for their children and for America. Their conscience was eased, and their children came in contact with a Christian culture which could not have happened in Russia without tragic consequences for the families. America now has many of our Mennonite people, numbering in the thousands. They are very industrious farming families which are enriching Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, Minnesota, etc., and are spreading even further into Texas, New Mexico, and California. English Canada is also most glad for our orthodox Mennonites because they are good land purchasers and farming people. For us it was also good as stated above; and it was good for Russia which was now free of these unmanageable, pious foster children whom it was impossible to satisfy no matter how hard this modern European state attempted to make every possible concession. At the same time, however, the state retained the greatest part of the Mennonite settlers. They allowed themselves to benefit from the wholesome and useful Russian societal and educational circumstances according to the gracious conditions, which astonished the political world, permitted by the monarch of that time and protected by his noble successors.<sup>29</sup>

### 13.10 Reflections

The authoritative voice of Peter M. Friesen forms a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Thirty-five years after the fact, he still insisted that those Mennonites who left Russia are typical of "The Mennonite sheepstall, which is far too low, too narrow and too confined". Those who left in 1874 had taken what they could from the fertile soil of Russia and now they were leaving on the pretext of their conscience. It was good riddance for Russia. In America these unmanageable, unsatiable, pious sorts would come into contact with a Christian culture whether they liked it or not. Thank God that they left is the concluding view of Peter M. Friesen.

Like Aeltester Jakob Wiebe, Peter M. Friesen quite correctly points out that many of those who left Russia placed too high an emphasis on the German language which in many cases eventually

became an article of faith. However, it seems that both groups might equally have heeded this sort of admonition as in the end it was the pietist-cultural Mennonites in Russia who promoted German culture and language with a passion which sometimes was almost equated with Godliness. i.e. Whoever could achieve the most in this regard was the most highly regarded and consequently also considered to be the best Mennonite. Peter M. Friesen quite rightly points out the self-deception of those who felt that the gospel could be preached and lived only in the German language, but it is equally difficult to understand his own position that the most cultured (and if also wealthy so much the better), the most educated, those who sang harmony with the most parts, and those who had the biggest and most elaborately embellished houses, etc., were automatically the best Christians.

In a similar vein the fine welfare, educational and charitable institutions, which the Russian Mennonites had developed by the peak of their pietist-cultural empire in 1910 are frequently lauded as unassailable evidence of the ultimate exemplification of the true Mennonite Christian character. While no one would deny the benevolence and great compassion inherent in these endeavours it must nevertheless be pointed out that these projects, which only a well established and prosperous society can undertake, were to an extent built upon the sacrifice and efforts of those who left Russia during the 1870s.

As startling as it may sound, it seems that when the emigration got underway, all organized efforts to provide land for the landless Mennonites in Russia ceased. The first daughter colony of the Molotschna, Sagraadowka, was settled in 1871, and one would have assumed that the far-sighted pietist-cultural Mennonite leaders would have recognized a golden opportunity right at home to assist their own landless. However, there seems to be no record that this happened. Instead those who already had means were given free rein to purchase the property of those who were leaving on such terms as they saw fit. These arrangements were frequently comparable to those which Oberschulz Friesen and his friends had once negotiated for the rental of the community lands in the Molotschna. Thus one finds reports where farms normally worth 6000 ruble had to be given away for 1000 ruble. The beautiful and fertile Bergthal Colony eventually had to be sold to non-Mennonites. In addition the Brandordnung refused even to pay the long suffering Bergthaler for fire damage which was legally due. Eventually the Bergthaler had to reduce their settlement by one-third or 7000 ruble in order to receive their money. This does not speak well for the elite culture and fine piety of which Peter M. Friesen speaks.

Some simple mathematics will illustrate the point very clearly. Some 3700 Russian Mennonite families emigrated during the 1870s. Assuming that they represented close to an average socio-economic cross section of Russian Mennonite society at the time, then about one-third or 1250 families would have been full farmers with properties normally worth about 6000 ruble. Assuming that a reduction in price of one-third to 4000 rubles would have represented a fair enough discount for the pietist-cultural Mennonites who remained in Russia, and assuming further that most farms were eventually sold for about 2000 ruble or about one-third of their normal value (this is very much giving the benefit of the doubt), then those leaving Russia were short changed by the modest sum of 2,000 ruble each. At ten percent compound interest this would double every eight years so that forty years later in 1915 this would have represented the handsome sum of 80,000,000 ruble.

This is an impressive amount when one considers that in 1908 the total declared value of all the Mennonite owned industrial plants and trade firms in all of Russia was 5,595,878 ruble.<sup>30</sup> These hypothetical figures are certainly not mentioned for the purpose of detracting in any way from the compassionate and benevolent charitable works of the Russian Mennonites. Nevertheless if the Mennonite sheepstall is to be widened and aired perhaps it will not be too damaging if the other end of the sheepstall is aired as well. The 1870s emigrants and especially those who went to Manitoba, where seemingly everything cost several times as much as in Nebraska or Kansas, could certainly have made use of these extra funds to enhance their culture in the way of hospitals and special schools, etc.

Peter M. Friesen also emphasizes the greater propensity for education found among the pietist-cultural Mennonites, and that the knowledge of Russian history and society of those who emigrated in the 1870s was pitiful little. In a previous volume it has already been mentioned that there were quite different concepts as to what constituted a good education between the pietist-cultural Mennonites and the Anabaptist-Mennonites. The latter respected a sound secular knowledge which was to be subject to a much more important knowledge of the full gospel faith. The former seemed to regard a year or two of education in a pietist oriented Bible School institution as a suitable educational base from which other groups could be judged and denied their salvation. However, in view of the events which occurred after 1915 it might be pointed out that perhaps the emigrants who left Russia during the 1870s were not quite so stupid and uneducated as it might have seemed at first.

In addition to the evangelical mission of being model and cultured citizens of Russia, the pietist-cultural Mennonites have also made much of their foreign mission efforts. These are generally promoted as being so vital and crucial that the emphasis on evangelical piety of the Anabaptist-Mennonite is insignificant and a small minded religious concern by comparison. In fact the mission efforts of the pietist-cultural Mennonites are invariably lauded as being the ultimate culmination of all scriptural teachings. In addition these efforts represent the final evidence of the superiority of a particular blend of theological philosophies. Here again it is unequivocally stated that these efforts are most admirable and that they deserve the highest recognition.

Nevertheless, perhaps there is a little room for venting the narrow Mennonite sheepstall here as well. When one considers the repeated references to the early mission programs and to the great wealth and material prosperity which the pietist-cultural Mennonites in Russia had achieved by their peak in 1910, one would expect that the number of foreign missionaries in the field would have numbered in the thousands. According to the magnificent mansions of the large estate owners one would assume that one of these alone could have supported a hundred missionaries. However, the reader will be horrified to learn that in 1910 the pietist-cultural Mennonite empire in Russia had only fifteen missionaries active in the foreign mission fields. Of course these fifteen missionaries no doubt were doing heroic work and making invaluable contributions.

It is certainly not the intention of this writer to disparage the invaluable contributions of the Russian Mennonites in 1910. But it is necessary to present these figures in order to put into perspective, statements such as the one by historian Peter M. Friesen. The writings set forth in this chapter present the views of those who favoured compromise with the Russian Government and Russian society, and reveal some very important things about these leaders. Certainly they were possessed of an only thinly veiled superiority complex which was not justified by the facts, at least not in terms of the historical standards of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Without question they were too critical of the 1870s emigrants. It can quite easily be understood that denying salvation to even the most devout of these emigrants and calling them traitors to the faith and opportunists, did little to enhance the future brotherly love and Christian relationships of the two groups. In fact it is somewhat surprising that during the 1920s these same "unsaved heathen" opened their arms to aid their brethren from Russia who were in need. Again the Anabaptist-Mennonite would insist that this was truly a testimony to the limitless regenerative power of the grace of God who was able to work forgiveness in their hearts.

In addition it can be seen that the pietist-cultural Mennonite leaders were the products of a very narrow and impoverished educational and cultural background. There seemed to be no room in their minds allowing them to say to their departing brethren, "Farewell, we don't agree with your stand but all the best to you". The superiority complex and judgemental attitude of these leaders is little more than astounding. If only these men could have had a small portion of the humility and introspection of the wise and venerable Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of Bergthal, there might have been some hope of a broader and more compassionate view on the part of the pietist-cultural Mennonites. It seems that all the newspapers, arts, and culture developed by the Russian Mennonites after 1880 could do little to overcome the eternal intolerance of separatist pietism of anything beyond its own narrow horizons.

Furthermore, the writings of these pietist-cultural Mennonite leaders reveal a total inability to understand the world around them and the Russian political system as well as Russian society itself. In their pseudo cultural elitism and material prosperity, they were blinded and kept ignorant of the true nature of the Russian Grizzly. In the end the cultural and socio-economic privileges of the closed settlement system in Russia blinded the eyes of the pietist-cultural Mennonite leaders to the social injustice among their own people and also to the horrifying poverty, starvation and social injustice which existed all around them. At the same time this starvation was so evident from across the ocean that the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, even though it could not yet afford for itself the splendid hospitals and schools of their former brethren, felt compelled to at least contribute what they could to alleviate such suffering as they could.

The foregoing indicates that the pietist-cultural Mennonite empire in Russia also suffered from more than its share of closed mindedness. All of the foregoing should cast no shadow on the honesty and piety of Peter M. Friesen and his likeminded colleagues. Certainly they were serving God to the best of their abilities and understanding. However, a careful study of their writings and the charges which they make against their Mennonite brethren and the largely incorrect assessment which they made of the entire Russian society in which they lived, is evidence of the limitations of their own intellectual horizons.<sup>31</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER THIRTEEN. NONRESISTANCE, MILLENIALISM AND NATIONALISM.

1. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 70.
2. Gerhard Wiebe, *op. cit.*, 35.
3. The Polish or Volharian Mennonites were in the least fortunate position.
4. C. Krahn "A Centennial Chronology" in *Mennonite Life*, March/1979, 3-9.
5. Franz Isaac, *op. cit.*, 304-306.
6. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 52 and 174.
7. Franz Isaac, *op. cit.*, 310-311.
8. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 62.
9. Franz Isaac, *op. cit.*, 313-316.
10. *History and Events*, *op. cit.*, 59-60.
11. Gerhard Wiebe, *op. cit.*, 30-33. See also Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 65.
12. As recorded in P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 589-590.
13. Franz Isaac, *op. cit.*, 321-322.
14. Peter M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 595-596.
15. *Ibid*, 602-605.
16. *History and Events*, *op. cit.*, 68-69.
17. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 71.
18. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 592.
19. *Ibid*, 605-608.
20. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 49.
21. F.H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, *op. cit.*, 404. Similarly the millions of "born again" pietist Christians in Germany made no effort to disassociate themselves with the programs of the Nazis and in fact quite cheerfully served in the German armed force where Stalin and Communism were seen as the Anti-Christ. At the same time millions of "born again" Christians served in the armies of the Allies, and in fact, the American Evangelical/Fundamentalist movement provided many of the most vocal advocates of the war which they understood as being an evangelistic campaign against the Anti-Christ (Hitler). At the same time, both the pietists and fundamentalists saw each military victory or defeat as crucial and necessary steps in their countless eschatological timetables.
22. See the *Golden years*, *op. cit.*, Section 9.16.
23. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 598-601.
24. Gaeddert, *op. cit.*, 70.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Ibid*, 71.
27. *Ibid*.
28. *Ibid*.
29. P.M. Friesen, *op. cit.*, 592-594.
30. *Ibid*, 868.
31. The narrow minded outlook of leaders such as P.M. Friesen was undoubtedly magnified by their limited education. i.e. Some Russian language study and a year or so at a radical separatist Bible school in Switzerland.



# Chapter Fourteen.

## The Emigration Movement

### 14.01 Introducing

Seventeen thousand Mennonites decided to leave the shores of Russia forever in 1874-1880. This chapter will consider some representative positions of those who made the difficult decision to leave their homes and prosperity for a new homeland and poverty, for the sake of their faith. The three viewpoints to be considered are the following; the mild pietist-cultural Mennonites, the mainline Anabaptist-Mennonites as represented by the Bergthal Gemeinde, and the radical Anabaptist-Mennonites represented by Abraham Thiessen.

### 14.02 Dietrich Gaeddert, The Alexanderwohl Gemeinde

Firstly, the views of the mild pietist-cultural Mennonites represented by leaders such as Consul Cornelius Jansen, Aeltester Leonard Suderman, and minister Dietrich Gaeddert. History has demonstrated that the teachings of separatist pietism almost invariably overwhelm and eradicate the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings and faith whenever the former invades the territory of the latter. This process of assimilation might be completed within a decade or in other cases might take a century or more. Although leaders such as Jansen, Suderman, and Gaeddert had adopted many pietist-cultural Mennonite teachings, the full gospel faith was still strong enough within these men that they and their followers were saved from the illusions which were adopted by most of those who remained in Russia. In each case some strong Anabaptist-Mennonite influence remained in these men so that they were able to perceive that this was not a time where any further compromise could be made.

Dietrich Gaeddert (1837-1900) was elected a minister of the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde in the Molotschna in 1867. In 1876 he became the Aeltester of the Hoffnungsau Mennonite Gemeinde in Kansas which was settled by a part of the Alexanderwohl group. Gaeddert was an early and devoted proponent of the emigration movement which resulted in the settlement in Kansas of almost the entire Alexanderwohl Gemeinde of some 250 families.<sup>1</sup> This Gemeinde had Old Flemish origins and had been in existence in Prussia as an organized community since the early part of the 17th century. In 1821 a part of the group had emigrated to the Molotschna where they founded and settled the village of Alexanderwohl. This was the only Gemeinde in the Molotschna whose members almost all lived in one village.

The "Old Flemish" designation meant that the group had originally practised a very pure Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching. The memoirs of Aeltester Klaas Reimer indicate, however, that by 1821 the Alexanderwohl group had already adopted crucial pietist teachings such as the doctrine of the millennium. Nevertheless it seems that the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde remained under strong Anabaptist-Mennonite influences and that it remained somewhat aloof from many of the battles which raged through the Molotschna colony. It seems that the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde was able to avoid the extreme judgmental attitude which plagued many of the pietist-cultural Mennonite groups and that it maintained amiable relations with most other groups in the Molotschna including the Kleine Gemeinde. For example as early as 1843 inter-Mennonite meetings were held in Alexanderwohl.

The Alexanderwohl Gemeinde retained some relationships with the Kleine Gemeinde in that some intermarriages took place and also some Kleine Gemeinde members lived in the Molotschna village of Alexanderwohl.<sup>2</sup> In fact some similarities exist between the two groups. The Alexanderwohl Gemeinde started in Russia in 1821 with some 21 families. The Kleine Gemeinde started in 1814 with some 20 families. In the 1874 emigration the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde emigrated with some 250 families while the two Kleine Gemeinde branches which emigrated totalled some 200 families. However, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren had seceded from the Kleine Gemeinde only seven years earlier and if their 36 or more families are counted then the size of the two groups would also be more or less equal at the time of emigration. Of course the Kleine Gemeinde had also suffered heavy losses of members during the turmoil of the 1860s. It seems quite likely that the one village settlement of the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde in the Molotschna made it somewhat immune to the most severe radical pietist influences which inundated and overwhelmed so many other groups at the time. In any event the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde and the Kleine Gemeinde were the only two Molotschna Mennonite Gemeinden to emigrate from Russia en masse.

Diedrich Gaeddert was one of the prominent Alexanderwohl leaders who favoured the emigra-



tion. He maintained a diary which is a valuable source of information pertaining to the activities of those promoting the emigration. For example this diary is the source of information for the statement which Cornelius Jansen made to the Mennonite delegates at the Alexanderwohl meeting held on January 11, 1872, regarding the surrender of economic privileges in exchange for true religious freedom.

Gaeddert also recorded that on the evening following this meeting Jansen and Suderman stayed at his home where they discussed the situation at length; they finally agreed on emigration as the only solution.<sup>3</sup> This was probably the first organized action in favour of emigration on the part of these leaders. Gaeddert reports in his diary that for the first time he noticed that he was not alone in his opinion in favour of emigration. Writing in the third person he noted that "here D. Gaeddert realized clearly and permanently that he was not quite as isolated in the world in his view of the circumstances as he had thought, and rather, that in brother Jansen he had found not only a likeminded colleague, but also an enlightened thinker and leader." No doubt the fact that the prominent and well respected Alexanderwohl Gemeinde had decided to leave as a total community must have been a crucial influence on the decision of hundreds of other Molotschna families to emigrate.

The decision of the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde to emigrate was in turn largely determined by far sighted men such as the minister Dietrich Gaeddert. Although Peter M. Friesen may have criticized leaders like Gaeddert because of his opinion that they had "set themselves apart from us (the pietist-cultural Mennonites who decided to remain in Russia) in their narrow partisan Mennonite tendency" it seems that this was the one crucial factor which allowed these men to see and assess the actual facts so correctly and honestly.

### 14.03 Leonard Suderman and the Berdjansk Gemeinde

Leonard Suderman (1821-1900) was the Aeltester of the Mennonite Gemeinde at Berdjansk, the busy seaport located some 80 miles south-east of the Molotschna colony. Suderman was one of the chief promoters of the emigration movement and also a very close friend of consul Cornelius Jansen who was a grain merchant in the same city. These men were both later immigrants from Prussia to Russia. Suderman and his widowed mother settled in Berdjansk in 1843. A Mennonite Gemeinde was eventually established in Berdjansk at first as a branch of the Pordenaue Mennonite Gemeinde which in turn was one of the three Gemeinden which had originated with the Grosze Gemeinde. Later the Berdjansk Gemeinde came under the influence of pietism through the work of the Lutheran pietist pastor Edward Wuest.

By 1876 these influences had infiltrated to the point that this congregation was loathe to emigrate since they felt they could live with the new Russian laws. Consequently this congregation remained in Russia despite the impassioned plea of its Aeltester Leonard Suderman. Regrettably the congregation did not heed the call of its leader so that Suderman eventually left his congregation and emigrated to Kansas by himself. Later his former congregation became a subsidiary of the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde in the Molotschna which had been one of the first groups to openly promote the teachings of pietism in the Molotschna.

As both Suderman and Jansen were later arrivals from Prussia it would be helpful to review the developments pertaining to nonresistance in Prussia. The emigration of the Molotschna settlers in 1803 in many ways marked the demise of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in Prussia. It seems that this emigration included many of the strongest and most active members of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in Prussia so that little aggressive spirit remained among those who had stayed behind.<sup>6</sup> For example the Aeltester who replaced Peter Epp of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde, traditionally the strongest evangelical force in Prussia, had no spirit with which to fight the forces of separatist pietism. By 1848 the process among the German Mennonites had gone to the point that when the Frankfurt Parliament debated a constitutional exemption from military service for the Mennonites, it was the Mennonite representative from Kleefeld who rejected the proposal.<sup>7</sup> Many of the Mennonite emigrants to Russia such as the entire Gnadenfeld Gemeinde, were strong proponents of radical pietism and eastward chiliarism. But the erosion of full gospel principles in Prussia also inspired some Mennonites to leave Prussia. This also occurred during the 1860s when the loss of the military exemption became more and more eminent.

The authors of the book *Exiled by the Czar* explain this development as follows:

"Many urban Mennonites, especially, gave up their principle of nonresistance. Others wanted to retain it in the form of noncombatant service. Among those who were persuaded that a change of the Mennonite position was necessary, and eminently worked for it, was Jacob

Mannhardt, pastor of the Danzig Mennonite congregation and editor of the *Mennonitische Blätter*, founded in 1854. This monthly magazine, of which Cornelius Jansen was a subscriber, favored under Mannhardt the abandonment of the principle of non-resistance and the introduction of mixed marriages. In considering the question, we have to bear in mind that those who were ready to give up nonresistance were eager to obtain something else instead: the full recognition of their church, and a higher social standing for themselves. Unsatisfied with the limited corporate rights they wanted the full corporate rights which would transform their church from a sect (*Sekte*) to a free religious association (*freie Religionsgemeinschaft*).

"Jacob Mannhardt, knowing that time was in his favor, was careful enough to avoid a split between the Danzig church and the rural congregation. Yet in January, 1868, after a long period of silence as to this delicate problem, he opposed, in an editorial, the proposed noncombatant service. But when in March, 1868, the king issued an order-in-council which left to his Mennonite subjects only the alternative of either accepting the noncombatant service or leaving the country, Jacob Mannhardt and the majority of the West Prussian Mennonites considered this question settled.

"Of those who still were opposed, some emigrated to Russia as did Elder Johann Toews of the Ladekopp congregation who had been a member of the delegations to Berlin in October, 1867, and February, 1868. The rest gathered around Elder Gerhard Penner, of the Heubuden congregation, who, advised by his friend and mediator, the Baron von Brauchitsch, Klein Katz, did not yet give up, but hoped for an act of grace on the part of the king.

"Finally, the nonconforming groups had to recognize that they too had no other choice than to emigrate. On April 25, 1870, the elders and ministers assembled for a conference on this question, but no agreement was reached. Shortly afterwards, on May 3, 1870, the most determined gathered again and elected a deputation which was assigned to look for adequate location in Russia.

"When the two delegates, Elder Wilhelm Ewert of Nessau near Thorn, and Peter Dyck, minister of the Rosenort congregation, came to Berdyansk in 1870, on their extensive tour, they got the same advice which they apparently had received during their visit the year before. While they conferred with Leonhard Sudermann and Cornelius Jansen the latter insisted that they should consider an emigration to America, and advised them to send a delegation there."

Thus it happened that a small minority of the Prussia Mennonites still cherished the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith sufficiently to give up their homeland for it. However, these Prussian emigrants were more fortunate in that they were able to dispose of their properties in Prussia for a good price so that they were generally of the more wealthy of the Mennonite immigrants to America. This would indicate either that their neighbors were more benevolent than the neighbours of the Russian Mennonite emigrants or that the property which these Prussian Mennonites sold was more integrated with the general market and therefore more quickly absorbed. In this regard it is noted that the Prussian Mennonites who were not prepared to emigrate were nonetheless prepared to contribute to the cost of a delegation to America, something which would never even have been considered among the Russian Mennonites.<sup>9</sup> The foregoing explanation of the demise of nonresistance among the Prussia Mennonites is helpful in understanding the position of leaders such as Suderman and Janzen who had emigrated from Prussia some 30 years earlier largely because of the declining prospects there.

Aeltester Suderman served as the leader of the first delegation to St. Petersburg in 1871.<sup>10</sup> On his return from St. Petersburg he also visited his brother in Prussia where he attended to the printing of some of Cornelius Jansen's material promoting the emigration. By 1872 a minority group among the Russian Mennonites was working actively for the emigration. Various meetings during the year were attended by the following: Jakob Wiebe, Annenfeld, Crimea; Dietrich Gaeddart, Alexanderwohl; Heinrich Richert, Gnadenheim; and Isaac Peters, Marienthal. These men by now seemingly all favoured the emigration. On September 25 the Molotschna group met again where a decision was made to send a delegation to America. This Molotschna delegation consisting of Suderman and Gaeddart had originally planned to leave for America on February 21, 1873. However, this date was changed because Pastor Hans of St. Petersburg had influenced the delegates to make one more effort in St. Petersburg. Consequently a conference was held at Alexanderwohl on January 29th, 1873, where the rift between those in favour of emigration and those in favour of compromise became painfully evident.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout these meetings and delegations Leonard Suderman remained a strong proponent of the emigration. Towards the end of April, 1873, the Molotschna delegation was finally underway travelling through Prussia where they were joined by Wilhelm Ewert, the Prussian delegate, and Tobias Unruh and Andreas Schrag, the representatives of the Volhynian Mennonites. It is noted here that since Diedrich Gaeddart unfortunately, was unable to travel because of family circumstances, Aeltester Jakob Buller had been appointed as the Alexanderwohl delegate.<sup>12</sup>

One of the important contributions of Aeltester Leonard Suderman was his record of the experiences of the delegates as they travelled almost half way around the world on their tour of in-

vestigation. This record has been published in a small book entitled **In Search of Freedom**. He also recorded his perception of the need for the emigration and the surrounding circumstances. The following extract from the writings of Aeltester Suderman provides valuable insight into the emigration movement and the full gospel teaching of nonresistance.

“It was a serious question that confronted our Mennonite community in Russia and Prussia and brought them to the decision to send a delegation to the United States of America. We hoped to find a suitable place to preserve our evangelical beliefs and confession for ourselves and, in the future, for our children. Constant persecution had taught our fathers to regard this lowly earthly life as a pilgrimage. Nevertheless, our true shepherd has a real purpose for his own in all trials. Through them the truth has been confirmed:

Bitter treatment, rebuke and abuse

Only serve to separate the chaff from the wheat.

Drive us to Jesus and increase our courage;

Tribulation strengthens our soul.

“But often it doesn’t stop with bitter treatment, rebuke and abuse. Often it also is and was a matter of life and death. After the Reformation more than one martyr sacrificed his life at the stake because he remained loyal to his conviction of the truth, standing up for it with what was dearest to him, even his life. Although many of our fellow believers experienced great restrictions, on the other hand, others were more mercifully tolerated while rulers repeatedly changed.

“In Russia, however, we thought that further persecution had been avoided by the “eternal Privilegium” renewed by Czar Paul in 1800. But twenty-six years ago (1871) a new military law indiscriminately obligated the subjects -- including the German colonists - to military service. Because the new law created unrest, several men were sent to Petersburg in order to find out exactly, from the highest sources, whether our future had been jeopardized despite the promise of the eternal Privilegium. The answer they received was not satisfactory. At best we could expect to be excused from military service with weapons but not from alternative hospital service. But if we allowed ourselves to be drawn into such service, we would be giving tacit support to the military. We found little comfort in the information given us and the obligations imposed on us, especially since we wanted to protect our youth from the dangers involved in life in the barracks. Thus we saw our future existence in Russia decidedly in jeopardy and had to think seriously of finding a new homeland.

“This concern to find a new home became a serious and common one. Several assemblies met to discuss the subject thoroughly. At first America hardly seemed to us to be the answer to the question “Where to?” On the other hand, where in Europe was there a place for the fifty to sixty thousand Mennonites in southern Russian alone? It required no small struggle even to consider America. According to our ideas, America was a part of the earth of interest to adventurers, a haven for criminals; how, among such people, along with the coarse natives, could we even think of finding a homeland in peace under grape vines and fig trees? At best, only one who had his pockets full of loaded revolvers and expected to risk his life, if need be, would dare to go to America. But for a nonviolent community it seemed America couldn’t possibly become a suitable home. And besides, there would be the long, difficult journey across the Atlantic Ocean. What a price the ocean would demand of a group who were mostly poor and had to leave everything - even the old homeland - behind. Such thoughts and innumerable similar ones had to be overcome before it was decided to struggle with our inner objections and to take America into consideration at all.

“We attempted, however, in all seriousness to reach a decision regarding the critical situation in which we found ourselves; our choice in this important question, moreover, was and always remained very limited. Many who read this will find it hard to understand how we could make such a judgement concerning America, but how could we reach a better one from such a distance? We had little opportunity to make a favorable judgement, since what we knew was based on what was reported in the public newspapers; and even today we know from experience the nature of such reports, especially in Russia. But necessity forced us to decide, and we thought above all of investigating the matter of America immediately and as thoroughly as possible. After several important consultations, the congregations in the Molotschna and in Mariapol (now Zhdamev) and also a number of our fellow believers in West Prussia were finally agreed. Such a decision was evidence of a great concern to be faithful to our confession. In conversation with important officials in Petersburg, no one would have thought that we could come to this point in our thoughts and decisions. We were reminded of our difficulties when counts and senators said to us: Where do you want to go? America is far away and Australia is even farther.

“We answered that, with God’s help, Australia wouldn’t be too far away if we had hopes of preserving our religion and faith there. But as was shown later the people in Petersburg didn’t take seriously our decision to consider America. The decision was made in the spring of 1873; and immediately after, men were chosen from the congregations to make the journey to investigate and become acquainted with the country and the people in the new world and, in general, to form a judgment whether and where we could immediately find a suitable place for settlement for our large brotherhood under the prevailing laws. The writer of this report was one of the two men who were chosen for the trip from our special assembly in a public meeting. First, Jacob Buller, elder of the Alexanderwohl church, was commissioned to this important investigation; next, the writer of this report was chosen to accompany him. It was no pleasure trip that we were assigned to undertake, but rather

a task entrusted with serious, responsible duties. The following assignment was given to us for this purpose:

“To the honorable church Elder Jacob Buller in Alexanderwohl and Leonhard Sudermann in Berdjansk

“Dear Elders and Brethren:

“In weighing our precarious position regarding the projected compulsory military training - already known to us in its broader outlines - we, the undersigned, on the basis of the grace period of ten years granted us by our government for migrating, have designated you by vote to go to North America as deputies to find and secure for us and our followers a place there for a new home. To be sure, we leave the choice of a place and the special conditions for securing it entirely up to your judgment, but we ask you to set the following essential preconditions as first principles of any possible treaty with a country.

“(a) Legal assurance of complete freedom of religion, and the prerequisite on which we all agree and on which there can be no compromise: exemption from any kind of military service.

“(b) Land corresponding both in quality and in quantity to our needs, which have been sufficiently made known to you, whether it is free of charge or purchased at a moderate price under the easiest possible terms of payment.

“(c) Assurance of a separate community constitution with the use of the German language and our elected administration, similar to what we have enjoyed here.

“(d) Reduction of the transport fees from Russia to America, as has already been offered us by the Canadian government, would not be essential, but it would be desirable and would further the migration.

“Whatever you decide, settle, or determine for us in this affair, we obligate ourselves to whatever extent is possible to fulfill in the grace period allowed.

“Wishing to you from our hearts the support of the Lord and to your deeds, success rich in blessings, we sign. Numerous signatures”

Aeltester Suderman is not in the least apologetic about the need for the emigration to America. In the view of Suderman, the true shepherd had a purpose when trials and tribulations beset his own, namely, that the chaff be separated from the wheat. The ultimate sacrifice had been required of the martyrs and consequently the sacrifice of leaving home and prosperity could also be required of his generation. Also of interest is the view of Suderman, apparently the general opinion in Russia, that America was little more than a haven for criminals where no one dared risk his life except with a pocket full of loaded revolvers. This expressed view makes the Mennonite emigration of the 1870s even more amazing. It is noteworthy that Aeltester Suderman talks more of freedom from military service than of nonresistance.

#### 14.04 Cornelius Janzen

The most significant of the proponents of the 1870s emigration movement was Consul Cornelius Jansen. Cornelius Jansen was a prosperous Berdjansk grain merchant who was intimately connected with the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde through his marriage to Helena von Riesen, the daughter of Peter von Riesen. Through his connection by marriage with the Kleine Gemeinde, as well as otherwise, Jansen had strong sympathy for the principles of the Anabaptist Mennonite faith. His position as a well travelled grain merchant and consular official for the Prussian government made him an excellent and influential proponent of the emigration movement. The part played by Jansen in this dramatic affair has been related in the book *Exiled By The Czar*, which provides a realistic and balanced interpretation of the emigration. The reader is referred to this source for a greater in depth look at this aspect of Russian Mennonite history.

Cornelius Jansen played a crucial role in the promotion of the actual emigration by gathering information about North America. Jansen had been in correspondence with the Mennonites there since 1868. In a letter of 1870 John F. Funk, the American Mennonite publisher, writes to Jansen noting his reference in an earlier letter that some of the Mennonites were thinking of leaving Russia. Jansen also worked earnestly through American and British diplomatic officials to collect information regarding settlement conditions in America as he had in mind nothing less than a large scale mass emigration. In 1872 Jansen published a collection of writings regarding the dangers facing nonresistance in Russia and the prospects of settlement in America. This booklet, called *Sammlung von Notizen ueber America*, was distributed among the Mennonites of Prussia and Russia. It was on January 11 of the same year that Cornelius Jansen addressed a meeting of Aeltesten, ministers, and delegates at Alexanderwohl, suggesting that the Mennonites surrender some of their special commercial privileges for properly guaranteed religious freedom. The reply, bluntly recorded by Diedrich Gaeddert, was that most of those present thought that the appeal by Jansen was absurd.

The authors of *Exiled by the Czar* have recorded that Cornelius Jansen was concerned not only

for his own Mennonite brethren but also for the Russian people who were so terribly misused by their own authorities. Thus daughter Helena Jansen is quoted relating of an incident where Cornelius Jansen interceded for some native Russians who had broken with the Russian Orthodox Church and who were now being severely persecuted by the priests.

“Two Russian farmers (brothers) living in quite good circumstances had come to the conclusion that the pictures of their holy saints which every Russian family must have according to the number of children in it, were of no account. They consequently removed them from their houses all together. Of this notice was given to the priest, who, with the authority he possessed, had both of these men torn away from their wives, children and occupation and thrown into prison. My father visited them frequently, taking refreshments to them and speaking words of encouragement. These indeed they needed, for it is not an easy thing, to have in prospect the standing in the pillory, which punishment many had suffered already before them; or to be imprisoned at the time of harvest, when they were so much needed at their homes.

“The wife of one of these men asked the officer on her knees with many tears to let her husband out, only for that time, that he might reap what he had sown before he was imprisoned, but she was refused. My father interceded for her, but even his exertions were in vain. The judge said to him, ‘Had this man been a robber or murderer, he might, because of your warranty, have been liberated for this time, but one who has turned away from the *Pravoslav-naya church* which means ‘right believing Church,’ has done a crime in offense to spiritual things and cannot be helped.’ Consequently these poor men remained imprisoned until they were released by death about a year after.

“Of instances like these, I could mention many, but I will only speak of one more.

“There is in Russia a sect called ‘Besspopovitz’ which means without pope or priest. They go very seldom or not at all to the public worship of the Greek Catholic Church nor fast before Easter like the other Russians must do, but they eat vegetables, butter, milk or things with the exception of meat. Smoking or any use of tobacco is looked upon by them as a vice and is not allowed because they believe it against the Bible . . .

“Now there are two girls, also belonging to this sect; they often worked for us, and we found them to be honest and diligent persons. Once however, when my mother sent for them, their house was empty and we were told that they, with their parents, had been imprisoned for not attending any of the services connected with the Russian Church.

“My parents asked the judge with whom they were acquainted whether he could do anything for them, but he assured them he could not.

“This took place previous to our leaving Russia. After coming to this country, my mother inquired in letters about these poor girls and was informed they had been ‘sent to Siberia.’”

It was events like these which disturbed and inspired Cornelius Jansen to take up the cause and to redouble his efforts on behalf of the emigration so that as many of his Mennonite brethren as possible would be saved. Jansen also found very disturbing the rising tide of anti-German sentiment which began to be expressed in the Russian press at about this time.<sup>15</sup> As a response Jansen had five additional pamphlets printed in August of 1872 which he distributed to his friends and anyone who might be interested in the emigration or who might be able to assist in some way. His biographers assessed Jansen’s religious convictions and his view of military service and evangelical nonresistance as follows:

“From what we can gather from the preserved pamphlets and occasional passages in letters, the principle of nonresistance was not the central part of Jansen’s belief, but it was a vital part of it, and being now in danger, it automatically moved into the foreground. It was important also that for this principle of nonresistance Cornelius Jansen found a confirmation of his convictions in the teachings of the Quakers.

“For Jansen the revocation of the privileges gave to the Mennonites the opportunity to demonstrate their faith. It was his belief that Christians should witness to their faith wherever possible and as widely as possible. History now offered the Mennonites a unique occasion to bear witness. It was a great privilege that God held the Mennonites worth of suffering for the sake of peace. Speaking of this period in the life of Cornelius Jansen, John F. Funk said in the obituary he wrote of him: “In after years he remembered these trials with joy and gratitude that he was accounted worthy to suffer for Christ and his Word.”

“Cornelius Jansen’s conception of the Mennonite emigration as an act of faith implied, on the other hand, his rejection of all other motives for emigration, and also his opposition to everyone who tried to use this migration for some other purpose. This should become evident, especially later in America.

“It was valid also for Jansen’s attitude toward the non-Mennonite colonists who were stirred up by the Mennonites and part of whom also planned to emigrate, though originally they did not object to warfare for religious reasons. As soon as he was convinced of the sincerity of their intentions, he was ready to cast aside all walls of separation. This is expressed in a letter to Robson and Harvey on November 13, 1872 where he wrote: ‘I hope that in not a long future I shall be able to make such an offer as now expressed to the Mennonites also

to all colonists; because there are some among them more true to the Lord than many among the Mennonites.'

"These colonists, Germans like the Mennonites, were with the loss of their special status, threatened by Russianization. This was important in the motivation of the emigration movement. Yet, the allegation of P. M. Friesen, that for Jansen, Sudermann and others the terms 'Mennonite' and 'German' were identical, is an overstatement not founded on facts. There was, in the whole movement, probably no German nationalist motive involved although Mennonites may have lacked a full understanding and appreciation of the Russian culture. For most of the emigrants, of course, the matter of language was important, and they foresaw that with the loss of their cherished German language they would lose some vital part of their religious heritage.

"But even this fear probably did not disturb Cornelius Jansen who distributed Bibles and tracts in many languages and had always felt the necessity of spreading the Gospel among his non-Mennonite neighbors. Jansen's concern was not the language, but the freedom of his church, and it is the latter which he saw threatened by the loss of the privileges to which Russianization was only a consequence.

"Cornelius Jansen expressed his thoughts on this subject in an essay, probably prepared for publication, but which did not appear in print: 'Etwas über unsere gegenwärtigen Zustände betreff dem Wehrdienst.' Jansen sensed dangerous possibilities in the fact that the Mennonite churches would have equal rights with the Russian Orthodox Church which in a special way was protected and privileged by the Russian law. Again and again he stressed that in Russia religious freedom was not guaranteed to the Mennonites. (Appendix II).

The arguments used by Cornelius Jansen against noncombatant military service were contained in a German pamphlet distributed by him among the Mennonites in Russia, an English translation of which was published later in the Mount Pleasant, Iowa, newspaper on the occasion of some talks given there by Cornelius Jansen, *Thoughts on Indirect Military Service, As That of Artisans, Train-Drivers, The Sanitary Service*, etc. (See Appendix III).

He attacked sharply a pretended martyrdom which had to serve as an excuse for people who in spite of their scruples wanted to stay. Jansen rightly denounced these pretensions as untrue and selfish because those who now made their decisions would not reap the consequences of these acts, while their children and grandchildren would.

Jansen maintained that the Mennonites had no choice but to leave. "The only testimony we can give, is to migrate like our fathers, and that I will do, my Lord and Savior helping me; and should I be deceived in my choice, and my children come into the same distress my testimony will make it easier for them to go on again. I did not teach them to strive after riches, but they also know well that nothing, nothing could press me to leave my good and comfortable position, except to preserve for me and for them the freedom of God's children, the freedom of conscience."<sup>16</sup>

It is evident that Jansen was deeply concerned about the impending crisis for the Mennonites. By the spring of 1873 he was in the process of preparing for his own personal emigration to America. The ball was rolling and the emigration movement was underway. Although Jansen was unable to accomplish what he did without making some enemies, in the end he was able to exclaim with full inner satisfaction, "Thanks be to God, our efforts have not been in vain."<sup>17</sup>

But this endeavour would not be completed without great personal sacrifice. On March 27, 1873, a uniformed military officer accompanied by a soldier came to Cornelius Jansen and served him with the official edict of the Czar. It stated that Jansen was spreading rumours and false ideas about the conditions of the Mennonites in Russia and the emigration to America, and that he was now being banished from Russia and prohibited from ever coming back. Within two months Jansen was to sell all of his property and remove himself and his family from Russian territory. Son Peter Jansen in his *Memoirs* notes that people knew that the Jansen family had to sell and naturally took advantage of the situation. The reader is reminded that within a year this same sort of neighbourliness became standard when the main groups of Mennonite emigrants started to leave. Even friends were afraid to be seen with the members of the Jansen family for fear of attracting the attentions of the police.

An examination of the writings of Cornelius Jansen will provide additional information as to his views of the situation and the prospects for the continuation of religious freedom in Russia. The following is a manuscript found among his papers:

**"Something about our current situation with respect to the military service"**

"If we are to be able to establish a sufficiently strong barrier against the flood of the Russification in which our people now find themselves, through the new law of June 4/16, 1871 affecting the colonists, we will require an unrestricted religious freedom for the future. If we do make renewed petitions for our existence in this land, let us be very watchful in order that we might obtain such an unequivocal answer from the side of the government, that we shall not have deceived ourselves in the future, nor do we want to be deceived. If we consider the extent of the danger and the despotism to which we expose ourselves, our children and Gemeinde, in the future, and if we soberly evaluate

our circumstances, then we must come to the conclusion that, although one can presently calmly say 'there is still no need nor desire on our part to look around for anything else', ten years from now after it is too late, we will say 'but we do not want to remain here'".

"It is not predominately an inclination to make proselytes which requires that we must obtain a true freedom of religion. Instead the future existence of our Gemeinde compels us to take this position. The contract which our government here made with our forefathers long ago, has been broken by the former without asking our approval. They consider this contract to have been fulfilled and they allow us ten years during which the option of emigration is open to us if we are unable to dispose ourselves to the new circumstances (Margin note: We have no choice with respect to the acceptance of the new duties towards the government, only obedience towards the obligation). It may easily be perceived that we cannot remain in view of the circumstances which are now coming to light, if we wish to remain true to our confession, or we must enter into a new contract with the government for the future. We would do well to see to the proper foundation of the same and to be about our business in this regard. Everything which has previously been experienced here admonishes us in that way. For we would surely not want to be such thoughtless and heartless fathers who would bequeath such freedom to our children that if their inner man had not yet completely died, that they would later lament and blame us.

"A look into the future teaches us that only suffering and persecution awaits for those who wish to have a different conscience and confession. Or should we unite ourselves with those who in extreme shallowness only give thought to a good material prospect for their own person. They surrender their children to the tragedy with all sorts of meaningless excuses. I repeat out of the deepest conviction, and in the spirit of our Lord and Savior, that if we are to be able to maintain ourselves in this State, we shall require complete religious freedom, a toleration alone will not suffice.

"At first sight it appears as if the landowner is now receiving his land holding as his own as he may now dispose of the same as he pleases. Will it be possible to prevent Russians from owning land in our colonies? Are we not deceiving ourselves in this respect? Granted that for a time our Gemeinden will earnestly struggle. But will we be able to prevail? Do consider that the officials are directed in precisely this interest and plan of the government, to pursue and support the natives of the land be it secretly or openly. In a Molokaner village in our neighbourhood it was sufficient for three contentious members to go over to the Russian church in order that a church be built and maintained for them. Likewise it is well known how this was also reason for the banishing of nine Molokaner families to the Amur, from where a part of this group was exiled to northern Siberia. The same danger also exists in the future of our colonies.

"In Halbstadt the first teacher is now a Russian whereas in many other schools the Russian is an assistant teacher. But it is now related in Halbstadt that the Russian priest is spending a full day up to twice a week making visitations there. Naturally the teacher will not delay in making his influence felt by the children. Even if the religious instruction is provided by one of our brethren, it will remain open for such a one to frequently make substitutions for our truths. How can such questionable circumstances be permitted?

"It is inevitable that priests will eventually also live in our villages with an unrestricted freedom to recruit for the State church. Our ministers will have no similar rights and, in fact, will constantly have to fear that they do not offend the law of the land, paragraph 58, which provides that 'A believer of a foreign faith who misleads any Russian from his faith, without regard to the case or pretense under which this may occur, and regardless of the faith to which the one who is misleading belongs, such a one is immediately to be put under watch and to be given over to a Judge together with the convert' (Crossed out: Will our ministers consequently not shortly be shepherds without flocks? Would to God that I am deceiving myself with the thought that in view of the passions created during the current land disputes, there are more than a few who, if they do not eventually obtain what they believe is rightfully theirs, are more than capable of effecting this unavoidable ruin upon their own people in short order).

"With eyes enlightened by spiritual truth, even though only in a weak clarity, we can easily perceive the veracity of the foregoing. But if one considers the sacrifice which such a categorical decision in a most serious matter will cost, then one gladly hopes for a somewhat more favourable conclusion to the matter. It is easier to be comforted and led by generally pleasant thoughts that, 'the matter can never become so serious', or 'if this or that man who is very decent, and rich in addition, is completely calm, are we poor people to leave first?'

"The most glaring examples from the Baltic provinces stand as an earnest admonition to us, and point out that which is awaiting for us, when after ten years the closing of the doors will occur. Notwithstanding all of the foregoing we want to remain blind to the danger. Nor do we try to maintain ourselves through a new fundamental revival of our faith. And if this is not acceptable then we must make the same decision that thousands of our ancestors have often done, in hardship and sorrow, by leaving behind all their earthly possessions. In the example of King David we must say in the face of danger, 'Arise and let us flee; for we shall not escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword'. Samuel 15, 14. And in verse 16 it says, 'And the king went forth and all his household after him'.

"The Word of God is the root of all Christian piety and not a single letter of this Word shall pass away, even if heaven and earth disappear. Out of thankfulness and love the Christian gladly

exerts himself within the confines of these Godly laws. Love is the fulfillment of the law, love of God and love of fellow man. But even indirect military service (Margin Note: And remaining there in any event is an acknowledgement and a witness of the possibility of departure) infringes upon this commandment through the evil requirement of such a law. Not only the ones who are performing such service but all of us, will become responsible, if we do not definitely attempt to protect our innocent children from this reality. For we are in danger of losing the heavenly kingdom if we aid in the diminishing of even one evangelical proscription even if it appears to be very trivial. How much more punishment will we not have to suffer (Margin note: as in this case) where the highest law, the law of love, is being violated.

'In no case are we to be understood that by rejecting military service, even indirectly, we are commanded to maintain a non-participating and non-involved manner during the calamity of war; if the Lord should allow such an event to take place because of the hardness of the hearts. No indeed! Quite to the contrary. In such lamentable circumstances we would find ourselves obligated, and in all earnestness admonish ourselves and our brethren, to do everything within our power to assist the suffering humanity and to help alleviate the unspeakable sorrow and heartrending hardships of war.'<sup>18</sup>

The foregoing provides an intimate look at the thoughts of consul Cornelius Jansen with respect to the emigration movement. His analysis of Russian society and the state of freedom of religion in that society is chillingly accurate when viewed with the benefit of hindsight. Although his primary concern is the principle of nonresistance which he has eloquently expressed as a principle of love, he has also considered this issue on the basis of the general climate of oppression and despotism so evident in Russia for anyone who was able to see beyond the confines of his own particular village. He is concerned about the use of the German language among the Russian Mennonites but only as one aspect of the whole question of religious freedom, and not in nationalistic fervor as was later sometimes the case.

This also explains why many of the Russian Mennonites were unable to accept the compromise, by which they would be able to perform alternative forestry service in place of military service, which Tottleben offered them in 1874. Although their principle of non-resistance was largely protected by this alternative service proposal, they had by now given deep consideration to the wider question of the prospects of freedom of religion in Russia.

Cornelius Jansen was one of the courageous and heroic men who risked life and property to bring this question to the attention of those of their Mennonite brethren who were still capable of hearing and heeding an objective and sober appraisal of the society in which they lived and prospered. The recommendation of Consul Cornelius Jansen was, "Arise and let us flee". The fact that several thousand Molotschna Mennonites were persuaded to leave behind much of their earthly possessions and cast their lot with a new and uncertain future speaks for the undaunted efforts of leaders such as Dietrich Gaedert, Leonard Suderman, and Cornelius Jansen.

#### 14.05 The Bergthal Mennonite Gemeinde

The Bergthal Gemeinde was one of the mainline Anabaptist Mennonite groups in Russia. A review of the history of this Gemeinde will be helpful to a consideration of its position relative to the emigration movement. The Bergthal settlement, located some 60 miles southeast of the Molotschna, was founded in 1836 by 145 families from the Chortitza "Old Colony" settlement. The Bergthal colony developed in response to a land shortage in the Chortitza colony and was established with assistance from its mother colony. Accordingly it was the first Mennonite daughter settlement in Russia.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding some difficult years the settlement was relatively successful. It was moderately progressive and had a well developed educational system and its own independent municipal government. The Bergthal settlement had been constituted as a separate Gemeinde from the start acquiring its own Aeltester when Jakob Braun (1791-1868) was ordained in 1840.<sup>20</sup>

The Bergthal colony was in many ways the mirror image of its Chortitz mother colony. It never had a Johan Cornies who would push for economic improvement or educational reform no matter what the cost. On the other hand Bergthal, like the mother colony, never had to suffer through the oppression of someone like Oberschulz Friesen. Nor did these settlements ever have to endure cultural reactionaries like Aeltester Jakob Warkentin or Heinrich Wiens as had been the case in the Molotschna. Although the first several decades of the Chortitza settlement were characterized by religious strife it seems that by the time that the Molotschna colony was founded in 1804 the worst of these adjustments had been made. Certainly Chortitza never had to suffer from the leadership of a man like Aeltester Jakob Enns whose response to reformers like Klaas Reimer or a popular secular leader such as Klaas Wiens, was simply to excommunicate them. Similarly it seems that the economic oppression of the poor in Chortitza never reached the extremes that were found in the Molotschna. It is evident that the socio-economic and religious tradition of the Chortitzer never reached the extremes of the



Molotschna.

The Bergthal colony was somewhat removed from the mainstream of Russian Mennonite life and consequently the new settlement developed largely on its own. This independent development was blessed with the more moderate influences found in the Chortitza mother colony. It seems that a greater emphasis on evangelical teachings, such as community of property, and more moderate religious leadership, allowed the Bergthalers to escape the worst of the social turmoil which resulted from the oppression of the poor and the inroads of pietism among the Mennonites elsewhere in Russia.

Thus we have a picture of the Bergthal Gemeinde emerging as a moderately progressive and tightly knit group with a strong independent Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Its spiritual motif was based very much on the passing down of the religious traditions of the forefathers from one generation to the next. This was in contrast to the faith of the Kleine Gemeinde which to a greater degree was based on a continual study and re-interpretation of the original Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. But then the Bergthaler did not have to struggle on a daily basis in the midst of a Mennonite society in which certain elements were prepared to go to any length to negate and avoid the teaching of the full gospel faith. All in all, the history of Bergthal, compared to that of both its mother colony Chortitza, and the strife ridden Molotschna, was a relatively peaceful one.

One of the most important reasons for this spirit of moderation was leadership. Foremost of these, was Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) who was elected as Aeltester of Bergthal in 1866.<sup>21</sup> Wiebe became one of the important leaders of the emigration movement. While the Molotschna had men like Suderman, Gaeddert, and Jansen to counteract the short-sighted tunnel vision of men like pastor Hans and Aeltester Jakob Wiebe of Karasan, Crimea, no equivalent leaders favouring the emigration came forward in the Chortitza Colony.

It seems as if the leaders of Chortitza were quite content to remain in Russia. It appears that Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe had to step into this void and provide leadership for those from the Chortitza mother colony, as well as those from another daughter colony known as Fürstenlandt which had been established in 1863, who were interested in emigration.

The decision of the Bergthaler to emigrate was keenly felt in the Chortitza colony and the new Fürstenlandt colony through the close family connections which these people had with the Bergthaler. As a result a large part of the Fürstenlandt settlement and a sizeable contingent from the Chortitz mother colony eventually decided to emigrate under the leadership of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe. The fact that Aeltester Wiebe was the only one of the Russian Mennonite leaders to be honoured by a personal audience with the Czar certainly speaks for the influence which this venerable leader and his group had among the Chortitzer people.

It should be noted that the emigration movement would have been crippled had the Czar been successful in persuading Gerhard Wiebe and his Gemeinde to remain in Russia. This would have eliminated some 3,000 souls or about 15 percent of the total from the emigration. Indeed this would have removed the largest single group which emigrated as an organized body. A Bergthaler decision to remain in Russia would have meant that most of the Fürstenlaender and Chortitzer who emigrated would have made a similar decision. The remainder of those in favour of emigration could then have been very successfully branded and portrayed as fanatical agitators and dissidents. It becomes evident that the emigration would have been reduced to a mere trickle if the Czar had been successful in reversing the resolve of the Bergthaler.

Indeed the meeting of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe and the Czar of Russia takes on a completely new significance when seen in this light. In the tradition of Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe also had the foresight to record some of his views and experiences for posterity. In these writings Wiebe has included the story of his meeting with the Czar as well as some of his thoughts and reflections relative thereto. The account is vivid and touching - the Czar actually receiving and talking to the Aeltester more like a brother than as a subject. Indeed, the "lowly" Bergthal Aeltester would never have allowed himself to dream that he would ever be so favoured and would gladly have done without the honour. The account of this memorable meeting is included here in order to highlight the drama and the significance of this event.

"Then the door opened and the adjutant said, 'Come in to appear before the Czar.' I pulled my handkerchief to dry my tears and His Majesty saw this as I stopped before him. Suddenly His Majesty stood before me and said, 'You are now standing before the Czar, so be careful what you say; and if you make a mistake today, then you are responsible for what happens to you.'

'But what happened? My dear Lord Jesus fulfilled His words, which he had said 1800 years ago, and He took, His cast-down servant in His arms and pressed him to His breast. Yes, I cannot describe it, because such a love for His Majesty rose up in me, that I could stand before him without

fear or alarm, and look at him lovingly. Yes, the Lord's Spirit had so encompassed me, that Satan could not touch my heart with his arrows of terror. I, poor worm, cannot praise, thank and honor my Lord enough for his mercy and gifts to me.

"Now His Majesty asked, 'Have you faithfully presented to your church what I proposed to you?' 'Yes, your Majesty,' I replied. 'I have.'" "And what did the church say?" "Pardon me, Your Majesty, the church requests permission to emigrate." This he asked me three times, and the third time I said, 'Pardon me, Your Majesty, but God in heaven is my witness, that I thus presented it to the church.' Then he spoke some more, but I was quiet except when an answer was really necessary. Suddenly he said, 'Why don't you speak?' 'Pardon me, Your Majesty, I am unable.' 'Why can you not?' 'I have understood what your Majesty has said that were I to make one mistake, things would go very badly with me. I am an imperfect and uneducated man and know that I make errors with almost every word, but knowingly I would not make a mistake before Your Majesty.' Thereby tears of love ran down my cheeks and I looked at him so lovingly, that he seemed suddenly so moved by God that he grasped a chair and said, 'Sit down, *Aeltester*, and do not be afraid. You will make no mistake.' I still stood quietly, but I noticed that God's hand had touched him through and through. Now he said again, 'Please sit down.' Whereupon I replied, 'I count myself too unworthy to sit in Your Majesty's presence.' He urged me again and so I sat down, but without fear or alarm I had been preserved by God's protection.

"But he still wanted to be victorious over this poor servant, and so the wicked enemy had thought up another trick whereby he could catch this weak servant in the end. The Lord withdrew His hand somewhat in order to test his weak servant. Hence, Satan was able to terrify my heart once more and push me to accept the next offer, namely, the church now was free. But now he attacked me personally and said, 'Now you have permission to ask something for yourself and your children. Whatever you ask will be granted. Ponder that.' A second time he asked, 'Do you understand me? You have permission to ask something for yourself and for your children, and whatever you ask shall be granted.'

"When he asked the second time, a great fear fell upon me. Now I had been led to the top of a mountain, and shown the riches of this world and Satan also suggested to me what I should ask for: freedom from military service for my children and children's children and also a few thousand dessiatin of land. All this Satan whispered to me and I might have succumbed to his temptation, had not the Lord's hand suddenly grasped me, because time for decision was short, and I still had no answer. But in this tribulation my wounded heart cried and asked him to teach me what I should say, when His Majesty would ask for a third time. And when he repeated the above for the third time, he added, 'And surely you will not reject this offer of the Czar.' At these last words the Lord's hand grasped me and God's Spirit gave me the words to speak, and I said, 'Pardon me, Your Majesty, have I, an imperfect man, the right to ask Your Majesty a question?' 'Yes,' he said. 'For example,' I said, 'a large landowner has a large herd of sheep and wants to travel for an indefinite time. He lets his chief shepherd come to him and tells him. 'Now I put the herd in your charge, but here you have my guidelines for herding the sheep. I expect that you will herd my flock on a wholesome pasture, in order than no disease enters the herd.'

"But now the chief shepherd thinks of himself: my lord won't return for a long time, and so he puts the charge of the sheep into the hands of assistants, and goes on a journey himself also; and the sheep are endangered thereby. Suddenly, the landowner returns and the chief shepherd, is not with the flock. What is he going to do with the chief shepherd, when he returns from his trip?' 'He would severely punish him,' was the answer. 'And what would the King of all kings say to me on that great Judgment day, should I as chief shepherd desert my flock?'

"'You may emigrate,' the Czar responded, but quite gently, and again the angel of the Lord had saved His weak servant. 'Now you have your permission,' and so I rose and he also. Now a poor and weak farmer stood before his Majesty, whose uniform shone with pure gold and silver, as well as many medals and decorations on his chest, and the sword in its sheath, and yet I was completely without fear because Jehovah's angel was at my side. Therefore I dared to ask His Majesty whether I would have permission and the honor to give my hand to His Majesty in order to say farewell. 'Yes,' he said, and stretched his hand out to me, and I grasped it. The angel of the Lord taught me to speak, but what all was said, I can't recall anymore; however, finally I took both of us to the throne of God that He might grant that we could meet each other there, then likely the barrier between us would not be as great as here. Even though it were, I would not care, as long as I could have even the lowliest place in heaven. When I had completed my farewell, he said to me, 'With a man such as you are, things cannot go well. You will become a despised and rejected man, because the world has never repaid such men otherwise.' Thereupon I said, 'Pardon me, Your Majesty, but I must submit and accommodate myself to whatever God has determined for me.'

"Now I drove to the official again, who had awaited me with some trepidation, because he was fond of me as of all the Berghaler, and his first question was, 'Well, how did you fare?' 'Very well, sir' I replied. 'I am glad to hear that,' he replied. But we hadn't ended the conversation when the Czar's servant came in and said to the official, 'You are to come to see the Czar immediately.' 'What does this mean?' he asked, and turning to me said, 'You remain seated,' and with that he rushed to see the Czar. In a few minutes he was back again. He told me, 'You have been harshly accused before the Czar in writing, for the charge states that you are the lone agitator of the emigration move-

ment. But do not despair, this time I can help again. 'Meanwhile his secretary had found the book in which the man's name was 'black listed'. He rushed back to show it to the Czar, and told him what sort of man my accuser was. Soon the official returned and said, 'The Czar said that if you wished you could come to him, and then this man shall go where neither sun nor moon will shine upon him.' But the Lord gave me such a loving heart towards this man, so that I said, 'God be thanked and praised for the mercy He has shown to my unworthy being; should I then bring another into such great misery? Please go and tell His Majesty that I have forgiven the man and ask on my behalf that His Majesty also forgive this man and to be generous to him.' Thereupon His Majesty has responded in words which I don't know and which are of no significance to me . . . Now I could ride home in peace with the driver, and tell the brethren that they could prepare for the emigration in peace.'"<sup>22</sup>

Many descendants of the Russian Mennonites will find the reflections of the venerable Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe a breath of fresh air compared to some of the writings set forth in the previous chapter. Certainly the faith of this leading Aeltester has little in common with that of the pietist-cultural Mennonites whose writings are filled with pious declarations that this or that group does not have a "joyous knowledge of God's grace", or that such and such a narrow minded Mennonite lacks an understanding of Christianity or that a certain social reformer is an atheist, etc. Indeed, Aeltester Wiebe has little in common with those who would judge the validity and substance of the salvation of an individual according to the degree or volume of verbal self-profession. It is further evident that the Aeltester was not one of those who assumed they were better Christians or superior Mennonites because they sang four part harmony, or could emulate German culture better or because their number included a handful of very wealthy barons who lived in opulent mansions in a land of devastating poverty. Some observers find it lamentable that some of the pietist-cultural Mennonite leaders were seemingly so deficient in the full gospel humility and realism which is evident in the writings of the Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe. How different Russian Mennonite history would have been if leaders such as Aeltester Jakob Enns, Aeltester Bernhard Fast, Oberschulz David Friesen or P. M. Friesen had also possessed an evangelical balance in their spiritual constitution.

To the Russian leadership the experience of meeting with the Bergthal leaders must have been a pleasant one compared to the continual petitions and counter-petitions which were received from the Molotschna. Here was a group which still practised its faith. When the Chortitza Brandordnung decided that there was no need to pay in full a fire loss in Bergthal, the long suffering Bergthaler simply settled for less. When a few of the more well-to-do in Bergthal were unhappy with the terms of sale of the Bergthal villages the leaders such as Aeltester Wiebe and Oberschulz Peters simply reduced the share which they had coming in order that the complainers could be paid what they demanded. Aeltester Wiebe has also recorded that these false brethren who threatened to sue if their claims would not be paid, thereby jeopardizing the emigration, left the Bergthal group in Canada settling in Minnesota instead.<sup>23</sup>

It must have been pleasant for Russian leaders such as General Totleben to interview the Bergthal leaders and to find that as a matter of course they had already made complete arrangements to take all their poor, sick, and old people along to Canada, that the debt owing to the widows and orphans were to be honoured by the Waisenamt, and in fact, that the majority of the well-to-do were prepared to write off the money owing to them in order that the whole community could emigrate.<sup>24</sup> By uniting in a personal prayer with Aeltester Wiebe, the Czar no doubt reflected a respect and love for his subjects who had truly lived out the gospel and whose knowledge of evangelical teachings was not just brought to the fore when it was convenient or when a crisis loomed ominously on the horizon.<sup>25</sup>

The earnest faith and applied theology of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe was also apparent in the peace and unity of his own Gemeinde. In the view of Aeltester Wiebe the pomp and so-called culture which was to pass for Christian piety among some of the Mennonite groups in Russia was a great enemy of evangelical faith.

"Therefore, presumptuousness comes first, then pride, ostentation and arrogance, and this was already happening to us, because we already drove in large, magnificent buggies and coaches, and when we passed the native Russians, they hardly knew whether we were aristocrats or only German farmers. That is how the farmers had already changed, and this led to our downfall, for God grants grace only to the humble, but He resists the arrogant. It is true, the spirit of the time had captivated us so much, and become so much a part of us, yet we thought ourselves to be the same humble and lowly people who had emigrated to Russia eighty years earlier. Yes, we were of the same stock, but our hearts and minds had been transformed into arrogance. The time had come that the Lord had to humble these children of the immigrant fathers and this time was close at hand."<sup>26</sup>

In another section of his book Aeltester Wiebe compares the situation of the Mennonites with that of the children of Israel whenever they abandoned the teachings of their faith.

“The writer begs you the reader to discover whether he can find one instance where, when priests and kings followed closely the teachings of the Lord, it ever went badly for Israel. But we find exactly the opposite everywhere, how poorly Israel fared, when kings acted against the teachings of the Lord and His faithful priests; and when Israel had become utterly depraved through the false kings and false priests, she was rejected by God.

“But the reader must not think that they did not have the Lord’s teaching any more; no, they had it, but through their worldly-wise ones and false prophets and priests they mixed truth and falsehood so thoroughly that it finally became utter deceit and pretence. In addition they became greedy and squeezed almost the last pennies out of the poor. As the Lord when He was on earth said to the scribes and Pharisees: You hypocrites who devour the widows’ houses and recite long prayers, you will earn damnation all the more, according to Matthew 23.”<sup>27</sup>

In the view of Aeltester Wiebe the speech and elaborate prayers of some of the pietist cultural Mennonites in Russia were beautiful but the actions and deeds spoke a different language. In his perception the self-exaltation and class consciousness of some of the Russian Mennonites, even though a handful were wealthy and some had a year or two of additional “Bible” schooling, should not be found among those who partake of the same bread and drink of the same spiritual wine, as he explains in the following passage:

“Yes, dear reader, we have all been baptized with one baptism and partake together of the same bread and drink the wine spiritually as the blood of Jesus Christ. So, if anyone in the congregation elevates himself, seeks after high honor and wishes to rule, that person is no longer a church member according to Christ’s teaching, and churches shall not tolerate such people as you can read in the apostolic epistles.”<sup>28</sup>

In his view the matter of supreme importance was that the Bergthaler at the time “were one heart and one soul because all, whether rich or poor, said: Even if we don’t get the best land, as long as we can get a spot where we can feed ourselves and our children, and above all where we can follow our faith according to God’s word . . .”<sup>29</sup>

The apparent wealth and prosperity of a small minority of the pietist-cultural Mennonites who remained in Russia was largely an illusion, for under the surface a great spiritual poverty was painfully evident. Aeltester Wiebe compares the matter with the church at Laodicea which the angel describes in Revelations “A large number are in a state of mind, as the Angel said to John in Revelation; You say you are rich. I have prospered and I need nothing, not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. Yes, the church has become very arrogant through pride, and has tired of the simple gospel; this also happened to the children of Israel in the desert with the manna when they said: “We are nauseated by it.”<sup>30</sup> In another section of his book Aeltester Wiebe goes on to explain the disease which had attacked the Mennonite church: “Oh, dear reader, how many are puffed up nowadays, who with derisive arrogance turn away from the old church, and exhibit such pious behavior as though they were the people with whom true wisdom and godliness will die; and oh, how painfully one must observe that precisely these defectors leave the most regrettable trails behind them . . .”<sup>31</sup>

It is evident that Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, like Consul Cornelius Jansen, looked at the wider socio-economic and religious currents sweeping around the Russian Mennonites. From the vantage point of the relative serenity and tranquility of the Bergthal settlement, Gerhard Wiebe was clearly able to discern that the long term prospects for the Mennonite brotherhood in Russia were not good. As a consequence he led his people through the apparently foolish decision to give up the greatest part of their material wealth for an uncertain future of poverty and struggle.

Through it all Gerhard Wiebe never wavered nor lost his faith in the leading and providence of his Savior. His faith is exemplified by his reference to the following words of Jesus where he says “My kingdom is not of this world, and again; whoever shall humble himself as this child, he shall obtain the kingdom of God, and; whoever has faith in the words that I speak and acts accordingly, he will be saved.”<sup>32</sup> This concludes a look at the philosophy of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe and the Bergthal Gemeinde of Russia relative to the emigration movement.<sup>33</sup>

#### **14.06 Abraham F. Thiessen, A Child of the Kleine Gemeinde**

The view and experience of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde relative to the emigration movement will be dealt with in chapter fifteen. Of course the decision to emigrate was not made solely on the basis of the principle of nonresistance. Also essential to the decision was the perception which the Kleine Gemeinde and other emigrants had of the Mennonite society in which they lived and of the general Russian world which enveloped their fortunate cultural island. The alternative service

proposals which Totleben offered in 1874 might have been acceptable to the various Anabaptist-Mennonite groups but by now they had been forced to seriously evaluate the society in which they lived. If the representatives of the Czar could mislead him to break his word (Privilegium) even this once, then what guarantee could be given that he would not do so again?

The Kleine Gemeinde was in a unique situation in this regard being organized into four congregations spread out in four separate locations in Russia. Through travelling and letter writing, connections in the Russian government administration and friends like Consul Cornelius Jansen, it was impossible for the Kleine Gemeinde to close its eyes to the injustice, misery and poverty all around the Mennonite islands of wealth. What was most important was that this suffering and injustice was accepted as a fact of life by the Russian society, an attitude which was mirrored by the separatist pietists whose teachings had great influence on the Mennonites. This was not a healthy society where freedom of religion would continue for any great length of time. Abraham F. Thiessen was the courageous social reformer who also favoured the decision to emigrate and who worked zealously to promote the same. The reader will recall that in 1874 Abraham F. Thiessen was banished to a Siberian labour camp for his efforts on behalf of his downtrodden brethren in the Molotschna. When he was able to buy his way out of this prison in 1876 and make good his escape to America he wrote a book regarding his views of Russian society and the prospects of freedom of religion within that society. Thiessen was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde in Jansen, Nebraska, and the views he expressed with respect to Russian society can be taken as representative of that group. In his booklet entitled **Die Lage der Deutschen Kolonisten in Russland** he first explains the reason for his action in taking up the cause of the emigration. He starts his explanation with the verse, "If they persecute you in one city, then flee to another." Thiessen then goes on to explain the reason for his action.

"The leading of God is undefinable and often we humans only recognize later what has been required of us", is what an acquaintance on the road called out to me on April 22, 1874. This was the day when without any investigation I was seized and transported away in a manner which does not even occur with thieves and murderers in other European states. That I was not locked into chains with murderers and forced to walk all the way to my place of banishment cost me 400 rubles. During the two years of my banishment these words now and again came to mind and I frequently wondered: Could this banishment coupled with the theft of all my property, without even a notion on my part of the cause of all this, serve any useful purpose?

While I was pursuing my rights from my place of banishment, by lawful means on the one hand, I quickly received an interest in the affairs of my surroundings on the other hand. I diligently gathered notes with respect to everything which I learned to know. However all this material was confiscated from me, and I had to experience that through this I had definitely worsened my circumstances.

Now that I have miraculously been able to escape, I have come to the question. What was the result of all of this? There can be only one answer: 'I have learnt to know Russia.' And this has inspired me to inform the German colonists, and especially my Mennonite brethren, through this brochure, about some of the things which I have come to learn about Russia in the preceding two years.

In order to achieve a true comprehension regarding the present, one must have a knowledge of the past, and only from the past and the present can one arrive at a true conclusion for the future. Therefore I will address the following questions. Firstly, how did we come to Russia? Secondly, what is our current status? And thirdly, what should we do now?"<sup>34</sup>

The foregoing quotation explains the cause of Abraham F. Thiessen as well as the purpose of his writing. It is unfortunate that the entire booklet cannot be reproduced here, as the whole work is written forcefully and earnestly as only one can who has tasted the bitter subject of his exposition. Nevertheless a lengthy quotation will provide the reader with the main thrust of Thiessen's forceful advocacy. In his work Thiessen has been referring to all the restrictions which the Russian government had decided to impose on the Mennonite settlements as well as the provision that the door for emigration will be open only until 1881. He then continues:

"That the government wishes to keep us in Russia is evidenced by the numerous officials and spies who are swarming around everywhere at the expense of the Crown. Through the interdiction and suppression of foreign mail, the eviction of various foreigners, through the interception of emigration agents, and through the offering of bribes and threats they make this evident. In fact, the Lieutenant-General von Totleben made promises to Mennonite ministers in the name of the government if they would persuade their members to remain in Russia. I will not reveal when and to whom these offers were made by Totleben for to do so would be to abandon these men to revenge. i.e. the lash and death by starvation in banishment as I have not yet been advised that these people are already out of Russia. However, reliable folks can obtain more definite information from me at any time.

"The ridiculous watching of the Germans in Russia, by public and uniformed police as well as

secret agents, has already cost the government thousands of rubles. I have read the letter of one Menonite who emigrated to America who wrote, 'I had to get away from Russia because all my business letters were either being opened or stolen completely, and I also received some as much as six months later.'

"But Russia would rather do all of this - granted, without the knowledge and will of the Czar - than to allow the Germans to continue to live in Russia in the way in which they have already lived in Russia for so many years. Either become Russian or leave. A true government for Russia should still make the same decision as a hundred years ago, call German farmers to Russia at any price and accord to them all possible freedoms in order that none of them would leave.

"One can only come to a comprehension of how everything in Russia has been prostrated from one who has personally been in the Russian heartland. I have seen Russian farm villages where not one single horse remained in existence and the last one had been seized in order to cover the levies of the Crown. There is often not a single house in the entire village which is worth 25 rubles, and the entire farm machinery of the Russian farmer even in the more prosperous villages is not worth 5 rubles. Indeed, I know of instances where the crown levy in arrears of the farmer totalled 70 rubles and where two horses and the cow together with all the farm equipment were seized and this did not even cover half the debt. That there can be little talk of working the acreage under such circumstances can easily be understood.

"The total of the delinquent crown levies already comes to many millions. The other amount of debt is even greater. This represents redemption money which the free peasant now must pay to the noblemen in accordance with the emancipation law of 1861. For some 49 years. Nevertheless the noblemen records interest owing on interest and then he laughs into his fist, when the emancipated farmers now have to work for him for half a year just to pay for the interest. However the debt remains and cannot be expunged in a thousand years. Unless if the debt would shortly be expunged through a revolution. The noble has gained much through the emancipation of the farmers. He now allows the farmer to work off the interest and then as soon as the work is finished he lets them go. Prior to 1861 he at least had to feed them the year round.

"The harsh measures which will be employed in order to bring in the Crown levies are shown by the following experiences. In Maszalszk the keeper of the city summoned 13 chairmen of the farmers to the police in March of 1875. Every chairman is elected by 4000 to 8000 souls. These 13 were given a tongue lashing by the police with words which any German would be ashamed to repeat. When the chairmen fell on their knees and begged for patience, because they were unable to obtain anymore money from the farmers, the keeper of the city screamed out to his soldiers, "Spear these dogs for me and confine them for seven days". A 60 year old grey haired man who sought to obtain grace from the keeper of the city through the kissing of his feet received a boot in his teeth for his efforts and the words, "Away with you cow (skotino)". All 13 of them were confined in a hole which was 1½ fathom in cubic dimension (9 feet by 9 feet by 9 feet) where they nearly suffocated. The keeper of the city had the right to impose this punishment against Oberschulzen who did not have any right of appeal. When the Oberschulzen were released there was a terrible hewing of all the farmers who could be found at home.

"Fortunately there are seldom more than five per cent of the farmers at home. Should such a farmer all at once come from his work in order to be with his wife and children for a few weeks, then he must immediately surrender all his money first for the Crown, secondly for the noblemen, and thirdly for those from whom nothing more can be obtained by the imposition of the whip. In accordance with the law of February 1860 the farmers are jointly liable for each other. Should such a returned farmer come under suspicion that he had not yet given up all of his money, and what father would not commit the sin of trying to secret away a few rubles for his children, he is not safe for an instant, but that he will be deprived of his children and taken under arrest in their presence.

"The law provides that 20 lashes can be given to any farmer without right of appeal and after 1881 also to any colonist. But if the one who is being punished is too poor to grease the one performing the sentence in advance, then he receives countless lashes. I myself have counted 168 lashes where only 20 were ordered. Should the farmers suddenly be sensitive and prosperous enough so as to complain about such despotism then matters go for them as they did in Kurszk. Here the police inspector Michajew had ordered such whippings way back in 1871. The one who was mistreated was occupied in pursuing his complaints for some five years. Finally in April of 1876 the matter came before the court. Many witnesses testified that instead of 20 the farmer had received up to 200 lashes, during which whipping one man had sat on the head and one man on the feet of the farmer. Even after five years scars which had grown together revealed that the man had been gruesomely stripped of his flesh. But what happened before the judge? Because the doctor who had been called as an expert witness would not take it on his conscience to say whether the scars came from the lawful 20 lashes or the unlawful 180 lashes the judge pronounced Michajew to be innocent.

A truly Russian twisting of the law. It was no concern of the law which lashes had left behind the evidence of the crime, for the law was to punish Michajew because he had given more than 20 lashes. The punishment had been given in the first place because the farmers in 1870 had refused to continue to labour as serfs. This is to say, 10 years after the emancipation (Petersburger Herald, N.134, 1876). Gentlemen like Professor Treitschki should at least make one trip through the Russian farming villages. Then they would be healed of all sympathy for the deeply cutting reforms of Alex-

ander II which were to open new vistas for the people (See the June edition of **Prussian Yearbook 1876 Turkey and the Great Powers**).

“Whether a revolution, for which two parties are agitating with astounding diligence, can accomplish something better for Russia, I do not know. But a terrible overthrow is developing because of the current despotism. And the longer it takes the more frightful it will be when the situation breaks. The noble who perceives himself to be eliminated from the most desirable state offices by the residents from the Baltic provinces strives for a government similar to that of the English. They called themselves the adherents of the Dekrabisten (the men of the Decembrist uprising of 1825). Through the work of this group each Russian newspaper uses every anti-German word to inflame its readers like a spark in a container of gun powder.

“I can only judge the other party according to their brochures of which I have read 78 with different contents. This party wants to create a state in which all people have equal rights, abolition of personal property, equal educational opportunities for all at the expense of the state, equal hours of employment for all, and the abolition of all classes and a government elected by the people. All people are to be citizens. I found the anti-Germanism in the brochures to be noteworthy. If one would judge according to the contents of these brochures then the hatred of Germans among this party is at least as great as among the other party, while a great sympathy for the French exists in both parties.

“Anyone who has the opportunity to come to experience as much as I have about the barbarism and the unspeakable misery in Russia can only look forward to the overthrow of everything which is presently existing, by whichever party will make the first move. Matters cannot get worse than they are at present. Then Europe will be made aware of what is secretly carried on in the cellars of Russia. For example, the almost rotten corpses of eight men were found in a vault this February in St. Petersburg. These men had a heavy chain around their neck and the other end was mortared into the wall. The Russian papers in astonishment wrote that this still originated from the “Sweden” era. Of course this is how they are obligated to write under the censor and the lash. For it is not that strange that these eight men were forgotten there. In Russia there are hundreds who are banished and then forgotten. There is no other word for a 24 year banishment without trial nor judgement. However, another time will come when with similar skeletons it will be said that they originate from the era and practice when Alexander II was theoretically on the throne.

In spite of all reforms, which are seemingly only enacted in order that Europe shall perceive a certain state of civilization in Russia, everything remains as it has been for a hundred years. Thousands are sitting in dismal dungeons, thousands are languishing in banishment. In both cases there has been neither a trial nor a verdict. I came to know a man whose brother had been held in the Peter-Paul fortress for years. Although he was never mistreated he was never given a trial. When he was finally released and he wanted to know the cause of his confinement, he was simply told, “Go away or matters will go even worse for you! This man also related that off and on the most horrifying screams of pain could be heard in this fortress. But always only at night. In these places people are bayoneted, lashed, and murdered. The latter is meant only for those who are no longer to be freed in order that they do not tell any tales.

A German by the name of Streicher had already been in the place from which I was able to escape for 23 years. Another man for 14 years. A Caucasian prince Tawayo-Tayo Anshibadschi came there somewhat later than I. Then the guard took away his money (120 rubles) and when he was disgruntled about this they put him into the lock-up on the grounds of mutiny. No one could speak with him because he did not understand any Russian. But the money which the government allows for the board of every criminal was also stolen from him, and if I had not supported the man he would have been left for dead on the street from starvation. This actually occurred to a student who was in such a circumstance. Some of those who were banished in 1875, having been released from life-long forced labour through an act of clemency, wrote to the **Parisian** as follows: “As God is our witness, we spend entire days without any nourishment. Having been released from everything after twelve years of suffering, we are too poor even to buy a piece of bread. We are without clothes and after we have endured a journey of over 3000 werst, we find that our situation is far more terrible than the forced labour was where we at least had bread and a place to stay. Hunger and cold, which falls as low as 40 degrees, will kill us if God does not send someone to save us.

This case originates from Vologda and that is considered as grace? But where? Not somewhere among the Indians, Chinese or in Turkey? No, right here in Christian Russia which also wants to bless us with its embrace of true believers. It grieves me that I am not enough of a writer to be able literally to paint a picture in order that the reader could comprehend the situation as I myself have witnessed it. I would not find it difficult to present hundreds of cases such as these, but because of a shortage of space I will leave this for later. If one acknowledges that there are 35 provinces in Russia in each of which those who are banished are abandoned to starvation, and if there are 10 to 15 places in each province where such people are interned then there are 500 such localities. That is without counting all the mines, fortresses, and factories and then another thousand prisons or more, all of which are filled up to suffocation level. Only thus, does one achieve some understanding of the system of justice of Russia and the reader will find it believable that I have been advised by a reliable source that over 75,000 people are interned without investigation or verdict, without knowing why or for how long. To be sure such individuals do not report statistics. Many have the misfortune to be forgotten by exactly such a manifest and in addition their petitions are all discarded. Two to six years pretrial

imprisonment is quite normal there under the new court system.

I was in one of the best of the 500 places where only completely innocent people had to languish away. If I have come to learn of uncountable horrors here, what would one discover in all these other places? When a student was released from prison in St. Petersburg this past month of July, he was kept under arrest for a whole year completely without cause, which devastated him. Immediately thereafter he died which occasioned a large funeral train. At the place of burial speeches were made in which phrases like "Revenge and death to the barbarians", "Down with the N.N.", "Long live freedom" and the like were spoken. Notwithstanding the presence of uniformed police and secret police the large assembly did not allow itself to be dissuaded from giving voice to its anger and passion. Yet, by now they have already imprisoned 150 of the group present there. However in spite of all inquisition none of the speakers has yet been betrayed. I present this as one case among hundreds. *Truly a sign of the times.*

I will now deal with the third question: what is to be done now? The short answer is **Leave Russia!**

When the Baltic provinces are russified with force and deceit, when the Ukrainians are forbidden (in July of 1876) to publish books in their own language, when the children of the Unitarians in Poland are taken by force and baptized and the adults are brought into the "true" church by pike and bayonet (August 1876), this is considered the right of a people. i.e. Might makes right. Only the history of mankind comes to the aid of these misfortunates and hesitatingly whispers to them, "When you become weak you will be conquered, deceived and oppressed. When you are strong enough then free yourself, either with or without allies." It is sad but true that even in this Christian era nothing has changed with respect to these current tyrannies and murders. The strong one is right".

Matters are entirely different with us German colonists. We have not been robbed nor have we been conquered. We could perhaps say that we have been deceived if we wanted to cast doubts as to the honesty of Katharina, but I for one can not do so. Rather our forefathers said to the then current government: We will only come to Russia if this and that is granted to us. When everything was subsequently granted and the Privilegium guaranteed these rights for eternity, they allowed themselves to be lured into Russia. The current government at the time actually even had a special law prepared for the colonists (XII Band, 2 Theil).

Therefore we have a contract with the government. Presently the same is arbitrarily being broken so that one must cry out to the heavens. Yes, such atrocities do not even occur in Turkey. What are we to do? If we should be in breach of our contract with the government then the law, judgement, lash, and Siberia would be there for us. But for us there is no remedy where a contract is so unscrupulously broken. We can only be quiet and depart therefrom. Now when this breach of contract is also explained away in all possible ways by your highest eminences in St. Petersburg I would still wish to put one question before you. How do you explain the termination of the right to emigrate? The abolition of the other rights is varnished over on the grounds that they were not in keeping with the times. Everything is perishable.

But the freedom to emigrate which at that time was guaranteed to our forefathers for eternity, is that also something which is not in keeping with the times? Is there a heathen Arabian people anywhere in the world which prohibits emigration? As the high Lords in St. Petersburg do not wish to answer this question very loudly, then I will make an attempt to deal with the subject.

One becomes very venturesome if one has come to maturity between censor and lash, without trial and verdict, banished without grounds unto death by starvation, and then all of a sudden is able to make one's escape, the way I have. In Russia I would never even have dreamt of explaining the thoughts of a high official. But here (in America) I have freedom not only to think what I want, but also freedom to speak and actually to write. But all the same I will now answer very gently for otherwise I can already hear a high official in St. Petersburg saying "I told you so, Thiessen must be put behind lock and key. Had my advice been followed at the time he would now be looked after". This was in the contents of a letter which I received from St. Petersburg in September.

I will explain the question, why do you gentlemen abolish the freedom to emigrate? Here is the answer; 1) We want to build you Russian churches in your villages, 2) We want to settle Russian farmers among you, 3) We want to give you Russian teachers, 4) Our church hierarchy shall lead you to the one true church, 5) We want to baptize your children as we did with the Unitarians in Poland. Therefore we have cunningly set the trap and now we hide away in our burrows like the bird catchers. Until 1881 we will allow you to rule and command as you like and we will not meddle in your affairs before then. But when the trap has sprung we will take a closer look at what the snare has captured for us. However, until that time one hundred gendarmes must secretly and openly keep a watch on you and open and steal your foreign mail; and escort foreigners, who wish to tell you that a trap has been set for you, over the border. We allow your own people, who are starting to have second thoughts, to vanish. Yes, we actually offer Mennonite ministers remuneration if they say to the members of their Gemeinde "Continue to sleep in peace, there is no danger".

In addition we have designed the right to emigrate until 1881 strictly for the reason that it will create an aura of holiness. This is the fig leaf which will conceal our villainy. But if we would allow you the continued emigration rights in perpetuity, whatever would become of our russification? If we would place a church in your midst, the entire village would immediately pack up for America. Should we baptize one child today, the fathers would be demanding an emigration pass in the morning. If our Pope would come into your church to preach as we are doing it in the Baltic provinces and in Poland, then you would all be incensed and demand passes. Should a Russian farmer wish



to purchase or build a house among you, you would not receive him into your Gemeinde in accordance with your practice prior to 1881. But after 1881 we will place farmers, priests and teachers among you whether you want or not.

This is the answer. Until now we had the right to emigrate and have not emigrated because we found it tolerable to live in Russia. If they had no sinister motive in mind one would find it laughable to say that all of a sudden, after 1881 you no longer have permission to leave Russia. Accordingly they must be planning something for us that they believe that we would leave and for that reason they first place the deadbolt on the door.

In America where no protection existed for the Mennonites prior to the war, they have prepared a lawful protection for them after the war. In Russia where we had a contractual protection in the law and the Privilegium, we offered everything during the war and then after the war they took all our rights and protection, and besides that they said that after ten years we will not allow you to leave Russia anymore. Whoever wants to leave must leave before then. Good. So we shake the dust from our feet and go there where they dearly want us.

This is what everyone will say who does not want his descendants at some time to cry out to him: Father, out of fear of losing a few rubles you have sold us to these barbarians.

Is this not warning enough for Germans in Russia? We Germans and especially we Mennonites have gained an unequalled reputation as a good farming people so that we are everywhere received with open arms. We are offered protection, the gift of a fine farm (160 acres to everyone), and they gladly sell us parcels of land payable over 20 to 30 years. The journey can now be made in a short time and very comfortably, indeed, in favourable weather many considered it to have been a pleasure. I have letters from America where it is literally stated that "the trip went very nicely". How totally different this is from the journey which our fathers made to Russia, which in fact took up almost an entire year. Some actually had to pull their own wagons and stay over winter somewhere along the way.

After the government has arbitrarily and unscrupulously broken our contract once, and so clearly shown us its teeth, we have no justification to remain in Russia any longer.

A number of the readers may be familiar with the state of the Russian laws and the question will occur to them, "How is it possible that I am still writing about the knout when it was already abolished in 1866?" My answer to this is that in the preamble to the same law, Alexander II says: "I command that lenience shall prevail in all laws and ten guilty ones shall be freed rather than that one innocent one be condemned". The first article provides that "no one shall be arrested without a decision". But in practice thousands are confined, banished, robbed in exile, and abandoned to death by starvation, without being able to have a notion as to the reason. Yes, without investigation and trial. In this brochure I have provided a few examples which are a very small indication of the actual reality, and I myself am living proof.

The situation with the phrase "The Knout has been abolished" is the same. For further in the statute one finds "That the former law remains in effect: a) for the Caucasus b) for Poland c) For Asiatic Russia d) for all those who are declared to have lost their rights e) for all those who escape from their banishment." Here the gateway and door to the despotism of the officials is revealed. Who is really safe from the knout? The one who goes to bed with a good conscience is often miles away on the road to Siberia by morning. And when they awake, his wife and children who were not aware of anything, receive the freedom to follow or to take out the letter of divorce. Where one is interned makes no difference. Whoever does not command thousands for the purpose of bribery will come into the most pitiful holes in existence. The one who can grease palms well, remains in the provincial capitals, where it is easier to earn something and to make a living.

If one wishes to write a letter the gendarme stands by with a weapon and dictates. If one receives a letter from one's own it must first come through a gauntlet of stations, where it is opened and translated until finally one out of ten arrives. i.e. 6-10 months after. In one of my letters the translator had mistranslated the word "apotheker" as "Agitor" so that my doors and windows were promptly nailed shut and closed with bars and four men set out on watch for a certain time. All of this occurred without me knowing the reasons as the letter had been intercepted and I first had to pay dearly for the contents of the same by indirect means.

Indeed, if an official makes a secret denunciation about anyone in such a manner that those in Department III believe that the law will deem such a one to be guilty in any event, then imprisonment is ordered instead of banishment. But the complainer, knowing all the time that everything he has said was a lie, quickly comes forward and hastens to aggravate the matter from four to six years. If the unfortunate one is lucky enough to survive this imprisonment he finally comes before the court and woe unto him if he is deemed innocent.

At one time I was an eyewitness while a young man was standing before the court; his health and comprehension had suffered terribly. His lawyer closed the defense of the accused with the words "The entire dealing has demonstrated that the accusation was a patent lie and I bid that a lawful investigation be instigated against Mr. D.". The accused was found to be innocent and released to his loved ones who now harbored the hope that with proper care his health and understanding could again be restored. And yet during that night he was seized and he never came back again!!

This procedure works in the following manner. An official will intercede for such a lying accuser with the following words. The court has decided to pursue Mr. D. but he is one of our best officials (meaning with whom he had often been able to do a little business!), and if he should come before

the court this will make a terrible impression upon the people (meaning if he should come before the court he will accuse me also), and we shall thereby lose much respect and influence (meaning I would then have to also point the finger to my benefactor regarding, you already know). But this man who has been ruled to be innocent is really only such a criminal, he is merely so clever, that his guilt cannot be proven (which means that it is better to send a man to Siberia than that we allow ourselves to be blamed). Thereupon the edict of banishment is decreed in the name of the Czar.

It would be a small matter for me to prove that the name Alexander II has been misused as described many thousands of times to render completely innocent individuals over to the knout and a drawn out murderous death, without the Czar knowing of even one word of what is going on. I must frequently ask myself, "How is it possible that to the shame of the 19th century, prominent Russian officials who have the murder of thousands of completely innocent people on their conscience are able to occupy places of great honour in Europe?" And while this is occurring the State, whose officials they are, is demanding humane treatment from Turkey in which land they do not have nearly as many hundreds of innocents who are plundered, robbed, and murdered, the way this happens by the thousands in Russia.

Recently I received a letter inquiring what I would think of an emigration and settlement in Turkey. I have no sympathy for this either in the European or Asian side. Not because of the Turks for as long as they govern, but because of the Russians who are constantly inciting trouble in the lands of the Mohamedans in order to be able to acquire Constantinople in such a way. These lands are not meant for Mennonites even if they are in the vicinity of Jerusalem. I do not believe that Russia will achieve anything other than human murders, but it could happen that Russia can grasp great chunks out of Turkey. For the same diplomats who considered it appropriate to deem Berlin the centre of gravity of Europe will also understand that the half moon, even if only set up in the last quarter in Constantinople, nevertheless exudes more light than the Russian knout in all its greatness. But whoever is seeking a warm and fruitful climate can certainly find the same in North and South America. Every bit as nice and fruitful as in Turkey.

Overall I believe that that with this brochure I have made it somewhat easier for the German colonist, to arrive at the correct decision for his future. In closing I also refer the reader to the following words "Examine everything and retain the good." Abraham F. Thiessen."<sup>35</sup>

The reader must bear in mind that this book was written and circulated among the Mennonites and German colonists in Russia in 1876 and not in 1926. Thiessen's understanding and assessment of the mentality of the Russian ruling class and the exploited state of the poor is deathly accurate. Thiessen loved his Mennonite brethren and gave his all for his cause. The significance of his writings will reverberate through recorded history as long as there are Mennonites. "*Father out of fear of losing a few ruble you have sold us to these Barbarians*".

The significance of the clear view which Abraham F. Thiessen had of what was happening in Russia is so chilling and horrifying that it defies further comment. Certainly this writing had a tremendous impact on those who were still giving thought to the emigration. In conclusion it is noted that a comparison of the various writings pertaining to the military service issue should provide the reader with a greater understanding of the Russian Mennonite emigration of the 1870s.

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FOURTEEN. THE EMIGRATION MOVEMENT.

1. C. Krahn, "Alexanderwohl", ME I, 28-49.
2. *History and Events*, op. cit., 28.
3. Gaeddert, op. cit., 53.
4. P.M. Friesen, op. cit., 591.
5. Leonard Suderman, *In Search of Freedom* (Derksen Printers, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1974), viii.
6. R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries*, op. cit., 140.
7. Gaeddert, op. cit., 40.
8. *Ibid.*, 40-41.
9. *Ibid.*, 43.
10. *Ibid.*, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, 64-65.
12. *Ibid.*, 65.
13. Leonard Suderman, op. cit., 1-4.
14. Gaeddert, op. cit., 28-29.
15. *Ibid.*, 56.
16. *Ibid.*, 68-70.
17. *ibid.*, 72.
18. *Ibid.*, 193-196.
19. William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, (CMBC Publications, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1974), 9-10.
20. *Ibid.*, 23.
21. C. Krahn, "Gerhard Wiebe", ME IV, 944.

22. **Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America.** (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Winnipeg, 1981) 45-48.
23. Ibid. 51 and 54.
24. Ibid., 36.
25. Ibid., 47.
26. Ibid., 23.
27. Ibid. 60.
28. Ibid., 60.
29. Ibid., 33.
30. Ibid., 62.
31. Ibid., 66.
32. Ibid., 64.
33. One is at a complete loss to explain the negative and factually unfounded view of the noble Bergthaler of certain writers. e.g. H.J. Gerbrandt, **Adventure in Faith** (The Bergthal Mennonite Church, 1970). Hopefully future historians can outgrow the narrow strictures of the P.M. Friesen analysis and get on with the scholarly task of collecting and translating documents so that the "true" story of the Bergthaler and Ait-Kolonier can be told.
34. Abraham F. Thiessen, **Die Lage der Deutschen Kolonisten in Russland**, (Robert Hoffman, Leipzig, 1876), 1-2.
35. Ibid., 14-22.

# *Part Five.*

## *The Exodus 1871-1875*

### **Chapter Fifteen.**

#### **Faith Under Fire 1871-1873**

##### **15.01 Introduction**

The five years commencing in 1871 and concluding in 1875 are characterized as a period of tremendous testing and trial for the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in Russia. It is ironic that the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde*, which was founded in 1812 in order to preserve the fundamental teachings of nonresistant Christianity, in the end would once again find it necessary to stake its very existence for the same principles. As a result of its commitment to the faith, which had been renewed by the chastening of the preceding years, the *Kleine Gemeinde* was able to recognize the leading and providence of God which resulted in the great exodus of 1874-1880 in which one-third or 17,000 Mennonites departed for North America. This was not the hasty flight to freedom of forelorn and devastated refugees but rather a true exodus in the biblical sense of a people going out pursuant to the call of God notwithstanding that this departure resulted in immeasurable personal sacrifice and loss.

It is necessary to review the reasons for the seemingly sudden change in the fortunes of the Russian Mennonites in the 1870s. Over the years a considerable anti-German prejudice had developed in Russian society. Dr. Adam Giesinger explains this as follows:

“By the reign of Alexander II the climate of opinion in Russia regarding Germans had changed greatly from that of the days of Catherine II and Alexander I. A variety of factors were responsible for the change. The Russian upper classes became anti-German because they resented the powerful influence of the Baltic Germans in public affairs, an influence which reached a high point in the reign of Nicholas I. The Russian peasants envied and resented the special privileges of the German colonists, their extensive land acquisitions and their prosperity. The Slavophil politicians and publicists saw a threat to the Slavs in the new united Germany in western Europe and considered the native German as dangerous as the foreigner. At first it was mainly the Balts who were suspect; later it was the colonists as well. These were accused of having settled in strategic areas to facilitate German conquest, of buying land with Bismarck’s gold, of being loyal to the Kaiser rather than to the Tsar, of building a foreign state within Russia.”<sup>1</sup>

Another factor which had tremendous bearing on the situation was the increasing pressure for reform and modernization of various aspects of Russian society. Consequently the reign of Czar Alexander II which commenced in 1855 and ended in 1881 was characterized by a number of very important reforms. This included the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, an event that affected also the Mennonites by making land available for purchase and by creating a vast supply of labour. The move also created a new class of free peasants whose socio-economic lot was frequently far worse than before. Another important reform was the *zemstvo* legislation of 1864 which created a system of district and provincial assemblies by which the peasants, townsmen, and nobility were to govern their affairs through an indirect electoral system.<sup>2</sup>

Growing Russian nationalism, expressed in a general anti-German sentiment and the push for reforms, made it evident that the privileges of the German and Mennonite colonists could not continue indefinitely. The blow fell in 1870 when an Imperial Ukas proclaimed the end of many of these privileges.<sup>3</sup> The *Fuersorge-Komitee* (Supervisory Committee) in Odessa as well as the special “*Instruktion*” by which the Mennonites had been governed was abolished and replaced with the *Zemstvo* governmental system. The special colonial status of the Germans and Mennonites in Russia had been abolished.

Even more disturbing were the reports which came out of the capital in St. Petersburg that the special exemption from military service of the Mennonites would also be revoked. Inspired by the increasing militarism of the European powers and the defeats of the Crimean War, Russia had decided to modernize its army as well. It was felt that the universal military draft was essential to the development of a modern European style army. The effect of this policy on the Russian Mennonites has

already been discussed in the preceding section.

The Kleine Gemeinde was affected by these social and administrative reforms in several ways. Its greatest concern was with respect to the abolition of the perpetual exemption from military service which Czar Paul had guaranteed to the Mennonites in 1800. As a result of these new measures the years 1871-1873 were overshadowed by a number of direct challenges and threats to the Anabaptist-Mennonites. Indeed it could be said that during these years the faith of the Kleine Gemeinde was literally under fire.

### 15.02 The Imposition of Offices of Authority

Regretably the dangers and threats to the full gospel faith would come from fellow Mennonites as well as from the Russian government. It seems that reorganization and reform of the local government system in 1870 also had immediate consequences for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in that all Mennonites were now to take part in the administration of justice by serving in juries and by voting for judges and other officials who would be required to enact punishments of fines and imprisonment against offenders. This was contrary to the evangelical teaching of nonresistance which stipulated that the only force which the Christian was to use was that of love. The believer was not to exercise any physical force against another person nor to do so vicariously under the guise of a public office through the enactment of an expression of judgement against an offender. This was so even if the actual punishment would be affected by someone else. These principles had been steadfastly maintained and practised by the Anabaptist-Mennonites ever since the founding of the movement in 1525.

The danger from this source was very real and evident. In a letter of January 17, 1870, Peter Toews refers to a conversation with Jakob Loewen of Friedensfeld in which reference was made to the transporting of prisoners in the Molotschna colony. Jakob Loewen reported that someone had recently told him that he would never want to live in the Friedensfeld area because of the transporting of prisoners which was also the practice there. Peter Toews then mentioned that the Kleine Gemeinde could not take part in the transporting or "podwodden" of prisoners. However, if the prisoners were in the custody of a separate guard then they would be able to drive such a vehicle but they were in no way able to act as guards. In this letter Peter Toews also mentions that the Borosenko area was still free of such requirements of exercising governmental authority. Even here pressure was being exerted for the establishment of a local government authority among the Mennonites in order to dispense justice and to exercise the power thereof.

Only a year later this would result in the first direct challenge to the faith of the Kleine Gemeinde. It seems that in 1871 all the male residents of the Molotschna colony were required to agree to accept jury service. A jury would normally hear all the evidence in a court case and then in the end make a decision as to whether the accused was guilty or not. This was contrary to the full gospel principle of nonresistance expressed above. Thus it happened that Abraham Klassen the leading minister of the Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the Molotschna was summoned and appointed, as a member of a jury. He steadfastly refused to perform this service notwithstanding that he was threatened with tremendous punishments if he failed to do as demanded. In a letter to Peter Toews of March 11, 1871, Abraham Klassen explains the situation and the measures taken to deal with the same.

Prangenu, March 11, 1871

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Firstly I wish you the true peace and well-being of God. When I drove to Marianwohl on the 28th day of February to hold worship services I met the two, Rempel and Penner from Rosenfeld and they gave me letters to be dropped off at numerous places. But brother Toews, they also gave me the letter which you had written to Johan Loewen in Kleefeld in order that I bring the same to him. The other brethren and I then came to one mind and opened and read the letter right away. From the same we understood that on the 22nd of February you forwarded a letter by post but to this day I have not yet received the same. Eight days ago I read the short letter to Johan Dueck during the worship service in Kleefeld and thereupon I immediately forwarded a letter by post which I addressed to the businessman Ivan Husoro in Nikopol. Perhaps you have not yet received this letter in which I have written about a number of matters and therefore I will not allow this opportunity to go unutilized. In that letter I had reported to you that they have driven to Petersburg and it seems as if they are still there at the present time.

"I have also mentioned that they had summoned me to the Gebietsamt in order to take a written acknowledgement from me that I would allow myself to be appointed as a member of a jury. I will mention something in this regard in case you or someone else there have not yet received the earlier letter. I am also able to report that at the Gebietsamt they prevailed upon me. When they realized that all my counselling and advising the others against the granting of this signature, was of little avail, they threatened me with an immense fine of money if I would not subscribe and they also read to me the relevant section of the law.

"However, I continued to insist that I was unable to subscribe and I requested that they completely exempt me from this requirement, which they totally refused. But right on the spot they demanded that I give them a declaration in order that they could immediately forward the same to the higher authorities together with all the other declarations. I together with another man asked for some time after which we would submit the declarations and on the third day I also brought them a declaration. Only God knows what they have decided. I believe that from among some eighty men no more than ten will have held back from signing as requested. This is the reason why they are so strict with us few and they have already threatened us that we may have to come to Berdjansk to subscribe. But Lord, may your will be done.

"Immediately and in front of everyone else I let them know what my views were. That in no instance would I be able to sign, as if I did subscribe that would be an indication that the Lord would not be with me any longer, and that everyone would then be able to see that I had been afflicted with blindness. But nothing was of any avail for almost everyone had subscribed. Many had also subscribed a number of days earlier upon being advised to do so by Peter Schmidt of Steinbach that this was not anything so terribly serious and that he had also subscribed himself. Consequently I wrote him a letter wherefrom he could examine and assess my views for he is also the Honourary Justice of the Peace. How terrible that our Mennonites yield themselves up to everything.

"Beloved brothers and sisters, I do bid that you include me in your prayers before God so that all these threats at least would not frighten me away from the love of Christ and in order that the proverb of the apostle might also be applicable to me that "and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ".

"My beloved, it is very necessary that in these so very dangerous times we really come to each others aid more frequently in true intercession with the Lord as the Apostle teaches us in verse 16 of the fifth chapter where it is stated, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." In Matthew chapter 7 the Savior also teaches us, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you". Therefore my beloved we do not want to rest from our battles and struggles which we can pursue by earnest prayer. We are each responsible for ourselves and also for each other. The Lord will not retract his pledge to us, and he says to all of us, "Ask, and it shall be given to you, seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." In Mark chapter 11 the beloved Savior also teaches us with the following words "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them".

"My beloved I must frequently consider the saying of our beloved Savior as it is stated in his first sermon; "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God". Oh my beloved, how necessary it is that we might all truly be of one heart in everything. For then we may also comfort ourselves with a gracious hearing of our prayers by the Lord. Oh but if only everyone might earnestly examine himself as to whether there might be anything which we grant room in our hearts which could be contrary to the will of God, for then our Savior cannot and will not hear our prayers. He says to us that we are to be fervent in prayer. By this he tells us that with earnest prayer we shall be able to resist any sinful desires which may still have free rein within us, in order that we would not acquiesce to the presence of sin, and that we utilize this so very brief life for the honour of God alone.

"My beloved in closing I bid you all to forgive me for this my imperfect writing, and receive a greeting from myself and my beloved wife." Abraham Klassen, March 11, 1871 Prangenu.

"N.B. I have just received a letter from brother Gerhard Goossen wherein I have received the tragic news of his sick wife. Oh, my beloved, would that it might not become too much of a habit to pray for these so that we might forget that after all the Lord wants to endow us with patience."

It seems that this crisis for the Molotschna Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde passed over even though the matter looked exceedingly serious for a time. In **Anhang Number One** published in **History and Events** Peter Toews has recorded that in the end the matter did not turn out all that badly for Abraham Klassen. From this one would presume that the charges against him were eventually withdrawn. With the looming issue of compulsory military service it would have been unwise for the Molotschna Mennonite authorities to enforce their regulations too strictly with fines and imprisonment, for finally the Russian government would again have had to take action in order to protect the nonresistant christians. This would have been very embarrassing at a time when the same Mennonite leaders were preparing a delegation to St. Petersburg in order to petition for freedom from military service on the strength of the same principles.

### 15.03 The Nikolaithal Vollost Bezirk

Hardly had the crisis in the Molotschna passed over when the Kleine Gemeinde in Borosenko were advised that a new Vollost Bezirk was to be constituted in the area north of Nikopol. They would have to be a part of a new Vollost Bezirk together with the neighbouring Russians or else together with the other German colonists. They were to decide within a few days and then proceed with the election of the necessary officials. Consequently a meeting was held between Aeltester Abraham Friesen

of Heuboden and Aeltester Peter Toews of Blumenhoff where a decision was reached to travel to Ekaterinoslav in order to present a petition to the Governor and to explain the position of the Kleine Gemeinde so that their opposition to the proposal would not come as a complete surprise to him.<sup>5</sup>

This position again was based on the proposition that the only force which the follower of Christ could exercise was that of love. The believer was not to impose any physical force against his fellowmen. As this would be required of the Kleine Gemeinde should they become a part of the new Vollost district they were opposed to the same. In the petition which was presented to the Governor in Ekaterinoslav the Kleine Gemeinde suggested that one solution to the problem would be the creation of a special Vollost district for the Molotschna Mennonites living in the area which would have consisted essentially of the members of the Kleine Gemeinde. Here follows the text of this petition which was submitted to the Governor in Ekaterinoslav in September of 1871:

To his Excellency the Lord Civil-Governor of Ekaterinoslav Province Acting Privy Councillor and knight. The most submissive **P**etition of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde of the Molotschna Mennonites. We, the undersigned together with all those under our supervision, who are settled here in the Ekaterinoslavschen Kreise, the Molotschna Mennonites of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde, find ourselves directed to the laws issued by the eminent and gracious government authorities on June 4th of this year. The same provide that we together with all other colonists are now to be removed from the jurisdiction of the Supervisory Committee for the operation of the district and are to be transferred and included with all other landowning farmers. Even though we perceive from the second clause of the referenced law that we shall indeed continue to retain our Privilegium in the future, for which we express our most devoted thanks and which we also want to demonstrate to our supreme and gracious government in all our deeds, nevertheless we come forward during the present founding of the Vollost administration because of fear respecting the involuntary imposition of offices which would be incompatible with our conscience and faith. Therefore we appear before your Excellency with the completely submissive petition, that you graciously protect us in the present situations which are so near at hand.

Because of our conscience we are unable to hold any office where the use of force or the taking of prisoners might be required, and as until this time we have enjoyed our freedom of conscience, we make note that this has also been guaranteed to us by our Privilegium. Would his Excellency care to give consideration to the creation of a special Vollost administration for those of us who are known as Molotschna Mennonites? In this way the new laws could otherwise be complied with in all respects, without a requirement that we would thereby have to violate our indispensable and so precious freedom of conscience.

With a view for a gracious answer to our most submissive plea the representatives of the Gemeinde subscribed hereto. Aeltester Peter Toews, and ministers Abraham Friesen and Gerhard Goossen<sup>6</sup>

It appears that the petition of the Kleine Gemeinde to have a separate Vollost district created for them was never granted. Eventually the Kleine Gemeinde settlements in the Borosenko area did become a part of the Nikolaithal Vollost. But the firm Kleine Gemeinde adherence to the teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith was eventually recognized by the Russian government authorities with the result that they were completely exempted from those obligations which were contrary to their confession of faith. In a letter to the Molotschna congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde of November 29, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews explains how the situation finally resolved itself.

Blumenhoff, the 29th of November, 1872. "To the Gemeinde in the Molotschna. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40,31. "Much beloved brothers and sisters: All who have love for our Lord Jesus Christ who first loved us and who with his blood has washed us from all sin. If we have love for Him then we shall also have love for one another. With this Christ is saying that by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. Therefore my love for you also inspired me to visit you with this little writing, as I do not know how soon I will be able to visit you personally."

"I feel especially burdened to advise you of the manner in which the Lord has fulfilled these promises for us, in these last days. As you know we have been waiting anxiously for some time to see how the matter of the establishment of a Gebietsamt here in our area would eventually come to pass. Suddenly we received a summons from the District Peace-Mediator (Friedensvermittler) that every tenth man, from among the four German colonies in the surrounding area which were living on their own land, was to assemble in Blumenhoff on the 16th of this month. The colonists were not included. Here they were to appear before the Peace-Mediator in order to carry out the election for the new Gebietsamt, and to elect an Oberschulz, a Beisitzer, a Candidate, and six judges."

We found ourselves in great sorrow regarding this impending election and consequently we drove to the Peace-Mediator and presented our concerns to him. We also explained the extent to which we could serve in such an office and that consequently we were likewise unable to vote for others in these positions. He promised to do whatever he could for us. Then we drove to the Aeltester of

the Mennonites from the Old Colony (Chortitz) who have moved here, and put the matter before him: If it would not be possible for us together as Mennonites and mindful of our Confession of Faith to bind ourselves together in writing, to the effect that we wanted to completely reject the election for judge, and consequently that all judging would continue to be among us, each and everyone in his own Gemeinde in accordance with our confession. The minister promised me that he would present this proposal to his Gemeinde and that he would bring me the resulting resolution, which also followed a few days later. They had not been able to achieve one mind in the matter and a number of them, particularly, one person who carried a great deal of influence, had declared that he did approve of this, as he wanted a judge in order that if he would catch a thief that he also had a place for the offender.

Nevertheless we went ahead and prepared a declaration and in fact did so together with the Heubodner Gemeinde. Those of our Gemeinde who were commissioned to partake in the election presented this declaration to the representatives of the Old Colony at the first meeting and we remained steadfast in our decision not to elect a judge. Two meetings were consumed by this unfinished business whereupon a number of those who were from the Old Colony left us in an unfavourable disposition. By now Tuesday the 16th had arrived. In the meantime another admonishment had been received from the Peace-Mediator, to the effect that all of us should come together in Blumenhoff very early so that the election for the officers would be completed by the time that he arrived after which he would merely have to confirm and provide the necessary instructions for the same.

Soon we were all together and again we were unable to come to an agreement. The officials who had accompanied the Peace-mediator were immediately impatient as to why the proceedings had not even started. They wanted a judge and we did not even want to vote for one. Aeltester Friesen from Heuboden and myself were now called into the company of the same, whereupon we referred to the word and made a presentation to the others as follows:

That it was very inconsistent when we Mennonites as a nonresistant people, who dispatched one delegation after another to St. Petersburg to plead for our freedom from military service, now voted for judges in our very own district which had been constituted completely independent from all other confessions by the government itself. Surely the government would truly have to recognize our fundamental betrayal if we now commenced to judge one another in the manner of the world. Would we not quite properly also experience the same fate as the Israelites in the time of Saul, when they started to cry out for a king? God allowed the people to be told through Samuel that he would make them a king because they had rejected him. But at the same time they should know that such a king would take their sons unto him for all manner of service unto him and that they should not cry out to the Lord in the day when unrighteousness was done unto them, after a king had been granted unto them in the manner of the heathen as they desired. I pointed out to them that this would also be our experience if we rejected the word of the Lord, His counsel and will, and if we did not want to allow ourselves to be punished by His spirit in accordance with the ordinances of the Gemeinde and our confession of faith, and if we rather wanted to have a judge appointed over us in accordance with the laws of the world. For then with the acquiescence - yes, direction of God - the government will take our sons unto their service with full right. Nor would we have any grounds to lament over our situation as we ourselves will have brought the same upon us.

Many of those who were assembled together seemed to concur with my presentation through their quiet attentiveness. Only two men spoke against our presentation and they made a definite declaration that according to the scripture and our confession of faith we were correct. But they went on to state that this position was not feasible for the result would be that we would be oppressed by everyone. Finally they declared that they would elect a judge completely by themselves, and that they wanted the judge to be constituted completely for themselves. They tried to compromise as much as they could in order that they would not be placed in the same jurisdiction as the Russians.

We were unable to give our consent to this as we believed that without the Oberschulz, for whom we were to vote, the judge would be powerless in any event, as the Oberschulz would have to give approval and blessing to everything that would be done. Consequently the proverb "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you" which was taught to us from our very first school years, would be endangered nonetheless. We continued to remain steadfast that we would not take part in the election of a judge and eventually it seemed as if the greatest part of the assembly would dispose itself to us. As we learnt later, it appeared that the alternative was that we would be placed in a jurisdiction together with the Russians. We then asked of them if they would not rather volunteer together with us to do without the election of a judge to see how matters went without one. But they did not believe that our representation would even receive serious consideration. While we continued to remain deadlocked the Peace-Mediator, together with a sergeant-at-arms and another man whom we did not know, drove up and interrupted our still undecided conference. But how wonderful! Far more than we had ever expected, he made his ruling completely in our favour: That we were two separate factions and that it was contrary to our conscience to judge anyone, and that consequently it was also contrary to our conscience to elect a judge and he allowed us every freedom in that regard.

Now the issue was that we did not want to vote for any of the other officials with whom the judge was connected. To this the Peace-Mediator demonstrated that these were only responsible for the performance of the things referred to in our own declaration and related matters, and that the office of the judge was a function completely independent unto itself which was subject to its own special administration. Upon these assurances we also presented our votes for the Oberschulz, Beisitzer,



and Candidate. There was no further discussion about the judges. The other positions were all filled from among the others by a minority vote. The Oberschulz was a certain Rempel from Nikolaithal who had originally given his apparent assent to our declaration through his attentiveness.

I also enclose the declaration to which reference has been made in this letter and also the letter regarding the excommunication of A. Friesen, the son of Friesen from Heuboden. P. Toews.<sup>7</sup>

#### 15.04 A Petition for Heinrich Wohlgemuth

The matters pertaining to the holding of public offices in which the application of force was involved, paled in comparison to the requirement of a universal compulsory military service. Here the issue was far more black and white. The only force which the disciple of Christ could exercise was that of love and the avowed purpose of war was the exact opposite. This struck to the very heart and essence of the full gospel faith which was nonresistant Christianity. The blow came when the general exemption from military service for the Mennonites was abolished in 1870.<sup>8</sup> The Mennonites were given ten years to accommodate themselves to the fact that their carefully negotiated privilegium of 1801 had been revoked.

Naturally concern ran very high in the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde. Reference to the issue of compulsory military service is found in the correspondence of the Kleine Gemeinde as early as 1870. In a letter of November 18th of that year minister Abraham Klassen of Prangenu refers to a previous letter of Aeltester Peter Toews in which Toews referred to an edict which had been issued by the Czar affecting the faith of the Mennonites. Klassen replies that according to what he has heard there is no cause for alarm, but that he will speak to others and attempt to obtain more information. From this time on, almost every letter between Peter Toews in Borosenko and the ministerial of the Molotschna congregation refers to this issue with mounting concern. In a letter to Peter Bearg and the Crimean congregation of February 9th, 1871, Toews reports that he is anxiously awaiting for a report from A. Klassen in the Molotschna with news from St. Petersburg regarding the current military question. A similar concern is expressed by Peter Toews in a letter to Heinrich Enns of Fischau, Molotschna of February 15th, 1871. Within a short time the issue had become the paramount concern of the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde.

The issue also acquired immediate personal significance for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde when one of its members was drafted for military service. This was Heinrich Wohlgemuth (1849-1899) who was born in Wolle, Poland and who originated from the Polish Mennonites. Apparently Wohlgemuth had joined the Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea in 1868 later moving to Borosenko. In a letter to the Molotschna of March 11, 1871, Peter Toews notes that Heinrich Wohlgemuth as well as his older brother have been drafted into military service. In order to avoid the draft it was necessary for Wohlgemuth to prove that he was a Mennonite by birth and that he was a member of a recognized Mennonite Gemeinde. In a letter of March 11, 1871, Peter Toews notes that it would be necessary for the Kleine Gemeinde to obtain a Seal in order to officially certify that Heinrich Wohlgemuth was their member. It seems that part of the problem was that in 1870 Wohlgemuth had surrendered his pass for a new one which he had never received. The Kleine Gemeinde assisted Wohlgemuth in this regard by forwarding a brief petition to the government jurisdiction of his homeland.

#### Petition

Heinrich Wohlgemuth formerly of the Plotskisch Province, formerly resident in the Crimea, where he was baptised in the Mennonite Gemeinde in 1868, is presently resident here in the Ekaterinoslav Province and District where he is a member of the Mennonite Gemeinde in Gruenfeld near Nikopol. Here he attends the church as a true brother and according to our faith, and otherwise also conducts himself in a quiet and peaceful manner. Almost two years ago he gave up his pass for the purpose of exchanging the same but to this date he has not yet received a new one. We therefore request that the authorities of the appropriate jurisdiction there might be good enough to grant him such a pass and to allow the same to be forwarded here. In authentication whereof this petition is certified by the subscription of the Seal of the Church and my name: Aeltester P. Toews, Blumenhoff, February 13th, 1872<sup>9</sup>.

The matter of Heinrich Wohlgemuth eventually developed into a long and protracted affair for the Kleine Gemeinde. Seemingly a number of letters, certificates and at least one journey would be required before Wohlgemuth finally received his pass and recognition of exemption from military service as a Mennonite. On August 19th, 1873, Peter Toews, together with Wohlgemuth, H. Reimer and Johan Warkentin, Senior drove to Ekaterinoslav in order to have a further attestation certified there by the appropriate government authorities. This trip was successful as on the strength of this certificate the Plotskisch-Government issued the necessary pass.<sup>9</sup> The issue of compulsory military

service became very real for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde through this matter.

### 15.05 The Molotschna Delegations, 1872-1873.

In view of the foregoing it is understandable that the Kleine Gemeinde would view the impending crisis with ever mounting anxiety. Consequently the Molotschna ministerial monitored very closely all developments in the situation and reported to the congregations in Borosenko and the Crimea. Here every report was anxiously awaited and received. The reader will recall from chapter thirteen that the first Molotschna delegates left for St. Petersburg on February 1, 1871, but that little was accomplished in the capital. On January 11th, 1872, another conference was held in Alexanderwohl in order to constitute a second delegation. This was the conference where consul Cornelius Jansen shocked the majority of the assembled delegates by suggesting that the Mennonites voluntarily surrender some of the favourable socio-economic benefits accorded to them by the Privilegium of 1800 in exchange for properly guaranteed religious freedom.

The increasing concern of the Kleine Gemeinde is illustrated by an extract from a lengthy letter of January 17, 1872, by Abraham Klassen to Aeltester Peter Toews in Borosenko.

“ . . . . . for on January 11th, I was at the Conference in Alexanderwohl. It was late in the darkness of evening before we left the church. In spite of this more or less nothing had been accomplished except that a second conference was to be held two weeks hence. The government is to notify us as to when we may send delegates to St. Petersburg in order to speak with the Czar. The Government will require that we serve in the medical corps, but it sounds as if the Czar has not yet confirmed this. There is little confidence in our colony regarding a further delegation to St. Petersburg and if they do go to St. Petersburg almost everyone is scared that they will not be able to work together in one mind in any event. There is a great agitation here that we should cooperate with the government in accepting service in the medical corps in order that they will deal sparingly with us. Whereupon I repeatedly expressed myself that if we would compromise in this, that we were then proceeding completely contrary to the teachings of Christ, and that we were thereby surrendering our youths to the full military service. I also told them that as long as the Lord was with us we were unable to compromise in anything.”

“Among us there is a great inclination in favour of pursuing emigration from Russia for there is no hope that we will retain our freedom (of conscience) in the future. Oh my beloved, would that we might commence praying far more earnestly so that we would truly be armed with the spirit of God in order that in this time of manifold tribulation we would not err to the right nor to the left . . . . .”

From the foregoing it appears that many of the Anabaptist-Mennonites in the Molotschna already had grave misgivings with respect to the sincerity of the representations of some of the Molotschna Mennonite groups. Nevertheless the Alexanderwohl Conference held two weeks later on January 25, 1872, elected another delegation to go to St. Petersburg. It appears that consul Cornelius Jansen and others already strongly in favour of emigration did not attend.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Peter Toews of March 29th, 1872, Abraham Klassen reports with respect to the results of the delegation and regarding the general prospects for the future:

“Prangenu, the 29th day of March, 1872.

Firstly, I wish you beloved the true peace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yesterday Johan Dueck and I visited Aeltester Isaac Peters of Marith, in order to make enquiries with respect to the workings in St. Petersburg. His first answer was that their journey had more or less been completely in vain. They had spoken to a number of officials and especially with Lord Gerngross who had advised them that the articles concerning the Mennonites were already completed. Whereupon they had implored him to show them a copy of the same and Gerngross had also made an effort to look for the same. But then it had occurred to him that the articles were at the printer at that very moment. We perceived that Peters had not been terribly curious with respect to the articles as he seemed to surmise what the contents thereof would be. Apparently not otherwise than that we take up service in the medical corps.”

From what Isaac Peters related it appears that he often had reason to fall silent when the matter was being discussed. There were nine men who were in St. Petersburg regarding this matter, namely, five from our Molotschna colony, two from the Old Colony, and also two from the Sarotov Gebiets (District). Peters realized that among these nine men there were always some who were concerned that a light service be accepted and that the matter of our freedom of conscience not be presented too strictly, at least if the government would not otherwise be satisfied. Peters seemed to be very downhearted in this regard and also said to us, “Ohms, it appears that we will have to submit ourselves for suffering”. Which seemed somewhat empty to me for he had no sons.

Peters also mentioned that it had seemed to be almost impossible to convince the officials in St. Petersburg that we would not be able to accept the medical corps service. The worst of it all was that if one would try to convince or to persuade the officials of this, then the unity for that purpose

would be lacking as some would accept such a service, namely, from among the delegates. It was sufficient when Peters also related, as I or actually the both of us understood, that the journey to St. Petersburg together with these comrades who truly lacked firm conviction had not at all been an enjoyable experience for him. But this had presented no difficulties as Gerngross simply advised them to return home and to wait until September when the delegates could return once more. He also said that when the Articles prepared for us had been published they would then be submitted to Constantine of the Supreme Council, who would not examine the articles, or as I understood it, would not give his views with respect to the same any earlier than September since many laws had been approved that summer. As we understood it, the Lord Gerngross also believed that Constantine might still make many changes. In September they could come again and also present a petition to him and this time it might also be necessary or beneficial to speak personally with the Czar. According to what we understood from Peters there would be no purpose in going there again as nothing could be done for now.

Allow me to advise you of one more matter, namely, that we in this Bezirk (district) have been required to pay money for the construction of a jail. They call it an arrest house which is to be built at the Vollst offices in Gnadenfeld. This immediately disturbed me very much and I sought to impress the matter upon brother Jakob Dueck who lives in the same Bezirk, that I was unable to pay money for such a purpose without grieving the Lord. He seemed to understand this in the same way. I also went to Johan Dueck, or Dueck came here, whereupon I related my grievous concern to him. He very much strengthened me in this, that it seemed very dangerous for us to aid in the construction of a jail. On Sunday I spoke to brother Johan Enns of Alexanderkron at the worship service there. He also understood the matter in the same way, that we could not take part in this. The cost projections for the project stand at 3000 and several hundred rubles.

"We would dearly wish to know how you beloved brethren are inclined in this regard. Please be kind enough to advise us of your views, brother P. Toews. Perhaps you will shortly be able to come here and personally share your views with us. Oh brethren, it is really so very necessary for us to satisfy ourselves and to enquire of ourselves with unceasing prayer, that we might truly know the extent to which we feel bound together with our redeemer Jesus Christ who was crucified for us."

"A heartfelt greeting to all of you from your weak brother and remember me before God in your prayers. "Abraham Klassen."

N.B. "I also briefly report that brother John Dueck and I were in Groszweide and Rudnerweide yesterday in order to speak with the Oberschulz and Beisitzer. In so far as the Lord imparted power unto us, we attempted to demonstrate to these people from the Holy Scripture, that those of us who call ourselves disciples of Christ cannot build such a house of arrest. We requested of them that they examine our declaration and deal with us as their conscience dictated."

### 15.06 A Petition to Eugen von Hahn, July 19, 1872

The foregoing demonstrates the increasing consternation in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde with respect to the sincerity of the appeals which were being made to the Russian government, supposedly on behalf of all Mennonites. In a letter to the Molotschna of April 23, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews refers to the assurance which the February delegation had received from Lord Gerngross that the Mennonites could peacefully sleep until September, by saying that the sleeping was not at all peaceful in the midst of such thunderstorms when no one knew what the final result of the matter might be. Toews then mentions that the Borosenko Gemeinde was of the view that an independant Kleine Gemeinde petition be composed and submitted to the Privy Councillor Eugene von Hahn in St. Petersburg. Hahn was the former President of the Supervisory-Committee in Odessa who had been the benefactor of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde during the 1840's. In his letter Aeltester Peter Toews explains his feeling that surely some special exemption could be negotiated through the intercession of a prominent leader such as Hahn. This view becomes evident in the following quotation:

"Therefore we have decided upon the idea that we should make a written, although merely private inquiry, of the beloved Privy Councillor Lord von Hahn in St. Petersburg, who is well known to us from former times. If out of his benevolence for our Gemeinde, with which he is familiar and whose endeavours he knows to be honest and peaceful, he might not be able to advise us? Namely, whether the government might not be able to make an exception for a Gemeinde which has at all times refrained from serving as jurymen and in other civil offices which were completely prohibited by their faith and conscience, and which has desired never to belabour their government and the district administrators with petitions or legal processes, and who in fact had never done so and do not wish to do so in the future? And whether through pleading and entreaties our wise government could not be persuaded to make an exception to the forthcoming military law for those who had always endeavoured to practice their faith as the quiet in the land so that we could remain completely free of these obligations since we are unable to take part in the same under any circumstances."

In another letter only five days later Aeltester Toews notes that it was risky to rely solely on the other Mennonite groups to make intercession on their behalf and that it might in fact be dangerous. For the other Molotschna delegates were seemingly not at all troubled to petition for freedom from

military service in St. Petersburg while their fellow Mennonites in the Molotschna were arresting people and building a jail for that purpose. Toews laments that the delegates seemingly ignored the fact that both the freedom from military service and the arresting and jailing of offenders were matters pertaining to the principle of nonresistance. He goes on to state as follows:

"Alas, how can the two be separated like this? If according to the pronouncement of Aeltester Lanzman at an Aeltester meeting it is not becoming that they work together with us for our freedom of conscience, then it may well be that it is even less becoming for us to work together with them! Because they make such an unconceivable distinction in their endeavours, we in association with them, might also forfeit our freedom of faith." "P. Toews".

On June the 7th, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews made a personal trip to the Molotschna in order to discuss the matter with the other Aeltesten sympathetic to the concerns of the Kleine Gemeinde. In his diary Aeltester Toews has noted that he met with Aeltester Buller in Alexanderwohl in order to ascertain how his group was inclined with respect to the most recent news from St. Petersburg. He reports that "they already wanted to send out a delegation and to prepare themselves for emigration". He also met with Franz Isaac in Tiege and his cousin Aeltester Johan Harder of Blumstein who were not yet committed in favour of emigration. "They first wanted to present a petition for more freedom to the Imperial Council and then personally to the Czar. We might be of the same mind as the latter and would only undertake to emigrate after we had first been oppressed."

On June 25th, 1872, the brotherhood of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde at Borosenko decided that a letter be written to Lord Senator von Hahn and that later a personal representation be made in St. Petersburg. This petition was undertaken together with the Heubodner Gemeinde and was ready by the 19th of July, 1872, when it was read to the brotherhood of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde for their approval. Here follows the text of this petition:

#### Petition

Most Honoured Lord von Hahn. The most submissive petition of the so-called Kleine Gemeinde of the Molotschna Mennonites. We ask that you might be good enough to forgive the undersigned for taking the liberty of forwarding these lines to you. We are compelled to do so by the call of duty and necessity.

Of all the Colonists who remember your benevolent guardianship in the by-gone past, it is the so-called Kleine Gemeinde who eternally owe you their thanks for your paternal supervision, in particular, for your gracious intercession with the Lord Minister of Crown Domains in the year of 1843. We hereby extend to you a humble expression of our thanks.

However, we ask that you allow us to simultaneously come before you with our most submissive and childlike petition. Highly esteemed and most beloved Lord, we are aware that through the new military laws all the Mennonites, as well as we, who until now have so graciously been able to enjoy freedom of conscience and faith, are threatened. If we wish to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and be and remain true to our faith, we cannot nor are we allowed to acquiesce in anything nor to accept any duties whereby war will be supported.

Therefore we cannot accept service in any military installations, nor can we take up any medical or supportive service as we did in 1854-1855 during the Crimean War. Nor can we provide any civil service in performing the duties of offices of authority, Matthew 20, 25-26; Mark 11, 42-43; Luke 22, 25-26, and we gladly leave the performance of these services to those who have freedom of conscience to do so. Our only wish is to be able to live as the most insignificant in the land, and gladly submit ourselves to and obey all laws, commandments, regulations, and institutions of our wise and dearly beloved government as the servant of God, Roman chapter 13, in so far as they do not conflict with our faith and conscience, which we also have always endeavoured to do in the past.

In our depressed situation we know of no other place of refuge than the paternal heart of his Imperial Majesty our beloved Czar who has been led by God, the Lord of Lords, to remember the freedom of the godly, so that the thoughts of his Majesty have not included the desire to become the ruler of the conscience of mankind. Therefore we believe and hope that he will also allow himself to hear our petition, that in the future as in the past we, insignificant that we are, might be allowed to live out our faith in our beloved fatherland. We wish to lay our childlike supplication at his feet. May the Lord accompany this petition and grant that we might find grace.

Most honoured Lord, consequently the following is now our most submissive plea. In your benevolence and fatherly sympathy for us would you be kind enough to do this for us and once more come to our aid with gracious intercession in our troubled circumstances? When we arrive in St. Petersburg, would we be able to have a personal audience with you with respect to this situation? We would also ask that you might be good enough to impart to us your benevolent advice. We shall longingly make our way to St. Petersburg with this hope. We might add here that by now the greatest part of our Gemeinde has settled outside of the Molotschna colony on its own land in the Ekaterinoslav and Kherson Provinces.

In anticipation of a benevolent reply we have fearfully subscribed in the names of the Gemeinde, as the representatives of the same. Gemeinde at Gruenfeld: Aeltester Peter Toews, Ministers Gerhard

Goossen, and Abraham Loewen. Deacons Peter Wiebe and Peter Kroeker, Gemeinde at Heuboden. Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, ministers Peter Friesen and Cornelius Friesen. Deacon Jakob Friesen.

### 15.07 A Kleine Gemeinde Delegation to St. Petersburg, 1872

In a letter to Peter Toews of July 29th, 1872, Abraham Klassen refers to another conference which was held in Alexanderwohl on June 23, 1872. Here there was some discussion of a delegation to America but eventually another delegation to St. Petersburg was approved. At the request of Governor-General von Kotzebue this delegation had travelled to Kertsch where they were to meet the Czar, but no such personal meeting took place. In a letter to Toews of August 17th, 1872, Klassen advises that he has spoken to Peter Goertz of Steinfeld, who was one of the delegates, who has reported that neither the Czar nor Kotzebue had spoken to the delegates. But Kotzebue had spoken briefly to Friesen of Berdjansk stating that the Czar was favourably inclined regarding the Mennonites but that he had to impose some service on them in order to satisfy the Russian people. Goertz had been concerned that a conference be held as soon as possible in order that another delegation could be sent to St. Petersburg. In another letter written on August 18, 1872, Klassen reports to Toews that this conference had been held the preceding day, and that another delegation has been appointed which is to travel to St. Petersburg.

According to the writings of Aeltester Peter Toews the Kleine Gemeinde until this time had remained completely excluded from the various Molotschna delegations to St. Petersburg. Because of the ever increasing differences in the views of these delegates and that of the nonresistant Christians, a decision was finally made that the Kleine Gemeinde had no choice but to constitute its own delegation. It was felt that it would not be right to simply leave Russia without having made every personal effort to successfully resolve the issue in dispute. In a letter of August 27th, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews explains his views in this regard and also the constitution and purpose of the proposed delegation to St. Petersburg.

Blumenhoff, the 27th of August, 1872. Firstly I wish unto you the grace and peace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ together with the abundant comfort and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "Beloved brother A. Klassen. We have held a brotherhood meeting pursuant to your last letter, regarding our course of action respecting our freedom of conscience, and decided that we will no longer be able to remain silent. We are seized in wonder that the higher government authorities have departed from their intention of designating medical corps service for the Mennonites and that they have now decided to require service as prison guards instead. For surely the latter is far less nonresistant and can far less be served without arms than the former. What does all this mean? It can be surmised that the wise and forbearing government has made a final decision to impose some obligation upon the Mennonites, but only something which would not be a matter of faith and conscience for them, in as much as the latter activity has been found among the Mennonites here since the earliest times. From the start they took each other into arrest and without being required to do so by any other confession they have built their own house of imprisonment. They have filed legal complaints against each other and they have served as government authorities where they have presided in judgement over their own brethren as well as others which conflicts with the authority of our Lord and Savior who alone is the one who judges."

Indeed the beloved delegates also state in their memorial writing that we should not only avoid the sword of war but also that we should not repay evil with evil. Alas, but my beloved shepherd of souls. Why then have a house of arrest for a nonresistant Gemeinde which asserts the foregoing. What kind of reasons can now be brought forward that they cannot serve as prison guards, reasons which these children of the world, who are so wise in their calling, would in fact find plausible that these were actually matters of conscience? When they are pronouncing a judgement those Mennonites who serve as jurors appeal to the dead letter of the law. Seemingly they do not give thought to the fact that if we are to use all the physical parts of our body for God as weapons of righteousness that we should no more use our tongue as a part of our body to bring into force the dead provisions of the law through a judgement, then to extend our arm with the sword in order to wound someone. Both parts of the body would remain in peace if they were not instructed to act. "Now beloved brother, what can be done if the government offers the Mennonites something which they have already been doing for a long time and which many of them have lovingly carried out with joy? You write that they also want to decline in this. But will they really have the heart to do so? If we remain sitting here so quietly, will we later not have only ourselves to blame?"

I mentioned that we had held a brotherhood meeting here today. The brethren were quite united that we should personally drive to St. Petersburg. Indeed, that we meet the others there. Nor do I want to say "no" to the Gemeinde even though I feel totally incompetent for this, but I do not want to undertake this alone. Consequently you can well imagine on whom it will fall. Goossen is very sick and has already been prostrated for over 14 days, and even now it seems that he has improved only little. It is still impossible to tell how it will end, whether he will live or die."

"Therefore we, and in fact the brethren, would like you to come along. But only after we have received definite news what the last deputies have experienced in the Crimea and what they have achieved.

Consequently please also consider the matter among yourselves, and if possible, if they are not yet on their way to St. Petersburg, then drive over to see them together with J. Dueck in order to somewhat clarify the matter with them; that they will not perceive it as evil from us when we finally also become curious and attentive with respect to what is being decided about us, and that we do not want to offend them by being in St. Petersburg together with them at the same time. For it would be no little matter if without any further ado we emigrated to America without really having known and experienced what had transpired, and how matters stood for us here in the future. They should not take it as being evil of us if we would decline something on our behalf to the government, which they themselves have for some time tried to impose on us without any instigation on the part of the government. For we may be able to account for ourselves in St. Petersburg which they can not. That is to say, as they always have this against with them when they are there."

"Should you or the both of you be unable to speak with the delegates before they leave, we would feel that it would still be beneficial for you to discuss somewhat the reason for our special undertaking with a number of other Aeltesten. And obtain a pass for both you and me, not for too short a time as we may also find it necessary later, and then come here together with brother Dueck as soon as possible. Here we shall constitute a power of attorney which we may show to any administrative officials as required, after which we will be on our way to the railway, the next 120 werst to Krementchug."

"This in brief is what the brother A. Friesen is to tell you personally when he arrives there after his departure from here tomorrow, or by now today. But it was certainly not too much for me to briefly advise you of this in writing, in order that you would receive the same earnestly and that much more seriously. Especially with respect to your response thereto, beloved brother Klassen, I would dearly have wanted to come to you in person. Hopefully you will not take this unkindly of me. Otherwise I have reported the most important details in this writing and hope that you there will also consider the matter for the best and consequently, that you will not be able to decline to come with me. At least for now I do not want to undertake the journey without you. N.B. The last information I have is that Abraham Friesen of Heuboden will also travel together with us. Always remember me in your prayers and forgive me for this which has been written in a great hurry. Your brother Peter Toews".

Finally the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde delegation was underway. The three delegates were Aeltester Peter Toews from the Blumenhoff Gemeinde in Borosenko, Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen of the Heuboden Gemeinde in Borosenko, and the minister Abraham Klassen of the Molotschna Gemeinde. Ironically the delegation left for St. Petersburg the day after the first worship service was held in the newly completed school and worship building in the village of Blumenhoff, Borosenko. In his 1872-1878 diary Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded the highlights of this delegation to St. Petersburg.

"September 10th. Worship service was held here in Blumenhoff in the new school for the first time. As Klassen and I wanted to leave for St. Petersburg on Monday, Loewen presented a sermon first and then Klassen presented the Word, after which he also presented a short farewell address and commendation for intercession for us from the brethren. The brethren had made a voluntary collection of 38 rubles and 50 kopek for the costs of our journey."

"On the morning of September 11th, A. Klassen and I, and Ab. Friesen the Aeltester from Heuboden, departed on our journey to Petersburg by way of Ekaterinoslav, to Krementchug, by water on the steamer. From here by rail to Petersburg (close to 2000 Werst) where we arrived on Sunday the 17th. On the 19th we spoke with Lord Hahn. He gave us little encouragement, and very much advised against submitting a petition to the Czar, for in his words "everything has already been said and written and His Majesty the Czar was fully informed regarding our circumstances, and that through the submission of a petition we would achieve nothing other than that we might come into disagreeable circumstances with the police". Nevertheless he did conclude with the words "that everyone is responsible for his own conscience".

"On the 28th we went to the General-Adjutant of His Majesty the Czar, Baron von Magendorf. He advised us that we should speak with the Minister Wolujeff. In the meantime the Aeltesten from the Molotschna, Volga, and Poland had also arrived. These had already talked with Prince Heyden and had also been directed to Wolujeff by the same. Therefore the two Aeltesten Dietrich and David Hamm, from the Volga and Samara, and Peters, Goertz, and Isaac from the Molotschna had gone to speak with him. By his demeanour he (Wolujeff) also allowed it to be understood, that he had more hope for the continuation of our freedoms, than Hahn. Among other things he (Wolujeff) had said, "that (only) the laws given by our beloved God stand firm and unchangeable" (NB. His exact words are to be found among the 1872 letters received).

"In the meantime Klassen and I spoke with Pastor Dalton of the Reformed Church because he had indicated to the Secretary of the Head Committee of the Evangelical Bible Society that he would like to speak to us. He was friendly and sympathetic in his reception of us, and he assured us that he had opportunity to make intercession for us with the Minister for which we were grateful. He also gave us a written commendation to his Bishops who had more opportunity to speak to the Minister. We tried to attend to this but as we had already announced the day of our departure and had telegraphed for a vehicle to receive us in Ekaterinoslav we were unable to look up the latter. We did arrange however that Goertz and Peters would

do so and also make these Bishops aware that because of our Confession of Faith we would be unable to perform medical corps service, so that at an opportune time they, the bishops, could bring this to the attention of the Minister."

"We left Petersburg in the evening of the 29th and boarded the train and arrived in Kremenchug on the evening of October 2. From here we traveled to Ekaterinoslav by post, where the brethren P. Penner, from Rosenfeld, and Joh. Toews, from Gruenfeld, were already waiting for us. Thus we arrived at home on the 5th of October. We were well physically and also found our families to be the same. Klassen left the same day for his home, travelling together with Joh. Loewens."

"N.B.: In Petersburg we also met two Aeltesten from Poland, one with the name Tobias, and one with the name Stukke, and also two men from Hutterdorf by the name of Hofer."

"Sunday the 8th of October after worship service, I related to the brethren of what we had been able to accomplish in Petersburg, and also read to the brethren what the Minister Woluff had said. I also presented the travel expenses, which totalled 168 Rubles and 5 Kopeks."<sup>12</sup>

Regretably the Kleine Gemeinde delegation had not been able to obtain any real or concrete assurances with respect to their freedom of faith. It might be noted that the delegation had prepared a petition which they had planned to submit to the Czar. But because of the advise of friend Eugen von Hahn they refrained from doing so. Nevertheless the petition is a valuable document as it serves as a summary of the Kleine Gemeinde position at this point. The text of the petition is contained in **History and Events**. It should also be noted here that the delegates had hardly returned home when they were notified that another delegation was on its way to the Crimea with the object of meeting with the Czar there. This delegation to the Crimea is also described in **History and Events** and therefore will not be dealt with here other than to say this delegation was no more successful than the previous one to St. Petersburg.<sup>13</sup> The reader should also note that at this very time the matter of the voting for Vollost offices was coming to a head in Borosenko. See Section 15.03.

It is evident that the delegations to St. Petersburg and Yalta in the Crimea served to convince the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde that no hope for continued freedom of conscience existed in Russia. Henceforth the consensus in the Gemeinde was in favour of emigration from Russia. The concept of a free America became more and more prevalent. This new outlook on the part of the Kleine Gemeinde is evident in this extract from a letter by Aeltester Peter Toews written on October 10, 1872.

"We have a troubled future ahead of us, but those who maintain that this is peace and that there is no danger, see the matter in a different light. In fact, there is little hope in this world for peace in our time for the truly nonresistant Christians, who are loyal to the confession of faith, and definitely not in St. Petersburg. Man thinks and God directs. Might the true peace of God still find entry into a good number of hearts through the fear of this world?"

"I have just recently received a beautiful letter from North America from where I have for some time ordered Christian books written by our blessed forefathers. Just recently I have received another fine book. In fact the Mennonites there even have their own publishing house. They enjoy full freedom of conscience. Should our fellow Mennonite confessionalists only wish to have even a number of books ordered for them I would be very much at their service. I would also note - if you have not yet heard-that Gerhard Goossen has died several weeks ago".

From the foregoing letter it is evident that by this time the Kleine Gemeinde had abandoned any realistic hopes that a mutually satisfactory arrangement could be made with the Russian government. From this point on an emigration was inevitable.

## 15.08 A Meeting with the Hutterian Brethren, 1872

Reference has already been made to some of the interesting interactions over the years between the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Russia as well as Switzerland, Prussia, North Germany, and elsewhere. During the delegation to St. Petersburg the Kleine Gemeinde representatives also had occasion to meet with the delegates of other Evangelical groups in Russia. One of these groups was the Hutterian Brethren who lived at Hutterdorf located some 50 miles north of the Molotschna Mennonite colony.

The reader may recall that in 1848 Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) had attempted to be of assistance to the Hutterites in the settling of some internal difficulties. It seems that the bond between the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and the Hutterian Brethren was renewed once more. In a letter of December 24th, 1872, the Molotschna minister Abraham Klassen describes his journey to Hutterdorf for the purpose of meeting with the Hofers who had represented the Hutterites in St. Petersburg.

"Prangenu, the 24th of December 1872. First of all I wish you the peace of God which is higher than all human comprehension. Brother Toews, I believe that you will often have been mindful of a writing from me. When I last had the opportunity, I had gone to Hutterdorf to speak with the Hofers at exactly that time, for they only arrived home from St. Petersburg

on the 9th of November. The elder Hofer was not at home for he had just left for Hutterthal. But I was able to discuss everything which occurred to me regarding the matter of their dealings with the government with the younger Hofer. They have had a good deal of discussion with the minister Wolujew, apparently twice for about an hour. They also submitted to him a petition to the Czar and their confession of faith. Wolujew had promised them that he would personally submit the same to the Czar, but that he would first read it himself as he was obligated to do. When they had appeared before him for the last time he had told them that the legalities respecting us would still be changed. This he believed, but whether it would be sufficient for us he could not say, but in any event the enactment would take another three years."

As they had not completely trusted the matter they had also travelled to Tsarskoe Selo in order to personally submit their petition to the Czar, but this was impossible. Consequently they submitted the same, both the confession and the petition, to the Adjutant of the Czar just as they had done with Wolujew. He had promised to place it on the table of the Czar on the very same day. But Hofer had mentioned to him that he was worried that the papers might go lost, whereupon the adjutant had directed him to a court from whence he could obtain a receipt that he had submitted the papers to the adjutant of the Czar. Hofer unequivocally stated that, the Czar would not speak to us. He said that even the Czar himself was not totally sure what he would finally do with us. Hofer advised that he would eventually receive a report as to what the government would finally decide to do with us. In total they held little hope. Right in my presence the Aeltester by the name of Waltner said to Hoffer that they would have to put their land up for sale and even if they would not need for one year they would hire themselves out. That way they would at least be free of all legal burdens.

Not long ago I read a letter which Aeltester Buller in Alexanderwohl had received from Aeltester Suderman in Berdjansk that they should appoint a day and call all the Aeltesten together. This also included the Aeltesten from the Kleine Gemeinde in order that all the Aeltesten could hold counsel together with respect to the sending out of a delegation. I have advised you of this in order that it will not be unexpected when you are formally invited. In addition I wish all of you the very best. Also greet all the other brothers and sisters and all together commit yourselves unto the Word of God and his grace. My wife also greets all of you. Keep us in your prayerful thoughts. Your brother and sister, Abraham Klassens.

### 15.09 The Constitution of a Delegation to America 1873

Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that on January 6 he received the invitation to take part in the conference in Alexanderwohl which was to deal with the matter of a delegation to America. On January 21 Abraham Loewen, Johan Harms, and Aeltester Peter Toews, accompanied by many brethren drove to the Molotschna. Because of the ice break-up in the Dnieper the group travelled by way of Chortitz and arrived in Alexanderwohl on the evening of Tuesday the 23rd of January 1873. The next day the representatives drove to Pordenuau together with Abraham Klassen of Prangenau. Here a delegation to America was discussed. In a letter of February 4th, 1873, Aeltester Toews mentions that the Kleine Gemeinde representatives had also participated in this conference although they had remained silent. In his diary, Toews has noted that Aeltester Suderman was elected as a delegate by many of the representatives there. The Aeltesten and ministers from Borosenko then proceeded to conduct worship services and brethren meetings in Lichtenau on the 26th, and in Alexanderwohl on the morning of Sunday, January 28th. In the afternoon holy communion was held in Alexanderwohl.

On the following day the representatives attended the conference in Alexanderwohl. Here a letter from pastor Hans in St. Petersburg recommending another delegation to St. Petersburg was discussed. It was suggested that this delegation submit a petition to the Crown Prince Konstantin, who was the President of the Imperial Council. The petition was to request that the Mennonites be spared from all military service. On the 30th the Borosenko brethren once more departed for home.

On the fourth of February a brotherhood meeting was held in Borosenko where the accomplishments of the trip to the Molotschna were discussed. After lengthy discussion agreement was reached to send a delegate to America. Consequently an election was held in which Cornelius Toews, the brother to the Aeltester Peter Toews, was elected with a majority of 62 votes. A collection was held for the cost of the delegates' journey to America with the result that within six days the sum of 1200 rubles had been gathered for this purpose. It seems that the Heubodner Gemeinde had made the decision to send a delegate to America somewhat sooner than the Blumenhoff Gemeinde. The Heubodner delegate was David Klassen (1813-1900). On the 15th of February the two delegates were driven to the Molotschna by Johan Loewen and Abraham Friesen. But as the other delegates there had decided to call off or at least postpone the delegation the Kleine Gemeinde deputies again returned to Borosenko. On February 10th the ministerial read for the approval of the Borosenko brotherhood the instructions which had been composed for the delegation to America. This consisted of the questions for which Cornelius Toews was instructed to obtain answers from the governments



of the United States and Canada. The entire text of these instructions follow here as they constitute a formal record of what seemed most important to the Kleine Gemeinde at this time.

### **Questions to the government of Canada or the United States by the Mennonites of South Russia, 1873.**

#### **A. Questions pertaining to Religious concerns.**

**First question:** Will our Gemeinde, which numbers approximately 110 families and which in accordance with the gospel confesses and requires that every direct and indirect participation in the waging of war be refused, be able to receive a complete exemption from military service under the protection of the subject supreme government?

**Second question:** May we be exempted from all state service and offices of authority as well as from any dealings in which the commandment of God "to love your neighbour as yourself" would be infringed? And would we be freed from participating in elections for any offices beyond what was allowed by our conscience?

**Third question:** Will we ever be compelled to swear oaths? And will our simple "yes" and "no" in accordance with our faith rather be accepted as sufficient?

**Fourth question:** Will we be allowed to conduct our worship services undisturbed in private houses until such a time that we construct a house of prayer? Will we be allowed to elect our own preachers in accordance with our confession of faith? And to conduct our own elections and ordinations?

**Fifth question:** May we have our own regulations, composed according to our confession of faith, for the governing of matters related to inheritance, orphans and widows, independently of other confessions, as well as our own widows and orphans administrators and school teachers? And may the latter also teach primarily only the German language and religion?

**Sixth question:** May we also bring our own devotional books along with us and where possible also obtain the same? And also have our own printery (publishing house)?

**Seventh question:** Will our freedom from military service be preserved for us for an indefinite or predetermined period of time by the supreme government through a Privilegium or a special law? And which would be granted on such terms that after the expiration of the appointed time we would nonetheless not be conscripted into the army and instead of the same that we would then have a tax imposed on us? And if alterations would occur in the laws which might endanger our freedom from military service because of previously unforeseen changes in circumstances, would we then be allowed freedom to emigrate once again?

#### **B. Questions pertaining to secular matters**

**First question:** Upon what terms or conditions will the supreme government appoint a parcel of land for our settlement as a gift or otherwise? And how much per soul? And what age of individual would qualify for the same? And is a widow also entitled to a similar quantity as a family?

**Second question:** May we also expect support for the journey and for the settlement on the part of the supreme (or central) government? Would we also be exempted from taxation for a number of years? And how much?

**Third question:** May we also be spared from the practice of quartering (of soldiers) etc?

**Fourth question:** In as much as various hinderances can come in the way of an emigration, can the offer to settle in the country remain open for an indefinite time? Or how many years are allowed for the settlement and occupation of the same? So that no one would be forced into an unnecessary or purposeless loss or abandonment of their properties. And after how many years would such an assurance be voided?

"The foregoing questions are to be presented to the government in Canada or the United States, in North America, in order that they may concurrently provide their answers to the same to Cornelius Toews the duly authorized representative of the Mennonite Gemeinde in Gruenfeld in the Ekatherinoslawschen Government, South Russia. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names. Aeltester Peter Toews, Jakob Barkman, Peter Kroeker, Peter Wiebe, Heinrich Wiebe. Blumenhoff, the 10th day of February 1873."

"Our total population (of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde) is 602 with 304 males and 298 females. A private question is also added to the foregoing. That for our part the instruction is added to the delegation that during the selection of a place of refuge they are first of all to keep the United States in mind and to bear in mind that no compulsion is to be imposed on anyone. Rather everyone is to have free choice as to where they will emigrate to."

### **15.10 Conclusion**

The final section of this chapter consists of a letter of Aeltester Peter Toews written shortly after the election of Cornelius Toews as delegate to America on February 4, 1873. In this letter to the Molotschna ministerial, Toews discusses a number of concerns respecting loss of all hope for freedom from military service in Russia, as well as matters pertaining to the delegation and the future emigration of the Gemeinde. As such this letter serves as a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

"Beloved brethren Abraham Klassen and Johan Dueck. After I have extended my heartfelt greeting

to you, and after I have wished you and those dear to you health in body and soul, I report to you briefly regarding our safe journey home. We arrived at home safe and sound on the evening of the first of February and found our dear ones to be well. On the second we would have encountered bad weather on the roads."

"Matters at home were as I had told you. For I was hardly home when the beloved brethren came in anticipation of hearing something more definite with respect to our future. Any hope for freedom here in our fatherland is sinking more and more and many brethren were seriously thinking about the seeking of a new homeland where our freedom of faith would be continued. There is certainly no one who expects to find the same in the heap of rubble and stone which is the earthly Jerusalem. But rather in North America. Consequently the brotherhood reached agreement to participate in the delegation and in fact to also send our own delegate. The same was elected through a majority of votes which fell on Cornelius Toews, Gruenfeld."

"With respect to the funds required for the journey and various disbursements, we simultaneously agreed that each and everyone could pledge to give a certain sum, and it also occurred that the average pledge was 6 rubles per soul. Many pledged far more per soul so that the amount already pledged consists of 1109 rubles. A part of the same is to be paid immediately but the greatest portion will only come together in fall. If necessary we can borrow against this amount. We hope that each and every brother there would add such an amount as they would like, to this act of benevolence in the enclosed record. We are also hoping for the same from the brethren in the Crimea whom we have already written. Those brethren who wish to pay the amount encumbant upon them over there, may pay the monies to you, brother Klassen. But we request that we receive a memorandum with respect to all the payments. In so far as we know the time of departure is dependant upon Suderman. I suppose we will be notified from there after which Toews together with Klassen will travel there."

"I want to set forth my initial opposition to the delaying of the deputation for I am always afraid that we would not unnecessarily achieve agreement regarding something which was not the will of the Lord. It also occurs to me that if it would actually happen, for example, that the Russian officials as we know them, would sooner or somewhat later, beat our young and in part already married brethren, the accusations would be far more bitter than if an emigration was already planned and begun. Therefore I decided to pursue the matter towards that end, and especially so because the matter for the greatest part was voluntarily undertaken by the brethren and not because of compulsion. This is evident from the sums of money which have been committed, and in this those brethren who would have postponed the matter have made no exception."

"I ask that you also consider the matter in your congregation and bear our situation in mind for the future and hopefully you will not wish to hold back. May each and everyone also participate in this kindly. In fact some may say that such a sum is not necessary or not needed. But how appropriate it would be if instead of not being sufficient the money came together in over-abundance. For when we come to the actual emigration we think of how all the poor, the widows, and orphans are to be transported. I hope that you will forgive me if the concern is impressed on me more heavily than on all the rest. Especially when the thought occurs to me of all the purposes for which the tenth part of the forthcoming crop might be applied in the example of Israel. Or that we would not forget to throw all our concerns upon the Lord for he cares for us. We should also be mindful of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"There were also originally those among us who favoured participating in the delegation without sending our own delegate. But it seemed better for us to send our own who would be mindful of all our needs in his investigations there, and who would report to us in writing from there and later also in person. And who would also be very helpful later during the journey as one familiar with the route. Now then, please consider the matter there with prayer and supplication, and when you have done so then do return to us the memorial with the record of the amounts pledged, whether in cash or for later receipt. Secondly, also forward your names in order that the authorizations which are required for the journey can be completed. And thirdly, it may become necessary to advise me of the total number of souls there as well as their ages from the youngest to the oldest, and especially whether male or female. Please report to me of this and whatever else is of concern to you as soon as possible, and if not otherwise than through the mail."

"With this I will conclude my writing. But I will add the comment that at the time of my departure there, the daughter of Ohm Eidse in Fischau had requested baptism. I suggested that perhaps she could come here for a time as we are also going to be instructing a group of young people here. But Ohm Eidse did not consent to this because it was too inconvenient for him. Accordingly you should instruct her in the faith and familiarize her with the articles. In the meantime I will also write her and then if the Lord wills and I am still alive I will come there after the seeding is finished. Finally a heartfelt greeting to you. I commit you to the Word and the grace of God. Always remember your brothers and servants (ministers) in your prayers. Peter Toews."

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER FIFTEEN. FAITH UNDER FIRE.

1. Adam Giesinger, *op.cit.*, 223.
2. *Ibid.*, 224-225.
3. Krahn, **Smith's Story of the Mennonites**, *op.cit.*, 284
4. Except as otherwise noted, all the source documents referred to in part five are from the letter collections of Aeltester P. Toews.
5. Toews letter dated September 19, 1871.
6. It is interesting to note that the original of this Petition was in the Russian language. It appears that the Kleine Gemeinde avoided the embarrassment of the Molotschnaer delegates to St. Petersburg who were severely chided for presenting their petitions in German.
7. The text of the declaration referred to in this letter is included in **Anhang Number One** which is published in **History and Events**, *op.cit.*, 58.
8. Krahn, **Smith's Story of the Mennonites**, *op.cit.*, 284.
9. Peter Toews, *Diary 1872-1878*, *op.cit.*, 67-68.
10. Gaeddert, *op.cit.*, 53.
11. P. Toews, *Diary 1872-1878*, *op.cit.*
12. *Ibid.*,
13. **History and Events**, *op.cit.*, 60-61

# Chapter Sixteen

## The Outward View

### 16.01 Introduction

From the writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonites it is evident that the Gemeinde could never become a purely inward looking institution and still remain true to the faith. Indeed, Menno Simons had enunciated a strong vision and love for a lost humanity! At the same time the “true” Church of God existed everywhere that believers were called to the historic truths of biblical Christianity. Consequently there would also be fellow believers and Gemeinden elsewhere with whom it would be desirable to correspond and to associate in brotherhood as part of the family of God. This interest is also evident from the writings of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) who states unequivocally that the Anabaptist-Mennonite Gemeinde must lovingly accept likeminded believers from distant Gemeinden by transfer.<sup>2</sup>

This outward view was very evident among the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. In previous chapters reference has been made to the strong connections which the Kleine Gemeinde maintained with friends and relatives in the old Prussian homeland until at least the middle of the 19th century. This insured that they would not lose their evangelical zeal by turning inward in philosophy. It has also become evident that the Kleine Gemeinde did not hesitate to include in its spiritual heritage writings which came from beyond its own Danzig Flemish Mennonite spiritual tradition. These included the writings of the Frisian, Waterlaender, and North German Mennonites. Such an interest in the writings of other branches of the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite family was no doubt encouraged by the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde lived in the setting of an often indifferent Molotschna Mennonite society within which they tried to be an evangelical witness and messenger.

Consequently it is not surprising that a number of contacts took place between the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia and various Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Switzerland, North Germany, and Prussia. In his *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde* Peter Toews included three letters which illustrate the foregoing and which are reproduced in chapter nine of this work. These are the following; **An Opinion Regarding the Mennonitische Blaetter of 1855**, **A Reply to Switzerland of 1856** and **A Letter to Christian Schmutz of 1861**. In addition a sum of money was sent for the relief of the Holstein Gemeinde in 1852. There was also an active correspondance with the Prussian Mennonites which has already been referred to.

In addition the Kleine Gemeinde also had a number of contacts with the Anabaptist-Hutterites or Hutterian Brethren. In his 1848 letter to the Hutterian Brethren Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) demonstrates his sincere love and empathy for this closely related branch of the extended full gospel family by counselling them in the resolution of a dispute.<sup>3</sup> Apparently the Hutterian Brethren must have remembered this interest favourably for during the time of the 1870s emigration the representatives of the two groups again made contact with each other. In 1873 the Hutterian and Kleine Gemeinde delegates travelled to America together.

### 16.02 Introduction to the Toews/Funk Correspondance, 1872-1873.

It is evident that the Kleine Gemeinde had a desire to make contact with Gemeinden elsewhere in order to compare their teachings with likeminded believers. Naturally the Swiss Mennonite groups were philosophically closer to the Kleine Gemeinde understanding of the full gospel faith than many of the Mennonite groups in the Molotschna. No doubt this was the case as the Swiss Mennonites had suffered persecution for a century longer than the Dutch-Prussia Mennonites. As a result, the faith of the Swiss Mennonites was kept pure and strong. The Kleine Gemeinde was also frequently called upon to give account for its faith. Until 1843 the Grosze Gemeinde tried with all its might to hinder and extinguish the Kleine Gemeinde. Somewhat later the inroads of pietism threatened to devastate the group. No doubt this greatly stimulated the Kleine Gemeinde interest in evangelical groups elsewhere. Surely there must be other Gemeinden who had remained committed to the teachings and practices of the forebearers which the older members of the Kleine Gemeinde still remembered from 18th century Prussia.

Thus it was with heartfelt joy that Aeltester Peter Toews (1841-1922) heard of a Swiss-American

Mennonite by the name of Johan F. Funk who not only shared the Kleine Gemeinde concept of non-resistance but also the Kleine Gemeinde love of the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings and the publication and the dissemination of the same. Funk was the well-known American Mennonite publisher from Elkhart, Indiana. Toews apparently became aware of Funk through an article in the **Mennonitische Blaetter** and was satisfied that here he had found a kindred soul. In his first letter he tells eagerly of the Kleine Gemeinde and its teachings and history. As well the first order is sent to Funk for sample books.

However, some regrettable notes appear here and there in the Toews letters. He talks of separating from "all other Gemeinden" and not merely of separating from a degenerate Grosze Gemeinde. From the reply of John F. Funk we see that he is puzzled by one of the statements made in the article read by Toews to the effect that "We seek to remain distant from all who think less strongly". Funk explains that this statement is not quite correct as they seek to work as closely as they can with others in any situation which is not directly contrary to their faith. Naturally they do not associate very much with those who swear oaths and who are not nonresistant. The statement by Funk seems to be in the same spirit as the teachings of Aeltester Klaas Reimer and Aeltester Abraham Friesen. In contrast it seems that Aeltester Peter Toews is moving to a somewhat more exclusive view of the Anabaptist-Mennonite model.

The second letter of Toews includes an important footnote which was not actually mailed to Funk. Nevertheless it is included here because in this notation Toews has referred very frankly to the crisis for the full gospel faith in Russia. This note indicates that up to that point the Molotschna Mennonite leaders had not included the Kleine Gemeinde in their delegations and representations to the Russian government authorities. According to this memorial it seems somewhat ironic to the Kleine Gemeinde that the groups who did not hesitate to beat and to imprison each other had suddenly rediscovered the principle of nonresistance when the issue of military service arose. Also worthy of note in this letter of August 25, 1872, is the symbolism of nourishment for the physical body used by Toews to explain the reason for the interest of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Anabaptist-Mennonite writings.

The replies of Funk demonstrate that a friendly relationship is developing between the two men which would continue even years later in America. In fact Funk refers to Toews as a brother in the Lord which term is then also used by Toews in his third letter to Funk. Toews refers to the history of his Gemeinde in terms of nonresistance. Nonresistance was one of the principle reasons for the original founding of a separate Kleine Gemeinde and the preservation of this same principle would mean that the Kleine Gemeinde must once more be ready to surrender its all by leaving Russia. Toews reviews some of the struggles which the Kleine Gemeinde has already encountered in this regard. To Toews these are not hypothetical problems as his group has already faced a number of real life challenges in this regard where physical and pecuniary punishment was threatened. Of course he also reminds Funk that the Kleine Gemeinde was not to be praised nor glorified either, as it has had its share of problems. Like the Apostolic Gemeinden on which it is modelled the Kleine Gemeinde has also experienced internal strife and division, differences in doctrine, the defection of a beloved leader, etc.

The fourth letter of Toews indicates that emigration now seems inevitable. Delegates are on their way to America, and in fact, the letter is being delivered by one of the delegates, Cornelius Toews, who is a brother to the Aeltester. In the final letter in this collection dated April 8th, 1873, apparently also delivered by Cornelius Toews, Aeltester Toews again discusses his views respecting nonresistance. He notes the irony of what has happened to the beliefs of the Prussian Mennonites in that a total reversal has occurred from the time that the senior Mannhardt wrote his book in 1813 to the 1872 article in the **Mennonitische Blaetter** condoning the actual use of arms. With these thoughts on nonresistance Toews concludes this part of his correspondence with Funk.

These letters represent all the correspondence between these two leaders which were extant in the Toews collection presently available. The correspondence and the brotherly friendship formed was later continued in America. Aeltester Peter Toews also had correspondence with other Mennonite leaders such as Cornelius Janzen and Schantz in Ontario during this period but the correspondence with John F. Funk is the most significant and the most extensive. Like the outward correspondence which Toews himself had included in Book Two of his **Sammlung** earlier referred to, these letters provide a frank and intimate self-view of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia during the early 1870s.

### 16.03 Letter by Toews to Funk, June 1, 1872.

Johan F. Funk, Elkhart, Indiana, North America.

Blumenhoff, June 1, 1872.

Worthy friend Johan F. Funk. Through a writing from a friend we were recently made aware of the information in the **Mennonitische Blaetter** that you in America are involved with the publication of the writings and books of our holy forefathers. In the booklet "Sammlung von Notizen ueber America" which has now been published by C. Jansen, Berjansk, we read the testimony of the Gemeinde to which you also belong. Therefore I can no longer postpone this writing to you and have the firm hope that my labour will not be thrown to the wind.

I have formed this hope from the testimony of your Gemeinde above referred to. Among other matters this article mentions that you publish the "Herald der Wahrheit". Also you seek to remain free of all other philosophies. You completely oppose especially trained ministers. The testimony states further that these Mennonites are firmly nonresistant, nor do they partake in political elections. Similarly they do not pursue their legal rights through the courts, even if only to collect monies which are due to them. They do not protect themselves nor seek restitution even if they are robbed, which has been demonstrated in actual situations. They do not demand the return of that which has been stolen and instead they put the one who has done so out of the Gemeinde.

I am interested in this testimony of your Gemeinde so that I have taken the liberty for now of writing and posting this letter on its long journey there with the question; would it be possible for us here in Russia to be able to obtain some of the books which are referred to in the "Harold der Wahrheit"? Especially the **Martyrs Mirrors** by T.J. von Bracht which are very scarce here. With the exception of our Gemeinde, the lovers of these writings are too few among most of the Mennonite Gemeinden here to warrant the publication of a new edition. Nor would such a publication be justified by our Gemeinde alone as it consists of only slightly over 200 members. But if only it would not be too terribly expensive these would quickly grasp at the opportunity, if it only would be possible to receive a dozen or so of these precious books here among us.

You will probably know that for some 50 years there has been a so-called Kleine Gemeinde here in Southern Russia which separated itself from all other Gemeinden in order to continue to strive to hold firmly to the confession of truth. This is the Gemeinde which I, unworthy one, together with four teachers (ministers) and three deacons, presently lead. Should you desire to know more about the founding, continuation and . . . among other things, which I expect that you will. We shall be very pleased to provide you with this information and shall not wait for your answer . . . before we write again. However, we must definitely expect that a few months will have gone by before we receive your reply.

As you have already been informed about the concern of the Mennonites here regarding the diminution of our freedom, you will also be able to conclude that this anxiety affects our Gemeinde even more . . . through the service in the public offices and civil services we are to help in governing the world. (From here on to the end of the page the script is totally illegible on the left hand side of the page. The following are the phrases which can be made out from the other side.) \*\*Through the taking up of the medical corps service . . . nonresistances to follow the lamb . . . And yet we are . . . if they persecute you in one city . . . true courage of the faith . . . the abandoning of the Prussian . . . Mennonites, instead of remaining and continuing to be a true example.

Worthy friend, thus you have been informed very briefly that already 50 years ago our Gemeinde had to follow the call of God, when it is stated "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you". and so on, 2 Corinthians 6:17 and Revelation of John 18:4. It will be no surprise to you that we definitely do not make use of the writings (books) of other confessions, for I conclude that you yourself are of one mind with us in this.

I understand that you have already found the means to forward books to C. Jansen in Berdjansk, and I believe that you will also find the means to forward these books to us. At first we will order one book or copy of "**The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror**" by T.J. Bracht, one "**Church History of the Mennonites**" by Eby, one "**Ehe der Christen**" by Dietrich Phillips, and a "**Spiegel der Taufe**".

"I am completely unfamiliar with the forwarding of money, as American money is not available here. I must impose upon your trust and bid that you forward these books together with your statement of account on the strength of my assurance and without prepayment. Also please advise as to the manner in which we are to make the payment. I would first have made these inquiries of C. Jansen through the post but this would have taken too long. I trust that you will have sufficient confidence in me that you will seek to fulfill my wishes as requested. It may even be of some encouragement to you that you may anticipate that we will be your agents here".

"Should you consider it to be more beneficial for yourself, that you forward these books to me through Mr. Jansen in Berdjansk, then please feel free to do so, in order that our request can be fulfilled that much quicker and safer. I will inform him of this, although I believe that he will not be opposed to this as he is familiar with our Gemeinde. He is more familiar with America than we are. As we hear that he wants to move there as well, it is possible that he may even be of further assistance to us in this matter".

Accordingly I conclude this my writing with trust in the Lord that if it is his will this letter will reach you, and that as soon as possible we will also receive the return here of a communication from you.

My heartfelt greeting. May the grace of the Lord be with you all. Amen. Respectfully yours, "Peter Toews".

"N.B.: I understand that one by the name of Dietrich Phillip is to have been a contemporary

of Menno Simon. I also understand, if I am not mistaken, that his book, which I have not yet read in the Dutch language, is available in your publishing house under the title **Handbook of Christian Doctrine**. If this book is available in the German language it might also find numerous recipients here. Accordingly I will expect to receive a copy of this book together with the others”.

#### 16.04 Letter by Funk to Toews, August 21, 1872.

Beloved friend and brother. Elkhart, August 21, 1872. Your worthy writing of June 1 of this year has been received in good order and it has given me great joy to have heard from our brethren in a foreign country so far distant. Indeed, such brethren whom I must believe are seeking for the proper teaching of truth.

The essay which you have seen is quite important, nevertheless, I do not quite perfectly understand the phrase where he says, “Also they seek to remain distant from all who think less strongly”. In this respect we are inclined not to have much association with any confessions which are not nonresistant and which swear the oath, and so on. Nevertheless we believe that we should be as free and as open-hearted towards all other people as we are given allowance by the gospel. Naturally only members of the Gemeinde are invited to partake in the communion services. That we baptise only those in their twenties is explained as follows: In accordance with the commandment of Christ we baptise upon faith. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved. If only the person comes to repentance, believes on Jesus, confesses his sins, and makes a commitment to a new life, then such a person is baptised be they 12, 15, 20 or 30 years of age or even older. Last spring we served an elderly white haired man who was 72 years of age with baptism and also received him into our Gemeinde. The remainder of that which was set forth has been correctly recorded. These are our regulations and yet the perfect carrying out of the same is sometimes not the way it should be. There is also much which can be improved with our lives in actual practice. Nevertheless with the help of God we seek to do the best that we can.

Regarding the books. The books which you desired have been shipped to you by post on July 20, namely, 1 **Martyrs Mirror**, unbound in order to keep the weight down as much as possible so that the shipping cost does not get too high, and the following: - \$4.65; 1 Church history - 0.50; 1 **Ehe der Christen** by Dietrich Phillips - 0.25; 1 **Spiegel der Taufe** by Heinrich Funk - 0.30. This makes up seven and three-quarters (7  $\frac{3}{4}$ ) rubles in Russian currency - 5.71; 1 Dietrich Phillips book - 0.80. In total 8 and three-quarters (8  $\frac{3}{4}$ ) rubles in Russian currency - 6.51.

All of these have been sent directly to you by post and we have presently also included the Dietrich Phillips book. We were unable to send the same earlier as it came off the presses only just now. The **Martyrs Mirror** has been sent in two packages. And one page, I do not quite remember if it was side 65 or 66 will not be found in the correct place in the series where it belongs but you will find it somewhere.

You will best be able to forward the money through a bill of exchange (bank draft) payable in New York. That is to say, you go to a bank which provides bills of exchange, whereupon the bank will give you a bill of exchange payable at New York, which you then send to me. Apparently this is how it will be done, but if not then presumably the banker in Berdjansk or Odessa will be able to provide further instructions. In any event the bill of exchange must be drawn on New York which is also acceptable for us. Perhaps you can advise us as to whether a duty must be paid on books which are imported into Russia. If the duty is not too high or if in fact there is no duty then the books should not be too expensive. But should there be a definite duty on these books it might be better to forward the books by post as usually there is no duty payable on postage. If in some way you could find out about this, perhaps through a book dealer in one of your capital cities or in some other way, then I would ask that you be so kind and write to me in this regard. We have not previously forwarded any books to Russia and so the matter is somewhat foreign to us. It would give me much joy if I might receive a complete report regarding the circumstance of your Gemeinde and the activities of the same. I will also send you a few calendars and a few magazines.

Now my beloved brother. Through your worthy and much appreciated letter I have already achieved the confidence that I can call you brother and I hope that this might also serve for your encouragement. We here in America have a deep empathy for you. Our prayer is that the Lord might truly watch over you and protect you and lead you upon the true path. May God give you as well as us grace to remain true until the death. We should be delighted to make a closer acquaintance and how dearly we would like to see you here in free America in order that you might enjoy together with us this noble and God given gift, namely, complete freedom of conscience. For this we can never be thankful enough.

May the Lord bless you and keep you and grant you peace in time and eternity. With a heartfelt greeting for all God seeking souls, I remain your humble brother bonded to you in love, and your co-worker in the vineyard of the Lord. Amen. “Johan F. Funk” Elkhart, Indiana, North America.

#### 16.05 Letter by Toews to Funk, August 25, 1872.

South-Russia, in Ekaterinoslav Gouvernment, Nikopol, Colony Blumenhoff, August 25, 1872. Honourable friend J.F. Funk.

I had already been considering the possibility of sending you another letter together with some funds, when on the 12th of this month I quite unexpectedly received the books which I had ordered

from you. We were also expecting information by way of a letter from you, particularly with respect to the cost of the books, and so the matter of a reply was delayed until today. As we presently can not know for how long we may expect to enjoy our freedom of faith and conscience as nonresistant Christians here in Russia, it is possible that it may hardly be worthwhile for us to order the books here in Russia.

But just as the physical body cannot subsist and stay alive without food and nourishment, even less so, can we withdraw the nourishment from the spiritual body which may be able to provide us with further strengthening for the eternal life. Thus for example, in our time and in our current predicament the history of the martyrs may serve for the encouragement and strengthening of our faith, and particularly that of our beloved youth, so that they can perceive their end and for the practice of their faith, for through our faith we have received the promises. Consequently that the passions would not astonish them so that they might not be misled by anything foreign. As the Apostle says, we have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Together with the payment of 50 rubles, written fifty rubles, we also forward an order for 24 **Martyrs Mirrors**, 12 **Spiegel der Taufe**, 12 **Ehe der Christen**, and 1 **Hoffart und Demut**. In addition we also order a copy of the **Foundation** of Menno Simons or "Complete Works" as it is referred to in your advertisement. Friend Jansen in Berjansk has brought it to my attention that all books coming from outside of the country must be approved by the censor, and therefore it will be more beneficial if I forward the money owing to you, to his beloved friend Braun in Hamburg. Your shipment to us here should also be sent in care of the same. I will follow his advice in this matter although I do not think that the books which I have already received have been through the censor.

I will leave it in your discretion. If you believe that the books will arrive here in the same manner and just as safely, and almost without any loss of time the way these books did, then these other detours would seem to be unnecessary. Otherwise it does not matter to us how we receive the books. If only we might be in receipt of the same very shortly. With the hope that you might best be able to fulfill our requests and that together with a new statement of account you will also send us a friendly reply to our first letter, the undersigned remains your respectful friend. "Peter Toews".

(Translator's note: This letter has a lengthy memorandum attached where Toews refers to the negotiations with the Russian Government regarding the freedom to practice nonresistance. However, this notation is crossed out with the words that as the letter in the end was not sent direct to Funk but rather via Braun in Hamburg the added portion was not actually forwarded. Possibly Toews felt that as it was going to go through many hands the chances of the letter being intercepted by the Russian censors were too great. Nevertheless this portion is included here as it provides insight into the attitude of the mainline pietist-cultural Mennonite groups with respect to the emigration and to the Anabaptist-Mennonite groups.)<sup>5</sup>

"As there is some room available here I will add a few observations with respect to our current circumstances. We remain completely excluded from all the church assemblies and conferences which are being held here by the joint Mennonite Gemeinden, such as the Molotschnaer, Chortitzer, Marienpöler, Berghaler, Volga, Samara, and Krimmer Mennoniten Gemeinden, relative to the negotiations regarding our freedom here in Russia. We are also completely excluded from all the delegations".

"Nevertheless we are informed by our fellow servants (ministers) in the Molotschna that these Mennonites had represented that they were unable to accept the proposal of the Russian government to serve in the medical corps. The last offer was that the Mennonites serve as prison guards and on prison duties. They have now readied a delegation which is to decline this proposal, but it can be expected that this refusal will not be accepted by the government, because for years the greatest majority of the Mennonites here have thrown each other into prison and punished each other physically. Also in the last years, and completely independently, they have constructed a special house of arrest at an estimated cost of 3000 rubles. Our members who did not want to take a part of this, including our fellow minister Klassen, were threatened with a punishment by way of a fine. Also for quite some time they have considered it to be no offense to their conscience, even if completely contrary to their own confession, when they perform jury duties for the State or if as civic officials, they punished their own brethren as well as others. In this they call upon the dead letter of the law and declare themselves innocent by saying that "God wishes to improve matters". In these and other similar matters we have no brotherly association with them. And therefore we are also viewed and treated as a sect by them. More than likely we shall have to send our own deputation to St. Petersburg".

#### 16.06 Letter by Funk to Toews, November 13, 1872.

"Elkhart, Ind., November 13th, 1872." "Worthy friend and brother in the Lord. Your letter and 50 rubles in Russian currency has come to my hand in good order. And we have now forwarded a chest with the following books: 24 **Martyr Spiegel** at \$4.50 - \$108.00; 12 **Ehe der Christen** at .25¢ - \$3.00; 12 **Spiegel der Taufe** at .25¢ - \$3.00; 1 **Hoffart und Demuth** - .10¢; 1 **Menno Simons Foundation** book - \$2.00; total \$116.00.

Which totals to 154 rubles and 80 kopeks. Previous shipment; 8 rubles and 75 kopeks. Total; 163 rubles and 00 kopeks. Paid on account; 50 rubles. Balance owing; 113 rubles and 60 kopeks.

We have bound all of these books as that is the best way to ship them as they have to go by



freight in any event. We have forwarded them through S. Braun in Hamburg. Also we have sent one more book than you had ordered. It is for Bernhard Warkentin in the Old Colony or Molotschna colony. Would you be so kind as to forward the same to him? His son Bernhard here, has ordered it for him from us. I have also enclosed a number of old calendars which you may distribute. The Menno Simons book is not completely printed in the German language and therefore we are sending only the **Foundation Book**.

Apparently you have already received my first letter some time ago. Let us hear from you again shortly, as to whether the books have arrived in good order and with respect to the conditions of your Gemeinde. I am glad when I am able to hear something from you.

At the present time we are forwarding the books for the prices listed and you pay the freight. When you have received the same please also write me and advise as to how much the freight came to. Then I will properly know what all of this costs should another occasion arise.

Hopefully you will receive the same in good order in due course. The Lord bless you and us all through Jesus Christ. Amen. Later when you forward the money rather send a bill of exchange through friend Braun. This is safer than money in case if a letter should ever go lost.

Thus I remain your brother united with you in love for the Lord. "Joh. F. Funk & Bros". Elkhart, Ind. U.S.A.

### **16.07 Letter Toews to Funk, December 6, 1872.**

Blumenhoff near Nikopol, in Ekatherinoslavschen Government, South Russia, December 6th, 1872. To J.F. Funk in America.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and your spirit which I know in the name only. I note that you have been able to give me so much confidence that you call me a brother in the Lord. It is my heartfelt wish that even though we are physically far distant from each other, that in the Lord we are nevertheless, truly bonded together as brethren. Your enterprise consisting of the dissemination of pure Christian writings which teach of the following of the Lamb wherever it leads, and what I have otherwise here and there heard of you and read about you in letters, impels me to believe that I have in you a brother in Christ.

Now beloved friend and brother. Already on December 2nd I received your letter written to me on November 13th. From the same we perceive that the 50 rubles have properly come into your hands and that you have already shipped the books which we had ordered and which we are now awaiting with longing. Quite some time ago we also received your first letter as well as the book by D. Phillips. As this letter appeared exactly at the time that I was in St. Petersburg one of our brethren, the schoolteacher P. Dueck, wrote a reply to you. I presume that you have already received this letter?

In your last letter you stated that you would gladly wish to learn something about us. Consequently I hasten to write a little about us for you. Already in my first letter I mentioned something about the circumstances of our Gemeinde. It is over 50 years ago and in fact shortly after the immigration into Russia when unrighteousness gained the upper hand, that a small flock separated. The start of the separation was caused when instead of exercising the evangelical ban they started to build a profunk (jail) for the evil doers, and the brethren started to beat the other physically and to carry each other away into prison, instead the Gemeinde leadership itself officially declared that these were police matters. After a certain minister (K.R.) had directed enough endeavours and efforts in vain, and after he had often been accused before the government and threatened with Siberia he started to hold himself back from the fallen and revenge seeking Mennonites together with a small flock.

Since that time we have confessed not only verbally but have also actually sought to carry out in the Gemeinde as a firm regulation in accordance with the word of God, that we do not undertake and pursue any legal complaint or legal process before or through the authority of the world. All matters are dealt with and judged in the Gemeinde. We confess and practice the evangelical ban. Hence we endure no drunkards, fornicators, adulterers, quarrelers, no smokers and card players and others who are afflicted with similar vices. Nor those who are proud or vain.

We also differentiate ourselves from the majority of the other Mennonites in that in accordance with the commandment of the Lord we practice washing of feet together with holy communion service. We also differentiate ourselves in that we feel obligated to serve the penitent who have come to a faith with baptism at any time during the year, and not only during a certain appointed time, i.e. between Easter and Pentecost. Nor do we have a certain appointed time for the conduct of holy communion. Rather we endeavour much more that this service not be undertaken unless all impurities and other sins have first been settled and removed from the way and we are all united and of one mind. So that like the leavened (vereinigte) bread of many kernels and the wine, we will be united as one body with one spirit even though we are many.

With respect to the government we confess that it is the servant of God, to protect the pious and to punish the evil. We believe in this as the Lord says "The worldly kings exercise Lordship over them and the mighty are called gracious benefactors. But among you it shall not be so". We are obligated to render all due honour to the authorities and to pay all taxes and levies. But for so long as we allow ourselves to be punished by the spirit of God we are not obligated to render any personal service (contrary to our confession) whether it be an expression of judgement by the tongue, or a personal service in the taking of prisoners, or guard duty of prisoners or to partake in military matters. Nor do we indulge ourselves to seek the return of property which has been stolen from us, and even less

to attempt to seize the thief. All we are allowed to do to such a person is to present his sin to him and the wages which the sin will bring, and the latter we are obligated to do.

Only recently we were directed to give our votes for six judges among us. We very definitely declined this instruction with the reply that we were only obligated to do that which we could (which was not contrary to our confession) and that it was contrary for us to serve as judges. We added to our response that the very name "judge" already gives evidence that we would be obligated to deliver a person or group to dealings which we ourselves would be unable to carry out. Therefore we did not do as directed. Until now we have not yet been put into confinement on account of this.

When the apostle says that we are to yield all the parts of our physical bodies as the weapons of righteousness, we believe that it is all one sort of sin, whether we yield to sin with our arm when in unrighteousness we reach out our arm with the sword in order to shorten the time of grace for someone by putting them to death, or whether we direct our tongue to a pronouncement of the judgment of the letter of the law. Both the sword and the law are merely dead mediums which must be brought into fulfillment through the members of the human body.

We are to yield all our members to God as weapons of righteousness and are not to resist evil but to follow the lamb wherever it may go. But this does not occur when we who represent ourselves to be the children of God, start to aspire and grasp for worldly government and authority as did the children of Israel in the time of Samuel, in the manner and style of all our neighbours around us. Consequently the Lord will have to pronounce the same remedy as in that case with respect to us, and he will be compelled to say of us that we have rejected him. He will also grant to us according to our desires, but just as with the children of Israel, they will also rightfully seize our properties for all manner of service to them.

Like the children of Israel our fellow confessionists here in Russia have already set the direction for falling into this dilemma. They are following in the same manner that has occurred to many of the Mennonites in Prussia. It was no wonder when more than twenty-five years ago 29 men there who were Aeltesten and ministers united themselves to a joint statement to seize and confiscate the Menno Simons books which had been published. In the case of a refusal the 29 undersigned intended to find cause to have the matter dealt with by the highest government authorities, August 20, 1835. i.e. The printing of these books through P.V. Reisen. However, as there were Aeltesten in Russia who did not have the writings of Menno Simons and were even less interested in reading the same, our Gemeinde was able to have these books which were banned in Prussia brought to Russia, through the leading of God. Here we have at all times recognized the same to be a pure christian teaching which we were obligated to strive to follow.

But my beloved friend. Do not understand me as if I would want to belittle the other Gemeinden and to exalt ours, and to praise and glorify ours as the true Gemeinde. Oh no, for we are also deficient in the glory which we should have before God. Unfortunately Satan has already desired ours, so that He has sifted us like the wheat, in that a number of years ago our Gemeinde was tragically divided on account of the ban and avoidance. Although our Gemeinde later regrouped to a considerable degree a great vexation again came over us some three years ago. Before the newly elected Aeltester had barely served in his office for a number of months, conducted holy communion once, and baptised a number of young persons, he had himself baptised once more and in fact by submersion in a river and also wanted to baptise again those whom he had already once baptised. Certainly the bewilderment of conscience was more than enough. We now truly learnt to know the meaning of the words, "temptation teaches one to heed the word".

Although the Gemeinde was still supplied with ministers it was now again without an Aeltester. After a period of about one year had elapsed and many difficult trials experienced the Gemeinde now consisting of a little over 200 members again united itself for the purpose of an Aeltester election. May the Lord in the times to come grant us his blessing which is faithful to the weak and strengthens that which is dying.

The greatest portion of our Gemeinde resides in the Ekaterinoslav Gouvernement near the city of Nikopol on its own parcel of land which was purchased only a few years ago, which will truly be very inconvenient for us now, for we are unable to think otherwise but that in a period of a few years we shall have to break away from here, in that many have not yet completely paid for their land. In this present year we have also built a house of worship for ourselves here. But it shall and will do us no harm to leave everything if it will become necessary to carry out the will of God. In this case we will now have nowhere to go other than to follow your friendly invitation. If we will indeed partake in the first delegation we do not yet know. As soon as it is definite that our freedom will be taken from us, the way it will most likely be, so that we shall have to flee on account of our faith, then we shall emigrate in any event.

Now beloved friend. I have a few questions which I would be pleased if you could answer them for me. I understand that the situation frequently arises with you that you baptise people from 40 to 70 years of age. However this is only very rarely the case with us, and even then only where people from another confession wish to come over to us. I would think that this would also only be the case with you when others wish to accept the Mennonite confession. This seems to occur more frequently with you and also seemingly is not contrary to the law of the land there. Or do some from among your families wait with baptism for so long until they are 40 and more years old?

Secondly, does a Gemeinde, which is nonresistant and defenseless in the sense that I have briefly described ours, and as I also consider yours to be, have complete freedom of religion and conscience

there in America? May we rely on that? I bid that you forgive my forwardness and that in love you will allow a written reply to come back to me.

Also I would gladly receive the "**Herald der Wahrheit** for the year 1873 in order that I might become more familiar with your Gemeinde. (\*An asterick to a footnote which cannot be deciphered due to the poor copy). I will forward the money which I owe either with a cheque through friend Braun in Hamburg, or with the delegates if a delegation will come to you this spring. With heartfelt greetings your friend and brother. "P. Toews".

(Translator note.) A postscript seems to order some more books including 12 copies of **Hoffart und Demuth**, 1 **Angenehme Stunde in Zion** . . . (but the rest of the note is illegible.)

### 16.08 Letter From Toews to Funk February 12, 1873.

South Russia, Ekaterinoslav, Nikopol Blumenhoff, February 12th, 1873. To Johan Funk, Elkhart, America.

Firstly I wish you the peace of God with a heartfelt greeting. Beloved friend J.F. Funk, I am forwarding with my dear brother the balance of the monies which I owe you in the amount of 113 rubles and 60 kopeks in accordance with the statement of account which you have sent me. He is on his way to America as a delegate in the company of many others. If you have received my last letter and in response to my bidding have forwarded another shipment to me together with the invoice for the same, then this box of books is travelling at a completely different pace than the previous one which I received by post completely without any difficulties. With respect to the box I have just recently received information from Odessa that it will very possibly still have to be processed through the censor in Warsaw. I know that it may take a long time before I will actually receive them into my possession, or who knows if in the end they will not actually be returned. I will expect the new shipments in the same manner in which I received the previous ones, namely by post.

Had we been able to foresee that we would so quickly have to depart from our fatherland and seek a new homeland we might possibly have waited with the books until we had them closer at hand. But we were still hoping for a favourable decision on the part of the government. Should the books in the end again return to you I will at that time anticipate receiving further news from you. I am now shortly awaiting the answer to my last letter and also the **Herald der Wahrheit**.

In many letters from America I have read how the desire is given expression to be hospitable and helpful to our delegates. For this I already forward an advance thank you in that, if it is the will of the Lord, my beloved brother is also coming to you and will personally hand deliver this letter to you. May the Lord protect him on his way, and help him and his associates so that they will be able to settle everything well. And oh, how glad we will be when we will once again see each other. May the Lord lead so that his holy will might be carried out on earth through us in our undertaking. May God so grant. Amen.

In addition I have a small favour to ask regarding the letters which will be sent from us here to Toews. We will already take the liberty of addressing the same to you so that they can be forwarded by you, as otherwise we have and know no one else there. We must recognize the providence of God in this in that we already have a friend in a foreign land which would have remained completely unfamiliar to us and in which we now wish to seek a new homeland. This is completely different from the direction which many in this time of religious delusions believe, namely towards Jerusalem. Might the beloved God grant each of the many souls who presently intend to emigrate on account of their faith, a true desire to emigrate from these huts of Kedar to the Jerusalem above, which God himself has founded as an eternal city on the blood of the covenant.

A heartfelt greeting to you with the peace of the one who says "But that which ye have already, hold fast until I come". Yours respectfully, "Peter Toews". (Note: Also ordered a **Foundation** by Menno Simon for Isaac Warkentin, Hochfeld.)

### 16.09 Letter Toews to Funk April 8, 1873.

To Johan F. Funk, Elkhart, North America, April 8th, 1873.

Acknowledgement for the receipt in Nikopol of the chest of books containing, 25 **Martyr books**, 12 **Spiegel der Taufe**, 12 **Ehe der Christen**, 1 **Hoffart und Demuth**, numerous calanders and magazines, and the statement of account for the freight, 34.00 rubles.

I am now awaiting the 12 **Spiegel der Taufe**, 12 **Hoffart und Demuth**, 1 **Angenehme Stunde in Zion** and the **Herald der Wahrheit**. In addition I would request 24 **Hoffart und Demuth**, 12 **Spiegel der Taufe**, 1 **Begebenheit** and the Menno Simons book already mentioned in the previous letter, and that these would all be sent directly to me through the post. I also enclose 113.60 the balance owing by your statement, as well as the payment for the subsequently ordered books. I await your further invoice and have also written the following.

In the September, 1871, issue of the magazines which we have received I read with interest your article on the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world and I have found that a portion of the questions posed in my last letter were answered thereby. I am exceedingly glad that I am always more and more able to give myself over to the conviction that many of the Mennonites in America follow the nonresistance of the Lamb, of which Peter said, "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed everything to the Lord who judgeth righteous-

ly". These are the footsteps which we are to follow:

Therefore it need come as no great surprise to us that those Mennonites, who not only repay abuse with abuse but actually also put others into prison and protect their own house with their fists and in fact with instruments of murder, cannot comprehend that taking part in a war is a sin, even if it is only by noncombative duties (medical corps) or train and other similar service. Even if in their representations to the higher government authorities almost the entire mass of the Mennonites here do not want to concede this, and are only prepared to accept indirect military service, the matter speaks for itself. For where the deed is speaking, words must fall silent.

Alas, what a sorrow it is to look on as the Mennonites deny their faith. See *Wehrfreiheit* 1813 by Mannhart page 171 where it is stated: "That commencing from the very moment of partaking in military service a Mennonite ceases to be a Mennonite, may the mode of participation be defense force (landstorm) or whatever it is called". But now in the *Mennonitische Blaetter*, 1872 volume, they declare as follows: "Where in times of war, we are serving in the medical corps or as train workers, and are summoned to take up arms against the forces of the enemy in order to protect the sick and wounded, or in order to take care of the goods belonging to our fighting brothers entrusted to us; we would only fulfill our Christian duty and our conscience would have no reason to be disturbed thereby, even though the defense of the sick, wounded, or necessary provisions, could not be carried out without killings, etc." In addition they do not terminate the association of those who are minded to enter into full military service.

Oh! You all who follow the Lamb wheresoever it goes. To whom would not the words of 2 Peter 2, 18-22 come to mind during an evaluation of the denial of the faith of our fellow confessionists. Indeed, how much more sharply this pierces the very soul when these foreswearers usurp the very words of the beloved and always nonresistant Menno to justify their sins. Oh, let us be warned, for after all, the perjurers shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The Lord says, "And I will come near unto you and punish you and will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who use might and unrighteousness against the day labourer, the widow, and the orphans, and who oppress the strangers, and who fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts". Malachi 3,5. See also the first eight verses of song Number 150 (*Gesangbuch*)

Now then, what is the mission of those of us who have gone out. Surely it is not to put to death our Lord Jesus Christ, or even one of his most insignificant ones, with swords and with spears. Are we not rather to follow the Lamb wherever it goes? This is what the word of God tells us. Yes, manifoldly, as does also the referenced poem. Therefore let us pray for them, even though they cannot say that they did not know what they were doing. Nevertheless we want to supplicate for them. Would that the Lord might allow them to regain true compassion.

Let us take up the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. It was also the intention of this writing to take up this sword against the enemies of the cross of Christ and to march to the field of battle with the herald of truth.

"P. Toews". With Corn. Toews.<sup>6</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SIXTEEN. THE OUTWARD VIEW.

1. J.C. Wenger, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, op.cit., 322.

2. *The Golden Years*, op.cit., 279-282.

3. *Ibid.*, 340-341.

4. Note. The copy of this letter was so poor that the transcriber, Peter A. Plett, Landmark, Manitoba, was unable to decipher some of the words which were almost indiscernable. Hopefully the original of this material can again be located. In any event a word is missing here. It could be "division". Page 55 of the Peter Toews collection #77-9, Correspondance 1870-1873, Courtesy Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.

5. There has been considerable debate in the Mennonite press in recent years regarding a collective "Mennonite guilt" concerning involvement in the "Selbstschutz", service in the "White" army, Nazi sympathizers in America, service in Wehrmacht, complacency in War Crimes, buying land at bargain prices from Japanese war internees, etc.. Others have been quick to point out that by following the full gospel truths of New Testament Christianity and the orthodox teachings of the faith, Old Order Mennonite groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde, have not yet in any way tarnished their witness to Christ. Even today, Kleine Gemeinde congregations in Belize suffer brutal death, rape and material devastation, rather than to sacrifice their Crown.

At the same time, those New Order Mennonites who now publicly agonize over the guilt of the "people," are frequently the same ones who earnestly promote German Pietist and/or American Fundamentalist conceptualizations and forms of worship, in fact, anything (including tongue worship), providing only that it has no taint of Orthodox Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching.

6. All documents in this chapter are from the Toews collection #77-9, MLA, Kansas.



# Chapter Seventeen.

## A Delegate's Journey

### 17.01 Introduction

The events and issues which finally resulted in a Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde decision to send delegates to consider settlement opportunities in North America have been considered in Chapter Fifteen. On February 4, 1873, the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde elected Cornelius P. Toews of Gruenfeld as its representative. He was the brother to Aeltester Peter Toews. Somewhat earlier the Heuboden Gemeinde had elected David Klassen (1813-1900) as its delegate. Klassen was the father-in-law to Johan Friesen (1807-1872), the former Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. This chapter will deal with the subsequent journey of these delegates.

A number of diaries and writings pertaining to the undertaking of the Russian Mennonite delegates to America have already been published. These include the recollections of Aeltester Leonard Suderman of Berdjansk, who served as one of the delegates of the Molotschna Mennonites. The same were published in 1974 under the title *In Search of Freedom*.<sup>1</sup> A diary account of Tobias Unruh, the Aeltester of the Vohlynian Mennonites, was published in 1970 under the title *Great Grandfather's Diary*.<sup>2</sup> Other documents such as the diary of Andreas Schrag, a delegate representing the Vohlynian Swiss Mennonites, are available in unpublished form<sup>3</sup>.

The twelve Mennonite delegates travelled to Elkart, Indiana, U.S.A., in several parties. The Kleine Gemeinde delegates travelled in the company of Paul Tschetter and Lorenz Tschetter, the representative of the Hutterian Brethren in South Russia. Therefore the sources referred to above contain only few references of direct interest to the reader of Kleine Gemeinde background. Fortunately Paul Tschetter, who was a minister of the Hutterites, maintained an extensive diary which has been published in *Das Kleine Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brueder*.<sup>4</sup> Portions of this vivid account will form a part of this chapter.

Regretably there is little information available from the Kleine Gemeinde delegates themselves. David Klassen (1813-1900), the Heubodner representative, apparently did not leave any diaries or other writings with respect to the delegation. The other delegate, Cornelius Toews, is remembered as a literate and articulate man who maintained extensive writings and correspondence, but his writings were lost when a fire destroyed his home in Gruenfeld, Manitoba in 1875. Fortunately a few of his reports and letters have been preserved among the papers of his brother Aeltester Peter Toews. The remnants of this correspondence and a review of the Tschetter diary will constitute the basis of this chapter. The same will provide the reader with some personal glimpses of the arduous journey and adventurous experiences of these men and some idea of the effects which their reports would have on the Gemeinde at home.

### 17.02 The Delegates Depart

It has already been mentioned that the delegation had originally planned to leave for America in February of 1873. But the travelling schedule was changed so that the actual departure only occurred in the spring of 1873. In his *1872-1878 Diary* Aeltester Peter Toews has referred to the departure of his brother Cornelius Toews, one of the delegates. He describes the tearful separation as follows:

"Saturday, April 14th, 1873. After some prayer and singing and some words of admonishment in the faith, brother Cornelius Toews took leave of the brethren and sisters who had assembled in rich numbers here in the school (Blumenhoff). On the same day he was accompanied to Nikopol by many brothers and sisters. They left Nikopol by steamboat for Odessa at 5 o'clock Sunday morning. They were accompanied to Odessa by a number of brethren as well as Klassen and two persons from the Hutterites. The brethren who had accompanied them brought us the information that they had left Odessa by railway at nine o'clock in the evening on Tuesday the 17th."

Aeltester Peter Toews goes on to note that the Hutterian and Kleine Gemeinde delegates had planned to meet Suderman of Berdjansk and Buller of Alexanderwohl in Prussia on Sunday the 22nd. From there the entire party had apparently planned to travel as a group. But these plans did not come to fruition and finally the Kleine Gemeinde and Hutterian Brethren travelled as a separate party. In his *Beschreibung der Reise nach America* Paul Tschetter describes the departure as follows:

"On Saturday the 14th of April, 1873, I embarked upon my fateful journey to America. Whereupon I took leave of my wife and children with a sad and sorrowful heart, and I also

took leave of all the brethren and sisters who were at the wagon. I found it especially sad that my brother Joseph Tschetter and my sister-in-law could not be there for they had planned to accompany me to Nikopol. But the Lord had directed otherwise as my brother's son in Hutterthal had become sick so that Joseph had to go there instead. Two brethren from Hutterdorf were visiting here and I also took leave of them, namely, Joerg Hofer and Joseph Hofer. My beloved mother and father were inspired of love to accompany us to Nikopol. Finally we were underway in the name of God, although with sad and sorrowful hearts. Only God knows if I will ever see my own again. I placed my entire trust in God that he would send angels to watch over us and that the same would guard and protect us. There were also three other brethren here from Hutterthal, namely, Peter Tschetter, Peter Mandel and Christian Hofer, who accompanied us to Nikopol. It seemed as if the Lord wanted some of all our brethren to be present when we departed. We arrived in Nikopol on the same day at 5 o'clock in the evening. We immediately went to see the steamship and took out second class tickets for Kherson. They cost 3 rubles 60 kopeks.

### 17.03 From Nikopol to Hamburg

This section as well as several more will be based almost entirely upon the vivid observations of Paul Tschetter. Although the Hutterian Brethren and the Kleine Gemeinde delegates only travelled together to Manitoba this portion of the Tschetter diary alone consists of some twenty substantial pages. Therefore it will be necessary to omit some portions entirely and to summarize or abridge other sections. This is regrettable as Tschetter was not only very perceptive but also capable of a clear and faithful recording of his observations. The reader should bear in mind that except where noted the Tschetter diary has been freely translated and paraphrased. The first person tense in which the diary is written will be retained where possible.

On April the 15th, 1873, the four delegates left Nikopol for Kherson on the Steamship Listsalscha. "In Kherson we took quarters in the European guest home. At 8 o'clock on the morning of April 16th we returned to the waterfront and obtained second class tickets for Odessa on the ship Gieszen. Cost 2 rubles and 40 kopeks. There was considerable wind but the ship did not sway appreciably while on the Dnieper. After four hours journey the ship entered the Black Sea where the wind became stronger and the waves more powerful. Here the delegates had their first taste of seasickness. At four o'clock of the evening we arrived in the large city of Odessa where we took quarters for the night.

"Immediately after our arrival Klassen and I went to Toews who was the ship agent to whom we had been referred. Here we sought counsel with respect to all our circumstances. The next morning the delegates returned to the ship agent in order to exchange their currency. Toews helped us in as much as he could by giving us a reference to the representative of the German Line in Berlin. He also wrote a letter to August Bolten, the agent of the German Line in Hamburg, requesting that he take us under his wing and reserve lodging for us with Maier in Hamburg.

"We thanked him for his help and on the same day, Tuesday, April 17, at 8 o'clock in the evening we departed for Wolotschisk on the Austrian border. Paid 6 rubles and 38 kopeks per person. At the border we were required to present our passes and a page of the same was removed. Our luggage was checked and stamped. From here we purchased a ticket to Podwotoczyska for 10 rubles and from Potwotoczyska to the Prussian border for 12 gulden and 11 kruetzer. Here we left the Russian language behind as the people spoke Austrian and some German. On April 19 we arrived in Lemberg the capital of Galacia where we changed trains and at 7 o'clock we arrived at Oswiecim. From here we obtained a ticket to Myslowitz where we stayed for the night. On April 20th the delegates entered Prussia passing through Cosel on their way to Breslam. At 8 o'clock in the evening we arrived in Berlin, the capital city of Prussia.

"I had never seen a train station as big as the one in Berlin; it exceeded even the one in St. Petersburg. What a cry and commotion! Here we were in the middle of the night and everything was foreign to us. Then a man approached us and offered to obtain quarters for us. We decided to trust him and followed him into the basement of a five-storey building. He showed us a compartment with only one window but with four beds. Lorenz and I did not like the place and went to look for something else. But we found nothing else and had to be satisfied. We bolted the door and prayed to the Lord that he would protect us. In the morning we met with the agent of the German Line who helped us with the necessary currency exchange. We received 620 dollars for 720 rubles. He then took us to the train station and saw to it that we obtained good places. At 10 o'clock in the morning we departed from Berlin and arrived in Hamburg at 7 o'clock in the evening a distance of 274 kilometers.

"Here again there was a hue and commotion just as in Berlin. Many men offered to obtain quarters and we did not know whom to trust. Finally someone shouted, "Toews, Klassen, Tschetter!" We were surprised but he explained that he was from the German Line and that we should come with him. He led us to a tall five-storey building through a room in which people were dancing. I did not want to go but he assured us that we would not be disturbed in our quarters. He explained that the dancers were celebrating their departure to America the next day. I replied that they should rather be in prayer.

"The next day April 22, I remained in our quarters until noon studying the word of God. Then

we went to the agent August Bolten who promised to do everything in his power for us. He provided a return ticket for our ships passage which cost 200 thaler. Monday, April 23rd. A group of 500 souls consisting mainly of people from Mecklenburg arrived late in the evening. They were emigrating for various reasons. One needed this and one needed that. After dinner I went to look over the city. On April 24th I was also invited to the minister Rosen. I did not go since I knew that he was a fallen Mennonite.

#### 17.04 The Ocean Journey

“On Wednesday the 25th of April we were taken from our quarters to the ship by wagon. The ship was about two verst away on the Elbe river. Here they checked our passes and then we embarked with sighing and prayer to God in whom we trusted that he would help us as we crossed over the wide and turbulent ocean. We departed at 8 o'clock in the morning and after two hours we came to the ocean liner where we transferred over to the larger ship, where we were shown our cabin which had six beds always one above the other. As our party only consisted of four we had two strangers with us. There was plenty of food which was served four times daily.

“After the first day we reached the North Sea. On April 26th the wind was strong and the ship started to sway in the waters. Many people became seasick. Many so bad that they could not eat at all. Our companion Toews was unable to eat anything that day. When the ship came out of the North Sea and into the English channel the wind became even stronger and the ship was thrown back and forth. I sighed to God but others sang and danced. On April 27th we stopped at the French seaport of Leharve in order to provision with water and coal.

“At 8 o'clock of Saturday, April 28th the ship ventured forth unto the ocean. After two hours we could no longer see land. Only sky and water. The sea was calm the first day. Sunday April 29th a wind arose. The ship started to sway and the people became sick. The same ladies and gentlemen who had paraded so proudly the previous day were now pale, the one here and another there. By Wednesday May 2nd most of the people had recovered from their seasickness. The ocean was quieter. Thursday May 3, the wind was calm but the ocean was still rough from the previous day. People were somewhat used to this by now, but not everyone adjusted. Our travelling companion Toews was prostrated by the sea sickness for eight days during which time he did not eat anything. The other comrad Klassen did not even get sick.

“Friday, May 4, Wind and rain. The ocean arose powerfully and the waves fell upon each other like mountains. The sea was calmer on May 5, the wind came from behind us and the sails were hoisted. The ship made 340 sea miles compared to the usual 315. Sunday, May 6 Sunshine. A pastor gave a sermon but it was only weak and in accordance with what the people wanted to hear. Some money was collected for the children of a man who had died. The corpse was buried in the water during the night so that the passengers would not be upset by the sight.

“On Monday the 7th of May, we were intercepted by a smaller ship from New York. A pilot came upon our ship in order to guide us into harbour. On May 8 we sighted land after having been on the great and stormy ocean for thirteen days. At 11 o'clock we disembarked from the mighty Silesia and were taken on by a smaller ship. After a short voyage of one hour during which we passed 100 other ships we arrived at Hoboken. At 12 midnight we disembarked from the ship. Oh, but what joy to be once more on the firm earth.”

Thus far from the Tschetter diary. This section is concluded with a brief excerpt from the Diary of Cornelius Toews which was found among the Peter Toews papers. It seems to have been sent to Peter Toews in Russia together with the Cornelius Toews letter of May 1, 1873 which will be set forth in the next section. Probably Cornelius Toews sent these excerpts from his diary to his brother in Russia in order to illustrate the vistitudes of ocean travel. As such this may well be the only portion of this diary which is still extant.

“**Circumstances from the Diary.** Today on the 9th of May we exchanged the American money (gold coin) for paper currency. For every one hundred dollars in gold coin we received 116 dollars in paper currency. The currency is not universally accepted as legal tender; it rises and falls in value like our products in Russia. There are people here who seem to be very helpful to us in all respects. If it is the will of God then we wish to leave here (New York) by railway at 7 o'clock for Elkhart. We should arrive there on the immigration train by noon on Friday. The cost is 12 dollars and 15 cents.

“And so beloved brother we are coming closer to our actual endeavour. Possibly the matter of our future fate will already be determined by the time you read this. Remember me in prayer . . . (There seems to be a part missing here).

“With the help of God we have concluded our ocean journey in a matter of thirteen days from the 25th of April to the 8th of May, with the exception of two hours in the harbour of a French commercial city. Although the weather was very favourable I was quite sick. I was completely unable to eat for a total of 2 days as I could not get used to the swaying of the ship. But thanks and praise unto God for I was relatively well once again during the last four days, and was able to recuperate somewhat. I hope that on the return journey I will not have this problem to the same degree.

“I believe that you will wish to know a great deal about the journey of which I have now briefly reported in part. May God grant that we might once more see each other face to face so that we could discuss everything personally. In as much as possible I am writing everything in accordance



with . . .” This is the end of this particular excerpt. The conclusion is missing. Nevertheless the diary does provide some insight into the ocean journey of the Kleine Gemeinde delegates.

### 17.05 On to Elkhart, Indiana

We return to the Tschetter diary as the four delegates continue on their journey. The next major stop was Elkhart, Indiana, where they were to meet with John F. Funk, the American Mennonite publisher. Tschetter recorded that upon disembarking from the ship in New York they were taken to a hotel in the City. On the next day, May 9th, they made their way to pastor Neumondt to whom they had been referred. Tschetter describes the subsequent events as follows:

“He (Pastor Neumondt) was very friendly but too talkative, which detracted from the value of his counsel. He mentioned that we should return in the afternoon when he would provide us with some addresses and help us with the exchanging of currency. Toews and Klassen also went back to see Neumondt in the afternoon. We left by railway for Elkhart, Indiana, at 8 o’clock that evening. On Friday, May 11th, we arrived in Chicago. At 3 o’clock during the next night we arrived in Elkhart where we stayed in the coach until morning. We have been on the train for 46 hours. Saturday May 12, we went to the place of John F. Funk, a minister of the Old Mennonites, but he was not at home. Nevertheless they took us in and fed us.”

The four delegates now had to wait in Elkhart until the 23rd of May. At first they waited for John F. Funk and then for the other Molotschna delegates in order that they could proceed as a group. The delegates put this time to good use by visiting with the Old Mennonites as well as the Amish Mennonites making inquiries and observing the religious practices and secular affairs in this new country. In his diary Tschetter provides pages of fascinating detail of the people and of the land through which the group has travelled. His observations during the eleven day stopover in Elkhart are priceless as they represent the first personal interaction between the Swiss American Mennonite church and the Russian Anabaptist-Mennonites and the Hutterian Brethren. Some of these descriptions by Tschetter follow here.

“A man by the name of Isaac (Kilmer) took us into his care. We arrived at his home just before sundown. The next morning Sunday May 13th we went to church where I was seated as a minister.” Tschetter described the worship service and the dress and demeanour of the Old Mennonites and then went on to note that they practiced the bann but not strong avoidance. He was very disappointed with the practice of smoking which he described as being so rampant that even the women smoked. He also noted that at least one Old Mennonite minister presented his sermon without a written text. The same was also in English. After the sermon a minister by the name of Daniel Brenneman took them to his home near the church.

Tschetter noted that careful inquiries were made of the Old Mennonites with respect to the status of nonresistance in America. He was assured that there was complete freedom of conscience. In the last war those who were drafted were released on payment of \$300.00 dollars. The Gemeinde looked after those members who were poor and unable to pay such a sum. Tschetter also made inquiries regarding the imposition of public offices of authority and the voting for the same. He was assured that no such offices were imposed on anyone and that each citizen was free to vote or not to vote. In general Tschetter was quite pleased with the pleasant countryside and prosperous farms in the Elkhart area. He noted that the farmers there have very good cows which cost about \$40.00 each.

On Tuesday May 15th the party met with John F. Funk who had returned home at 10 o’clock the previous night. Funk had received a telegram from the delegates Suderman and Buller that they expected to disembark from their ship in New York on the following day. Funk advised the Kleine Gemeinde and Hutterian delegates to wait for Buller and Suderman in order that all the delegates could work together. He also promised to accompany them since their English was not strong. Consequently the delegates decided to wait for their brethren.

Later that same day the delegates together with Funk and other Old Mennonite ministers visited another congregation nearby. For supper and for the night they stayed at the place of Joseph Holdeman. The next day on the 16th of May the Russian delegates visited the Amish Mennonites in the neighbourhood. Tschetter described their dress, demeanour, and practices. Tschetter also noted that these people were probably the closest to the Hutterites in the matter of clothing, but that in general the Old Mennonites were friendlier. The Amish Mennonites also condoned the practice of smoking. Tschetter noted that on the morning of the 17th of May he heard the discharge of a gun and that he was somewhat shocked later when he discovered that his host, a minister, had been out hunting. Later the same day the party returned to the Old Mennonites. On Friday the 18th the delegates were

again in the home of Joseph Holdeman and later that day they returned to the home of John Funk in Elkhart.

On Sunday the 20th of May the party attended the worship service of the Old Mennonites where Brennenmen presented the sermon. Later that day Tschetter attended the service at a nearby "evangelical" church. He described it as being different from the Lutheran church in that they did not insist on infant baptism quite as strongly and that they also allow adult baptism. Here is Tschetter's description of the worship service of this so-called Evangelical church:

"The pastor started to preach. The text was to trust in the Lord and to continue in him so that you will inherit the land and see how the godless are rooted out. The man then started to scream as loud as he could. As I sat near the pulpit I was shocked and wanted to run out. The man ran around behind the pulpit, first on one side and then on the other. It seemed as if he was going bezerk. He beat his fists together and then he beat his fists into his breast, and then he pounded the lecturn with his fists. One time he seized his breast with his hands and screamed, "the Savior must live in here." Another time he pointed to heaven and then again downward to hell with a terrible scream. Even a person who was bezerk would be unable to distort himself in such a way. He was not like a preacher behind the pulpit but rather like a military man who wanted to devastate everything in his path. On one occasion it seemed as if he wanted to throw everything up into heaven and on the next as if he wanted to beat everything down into hell. The reader may think that I have exaggerated but I have written everything the way it was. I have been in many churches during my lifetime but I have never before seen such a sight. One could not see anything more strange in a comedian show. He preached the truth but with great lack of understanding."

The Kleine Gemeinde representatives would not have found the antics of the so-called Evangelical minister quite as shocking as they were already used to such behavior from the many denominations of radical pietists who had made their way through the Mennonite settlements in Russia during the previous decades. Tschetter also described an interesting exchange with the Old Mennonite minister Brennenman regarding music. Tschetter did not believe in instrumental music and supported his position by reference to Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord". Brennenman countered by referring to King David who had himself played stringed instruments. To this Tschetter replied that King David had also gone to war and shed blood.

The Molotschna delegates had still not arrived by Tuesday, May 22. Consequently the delegates together with John Funk decided that they would have to get underway by themselves. On the previous day Cornelius Toews wrote a report to his brother, a portion of which has been preserved. This letter provides a valuable insight into the delegates journey up to this point.

"Beloved Brother Toews" May 21, 1873 Elkhart, Indiana

"Firstly I wish you and all the beloved brethren there the love of God and the comfort rich communion of the Holy Spirit, together with a heartfelt greeting. You as well as all the brethren there are entitled to know of my circumstances here in America. I believe that you will already have received the letter written from New York. From New York we travelled two days and three nights which was a distance of 650 miles without the train having failed us even once. We arrived in Elkhart at 4 o'clock in the morning of May 12, well and in good spirits. Thus we have a considerable distance behind us but the actual purpose of our journey still lies ahead of us. In the meantime it seems as if everything is taking too long for now we must wait here in Elkhart for eight days. First of all we did not find the brother Funk at home nor was he expected until . . . (here a page or section is missing)

"It will take at least a month for this letter to reach you provided that it finds no hinderances or disruptions on the way. Hopefully we will be finished by then and on our way home. But as God directs and if we live. I would dearly hope that I might shortly receive a letter from you or my beloved wife as this would be a tremendous joy for me here in this foreign land. This would also provide strength for me, beloved brother, of which I am in great need at times. Especially here so far away where everything is strange and unusual. For the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Therefore I must cry out here in the distant country; Jesus Gnade troeste mich, ob es mir gleich gehet hart, ich doch der erloesung wart in der Fremde rufe Ich, Jesus ach erhalte mich, und auch fuhre mich daheim, das wir wieder uns erfreuen. In closing I would ask that you remember me in prayer. Yes, help me to pray earnestly in order that if I live, the Lord would want to grant me a safe journey home. Cornelius Toews."

## 17.06 From Elkhart to Fargo

Finally the Kleine Gemeinde and Hutterian delegates were on their way to investigate the available settlement sites in North Dakota and in Manitoba. They had decided that they could not wait any longer for the other delegates. On Tuesday May 22 they left Elkhart for Chicago. From here they

departed on May 23 on their way to St. Paul, Minnesota where they arrived the next day, having travelled a distance of 408 miles. Here they also received a telegram that Suderman and Buller were on their way to St. Paul. Tschetter noted that the city of St. Paul had been established only sixteen years prior.

On the evening of May 24 the Bergthaler delegates arrived at the quarters of the Hutterite and Kleine Gemeinde delegates. The Bergthaler included the Oberschulz Jakob Peters, Heinrich Wiebe, a minister, and Cornelius Buhr. Tschetter noted how glad he was at their arrival as if some of his own people had come. The Bergthaler had already seen many areas but had not yet found a new home land. They had toured the south and Texas where the wheat harvest was already underway. But they had not yet found anything satisfactory.

On Friday, May 25, the Kleine Gemeinde and Hutterite delegates again wanted to be on their way and requested that the Bergthaler join them. But the latter had promised to wait for Suderman and Buller and therefore declined. Consequently it was decided that the Bergthaler would wait in St. Paul and then join those who were going on ahead later. The definite consensus was that all the delegates should be together as a body in order to be more effective in making the arrangements for a new homeland, and most important of all, in the obtaining of freedom from military service.

Consequently the Tschetters, Toews and Klassen were on their way. Tschetter notes that Heinrich Wiebe, the Bergthaler minister, helped him to carry his luggage to the train station. On the way he asked for Wiebe's opinion regarding the freedom from military service. Wiebe had replied that it was not a complete freedom but that he expected that the English government would grant a **Privilegium** which would be better. Tschetter notes that: "The man had spoken so decently that he immediately won my love. He said that we must not merely look at the land but at the freedom. This is the reason for which we have come here and undertaken such a long journey".

From St. Paul the delegates travelled to Duluth where they arrived on May 25. On the next day they left from Duluth arriving in Glyndon that evening where they decided to remain over Sunday. On Monday April 28 the delegates investigated some of the land available in the Glyndon area. That evening the other delegates finally caught up with the Kleine Gemeinde and Hutterian Brethren. The party was now complete and included Buller, Suderman, Wilhelm Ewert from Prussia, Tobias Unruh from Poland, who were all Aeltesten; along with Andreas Schrag from Poland and the three Bergthaler delegates. The entire group arrived in Fargo that evening. The next day they looked at land in the James River region 100 miles from Fargo. This was where the Hutterites would eventually decide to settle. A group of six delegates returned for a closer look at this land the next day.

On Thursday May 31, 1873, the delegates decided to continue on to Manitoba. Tschetter noted that he remained in his quarters writing letters for almost the entire day. Cornelius Toews must have done the same as he wrote a letter to his brother Peter Toews on that day. The same provides another intimate look at the experiences of the Kleine Gemeinde delegates.

Beloved brothers. Fargo, in the State of Dakota, May 31, 1873.

"I have resolved not to write again. But as it will be some time before I return home, I will report the most necessary facts of our circumstances to you and indeed to all the brethren. In the course of our journey with brother Funk we came together with the other delegates and in the company of Hespeller, we came to a unanimous decision that we should go to Manitoba together with Hespeller, so that the gracious offer made by the English government would not be completely thrown into the wind. This offer consisted of 184,000 acres of land valid for the entire period when emigration from Russia would be permissible which land was definitely reserved for the Russians. This land appears to be suitable for our purpose.

"We also plan to investigate many places in the United States. There is nothing to fear with respect to freedom of religion neither here nor there. According to the testimony of the brethren there are no detrimental circumstances at hand which might endanger the nonresistant ones. If it is the will of God I will bring the final decision to you in person. In so far as is possible and in great weakness, I shall seek to fulfill my assignment for the best of everyone. Hopefully the Lord will grant His blessing to this. I recognize that nothing can be done without Him and therefore I bid that you would always remember me in your prayers so that the paternal giver of good gifts might truly grant his blessing to me, and quickly come to help me in my need, and to assist me so that the eventual outcome would be to His honour.

"For my weak flesh and blood always seek to have something to say as well, especially in this my circumstance which has caused me many a struggle and battle. Everything to which one comes is foreign and strange. In a word, everything! At times I am very home sick for the brotherhood in Gruenfeld, and for the beloved brotherhood in general, from which I am to be parted for such a length of time. Therefore my poor heart sighs for your intercession for me with God that he would stand by me in the future if it should be His will, and that he would graciously lead me on my journey

home and particularly over the great ocean. That his gracious paternal hand would be over me and that He would bless me on my homeward journey.

"My beloved brethren and sisters. I also promise that I have not forgotten my beloved wife and children whom I left behind with so much sorrow and who weigh heavily upon my heart and who are so very dear to me. Is my beloved aged father still alive? Should he still be among the living I would wish unto him a patient and submitted perseverance in the suffering which God has laid upon him, and a confident hope for eternal salvation which God has unfailingly promised all believers. Of this testimony is to be found in numerous passages of the Scripture. Beloved father, if you are still in the flesh I accompany you to the rest of the grave with prayer, and I do not doubt but that our prayers will meet each other before God and His throne. AMEN. A heartfelt greeting to all of you from your weak brother. Cornelius Toews."

### 17.07 Scouting the Land

From the point of view of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde the inspection of the land available for settlement in Manitoba was the most important aspect of the delegates' journey. In the end three-quarters of the Kleine Gemeinde emigrants from Russia would decide to settle in Manitoba. The majority of these immigrants decided to settle in what became known as the Eastern Mennonite Reserve, or presently the Rural Municipality of Hanover. Fortunately the Tschetter diary provides a detailed account of the inspection tour of this land:

"Thursday May 31. In the evening I went to the river to examine the ship with which we are to travel to Manitoba. It belongs to the English government. At 8 o'clock the next morning we boarded the ship and at 2 o'clock that afternoon we left Moorhead, travelling along the Red River for Manitoba. The steamship was five fathoms wide and twenty fathoms long. The river was about twenty fathoms wide. Sunday June 3. The ship proceeded always further. On one occasion it got stuck but after 4 hours of work we were on our way again. June 4. At 8 o'clock in the morning we came to a fortress by the name of Pembina which was located in the State of Dakota. Here we saw handsomely dressed soldiers and many cannon. These were the first soldiers we had seen after nearly a month in the United States. Soon we arrived at the border where we all had to disembark and enter individually like sheep. The English officials stood here asking everyone for his name and occupation which was entered into a book. This was Monday morning after which the ship proceeded downriver. At 5 o'clock on Tuesday we disembarked at Winnipeg, (Fort Garry) which was located a half a mile from the river. This was a small city. Nearby was a fortress manned by soldiers belonging to the English government. They are generally dressed in red. The distance from Fargo to Winnipeg was 224 miles but it is further by water.

"After dinner the Governor summoned us as he wanted to meet with us. He was very friendly and spoke a lot although in English. Hespeller was our translator and told us about all the good they would do for us. But one can not trust everyone. Thereupon three wagons were hitched up and our group consisting of twenty persons now went across country to view the farms. The farmers seem quite lazy. They are Metis of mixed blood. They are cattle farmers rather than grain farmers. The land does not look bad. The soil is black mixed with considerable sand. The wheat was not very big but it was only a new growth. There was still some very fine unthreshed wheat from the previous year. On the morning of Wednesday June 6 we drove out on the land with twenty people on five wagons. Two wagons with tents and provisions had already been sent out earlier. As we were ready to leave, the wagons were ordered into a row. A photographer with a tripod was taking a picture. It did not please me that this man would circulate our likeness all around the world. But what can one do with the world. For the world is worldly and that is how it will remain until the Lord will make an end of it.

"First of all we crossed the Red River on the barge (Baram). After we had driven for 15 verst (10 miles) we stopped to feed the horses and to eat dinner. It had rained very heavily. After dinner we drove on through a number of very swampy spots. At one spot our horses sank in front of our wagon so that we had to push the wagon out ourselves. This was a terrible road. After we had put the entire 60 Verst behind us we finally arrived at a number of houses occupied by half-breeds (presumably Pont des Chene now Ste Anne). Because the guides had lost the road our tents had not yet arrived and consequently it seemed as if we would have to spend the night under the open sky. The people did not want to allow us into their abodes, but finally we were allowed to enter and could also spend the night.

"Thursday, June 7. Awoke healthy and refreshed. After we had had our breakfast we sang a song of thanks to the Lord. Brother Suderman read the 19th Psalm and then said a prayer (Note: Tschetter describes such devotional moments on a daily basis and sometimes oftener). The two wagons with the tents finally arrived at 11 o'clock that morning. We ate dinner and at 3 o'clock we were on our way to the land. A man with a horse drove along with us in order to show us the way. He was a half breed. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at the land where we ate our evening meal. We sang a number of songs of thanksgiving to the Lord and then laid down to sleep.

"June 8. We arose refreshed and healthy. Unto God alone the honour for our protection. We drove further and at 10 o'clock in the morning we arrived at a residence where only the wife was home. She spoke a very beautiful German. She had immigrated to Canada two years ago. We asked

many things of her and she praised the region highly, presumeably because they dearly wanted to have neighbours. This is the practice of the people all over North America. Each and everyone praises his own part of the country as the best, just as the merchants praise their wares. The land over which we drove that morning was somewhat drier. We drove still further over two creeks and through a stretch of bush. At noon we stopped at a creek and ate our dinner. There were so many mosquitoes that one could hardly protect oneself. After dinner we continued on our way over fine level land with a black bottom without sand. The grass grew quite well. We arrived at a creek and crossed over. On the other side we found thick large grass over quite a wide area. (Note: Tschetter was a sharp observer of soil, climate, and other factors relevant to selecting good farmland. Compared to his comments regarding the numerous parcels of property which the Hutterites later examined in the United States his rating of the East Reserve land is quite favourable). Further on we again came to a creek. We made a bridge of grass and then the horses were lead over. We brought the wagons over by ourselves. We continued on for another short stretch and then we stopped for the night. But the sleeping was not the best because of the mosquitoes.

“Saturday June 9. After breakfast we continued on. Firstly, fifteen verst of very fine land. We stopped at a creek and ate our dinner. From here we drove to the city of Winnipeg. The land which we had seen had many swampy places so that it would be difficult to bring anything into the country because of the miserable roads. There was also some forest but only of a very poor quality. I reckoned the bush to be suitable for firewood. There is no connection and association with the railway. The City of Winnipeg is 45 verst away from the land and the road to the city is very poor. The pine wood for construction must be brought in from the State of Minnesota along the Red River. The halfbreeds are the neighbours to this land. The first three miles along the Red River belong to the halfbreeds. There are very many grasshoppers on the land. Cattle and all farm and household appliances are much cheaper in the United States than in Manitoba and a duty is payable on anything coming over the border. Because of all this we were not satisfied with the land. The others were satisfied and wanted to undertake another journey into a south-westerly direction. But the five of us, namely, Lorenz Tschetter, Ewert, Tobias Unruh, brother Funk and myself decided to return to the Dakotas with the consolation that we would meet the other brethren there in two weeks. We took leave of our brethren and at midnight on June 9 we embarked on our ship”.

Thus far from the diary of Paul Tschetter. The Hutterian representatives went on to investigate many available blocks of land in the United States and eventually decided to settle in the James Valley district in North Dakota. Before they returned to Russia they would also meet with United States President Grant in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain special concessions for freedom of faith. But the Kleine Gemeinde delegates never rejoined their Hutterian Brethren as planned. In view of the special religious freedoms which the Canadian government was prepared to grant, they decided that the opportunity being offered in Manitoba was acceptable. Consequently the paths of the Hutterite and Kleine Gemeinde delegates did not meet again during the delegate journey. As a result further references to the Paul Tschetter diary will not apply directly to the story of the Kleine Gemeinde delegates.

In a letter written in Winnipeg on June 21, 1873, Cornelius Toews reports on the progress which the delegates were making and also commented with respect to the land inspection tours in Manitoba. Here follows the text of this letter.

“Winnipeg, the 21 of June 1873. Beloved brother Peter Toews. Yes, all beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. As I am writing this we are already in the 10th week since we were parted from each other. Often I believe that we have been together in the spirit until the loving and very joyful presence of God was also given to us.

“We have been here in Winnipeg since the 3rd of this month and so to say, we have our headquarters here. The government takes us into all parts of the State wherever there is open land, if only we wish to see it. The first inspection tour took four days, the second nine days, and we have just decided on another one for tomorrow which will take four days at the most. After this we will proceed without interruption to the Government of Canada in order to attend to the final and most important part of our mission there.

“Thanks be to God, we already have the expectation that we can be home in seven weeks from today, to rejoice with each other and to praise and thank God for the grace and providence which He has provided to me and all of us. He has demonstrated so much goodness especially for me, most unworthy and miserable person that I am and so unfit for the mission which has been required of me. He has protected me from all danger and preserved me from evil and has allowed me to remain healthy. I hope that His scepter of grace will remain extended over me and that He might allow this matter to attain an end which would serve for His honour, fame and glory, and that it would be sufficient for us all. In so far as lies within my power I have sought to deliberate and to consider everything and have endeavoured to achieve the best for us. I have a heartfelt concern that I might be blameless in this. I assure myself that the brotherhood there will perceive everything for the best in the manner of love and be patient with me until, if it is the will of God, I return home; And then I will give a report with respect to every circumstance either here or there which does not seem suitable to me or which might have detrimental consequences for us in order that all of us can consider every alternative.

"I do not really know of anything more that I should write for this time other than that you should not ever forget to include me in your prayers. I am so weak that it is very necessary. I have not yet been able to receive any letters because of particular circumstances for they are to be received only indirectly through Elkhart which is quite distant. I hope to receive at least one letter and perhaps more in eight days from today in Fargo where they have been forwarded by Funk's company. I expect to find the remainder of the letters in Elkhart. I steadfastly approach the time when I will actually be able to enjoy the letters from the homeland. I conclude with the expectation of our eminent reuniting which is my heartfelt wish. I do not have anything to complain about physically but am in great need of the fellowship of my own amidst all the present noise and tumult of the world. Finally, a heartfelt greeting to all of you from your very weak brother who is bound with you in love and who is languishing in the distance. "Cornelius Toews."

#### 17.08 News from Home

Naturally the Gemeinden at home anxiously awaited letters and other news from the delegates. The preceding correspondence indicates that the opposite was also true as the delegates were very homesick and longed for any word of their beloved families and brethren at home. Letters were sent to delegate Cornelius Toews in care of John F. Funk in Elkhart, Indiana, as well as other drop-off points. These letters provide the reader with an indication of the interest which the home church had in the delegation and of the effect which the news from America is having among the Mennonites in Russia. One such letter was written by Aeltester Peter Toews on July 1, 1873. Here follows the text of the same:

To Cornelius Toews. To be received by him on his return from America. July 1, 1873.

Cornelius Toews. Beloved brother in Christ. By the time that you will have taken this letter into your possession, you through the grace of God, will have left the swaying firmament behind you, and you will prefer to do nothing rather than to read the news from home with intense interest. By then you should have read my letter to you of May 31. With this I firstly extend to you my heartfelt greeting. The day before yesterday we received your letter of May 31 which you had written in Fargo. Thus we had both written to each other on the same day and our prayers will often have come before God at one and the same time in like manner and perhaps also in the hour approaching midnight as there are many among us and in many other places who continue watchfully in prayer and supplication.

"In the previous letter you will first of all have read the news that our beloved father has gone home to his rest. While I was in the process of writing my previous letter we were planning to travel to the Molotschna. Here the Lord again provided us with an opportunity to watch and pray. First of all my beloved wife became sick and then our Anna and also our little John. Anna also died after two days.

"Now I have not yet written you about your beloved wife and children. But here I can share with you that they are all fine and healthy including David. They have already finished hauling in the rye. We are again reaping only a meagre crop. But the same is almost all ready for harvest by now.

"The pronouncement to "thrust in thy sickle and reap" of the Revelations of John, has also found application among us. For after you have rushed home on the post wagons, you will find that many friends are no longer in our midst. They are in the grace of God. Four sisters have died in Steinbach. Also we have already buried our beloved grandfather (Isaac Loewen). He died old and at a peaceful age. He was tired of living. The Lord had finally provided his release for which he, as well as our beloved father, were truly longing from the heart. They have gone unto their rest in the true land of freedom and are now enjoying the blessed peace on the right hand of the Savior in the eternal blessed fatherland where they will never more weary. As well there are many children who have been carried into the lap of Abraham through the service of the holy angels.

"Now beloved brother. I hope that you will not have forgotten to pass on my requests to Funk with respect to the money, books and the *Herald der Wahrheit*. Of course, if it is the will of God you will shortly advise me of this in person. In the meantime I am comforting your wife that she should not expect you too soon. When you are ready to depart from Hamburg it would be very good if you could advise us by telegram as to when you might expect to arrive in Odessa or some other point, for then we would know approximately when to expect your arrival and from where and approximately when we should pick you up."

"Now, may the Lord grant that these lines will be read by you in good health and that we may once more see each other again. Might the Lord grant the same. P. Toews. Our Johan is very sick and a suffering Lazarus from head to toe. He has the small-pox because of which so many have become an offering unto death. Both of the children of J. Goossen are also smitten by this. It is my heartfelt wish that your family might remain spared from this sickness until your return home."

#### 17.09 Homeward Bound

By coincidence the two brothers were again writing each other on the same day for on July 1, 1873, Cornelius Toews also wrote Peter Toews from Fargo in North Dakota. He reported with respect to the land scouting in Manitoba which had now been completed and also advised of the plans of

the Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde delegates to proceed to the Canadian capital in Ottawa. Here they hoped to obtain legal guarantees for the numerous promises and representations which had been made to them during the course of their delegation as well as previously in Russia. Here follows the text of the Cornelius Toews letter of July 1, 1873.

Fargo, July 1, 1873. Beloved brother Peter Toews.

"A heartfelt greeting is hereby extended to all of you beloved brothers and sisters. I hope that these lines will find all of you in good health. For my part I am healthier than ever respecting the physical body. To God be thanks for this."

Now my beloved. Until now it seemed as if the beloved homeland was always becoming more and more distant behind me. In the meantime you were always, always drawing nearer to me and more deeply impressed in my thoughts even though I was far away. But since the 27th of June I have come 242 miles closer to the homeland along the Red River from Winnipeg, and if God wills and we are alive, we plan to depart on the train tomorrow July 2 and to rapidly proceed on our return journey home.

We have spent three weeks in the Province of Manitoba attending to the business concerns here. Consequently we are now proceeding to Ottawa the capital of Canada with the purpose of obtaining a complete conviction with respect to our principal concern. In fact, we have the expectation that there is nothing more satisfactory to our questions to be obtained anywhere than exactly here. In so far as God provides grace and support I want to help in securing this final and most important matter. I expect to inform you more fully in this regard later.

Beloved siblings. I must always confess that I am accompanied by such a very weak flesh and it seems that the closer that I come to the point in time that we will once more see each other, the stronger and harder I must battle against my impatience. At times I feel so impoverished and weakened in my spirit through the suffering of being separated from your worthy fellowship that the longing in my hungry soul for our spiritual reunion is becoming ever greater. I had been hoping to receive some letters here in Fargo which would have provided a necessary refreshment, but all in vain. Now the comfort remains that I will find the letters from the beloved homeland three days from now in Elkhart, for the sight of which I proceed onward in grief.

"I also believe that we are already able to anticipate sufficiently that within eight days from today we shall be finished here to the point that we will be able to embark upon the ocean journey. Should you come into receipt of this letter then you may also expect me to arrive in Nikopol in the days following shortly thereafter."

"In the name of the one who says, "without me you can not do anything," I also note that if God would bless our return, that we may be able to promise ourselves our spiritual reunion by August 10. The dear father and grandfather are especially in my thoughts and I ask that you would extend a heartfelt greeting to them. From your beloved brother "Cornelius Toews." I also note that only we and the three Bergthaler are now left here. We have not yet heard any news of the others since they departed from us. Received in Blumenhoff July 26, 1873."

From Elkhart Indiana, the Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthaler delegates proceeded to Ottawa. Here they were met by various officials and provided with a written statement setting forth the most important of the representations and promises which had been made to them in the course of their journey. This statement was issued to the delegates on July 25th, 1873 by John Lowe the secretary of the Department of Agriculture. This declaration addressed itself to the most crucial of the questions for which the delegates had been instructed to obtain answers by the brethren at home, and was given out pursuant to the instructions and authority of the Minister of Agriculture. Consequently it was accepted by the delegates as binding on the Government of Canada and the Governor-General the highest emissary of the Queen. In the view of the delegates they had successfully concluded their mission as their uppermost concern for complete freedom to exercise the full gospel faith was satisfied by the assurances of the letter. The same was accepted as the new Privilegium of the Mennonites who would emigrate from Russia to Canada on the strength of this document. Here follows the text of the same:

Department of Agriculture

Ottawa, 25th July, 1873.

Gentlemen:

I have the honour, under the instruction of the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture, to state to you in reply to your letter of this day's date the following facts relating to advantages offered to settlers, and to the immunities offered to Mennonites which are established by Statute Law and by orders of his Excellency the Governor-General-in-Council for the information of German Mennonites having intention to emigrate to Canada via Hamburg.

1. An entire exemption from military service is by law and Order-in-Council granted to the Denomination of Christians called Mennonites.

2. An Order-in-Council was passed on the 3rd March last to reserve eight townships in the Province of Manitoba for free grants on the condition of settlement as provided in the Dominion Lands Act, that is to say, "Any person who is head of a family or has obtained the age

of 21 years shall be entitled to be entered for  $\frac{1}{4}$  section or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion lands, for a purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof."

3. The said reserve of eight townships is for the exclusive use of the Mennonites, and the said free grants of  $\frac{1}{4}$  section to consist of 160 acres each, as defined by the act.

4. Should the Mennonite Settlement extend beyond the eight townships set aside by the Order-in-Council of March 3rd last, other townships will be in the same way reserved to meet the full requirements of Mennonite immigration.

5. If next spring the Mennonite settlers on viewing the eight townships set aside for their use should decide to exchange them for any other unoccupied eight townships, such exchange will be allowed.

6. In addition to the free grant of  $\frac{1}{4}$  section or 160 acres to every person over 21 years of age on the condition of settlement the right to purchase the remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the section at \$1.00 per acre is granted by law so as to complete the whole section of 640 acres which is the largest quantity of land the Government will grant a patent for to one person.

7. The settler will receive a patent for a free grant after three years residence in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Lands Act.

8. In event of the death of the settler, the lawful heirs can claim the patent for the free grant upon proof that settlement duties for three years have been performed.

9. From the moment of occupation the settler acquires a "homestead right" in the land.

10. The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.

11. The privilege of affirming instead of making affidavits is afforded by law.

12. The Government of Canada will undertake to furnish passenger warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry for Mennonite families of good characters for the sum of \$30.00 for adult persons over the age of eight years, for persons under eight years half price of \$15.00 and for infants under one year, \$3.00.

13. The minister specially authorizes me to state that this arrangement as to price shall not be changed for the seasons of 1874, 1875, or 1876.

14. I am further to state that if it is changed thereafter the price shall not up to the year 1882 exceed \$40.00 per adult and children in proportion, subject to the approval of Parliament.

15. The immigrants will be provided with provisions on the portion of the journey between Liverpool and Collingwood but between other portions of the journey they are to find their own provisions.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) John Lowe

Secretary, Department of Agriculture.

Messrs. David Klassen  
Jacob Peters  
Heinrich Wiebe  
Cornelius Toews  
Mennonite Delegates from Southern Russia.<sup>5</sup>

### 17.10 Mission Accomplished

The delegates had finally completed their mission and embarked on their return journey home. They arrived in Nikopol on August 7, 1873, where they were greeted and received by the brethren who took them to their homes in Borosenko. Here they were tearfully and joyfully received by their families and the Gemeinde. They reported with respect to the warm reception they had received in the Manitoba and in the Canadian capital and produced the **Privilegium** which seemed to satisfy all major concerns. To the brethren and sisters at home it seemed as if all their prayers had been answered. In his diary Aeltester Peter Toews has referred to the reunion in Gruenfeld where the brothers and sisters gave voice to their joy with the song "Grosz ist Herr deine Gute".

In a letter of August 8, 1873, Aeltester Peter Toews forwarded copies of the **Privilegium** as well as the last two letters of Cornelius Toews to the Gemeinden in the Molotschna and in the Crimea. In this letter he describes the joy of the immediate family and the Gemeinde in Gruenfeld over the homecoming of their long lost husband, father, and brother. Aeltester Toews concludes his letter with a lengthy admonition to his spiritual charges that they should now prepare themselves to sacrifice all their material treasures and to forego all worldly allurements in order that they might heed the call of the Savior, even at the cost of impoverishment and penury. This letter provides a look at the effect which the return of the delegates and the news which they brought with them had for the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. As such it provides a fitting conclusion for this chapter.



"A letter to the brethren first to the Molotschna and from there to the Crimea, together with a copy of the guarantee which we have received from the English government in Canada as well as the two last letters which we received from Cornelius Toews in America, from Winnipeg and Fargo."

'Blumenhoff, the 8th of August, 1873. Beloved brothers and sisters. The manifold grace and peace of God the Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, is hereby wished unto you in love and in truth from the heart, together with the testimony of the filiation of God through the Holy Spirit.

This is already the fourth letter which I have written since we were in Alexanderwohl and even though I have not yet received any answer I shall not become weary and will again visit you with a writing. Especially so as I anticipate an opportunity presently, since the post takes at least as long as from America to here. I had driven to Nikopol the day before yesterday and went to the post office to pick up mail but did not find any letters from you. But there was a letter from Ohm Peter Baerg in the Crimea with the sorrowful news of Johan Esau. How terrible. This is already the third time. And the same sin in the clutches of Satan.

I remained in Nikopol overnight in order to await the steamship and to receive my brother. Finally the hour arrived that I spotted him on the rapidly approaching steamship and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him at a distance. But then all at once he was actually there in person together with his travelling companion D(avid) K(lassen). With the help of God they had successfully completed their journey. According to our view they have brought very favourable news and I also enclose a copy of the same herewith.

At approximately 2 o'clock in the afternoon of August 7 we, Johan Toews and myself, brought our beloved brother to his own in Gruenfeld where he was greeted with tears of joy, and all the beloved brothers and sisters together gave praise and thanks to the Lord. Indeed, after we have frequently had opportunity to weep with those who were weeping we were now also able to rejoice with those who were rejoicing. After so many tears and so much sorrow it is indeed very special to once more be able to rejoice in such a manner together with those who are glad.

In his absence his children had been afflicted with smallpox, and one of them, some three years old, was taken over into blessed eternity some eight days prior to his return, where together with many others the child is assured of an eternal home. Four of our children have also preceded us into a joyful eternity where they are now radiant in blessed innocence and transformed by glory, over yonder sea of stars to the land of freedom beyond. Which seems to be far away and yet is also very near. Indeed this Canaan is far more securely guaranteed unto us than the distant Manitoba which lies across the great ocean.

Yes, my loved ones. During the dispatching of my brother as well as during his homecoming it has frequently occurred to me and entered my mind how many times better it was for us that the beloved Christ has preceded us to the place where there are many many mansions, and where according to His own words it will not be necessary to first prepare a place for us. He said: that when I am ascended from the earth I will receive you all unto myself, and he has also promised that he will once more return again. Alas when a new circumstance such as the present one comes directly towards us in the flesh, I frequently pray that we might raise up our heads in the spirit and look unto the mountains from whence He shall appear in the clouds of heaven, and that consequently we would always direct our sights upon the beloved Savior with a true passion in the spirit. For He is the one who hath loved us unto the death, and purchased us with His blood: And he has founded our eternal redemption and provided a citizenship in heaven for those who have finished their pilgrimage according to the testament which is so contrary, and who have made their covenant with their father that they would become citizens of heaven.

Oh that we might also have as much love for Christ who has so much love for us. If only all the beloved brothers and sisters would gladly surrender their hearts to him in this instance, in order to decide whether we are also willing to sacrifice the necessary capital and in addition to put aside what is necessary for the brethren. For that homeland in which an eternal nonresistance has been assured unto us is far safer, better, and more certain, as is also the blood of the one who says: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He did not wish that we would have to remain in ignorance and uncertainty over this our heavenly citizenship and for this reason he gave us the Holy Spirit as a pledge which is our constant advocate and which provides us with evidence of oneness with God. But only if we do not spurn this pledge (assurance) and rather are minded to treasure the same and remain in the love and truth, and only in so far as we are the ones for whom the words of the Lord "In the world ye shall have tribulation" are valid, and only if we are the ones who are able to apply to themselves the words of the apostle, "Our faith is the victory which overcomes the world."

But my beloved, unfortunately the saying "Wie das ihr um das hoechste Gut, so fasst versagt und sorglos Gut" far too often holds true for us instead. The apostle Paul says to us that we are not to be idle. Why is it then that the contrary is so often the case. For certainly we are not slothful in our material life. One gathers, one rushes about and works from early till late. We are so afraid that inclement weather might overtake us before the crop is gathered in. In fact one sometimes has to take the Sunday, the day of fellowship and the service of God, and utilize the same for earthly purposes. One fears that the fall with its short misty days will come upon us. In brief one is most industrious in order to complete everything which must be done before autumn or winter comes.

But what is the status of matters pertaining to our spiritual harvest. Oh would that we might also be as zealous here. For we have great reason to fear that the autumn of our lives would not overtake one or another and that the leaves of our tree would not turn yellow leaving only the cold unfruitful wood standing by itself. I am afraid that in the end many of us may have to say: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and no help hath come to save us, Jeremiah. Oh, if only we could always take heed of the time and make use of the day in all our daily undertakings. We must also remember that a moment is coming - yes, the night is coming - when no one will be able to work any longer. Oh that we would not waste the day of salvation. For today is the day of salvation, the acceptable time, in which we are to work for the meat which is not perishable. This is the day in which we are to gather treasures in heaven which will never perish, where no thief can enter and no moth can corrupt. O Laszt uns doch warten und eilen zu der Zukunft des Tages des Herrn, etc . . Oh that we would be acceptable with a life that is holy and pious.

Beloved brothers and sisters. I bid that you would want to receive this insignificant writing in love, and that you would forgive me for I have written poorly and in a great hurry. Brother Klassen, I hope that you will read it to the others so that it would be understood by all. With this I commit you unto the grace and the word of God. From your beloved P. Toews.

I also add the request to consider the holding of a general brotherhood meeting for which Peter Bearg in the Crimea is also invited. Klassen and Dueck please advise me of your views in this regard in order that the necessary preparation for the same can be organized.

#### FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER SEVENTEEN. A DELEGATES JOURNEY.

1. L. Suderman, *op.cit.*,
2. Tobias Unruh, *Great Grandfather's Diary*, (Abe J. Unruh, Montezuma, Kansas, 1982), 26 pp.
3. AHSGR Vol. 6, 1984, 43. See also A.J. Unruh, *The Helpless Poles*, (Self-published, Montezuma, Kansas, 1980), 80-128.
4. Zieglschmid, *Das Klein Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brueder*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1947), 571-592. A translation of the diary of Paul Tschetter has been published in the Mennonite Quarterly Review. See J.M. Hofer, "The Diary of Paul is Tschetter, 1873," *MQR*, V (April, 1931), 113-127; (July 1931) 198-216. I am indebted to Gus Mandel of the Suncrest Colony, Kleefeld, Manitoba, for the reference to this as well as other related material.
5. E.K. Francis, *op.cit.*, 44-45.



# Chapter Eighteen.

## The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ

### A Publication Story

#### 18.01 Introduction.

One of the most significant aspects of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia was its publication program which has already been dealt with in **The Golden Years.**<sup>1</sup> This program commenced with the publication of the Peter Peters' **Spiegel der Gierigkeit** in 1827, and confined with the **Foundation Book** of Menno Simons in 1835. This was followed with the publication of three major works under the leadership of minister Heinrich Enns during the 1860s. These included **The Wandering Soul** by Schabalie, the **Abridged Martyrs' Mirror** by Isaac van Duhren, and **The Selected Writings** by Peter Peters.

In view of the socio-economic and religious ferment within Russian Mennonite society and the internal difficulties of the Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860s it might be assumed that such an effort would be discontinued. But this was not the case. The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde would undertake one final publication endeavour before its sojourn in Russia would come to a close. This was the booklet **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** by Peter J. Twisk. The story of the publication of this significant work will be the topic of this chapter.

#### 18.02 Peter J. Twisk and The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ.

Peter Jansz Twisk was an outstanding teacher and Aeltester of the Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonites.<sup>2</sup> He belonged to a Gemeinde known as the "Hard Frisians" and was a venerable leader of the faith. He energetically defended the teachings of Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips against the "pietistical" and "spiritualistic" outside influences which were threatening to subvert the Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite world. One of his opponents was Hans die Ries who was a leading figure in directing the Dutch Mennonite church and especially his the Waterlaender Gemeinde away from the biblical truths of the full gospel faith.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast Twisk unashamedly defended the purity of the teachings of Menno Simons of whom he had known personally. Twisk was a tireless Aeltester who worked earnestly against the attempts of leaders such as Hans die Ries to "uplift" the Mennonite brotherhood by the introduction of new and borrowed teachings under the guise of unity and brotherhood. Although Twisk was a man of little education he was a well-read man and a prolific writer. Herman Schijn, the historian of the Dutch Anabaptist-Mennonite church, lists some 26 titles to his credit. Of outstanding importance is the thirty-three article Confession of Faith of 1617 which was widely used for many centuries among various Mennonite groups. These endeavours would indicate that Twisk was one of the most outstanding second generation Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders.

His tract or booklet **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** is of special significance to the Kleine Gemeinde story. The full German title of the work was **Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung des 20. Kapitels in Offenbarung St. Johannis.** The book was an exposition of the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the twentieth chapter of Revelation; the significance of the work lies in its unification of various aspects of full gospel teaching within the concept of the Peaceful Kingdom of Christ or millenium. This biblical one thousand year reign was instituted by the birth of Christ which also inaugurated the one and only historical dispensation period of grace. This was a spiritual kingdom which each individual disciple or believer joined upon his conversion or rebirth. This was the first resurrection. The second resurrection or physical death held no power over these regenerated saints. The duration of this kingdom was to be for a figurative thousand years during which Christ together with his followers and the saints who had already died in Christ, would rule the earth.

Of course this reign was a spiritual one. During this millenium Satan would be bound and therefore unable to extinguish or eradicate the Church of Christ. The church as the bride of Christ would be able to survive and subsist in the face of adversity and tribulation by following and practising the example of Jesus Christ, the Savior of his people and founder of the faith. Hence love was the only force which individual disciples and the church or bride of Christ could employ. This was the essence

of evangelical Christianity and the foundation of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

Throughout history various religious movements and spiritual leaders would attempt to subvert the Church or bride of Christ from its historical and biblical moorings. Under Constantine the Church assumed the posture and authority of the Roman Empire setting about on a program to evangelize the then known world by the sword. Naturally the evangelized areas, including major parts of Europe, then also adopted and propagated this Christianity of the sword. By the time of the Middle Ages almost all traces of evangelical Christianity had been eradicated from the Roman church under a succession of Popes who were mainly concerned about the establishment of a vast earthly realm and who had little or no understanding of the historical spiritual kingdom of Christ, the Lamb, whose church they purported to represent. When the Anabaptist-Mennonites and other radical reformers rejected the authority of the Roman Church the response was an attempt to eradicate or evangelize the same by torture and burning at the stake. Eventually the tyranny of the Roman Pope was shattered when the Protestant princes led by Luther arose and defeated him by force of arms.

Now a new danger arose. As a Catholic monk Luther had apparently sought in vain to earn his salvation by his own works and merit. Eventually he was able to perceive and comprehend that salvation was and could only be a gift of God.<sup>4</sup> To Luther the formulation of Paul that he was "saved by faith alone" came to be the nexus through which he was able to find victory in his own spiritual battle and consequently this formulation came to represent the tunnel through which all scriptural truth must be understood. In his anxiety and earnestness to overcome the restrictions of an unevangelical works - righteousness Luther had gravitated to the opposite extreme of "cheap grace", as a result again overlooking the truths of historic Christianity. The followers of the reformers now sought to evangelize their world by the slaughter of their opponents including many Anabaptist-Mennonites. Throughout the best of these endeavours by the Roman Pope, as well as the Reformers, the nonresistant church or bride of Christ persevered and thrived.

But now an even greater danger arose. The persecution of the Peaceful Kingdom of Christ slowed and eventually came to a halt. New teachings based on the formulation of Luther and the Reformers but divorced from the sacerdotal dogma of the State Churches arose, teaching that the discipleship of the believer was to be centered in the enjoyment and realization of salvation and not in the following of Christ. In the view of Twisk and the Anabaptist-Mennonites this constituted the greatest danger of all. For in the absence of open persecution the Church of Christ was inevitably subverted by prosperity and secularization and consequently many branches of the same eagerly adopted yet another form of unevangelical Christianity. In the view of Twisk this most serious challenge of all represented the temporary release of Satan in the end times.

According to Twisk, Satan had finally realized that he could not ever destroy and eradicate the peaceful Kingdom of Christ by force. Satan now adopted a new tactic in which he sought to mislead many devout and pious souls drawing them away from the truths of full gospel Christianity into a harmless enjoyment of salvation and evangelization of others for the sake of the same kind of harmless Christianity. Twisk reasoned that Satan was more than able to realize and fulfill all his objectives through his new technique. These new unevangelical species of Christians would continue to wage wars against each other in the name of Christ, evangelize by the sword and other unevangelical means, and oppress and tyrannize the poor and lowly. All the while members of this so-called "inward" Christendom would live in untold opulence and splendour praising the Lord for the peace in their hearts in the midst of a world of poverty, oppression, suffering, and ignorance.

In the view of Twisk these Christian confessions had not truly understood the significance of the message of Christ the suffering Lamb. Consequently he viewed the attempts of leaders such as Hans De Ries to reform the Mennonite church by the introduction of all manner of foreign teaching under the guise of brotherhood and unity as representing a very great danger to the Peaceful Kingdom of Christ. This in short is the historical view and interpretation represented by his tract or booklet **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ**.

### **18.03 The Kleine Gemeinde and the Peaceful Kingdom of Christ.**

The Kleine Gemeinde agreed with the historical understanding of the Christian church which was represented by the writing of Twisk. Aeltester Klaas Reimer and other early leaders had been the first to earnestly oppose the inroads which the teachings of foreign confessions were making among the Russian Mennonites. Since then the situation had become progressively worse and consequently Aeltester Peter Toews and the Kleine Gemeinde no doubt felt that the publication of the Twisk booklet in a readable German translation might be of help to some of their brethren in preserving the full

gospel faith.

By the 1860s many of the leaders of the Russian Mennonite churches had largely rejected Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings and were struggling with all manner of foreign doctrine. That this was not restricted to a few groups of radical pietists or radical chiliast is evident from the fact that Bernhard Harder (1832-1884), who is generally regarded as the all time greatest spiritual leader to whom all Russian Mennonite pulpits were open, adhered to and preached various forms of premillennialism. In fact the eminent Russian Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen states that evangelist Bernhard Harder for a time strongly supported the radical premillennial view represented in the Jungstilling novel **Heimweh** that during the reign of the Anti-christ salvation would be found in central Asia. In sharp contrast, his cousin Johan Harder, the dearly beloved Aeltester of Orloff, earnestly opposed this view.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for the future of the Russian Mennonites, Aeltester Johan Harder died in 1876.

In this sense the efforts of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in the translation and publication of the Peter J. Twisk booklet **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** can be regarded as a last and final parting gift to their dearly loved Russian Mennonite brotherhood. For this reason and because it represents such a classical formulation and unification of various Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings the entire booklet is included here as Section 18.05. This will also provide the reader with another representative Anabaptist-Mennonite writing. The English translation is that of John F. Funk, the American publisher who found such an interest and need for the booklet among the Old Mennonites that he reprinted it several times in German and also in English in 1913.

#### 18.04 A Publication Story.

This section will consist of various writings and letters pertaining to the Kleine Gemeinde publication of the booklet **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** by Peter J. Twisk. The first mention of this publication in the papers of Aeltester Peter Toews is a letter of October 26, 1873 from the printers Ulrich & Schultze in Odessa. Here follows the text of the same:

"Mr. Peter Toews, in Blumenthal near Nikopol. October 26, 1873. In reply to your worthy letter which came to us by today's mail we have the honour to advise you that we are accepting for printing the booklet "**Das Thousand-jaehrige Reich Christi** on the following conditions: For every page 7 ruble for every 500 copies. For the cover and binding 12 rubles. We would estimate the time required to complete the work for you as being approximately six weeks from the time that we receive the same from you. Provided that the time lost in processing by the censor is not unusually lengthy and that the censor does not completely reject the same. We will also assume responsibility for the approval of this work by the censor. In the meantime we are honoured to subscribe our name with high regards and respect". "Ulrich & Schultze".

In the meantime Aeltester Peter Toews had been busy in promoting the work which he was publishing. He sought to contact other Mennonite Aeltesten who he thought might be interested in the publication. Because of the emigration there were only very few Russian Mennonite leaders left in 1874 who supported the full gospel teaching of the peaceable earthly Kingdom of Christ. One of these was the dearly beloved Aeltester Johan Harder (1811-1876) of the Orloff Gemeinde. Harder was also a first cousin to Toews and thus it was to be expected that he would inquire as to whether Harder was interested in this publication. Here follows the text of a letter of Aeltester Johan Harder of January 21, 1874, in which he responds to this inquiry.

"Beloved friend Toews." Blumstein, the 21st of January 1874.

I have received your letter of the 20th which was very precious to me. It was truly a heart-felt joy for me to receive such a letter during a period when the teaching of a thousand year reign (millenium) which is yet to come here on earth is being adopted so earnestly. But I do not understand this in that manner and I am in complete agreement with the contents and meaning of your letter. It is unfortunate that I had not previously read the referenced work which you intend to publish, for then I would have been able to endorse it more and consequently also take a greater part in this. For the greater the number of copies printed the more reasonable the cost. Nevertheless you can count on 100 copies. I will forward payment as soon as you will request the same. With heartfelt greeting. Johan Harder".

In the meantime the actual printing of the booklet was being delayed by the censor in Odessa. In a letter of January 26th, 1874, the printers in Odessa explain the situation.

"Your brochure has just been returned to us by the censor together with the instruction to obtain the consent for this printing from your **Constitorium** (Board). Upon the receipt of the same the censor wishes to add its approval. Until that time the censor is withholding the final approval of the same. Accordingly we are returning your brochure with the wish that

you obtain the result requested from the appropriate Council (Consistorium) there as soon as possible, and that you then again return the manuscript to us in order that we may proceed further with our responsibilities. With the highest regard. Ulrich & Schultze”.

In the meantime efforts to obtain further sponsors for the publication of the booklet were continuing. Aeltester Johan Harder certainly realized the significance of the sound biblical teaching contained in the booklet and attempted to obtain some additional sponsors for the publication of the same. In a letter to Aeltester Peter Toews of April 9th, 1874 he explains his interest and efforts in this regard.

“Blumstein, April 9th, 1874. To the Church Aeltester Peter Toews in Blumenhoff. Beloved friend. It has taken somewhat long for us to provide you with a definite reply to your last writing. I had requested that Aeltester Toews in Blumenort also take part in this endeavour, but this he declined to do. The seeding season came in the meantime and so the matter remained until now. But you may count on 150 copies for us. With respect to the endorsement or approval of this work for the printer, I believe that it would be sufficient if you would provide your attestation for the booklet in the same manner in which you commenced herein. For we do not have a joint counsel (Consistorium) as each Gemeinde deals independantly for itself.

“It is my wish that this work be printed if the approval of the censor is granted. I wish even more that our beloved God might bless the same so that Satan would not be able to succeed in his plan. Matters here have already progressed to the point that it (Chiliasm) is being cast down from the pulpit during the worship services. There are certainly those who are casting shame on the teaching of their Savior in that they do not endorse or believe his teachings. With heartfelt greeting from your true friend Johan Harder.”

From this letter it is evident that Aeltester Johan Harder was deeply concerned with respect to the spiritual fate of the Molotschna Mennonites. But the printing of books was a time-consuming process anywhere and Czarist Russia was no exception. In a letter of July 2, 1874, Ulrich & Schultze provided Aeltester Peter Toews with a brief report on the status of the publication project.

“Herr Peter Toews, Blumenhof. Odessa July 2, 1874. In respectful reply to your worthy letter of June 18th we have the honour to share with you that the censor here has now submitted the manuscript of **Das Friedensreich Christi** to the censor in St. Petersburg from where the return of the same is expected any day. Whereupon we will immediately report to you as to the results. Until then you will have to remain patient for a short time. We ask that you receive our highest regards.” “Ulrich & Schultze”.

Aeltester Peter Toews finally decided that he should personally travel to Odessa in order to look into the continuing delay in the approval of the manuscript. He notes in his diary that he left for Odessa on September 8. Here he was assured that the manuscript was still in St. Petersburg. On September 11 he returned to Blumenhoff without having received any positive news. Later in November Aeltester Toews made another journey to Odessa and this time he attended personally at the offices of the censor in order to satisfy himself regarding the status of the work which had been submitted. Again he was advised that it was still in St. Petersburg, but now he was assured that there were to be results within the time span of a month.

The approval of the manuscript finally came on December 20, 1874 as can be seen in a letter of that date by Ulrich & Schultze.

“Herr Peter Toews in Blumenhoff. Odessa the 20th of December 1874. Today we have the pleasure of informing you that we have now received the return of the manuscript of **Das Friedensreich Christi** from St. Petersburg together with the approval to print the same. In accordance therewith we shall commence the work immediately after New Year’s. Because of other work in progress we are unable to proceed with your project any sooner than the mentioned time. In the meantime we await for your favourable advisement should you have any further instructions for us. Please accept this assurance of our highest regards.” “Ulrich & Schultze”. “P.S. The work should be completed before the end of January. We only ask that you advise as to the number of copies that you want.”

Finally some progress was being achieved. In his diary Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded that the printing of **Das Friedensreich Christi** was completed in the month of April of 1875. He notes that he received the printed booklets at the end of April but only after he had been in Odessa for a third time. This concludes the publication story of **The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ** the entire text of which is included here in the following section. The English edition of John F. Funk has been slightly modified by the addition of section headings.

## 18.05 The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ.

Or An Exposition of the 20th Chapter of the Book of Revelation, by Peter J. Twisk.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." John 5:25.

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Rev. 20:5.

Translated from the German by John F. Funk.

Preface to Former German Edition.

Beloved Reader:—The following work, an exposition of the twentieth chapter of the Revelation to the Apostle John, was written by Peter Jan Twisk, a minister of the Anabaptist-Mennonites (Taufgesinnten), who lived about the year A.D. 1600. It was written in the Holland or Dutch language, and later by a lover of the truth translated into German, and in as much as in our time the views concerning the Jewish kingdom are understood so differently, I have been prompted to interest myself in the matter, and believe that I am rendering an acceptable service to all who are seeking after the unadulterated truth, by re-publishing this work in the German language. May the kind reader prove all things with the word of God, retain that which is good, and give God the glory. (Presumably by Peter Toews).

Preface to the English Edition.

The translator of the first English edition of this valuable work by P.J. Twisk was prompted to the translation of this booklet on the "Kingdom of Peace" by a desire to become more fully acquainted with the subject and the arguments therein presented for the reason that he could not understand the views on this subject as they are maintained by many of our modern theologians. After the translation was completed, a brother from Oklahoma made an earnest appeal to have the little work printed and published in the English language and offered to make a very liberal contribution toward the expense. Thus it transpires that one of the active workers of the kingdom of Christ of three centuries ago, though long since dead, still speaks to us in our English language. May the Lord bless the work and may it go forth to the edifying of many souls.

The Translator (J.F. Funk). Elkhart, Indiana, May 8, 1913.

**The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ.**

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Rev. 20:1-5.

**Introduction.**

Concerning this prophetic declaration a number of educated men have attempted different explanations or interpretations, but different as these interpretations have been given, many of them have not succeeded in striking the correct idea contained in these words, given us through the Spirit of divine revelation. But that this revelation or prophecy is not of human origin is a fact conceded by all, and also that of the fulfilling thereof there remains no doubt. We purpose to show from the Psalms, the Prophets and the Pentateuch (the Books of Moses), how they were to be fulfilled and how they were fulfilled.

The holy and God-fearing men, both before and after the giving of the law through Moses, hoped for a time (and rejoiced in the expectation thereof) in which the high and inestimable happiness of the human race should be restored to them in its full measure. Concerning the exalted happiness, and the possession and enjoyment thereof, though it be only as a foretaste, Jesus speaks in plain terms, saying, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear; for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them" (Matth. 13:16, 17).

We do not think that any one will take it that herewith (from the above quoted words) is meant the simple seeing of the person of Christ in human form, that would bring to the human race such blessedness or salvation. This is plainly understood from the words of the woman who cried out and said, "Blessed is the womb which bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked." But Jesus said, "Yea, blessed are they which hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27, 28).

The revelation of this Word of God, which was made flesh and dwelt among men—this is the glory of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The time of the revelation of this word of the gospel of peace—this was the acceptable time which was fulfilled by the coming of Christ in the flesh, and which was published or preached to the people for the first time after Christ had



withstood the temptations of Satan. All this was fulfilled in the day when the Savior said, "Today is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). As in the prophecy of Isaiah, when he prophesied concerning the blessed conditions that would be revealed in the kingdom of God, and spake of these conditions in a figurative sense, so also, without doubt, the prophecy revealed by the Spirit to John set forth in a figurative sense the period of this gospel of peace as one thousand years.

The law had the shadow of good things to come, not the substance of the things themselves (Heb. 10), for neither by the offering nor by the blood of the offering was it possible to take away sin—and neither the royal priesthood nor the priestly service of the Levites was able to help even a single man who had fallen among thieves, though the bleeding misery of the half-dead man was plainly visible. and the matter of help was left in hope until the compassionate Samaritan appeared, declaring in decided terms, "Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O Lord," "in which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all" (Heb. 10:7-10). This also is witnessed to us by the Holy Ghost when he says (Jer. 31:31-34), "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days: I will put my law into their inward parts and will write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people." And only through this testament, which is sealed with the innocent blood of Jesus, have we the joy of entering into the holy place.

To have an entrance there, however, all men who desire this must possess a true heart and the full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled and made free from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water.

It is this acceptable time in which all men who give heed to the holy calling and awake from the sleep of sin and are spiritually born anew, arise from the spiritual death and are enlightened by Christ, shall live with Christ and reign with him a thousand years. It is this glorious kingdom of Christ on earth, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, but which cometh not with outward appearances, neither shall men say, "Lo, here! or lo, there! for the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

### **The Inception of the Kingdom**

This is the kingdom which God showed to King Nebuchadnezzar, and which he had Daniel set forth more clearly as he interpreted the dream to the king. This is the kingdom which was to be established and exist while yet the temporal kingdoms of the world existed, as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and especially also the Roman kingdom, which is represented hard as iron (Daniel 2), under the strong dominion of which also Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the whole world, a *King of all kings*, was born. \*) The kingdom of Christ should be established and exist while these kingdoms of the world were still in power.

It is a matter worthy of note that we are told, "*In the days of these kings*" (or kingdoms). We may confidently believe that it was to come to pass under the fourth monarchy of the biblical history of the world; and the chronicles and church histories, as well as the histories of the world, show clearly that what Daniel finally said was true: "And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof is sure." This kingdom also shall never be destroyed, as were other temporal, worldly kingdoms; neither shall it ever be left to any other people, such as Babylon, Persia or Greece. Then, again, after much warring and bloodshed, the Romans conquered all these nations and brought them under their dominion. Kindly read the explanation in Daniel.

Consequently the kingdom, improperly called the Millennium, under the reign of the Roman Emperor or Roman Dominion, was established by God himself. The kingdom was established as said, but the King himself must go into a far country, in order to possess the kingdom, for he had many enemies who were not willing to bow under his dominion, and especially the strongest enemy, which he, last of all, must destroy, was death. When, however, he had conquered death and put him under his feet (1 Cor. 15:26) and thus taken away his power, he also gave gifts unto his subjects that they might reign over sin as long as they dwell in these tabernacles, and as many as believe in him shall live, though they die. Jesus further says (John 11:26), "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," and consequently these shall live with him and reign with him a thousand years, that is, forever.

Although the souls of those who were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held, sometimes (possibly often) cried with a loud voice from under the altar, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" But we are told that it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren that should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled. \*) (Rev. 6:10, 11). \*) Should also be gathered or brought together with them.—(Translator.)

### **Binding Satan**

Now since death was robbed of his power, an angel also could bind Satan and cast him into prison, as our text declares that he had a great chain in his hand; a chain made up of many sacrifices, much blood and many lives, strengthened with the obedience of Christ, yea, with his obedience unto death, by means of which the whole law was fulfilled; and through himself, that is, through Christ, the enmity was destroyed and thus also through his flesh the middle wall of partition was taken away (Heb. 2).

This great chain of the law relating to all the commandments, fulfilled and confirmed through the blood of Jesus Christ and his full and complete propitiation, was now strong enough to bind Satan and cast him into prison, and then could the angel proclaim the everlasting gospel to them

that dwell upon the earth, and to all the heathen and kindred and people and tongues. For only after the death of Jesus was the testament (the new testament) established and received the power which in the law of Moses was promised unto men. For this reason also no man or angel before this could invent or even think of any means by which fallen man could be redeemed, but that an acceptable time, a day of salvation, should come upon the earth before the earth should be smitten with a curse, is plainly set forth in Mal. 4:6. And this acceptable day of grace is also indicated in the law by the celebration of the Sabatical year and the year of Jubilee, in which every poor Israelite could again come into the possession of his fathers' inheritance (Lev. 25; Deut. 15).

#### **The First Resurrection**

This acceptable time was also indicated or typified by the cities of refuge, into which he who had unawares slain any one could escape the murderer's doom and be made free after the high priest, who had been anointed with the holy oil, had died. Likewise could the kingdom of peace here on earth be established only after the High Priest—the spiritual Melchizedek, the King of Salem—had died; and now all who believe in this promise die spiritually with Christ, and are also, through his resurrection, raised up and awakened to a new and spiritual life (Rom. 6:4); and this is the first resurrection, and blessed and holy is he that hath part in it; over such the second death has no power (Rev. 20:5, 6).

No one, however, whosoever he may be, will have part in this kingdom, except those who are regenerated and born anew, for Jesus testifies with a twofold "verily," saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

#### **The Kingdom of Peace**

Concerning this glorious time of peace the holy men of God have written a great deal and desired to see it. They also testified prophetically concerning it. Now (as this time came) the threatening power of the Mosaic law was set aside, and the words of the prophet could be applied, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished; . . . prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places shall be made plain" (Isa. 40:1-5). "And he shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arm and carry them in his bosom and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:11). "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and a sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isa. 11:6-9).

"Then they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and nation shall not lift up the sword against nation and they will not learn the arts of war any more" (Isa. 2; Mich. 4).

All this is fulfilled in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is the church, from the days of the apostles on until the time when this time\*) shall be fulfilled, and there is none that more fully fulfilled this scripture than the Apostle Paul, who, like a ravenous wolf, caught and tore the lambs of Christ and took pleasure in the death of the innocent sheep of Christ. \*)This present time, the last days; the days of the gospel dispensation, shall end with the end of the world. Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-31. See also other references. Afterwards, however, he became peaceable and prepared so that like a little child of a few days (after his regeneration or spiritual resurrection) he led calves and young lions and fatlings together. In persecution he was comforted in the word of truth, in the power of God, through the weapons of righteousness, to his right and to his left (2 Cor. 6), and he testified that now is the day of salvation, the acceptable time in which God will hear us.

#### **A Spiritual Kingdom**

Paul, in the proper spiritual sense, did indeed lead calves and young lions together. Pontius Festus, the Governor of Caesarea, permitted himself to be led by Paul and concluded from the words that Paul spoke that he was innocent of the charges brought against him, and testified before King Agrippa and the entire counsel that he (Paul) had done nothing worthy of death (Acts 25). Also Felix was terrified when Paul reasoned before him of righteousness, and of temperance, and of the judgment to come. But he answered, "Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." But there is no record that this convenient time for Felix ever came. Agrippa the king, however, was so led of Paul through the explanatory representation of his imprisonment that he cried out and said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." But of the conversion or regeneration of these worldly lords we have no account; consequently they are not to be classed with the lambs of Christ, but with those who are without and those who are compared to lions, bears, tigers and wolves.

That all scripture texts to which we have referred, all similar prophecies of all the prophets and the psalms, as well as all the parables of the law, must be understood spiritually and cannot be taken in a natural sense, if in any case they are to agree and harmonize one with another, even as the music of a harp of many chords in which all the chords harmonize with each other in giving glory to our great King, Priest and Prophet, all the scriptures show. For that in a natural sense every hill and every mountain shall be made low, and every valley shall be exalted, I hope no one who with half

an eye reads the Bible believes; and as this one thing is not to be understood in a natural sense, so are also other prophecies and figurative declarations of God's word not to be taken as though it would occur or come to pass in a natural sense, as Christ's own words declare, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . . but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

Jesus did not withhold from Pilate the fact that he was a King, and that to this end he was born and came into the world to testify to the truth which should make free all them that believe it. Those, however, who do not believe on the word of truth, which is the gospel of peace—these, in deepest sorrow, ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" Yea, they do not trust the word of God, though it is sharper than a two-edged sword; with which all who have confessed and acknowledged the testimony of the truth have overcome the enemy of God.

I do not consider it necessary to produce further proof that this kingdom is intended to be a spiritual kingdom, and that all the prophetic passages pointing to it must also be understood and taken spiritually. The words of Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world," show this fact fully, and all who brawl against it, speak in vain (Psa. 2:1). "For he that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh at them . . . he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." And he says further, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion," and this is the mountain which became great so that it filled the whole world, and this came forth from one stone which was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet, of which we may read in detail in the explanation of this text (Dan. 2).

### **The Hope of Redemption**

Should we take these passages and explain them literally, we would need an explanation which would exceed all the superstitions that ever existed. Consequently we cannot interpret any other scriptural passages that refer to this prophetically in any other way than spiritually. The apostle indeed speaks of the earnest expectation of the creature waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, and says further, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; because the creature itself, also, shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God; for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now; and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit: the redemption of our body; for we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom. 8:19-24).

This earnest expectation of the creature will remain even during the period of Christ's glorious kingdom of peace on earth and is to be understood as applying to the loud cries of the souls under the altar of God, which are so anxiously awaiting the revelation of Christ and the reuniting with their then glorified bodies. However, their life with Christ is hid in God (Col. 3). It can, therefore, not be distinguishable before the world, as the Savior himself said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (St. John 3:8). And though to all the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they had given from the word of God, there was given to each a white robe, which, when put on, guaranteed to all who are called to the passover of the Lamb full salvation (which those in the faith, as yet only hoped for, and the saints who were slain, expected) (Rev. 19), there remained still with them the earnest expectation and desire for the reuniting of their transformed and glorified bodies with the soul and spirit.

### **The Millennium. A Time of Tribulation.**

During this acceptable time—these thousand years—Satan should not deceive the nations. That, however, in this time no temptations should come in the way of those who confess Christ cannot be shown by any word of scripture, but on the contrary it is said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Matth. 26:41). Satan will indeed assail men and lead them into many temptations, but no one who continues in watching and praying to God and pleading with him, shall fall, unless, like Saul, he rejects the commandments of God, or like Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord, or like Israel, contrary to the law, admit people of uncircumcised hearts and uncircumcised flesh into the holy place of God (Hez. 44). All similar examples were means and causes of falling into temptations.

On the other hand, those who continue in watchfulness and prayer, and highly esteem the commandments of God, in the hour of temptation that shall come over all the world, shall be preserved; as the Spirit (in Rev. 3) says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee" (Rev. 3:10). Everywhere, however, as well under the law as also in the gospel, God promised his help and his presence on the unchangeable conditions: "If ye will walk in my statutes and observe and keep my commandments and do them" (Lev. 36).

The glorious time of peace in these thousand years in which those who arose in the first resurrection shall reign with Christ, is the time in which the two witnesses shall prophesy (Rev. 11). and when the woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown with twelve stars, fled into wilderness and remained there 1,260 days (Rev. 12). That this time shall be a time of distress, we learn from Dan 9:25 and Rev. 11:3. Clothed in sackcloth during the time of these prophecies denotes the cross of Christ and especially that the heathen shall trample the holy city forty-two months (1,260 days, indicating 1,260 years). That this time shall be a time of distress and a hard

time is readily to be concluded from the scriptures above referred to, and is also shown by the open book which John took from the hand of the angel and ate it up, and it became bitter in his belly. But he was nevertheless commanded to prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings (Rev. 10:1, 11), and after this, Satan was to be loosed for a little time.

All the examples that are given us concerning the temptations with which Satan sought to tempt men, were presented to them in a friendly way. He said to Eve, "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat . . . Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.'"

The two hundred and fifty princes, men of renown in the congregation, said, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy" (Num. 16:3, 4). Likewise both Saul and Jeroboam thought, "Did God say?" and though they said it with good intentions, they both rejected the commandments and were misled, etc. When, however, the fullness of the gentiles shall have come in, that is, into the sheepfold of Christ, into the church of God, and also all Israel shall be saved, that is, all the spiritual Israel, that in the days of the prophecy of the witnesses of God shall be converted to God, that is, of those that remain not in unbelief (Rom. 11:33; compare with Rom. 2:28, 29), shall be saved although they may not have been hired until the eleventh hour, they shall every one receive the penny of divine grace.

#### **And Satan Must be Loosed for a Season.**

And Satan shall go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle. This going forth of Satan into the wide world clearly signifies that it is the time when the witnesses of God lay dead in the streets, in which a voluptuous life offered itself to the people. Just as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, in which men did eat and drink, bought and sold, married and were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered in the ark and the flood destroyed them; and as it was in the day of Sodom, when Lot went out of the doomed city, and fire and brimstone devoured the place, so shall it also be in those days.

When Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, he will have no opposition to fear. He can go about without hindrance. As compared with a prisoner secured in prison and bonds, though he is sometimes permitted to go out of his prison, still he cannot lay aside the shame and bonds of his imprisonment, and he dare not enact his former evil deeds, whether murder or theft, etc., because aside from his bonds he is accompanied by armed soldiers who protect all the subjects and citizens of the great kingdom and prevent the prisoner from venting his rage upon them. As soon, however, as a prisoner is released from his bonds and given his freedom, he need not care for the shame of imprisonment, but goes out openly to work and make gain for himself. This time in which Satan is loosed from his imprisonment is, without doubt, the time in which the witnesses of God are lying dead in the street (Rev. 11), and I believe I am not in error that this is also the time in which the woman clothed with the sun fled to her place in the wilderness, a time and times and half time, or three and a half days.

Now Satan, as an imprisoned transgressor, dare not any more appear in his natural wolflike character and cause the people to fear, but he comes as lord of the world and offers all the things of this world through which he is permitted to announce himself and says, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." And in the longing desires of the natural man he turns away from the cross of Christ and is pleased to serve his own lusts rather than God (Phil. 3), explaining that the bodies of the witnesses of God are not laid into graves as the means of eternal joy. And thus through the dead letter or the letter which killeth, a great work is carried on which seems very similar to that which was foretold by the witnesses of God during the one thousand years. This is confirmed by all the prophets and by the gospel, when it is said with other things, "This people draweth near to me with their lips and honoreth me, but their heart is far from me" (Isa. 29:13; 6:10). And especially through the flying roll does God make known figuratively this time of which we speak, and showed the Prophet Zechariah what it signified. God spake to him and said, "What seest thou?" In answer to these words the prophet said, "I see a flying letter, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide." He received this explanation, "This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth; for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it, and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it" (Zech. 5:2, 3).

#### **The Dead Letter Shall be Preached Throughout the World.**

Christ the Lord himself shows us again and again that the last time before his second coming will be a time in which no one will be able to work any more (John 9:4), in which indeed the gospel will be preached in the whole world—but understand, as a dead letter for a witness, only in accordance with Matth. 24:14. And thus this time may rightly be compared to the time of Noah before the flood, as also to the time spoken of by the prophet; when the witnesses of God lay dead on the streets, when high living and the giving of gifts one to another seemed to be the chief work of men. The Apostle Paul also confirms this time as a peaceful time after the flesh and says, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then shall sudden destruction come upon them" (1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 2).

In reference to the falling away referred to above, how can there be a falling away where the prophecies of the living witnesses of God have never been heard, for there is nothing besides God and his word from which man can fall away and then after that shall come he that is to come to terrify the earth (Isa. 2:10-21).

Th Spirit, in the book of the Revelations of John, bears testimony repeatedly of this time, and

in harmony with what is said about it by others, and to the angel of the church of Laodicea this lukewarmness was rebuked and declared as displeasing to God, but according to the letter it is spoken of as a time of wealth and pleasure. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

In the opening of the sixth seal there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth (Rev. 6:12, 13).

We may readily understand that the time in which this great earthquake (which signifies the changes in the political world) took place is to be a time of continued liberty, favorable to the enemy of souls, to be loosed in that time from his imprisonment, and also that this time of liberty will continue in the world until the second advent of Christ. This is shown by the anxious calling of the earthly kings and great rulers and rich men (Rev. 18), and the same is confirmed by the sounding of the trumpet of the sixth angel (Rev. 9).

Now at this time the four angels that were bound in the great River Euphrates, which were prepared to kill, were loosed. Their power, however, was in their mouths (Rev. 9:14-16), and from them issued fire and smoke and brimstone; and through this consuming power of the fire the wrath of God was manifested upon the earth, upon all unregenerated, unbelieving, dead people; and Satan, now loosed from his chains, sent out his servants to the kings of the earth and to all the world, to gather to the conflict on the great day of God the Almighty. This is now the time in which the witnesses of God will again arise to their feet, and after their reception in heaven they will judge by the word of God, first spoken by the angels, but in the last days by the word spoken through his Son (Jesus).

That the three spirits (Chap. 16) are false teachers, the 14th verse clearly shows, for it is said: "And they are spirits of the devil." These do wonders—but, alas, what a pity! Oh, the everlasting regret—to all those who have rejected the word of God and who are now also to be rejected of Christ. And though they may claim to have prophesied in the name of Jesus and to have eaten and drunken in his presence and say, "Thou hast taught us on our streets"—it is written, "And he shall say, I say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Luke 13:27).  
**The Commencement of the Kingdom.**

I have now briefly shown the character of this glorious kingdom of Christ upon earth and also the types and shadows and parables, setting forth and establishing this kingdom both in the Old and New Testaments, and explaining and harmonizing them in their true signification, and I will also here try, in accordance with the word of God, to show the beginning of this kingdom, in as much as many of the interpreters and expositors of the prophecies of God are still looking for it in the future. God grant that it may appear to every reader as clear and plain as it is in my own heart. Oh! that I might be able to paint it as upon a tablet, as Habakuk was commanded, that it could be read, and I say, that it might be understood also by him even that runneth (Hab. 2:2).

The first prophecies that testify to the beginning of this kingdom are the declarations of the Patriarch Jacob to his son Judah, saying: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10).

That this Shiloh, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Bruiser of the serpent's head, did come just as the sceptre had departed from Judah, hardly needs an explanation, for it is a word or fact that is almost universally known (and acknowledged\*). \*) Translator. The Jews were under the dominion of Rome, required to pay tribute or taxes to them and were compelled to acknowledge them as their sovereign and bow to the Roman power and authority, which, before this, they had never done. Besides through all the overturnings of the great monarchs, as those of Babylon, Persia and Greece, the sceptre or power of Judah was never taken away, as the history of the Maccabees distinctly shows, and as both church and secular history relates in detail.

But, as above intimated, as the Jewish sceptre was broken by the Romans and had departed from the Jewish people, all pious believers perceive that the time was now fulfilled and that the King of the Jews must now be born (Luke 2:25, 38).

This is confirmed by Daniel in his prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9), after the expiration of which Christ should come as a Prince or King. These seventy weeks, calculated as year-weeks, that is, each day taken as a year, make up the time of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Four hundred and ninety years after the prophecy of Daniel, Christ was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the reign of Caesar Augustus of Rome, who reigned, with the rest of the then known world, also over the land of Judea.

That this imperishable kingdom should be established at the time of these temporal kingdoms. Daniel showed King Nebuchadnezzar in his explanation of the king's dream. He (Daniel) also shows the continuation of this kingdom to be established of God, namely: It shall never be destroyed, it shall never be left to any other people, and it shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44).

#### **The Glory of the Kingdom.**

Consequently, in the days of Caesar Augustus, in the twenty-fifth year of his reign and in the last century of the full, round number of 4,000 years after the creation of the world, this imperishable kingdom was established—a kingdom, the value and endurance of which was confirmed by many, especially by the angels on the fields of Bethlehem. This was likewise confirmed by the angel at the annunciation to Mary, when he said, "And he (this King) shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33).

Hence I desire, with all the chosen ones of God and especially with King David, to sing a beautiful song concerning this new King: "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever . . . Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre; thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore, God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Psa. 45:2-7). Kindly read this entire Psalm and compare the loving conversation of King Solomon in Canticles or his Song of Songs, between the Bridegroom (that is, Christ, the King) and his bride (that is, the kingdom of Christ, the Holy City, the church of Christ upon earth). It would seem impossible that any one should yet hope for a time, a free, natural time of peace, in which in joyfulness for a thousand years there should exist only a life of earthly pleasure and enjoyment, as many understand Isaiah 65—a time in which no one will "labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble," etc. But, dear reader, I say in the direct words of the Savior, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matth. 22:29); and consequently they will also not bring forth.

#### **The Duration of the Kingdom.**

Therefore, O ye beloved, those to whom the word of God is precious and who have a sincere desire to search therein, and who have not only a desire to search therein but also to understand the same, let us examine the signs of the times; for this purpose the word of God was given us that we should search in it and also learn to understand and explain the prophecies, for the time is at hand.

This prophecy is not sealed or hidden, but is given of God through Jesus Christ to show to his servants what shall shortly take place.

Therefore I believe that every one will also believe with me that by this kingdom is meant a spiritual kingdom on earth, to which all those who awake from the spiritual life of sin and who have spiritually arisen from the dead, are invited, so that they may live and reign with Christ in this spiritual life a thousand years.

Whether exactly a thousand years according to our reckoning of time are meant, I do not know that our purpose demands of us to decide; if so, it would no doubt have been given us also to know the day and hour; but this is not so intended (Matth. 24:36). But that it is one and the same time, namely, these one thousand years, and the twelve hundred and sixty days in which the witnesses of God prophesy and during the same time the woman was supported in the wilderness, and the forty-two months in which the church of God shall be trampled by the heathen, is, without any doubt, according to my understanding, a distinct testimony of the prophecy of all the prophets and all have reference to the same time.

#### **The Bride of Christ.**

Let us, however, well compare the 45th Psalm above referred to and the entire loving conversation of the King of Salem or the Bridegroom with his beloved queen, bride or city of God, described in this Song of Songs, and the prophecies of the suffering and death of Jesus, and I hope you will soon find that his glory may be a spiritual communion with Christ; for Solomon also here and there shows how poor and despised the bride of Christ is. In chapter 1 verse 5 he says, "I am black, but comely . . . Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's children were angry with me" (Song of S. 1:5, 6). "Oh, my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rocks, and in the secret places of the stairs" (Song of S. 2:14).

Indeed, thus despised is the bride of Christ, together with her Bridegroom, everywhere described to us in their natural appearance; especially does the prophet Isaiah set forth the personal appearance of the Savior when he says (Isa. 53), "He hath no form or comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him, and we hid as it were our faces from him." But again it is said (verse 11), "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied . . . Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (Isa. 53:11, 12). This is He that teacheth righteousness and is mighty to save, whose garments were dyed with blood and his name is called The Word of God (Rev. 14).

This is the spiritual marriage which amidst all the confusion of the wicked world had its beginning in the dark stable at Bethlehem, and at the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem ten days after Christ had ascended to heaven, was fully consummated. The Prophet Hosea says, "I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in judgment, and in loving kindness and in mercies" (Hos. 2:19).

This was the beginning of this glorious kingdom of Christ upon earth so often spoken of in the word of God.

#### **The Restoration of the Fall.**

Now the Lamb that was slain, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root and Offspring of David had overcome and taken the sealed book out of the hand of Him that sat upon the throne and opened it and broken the seven seals, and with the opening of the first seal he showed forth the glory of the kingdom and restored that which had been lost through Adams transgression or through the fall; for now all those who would overcome should be permitted to eat of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7; 6:2).

This glory of the kingdom of Christ upon earth, which exists in spirit and in truth, was made known unto men as the glory of the only begotten Son of God and prophetically shown or declared by the white horse, and He that sat thereon who had a bow and to whom was given a crown, and

who went forth to conquer and who was victorious. And thus was restored the privilege to eat of the tree of life.

Also the Babylonian confusion was, in truth and in essence, again manifested, as on the day of Pentecost all who were gathered together with the disciples began to speak with other tongues, so that the assembled multitude was amazed in consternation, and in astonishment cried out, "Are not all these which speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?"

#### **A Kingdom of Suffering and Humility.**

In the opening of this first seal the glory of God in its full measure was made manifest to the believers, the regenerated and unto those who had been spiritually resurrected, and this had also before been, and of this the angels knew at the time of the birth of the great King, for which reason they also desired to look into the great mystery of God which he now was about to bestow upon the children of men, over which, in great rejoicing, they broke out in harmonious melody upon the fields of Bethlehem, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to man. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Thus was the King of heaven born poor and hidden (as it were) from the boasting, noisy world in a lowly condition. But notwithstanding his birth was gloriously celebrated, much more so than the birth of any earthly prince or heir to a worldly throne ever was or ever can be. Not only did the humble shepherds rejoice because of the message brought them by the angels and praised God for it, but also princes from the distant East came and made known the mystery of the birth of the great King of kings, whose kingdom was to be an everlasting kingdom and whose dominion was to extend from sea to sea over all the earth.

In the natural appearance, however, he was the most despised of all; he was hated by both Jews and Gentiles, and his disciples (the citizens of his kingdom) had only bonds and tribulation awaiting them. The prophet indicates the reign of the King of the Jews when he says (Isa. 9:6), "And the government shall be upon his shoulders."

On the other hand, when we look upon the kingdoms of this world, the greater the authority the more honor and service the potentate or sovereign may command. In this kingdom of our Lord, however, the power and authority of the Ruler becomes great through suffering, patience and by enduring the offenses and evil entreatings of men. For this reason also the early Christians praised God when they were accounted worthy for Christ's sake to suffer reproach (Acts 5). For thus the great King commanded his followers to rejoice when men should reproach and persecute them, and speak all manner of evil against them falsely for his sake (Matth. 5).

In this manner also the apostles, as its first counsellors, ruled this kingdom in lowliness and did not ask others to serve them, but they themselves, at all times, served and recognized that God had placed them as the very lowest, as it were, appointed unto death (1 Cor. 4). "For we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake . . . even to this present hour; we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and labor working with our own hands. We are continually as a curse of the world and as the offscouring of all men."

Therefore the apostle admonishes and says, "Be ye followers of me." "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." So also the wisdom of the rulers of this kingdom does not regard temporal or natural things, for it is said, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). By the above, however, we do not wish to convey the idea of ignorance, or that ignorance with those having the spiritual life and ruling in the spiritual kingdom were a common thing, for the apostle says (1 Cor. 2), "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to naught, but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom of God, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; a wisdom which tastes and realizes that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for those that love him."

#### **The First Resurrection.**

That this is the kingdom which God would establish while yet the temporal kingdoms spoken of (namely Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) existed, can here be shown or proved in few words; for he says not, "Before or after these kingdoms," but "In the days of these kings" or kingdoms (Dan. 2:44). And that it is the kingdom in which those who arose in the first resurrection live and reign with Christ is shown by the stone which became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2).

This will be sufficient as proof of the beginning of this kingdom, and I hope that the Christian reader will agree herewith and believe the testimonies which we have adduced on his subject from the scriptures, which clearly sets aside all hope of a temporal or Jewish kingdom; and with these I will close this part of the discussion, but will take into further consideration other parts of the text.

#### **Judgment by the Redeemed.**

*"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads,*

*or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years'' (Rev. 20:4).*

That the regenerated and those who have spiritually risen shall participate in the judgment, is shown in the answer of Christ to Peter, in which Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matth. 19:28).

Again, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas . . . . The queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this regeneration and condemn it, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here" (Matth. 12:41, 42).

The Apostle Paul also testifies, saying, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2).

Judgment, according to the word of God, is mercy and the most weighty (important) in the law (Matth. 23:23), and is imposed on the believers as the greatest command, and this in the Old as well as in the New Testament. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (more than others), laid before his people with special stress the importance of judgment and said, "Take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it; for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts . . . . Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a perfect heart; and what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in your cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they transgress not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you: this do and ye shall not trespass" (2 Chron. 19:6-10). The judgment of mercy or merciful judgment was also given to the church of God of the New Testament and was a special command to Peter, and with him to all Christians, for it is said, "But what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."

It was the key of the kingdom of heaven that was given to Peter and to all the regenerated in accordance with which all things in his church on earth be bound or loosed, even as they shall be found bound or loosed in heaven, which judgment likewise will not be held for men (that is, to please men), but for God (that is, to please God). This judgment is given to those who are risen (from the death of sin) and to all the regenerated who now, like the scribes and Pharisees in former times, sit in Moses' seat, when there are things to be judged between brother and brother, and according to the teaching of Paul (1 Cor. 6).

This includes judgment upon all dealings in temporal things, "for if the world shall be judged by you, how much more things that pertain to this life?"—all of which, to a certain extent, also affect our spiritual life. These who have spiritually arisen are they who constitute the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, who now instead of the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat and judge these things; and because they in all things judge themselves they need not be judged by others (1 Cor. 11:30). When any one through weakness commits a sin, he has an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. When, however, any one commits a sin with better knowledge and wantonly, he will be judged by all and saved by fear, so that he may not be condemned with the world (Jude 23).

Of this nature is judgment, and mercy is the most weighty and important in the law, which, however, must not be overlooked. In this manner the believers will judge all things spiritually and will not by any one be judged (1 Cor. 2).

The word, however, which they have declared here on earth as the testimony of God unto men, this will then judge the whole world in righteousness, and as all faithful ministers of the gospel have preached the word of truth and faith in Christ, so will God then hold up before all men faith, yea, the same faith comprehended in his word and which was preached to them, and judge them in accordance therewith in the day of judgment.

This judgment of God, the overabundant mercy of God—which may justly be called the restoration of all things, the grace of God which bringeth salvation, which has appeared to all men—is confirmed and established in the command of Jesus to Peter, and at the same time to all the flock entrusted to his care, in the words: "Feed my lambs!" "Feed my sheep!"

This was the key to the kingdom of heaven with which all things on earth were to be bound or loosed, and this alone in accordance with the word of God and in accordance with the scriptures, in the books which were given us as the rule in these things. These books were already seen by Daniel in the vision shown him, and how they were opened (Dan. 7:10). This great book which was closed and sealed with seven seals, which neither man nor angel could open and which contained the hidden counsel of God, which could not be read as long as the veil hung over it (2 Cor. 3), in which were hidden the words of God until the last times (Dan. 12)—this great book was opened by the death of Jesus. This veil or covering typified the veil of the temple which closed the entrance into the holy of holies, but now when Jesus died was rent from the top to the bottom, so that every one would be permitted to enter and eat of the tree of life, that is, in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

#### **The Reign of the Regenerated.**

The souls who through the spiritual resurrection had risen from the dead, were they who now seated themselves in Moses' seat. Many of these were beheaded for the word of God and for the testimony which they held, and had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not taken upon their foreheads nor upon their hands the mark of the beast, and this was the judgment that was given



them namely: That all who had not worshipped the image, but had been regenerated and loosed with the key of the kingdom of heaven, and showed that their conversation was in heaven, from whence also they looked for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ—these are they who shall sit in Moses' seat and judge the world, and these constitute the kingdom of righteousness, the kingdom of peace, the Millennium (Phil. 3:20).

Those who, on the contrary, do not believe in the word and walk according to the flesh after the lusts of their hearts, and who worship the beast and take upon themselves the mark of the beast, these will be judged by the binding key and excluded from the camp of Zion; and these shall also be bound in heaven in accordance with the words of Jesus (Matth. 18). Those, however, who in this day of grace will come to the knowledge of the truth and realize the virtue of this correction, and comprehend the meaning of being given over unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, their spirits shall be saved in the day of the Lord. As long as this judgment of mercy is maintained in the church of Christ, so long the unconquerable King reigns in his city of peace, and all the citizens of the city or kingdom reign with him and live in blessed rest, even as it was in the days of the natural King Solomon, when peace and quietude were predominant.

#### **The Anti-Christ.**

When, however, Satan for a little time shall be loosed and released from his prison, then will this judgment with the key of heaven be administered very differently. The man of sin, the beast out of the pit, the son of perdition will administer this judgment after the manner of men in terrible form. The curse of the judgment of condemnation will let the beams of the bann with the power given it by the key of heaven, thunder over all that have not taken upon themselves the mark of the beast and especially those who believe the testimony of the two witnesses. Satan will succeed in killing the two witnesses and in drowning the woman with a great stream of water cast forth out of his mouth; a flood of water, of numberless self-chosen laws, sects and commandments, which were strong enough to wash away the entire church of God from the earth; but the earth helped the woman and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood. That is, the kings of the earth contracted the power of the pope and limited his power, both in multiplying the number of convents and the shameful wickedness associated with them, under the semblance of righteousness, and also in the absolution deals and the pilgrimages so detrimental to the state.

And thus the woman (the church) remained in the wilderness, while Satan went out into all the world, and the great stream Euphrates dried up, and all the nations were gathered together to a great conflict on the great day of the Lord. The cursings of the bann of the pope ceased and the ten kings (Rev. 17:16) made him desolate and naked, hated him and consumed his flesh, that is, took from him the possessions belonging to him.

#### **The Angel of Light.**

But Satan outwitted his opponents and clothed himself with the letter of the word, and then as an angel of light gained much more for himself, and went out to gather for the great day of the Lord. Now he assumed to know nothing of judgment and spoke positively, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. Condemn not, so shall ye not be condemned" (Matth. 7). Likewise the judgment given to the saints he explained as an absurd silliness not commanded to any one. In consequence of this, the conflict ceased and all was deferred until the great day of the Lord. The witnesses of God, the two witnesses, which were the two Testaments, were now killed, and what had been accomplished by them in stirring up the consciences of men was again quieted and the troubled hearts were quieted and joy took its place. A voluptuous life and the giving of presents became the unhindered chief work of the people. Satan would have taken pleasure in making sport of eternity, and making men believe that hell was only a fable, if his torturing conscience would not continually have reminded him of the coming wrath of God. Hence, also, faith in Christ and in God were not rejected, if only, though through fear and trembling, the glory of God could be changed into an image or an imaginary Christianity (Rom. 1:13), and the creature worshipped more than the Creator.

That God, is not so readily denied, and also faith in Jesus is commended, but with their works men do deny the faith. The highly enlightened false philosophy of men has so robbed mankind and misrepresented the end and purpose of life that men are indeed led to believe that godliness is a business or trade (1 Tim. 6). In humility and the spirituality of angels, men go about with carnal minds and carnal purposes, vainly puffed up in their fleshy minds (Col. 2:13). Men for conscience sake refrain from eating or drinking or from working on certain days, etc. All these and many other like things are signs of the times, which Jesus commanded his disciples to observe (Luke 12:56).

#### **Now is the Acceptable Time of Salvation.**

From all these things we may conclude that the end is nigh at the door and that the prophecies are fulfilled. It is midnight and who knows how soon the seventh angel will sound and call out, "The Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."

For each individual, however, the time is fulfilled when it is said, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." Therefore watch and pray, for as no one knows in which hour the Lord will come. No doubt he will come in the night when all are asleep and no one thinks of his coming. Blessed is that servant who watches and who governs well his house and provides for it, who has not hid his pound in a napkin, and who from the heart forgives his brother, for it is said, "He will gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and he will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER EIGHTEEN. A PUBLICATION STORY.

1. Op.cit., Chapter seventeen.
2. Dr. Archie Penner, **Pieter Jansz Twisk—Second Generation Anabaptist/Mennonite Churchman, Writer and Polemicist.**, Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Iowa, 1971, 465 pages. In this work Dr. Penner provides a crucial insight into the life of the Dutch Mennonite Church through the life and work of one of its most capable Bishops and churchmen.
3. Van der Zijpp, "Hans de Ries", ME 4, 330-331.
4. John C. Wenger, **A Lay Guide to Romans** (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1983), 37-38.
5. Peter M. Friesen, op.cit., 570.



# Chapter Nineteen.

## Farewell to Russia

### 19.00 Introduction

The story of the Mennonite Kleinen Gemeinde in Russia comes to a close with the emigration to America during the years 1874-1875. The factors considered in the previous chapters had resulted in a chastened and purified Gemeinde which included only the most steadfast and earnest members. By 1874 there were only a few families left in the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde who were not prepared to bid farewell to their fine homes and beautiful farms for a future of inevitable penury and poverty for the sake of their faith. As a result some 200 families of the Heuboden, Blumenhoff, Molotschna and Crimean Gemeinden departed from the shores of Russia forever. This chapter will tell the story of this emigration and the journey of a complete community to a new land.

### 19.01 Preparing for Emigration

In his **1872-1878 Diary**, Aeltester Peter Toews has recorded some of the more important events leading up to the final departure from Russia. As the Aeltester of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde, his notations are generally made from the perspective of leadership and the Gemeinde as a whole so that the same provides a valuable overview of the decisions and preparations leading up to the emigration. It seems that the decision to emigrate from Russia was already made by August of 1873. Aeltester Toews has noted that delegate, Cornelius Toews, reported to the brotherhood, presumably in Blumenhoff, on Sunday, August 12, 1873. Here Cornelius Toews read for the brethren, the letter of assurances which the Canadian Government in America had given to him, "in which our religious freedom was promised to us. And he also related to us the most essential of the arrangements made in Manitoba and with the Minister of Agriculture in Ottawa".

Another meeting was held on the following Saturday, August 18, at which many matters pertaining to the emigration were discussed. e.g. How would the poor be able to emigrate as there were considerable expenses involved? Various Kleine Gemeinde sources indicate that the travelling expenses alone came to about \$300.00 to \$400.00 per family, a substantial sum in those days. It was reported that the travelling expenses to America and back of delegate Cornelius Toews had amounted to 654 rubles and 10 kopeks. It was decided to call a general brotherhood meeting in order that the brethren from the Molotschna and the Crimea could participate in the decision which now had to be made. By this time some of the brethren were already starting to put their properties up for sale and on Sunday, August 26, Aeltester Toews admonished his Gemeinde that everything pertaining to the sale and disposition of properties should be done only in love so that neither one nor the other would occasion damage thereby.

An important meeting was held on August 30, 1873 at the home of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen in Heuboden. Aeltester J. Wiebe from the Crimea was also present indicating that he was able to overlook some of his scruples regarding the salvation of his former brethren when it came to the planning for the emigration. No doubt the larger Blumenhoff and Heuboden Gemeinden in Borosenko were able to provide considerable planning assistance and advice to the small Krimmer Mennonite Brethren group, which only consisted of about 20 families. The Aeltesten Conference decided that the land ordinances offered by the Canadian Government authorities should be accepted. It meant that all men and women over 20 years of age would be entitled to homestead rights. Apparently the previous view had been that it would be sufficient if the male persons were utilized for this purpose. The meeting also decided that it would be beneficial for all persons to pay their debts before the notices and demands for the payment of debts would have to be published.

The Blumenhoff Gemeinde held another brotherhood meeting on Saturday, September 8. Here the ministerial again admonished the brethren that they should not follow the leading of the Lord in one thing, namely emigration; and omit to do his will in the other, namely to love one another. It was also decided that each and everyone who had already decided to leave Russia and who had debts and other obligations outstanding should attend to the payment of the same before such obligations were satisfied by the creditors through legal means. In this the Blumenhoff Gemeinde was endorsing the decision of the Aeltesten Conference. The necessity of holding an all-congregation brotherhood meeting was again brought forth. Another brotherhood meeting was held on Friday, the 14th of September, but the Crimean and Molotschna brethren had not been able to come and were not pre-

sent. Again various matters pertaining to the emigration were discussed, i.e. how to go about the obtaining of the emigration passes, and the like. The imitation of the world in vehicles and embellished clothes was worked against and the brethren were encouraged to be faithful and obedient to the word of God.

Finally the brethren from the Crimea and the Molotschna arrived. On Sunday, September 16, Ohm Peter Baerg presented the sermon in Blumenhoff, followed by Abraham Klassen from the Molotschna. The general brotherhood meeting was held on Tuesday, the 18th of September, with the agenda consisting of various matters pertaining to the emigration. The question was raised whether any further efforts should be made to determine when the new military law would come into force against the Mennonites. Eventually this was considered unnecessary in view of the fact that these laws had already been promulgated. A decision was also reached that the surplus monies from the fund for the delegation to America were to be paid into the Gemeinde treasury. The sale of the school and worship building in Blumenhoff was also discussed.

One of the matters discussed at this general brotherhood meeting was the desire of the Heubodner Gemeinde to amalgamate with the Blumenhoff Gemeinde. This had already been discussed at the brotherhood meeting of August 8 and again at the brotherhood meeting of September 8th. The Ohms from the Molotschna and the Crimea were present at the general brotherhood meeting of September 18, 1873, and consequently it was decided that this would be a convenient opportunity to hold a joint ministerial conference together with the Heubodner Gemeinde. As a result, a meeting between the Heubodner and Blumenhoff ministerial was held in the school building in Blumenhoff on September 20th. The participants included Aeltester Peter Toews; the ministers A. Loewen, P. Kroeker, J. Barkman, and Abraham Klassen and Peter Baerg; and the deacons, H. Wiebe and John L. Dueck; from the Blumenhoff, Crimea and Molotschna Gemeinden. The Heubodner representatives included the Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, the ministers Peter Friesen and Cornelius Friesen, and the deacons Jakob Friesen and Jakob Kroeker.

The discussion during this conference centered on the differences between the groups pertaining to edification and prayer. It seems that the Heuboden Gemeinde placed some emphasis on silent prayer. On the other hand the Blumenhoff Gemeinde appeared to place greater emphasis on the inward spiritual life of the believer. But the proposed unification did not come to pass because the two groups had already become too independent in their respective practices since the division of 1866. For example, the Blumenhoff Gemeinde decided at a brotherhood meeting of November 11, 1873, that no definite policy that praying aloud should not be recognized could be adopted.

Nevertheless the two Gemeinden continued to work together and cooperate together as sister Gemeinden. In fact the existence of separate Gemeinden and congregations within the overall Kleine Gemeinde movement was a healthy and progressive development in the long run. Such an organizational arrangement was necessary and inevitable as it allowed variations in faith and practice in non-essentials. At the same time each group could be enriched and strengthened by the sister congregations and still remain unequivocally faithful and loyal to the full gospel faith under the overall Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde umbrella.

Another interesting matter which arose toward the latter part of 1873 was the claim which Abraham F. Thiessen placed against the Kleine Gemeinde. The reader will recall that Thiessen was the social reformer and advocate of the landless Mennonites in Russia. His earlier excommunication and reacceptance into the Kleine Gemeinde in 1866 had been the spark which caused the great Kleine Gemeinde division of that year. The reader will also recall that Abraham F. Thiessen later was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde congregation in Jansen, Nebraska. It seems that Thiessen was unfavourably inclined towards the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia for a time for he now placed a legal claim against his brethren. This consisted of a claim for 1000 rubles against the Kleine Gemeinde for damages allegedly suffered while he was excommunicated from the Gemeinde.

In his *Diary*, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that he and Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen were summoned to the Nikolaithaler Vollost office on November 7th, 1873, in order to file written assurances with respect to these charges and that the Kleine Gemeinde had no outstanding matters concerning A. Thiessen of Neu-Halbstadt. Apparently Abraham F. Thiessen had presented a written statement to the Vollost office in Nikolaithal in which he outlined his claims. At a brotherhood meeting on November 11th, Aeltester Toews presented these claims to his brethren. On January 2nd, 1874, Aeltester Toews had to attend at the Vollost offices in Nikolaithal in order to reply to a similar claim against the Gemeinde by Jacob Braun. Braun was a former member of the Kleine Gemeinde who apparently intended to embarrass his former brethren with an unfounded claim in the hope that he could thereby

exact a settlement. In the end both claims were completely unsuccessful. In **Anhang Number One**, Aeltester Peter Toews explains that in April of 1874, Lord Totleben issued a degree banning Abraham Thiessen from the Molotschna colony as well as from all of Southern Russia. Through this action the claims of Thiessen and Braun were as good as extinguished.<sup>1</sup>

Other matters of concern which arose during the early part of 1874, included a misunderstanding between John Goossen and the village assembly in Blumenhoff, over land boundaries. It seems that Goossen was never quite able to reconcile himself to a certain decision of the village assembly and eventually was put out of the Gemeinde because of insufficient acknowledgement. Although he eventually confessed his fault and was once again accepted into the Gemeinde, he later settled in Gnadenu, Kansas, together with the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren group. Another similar case arose with Heinrich Friesen of Sagrodowka, who had expressed himself unlovingly towards Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe in the Crimea. On April 14 the brotherhood decided to forgive him on the condition that he write to Wiebe in Annenfeld to confess his loveless attitude.

The matter of raising the large sums of money required if the Gemeinde was to be able to transport all the widows, orphans, and poor families, came up for frequent discussion. On Sunday, September 14th, Aeltester Toews encouraged the Gemeinde that they should richly support the treasury in order that capital would be assembled so that the poor could be transported to America. Apparently there were differences in view regarding the Gemeinde treasury into which everyone was to contribute in love. As a result, minister Isaac Friesen renounced the Gemeinde on March 2nd, 1874. On April 14th, the brotherhood gave consideration to the collection of a fund for this purpose by the imposition of assessments on all members. In **Anhang Number One**, Aeltester Peter Toews has noted that the collection of a rate or assessment had already commenced in 1873. By the time of the departure of the first Kleine Gemeinde contingent, this fund consisted of 1182 ruble so that the Gemeinde definitely had the wherewithal to transport all those who lacked their own means.<sup>2</sup>

Having decided to emigrate from Russia each member of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde now had to make the important decision as to the eventual destination of this emigration. It seems that the Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde had always favoured the greater religious freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Government even though the settlement in Manitoba would obviously be far more difficult and expensive. The Heubodner Gemeinde, on the other hand, was inclined in favour of settlement in Nebraska or elsewhere in the United States, where settlement opportunities were more favourable and the climate more comparable to that of Southern Russia. This inclination was no doubt inspired by the close family relationship which many members of the group had with Consul Cornelius Jansen who had been exiled from Russia in 1873 and who eventually decided in favour of settlement in the United States.

Some of the families of the Heuboden Gemeinde agreed with the decision of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde to settle in Manitoba and consequently transferred their membership in order to emigrate together with the same. They were joined by members of other Gemeinden in the Borosenko area as well as in the Molotschna who were also prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice which the spiritual lot of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde required at this time. In his **Diary**, Aeltester Peter Toews has made note of some of the families who joined the Kleine Gemeinde under these circumstances. At a brotherhood meeting of December 26, a widow Esau from Osterwick was received into the Gemeinde. Her desire to do so had already been presented to the brethren on December 23rd. On January 6th, 1874, she married Peter Loewen. On January 1, 1874, a number of families who wanted to join were presented to the Gemeinde. These included Broski, the elder Vehr's from Krdenenthal, and Buller's from Steinbach. On January 24, the Bullers from Steinbach were accepted into the Gemeinde. On March 10, Peter Enns' were accepted into the Gemeinde in Rosenfeld.

On the Sunday before Pentecost in April, 1874, the members of the Heuboden Gemeinde who wanted to join the Blumenhoff Gemeinde were presented to the brotherhood. On the first Friday of Pentecost they were presented again with the result that the first festive day of Pentecost was appointed for their acceptance. On May 20, Johan Broski was joined to the Gemeinde by baptism. Several other families who joined with the Kleine Gemeinde for the purpose of the journey to America only became members of the Kleine Gemeinde later in Manitoba. This included the Gerhard Doerksen family, formerly of Fischau in the Molotschna, and the Dietrich Isaacs. Another new member who joined the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde on October 5th, 1875, was Gottlieb Janke who had been a farmhand in the Borosenko area and who had decided to join his Kleine Gemeinde employers in the move to Manitoba.

## 19.02 Abraham R. Friesen and the Molotschna Gemeinde

As soon as the decision to emigrate was finalized, each family had to undertake the momentous task of disposing of property, hearth, and home. In an earlier chapter, mention was made that this procedure was somewhat less difficult in the Molotschna where the property market did not plummet to quite the same degree as in the newer and less well established Mennonite settlements such as Borosenko. The diary of Kleine Gemeinde school teacher, Abraham R. Friesen of Lichtenau, Molotschna, mentions the forced disposition of property and other events leading up to the emigration from Russia.

The reader will recall that the Abraham R. Friesen diary contains the record of a veteran teacher in the Molotschna school system, the activities of a part time farmer, and of a rich and vibrant social life. According to the diary these activities continued unabated until the time of actual departure from Russia. The first diary reference to the impending emigration is on September 11, 1873, when Abraham R. Friesen has noted in his diary that there is much general discussion about the emigration to America. At about this time the cattle plague, which was rampant in the Molotschna at that time, had killed all three of his cattle within eight days. He notes that 150 head of cattle had died in the area within a time of seventeen days.

The members of the Molotschna congregation were already proceeding with the disposition of their properties. On Monday, October 15, Abraham R. Friesen was visiting at the home of the Elder Eidge, in Fischau, where he learned that they had just sold their Wirtschaft to N. Derksen of Lindenau for 2800 rubles. This would appear to have been a relatively favourable sale being almost half of the price received by the members of the Kleine Gemeinde who were moving to the new settlements during the 1860s. Some sources indicate that the prices of farm properties in the Molotschna would fall to about a third of their normal value. On Saturday, November 11, Friesen has noted that Kor. Kor. has purchased the small "Wirtschaft" of Johan Regalsky for 1050 rubles. Johan Bolt has also sold his place to Kornelsen from the Old Colony for 1000 rubles.

The diary refers to a continual stream of visitors from the Kleine Gemeinde congregations in the Crimea and Borosenko. On December 15, 1873, Abraham R. Friesen mentions that a worship service was held at H. Warkentin's in Lichtenau, where he remained for the afternoon. In the evening Is. Barf., Abr. Nikkel and Kor. Enns' were visiting at his home in the same village. The next evening he had visitors, Jakob Friesens. The next day Abraham Kornelsens from the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde were there with cattle which they had for sale. The next day his father, Klaas Friesen, Cornelius Goossen from Annafeld, and H. Enns from Fischau, came for a visit. On Friday, the 21st of December, Abraham R. Friesen notes that he only held school until noon and that after dinner he drove to Fischau together with his father. A number of family heads had gathered here for a meeting regarding the emigration passes. These included Klaas Friesen, Korn. Goossen, Hein. Brandt, Jakob Wiebe, Joh. Reimer, and Franz Kroeker. From a previous chapter the reader will recall that the amount of visiting recorded was not at all unusual within nineteenth century Russian Mennonite society.

Abraham R. Friesen continued to be interested in owning a small dairy notwithstanding the previous loss of his entire herd. On December 24th he purchased another cow for 35 rubles. This was about a quarter of the price of \$100.00 which the Kleine Gemeinde emigrants would have to pay for a cow in Manitoba later the same year. But Friesen had already decided that he would remain in Russia for at least another year and on January 24th, 1874 he committed himself for another year of teaching at a salary of 200 ruble, 5 tschetwert of rye, 5 tschetwert of wheat, 7 tschetwert of barley, and 4 desjatines of cultivated land.

There are repeated reminders of the seriousness and brevity of life. On April 20th, Friesen received the funeral letter for Martin Rempel of Margenau who had died the previous day after a lengthy illness, at the age of 51 years and 3 months. Rempel was a beloved brother in the Kleine Gemeinde. On the same day the Lichtenau neighbours assembled in the village school in order to discuss the forms of service which should be accepted in wartime. Forestry service was questioned. But the realities of Russian society are evident to all. On April 25th Friesen has noted that Abraham F. Thiessen was sent to Siberia on that day.

By now many auction sales were taking place. On the 29th of May, Abraham R. Friesen notes that he purchased a bridle at an auction in Tiege. A few days earlier he had purchased a bed at the joint auction of Giesbrechts and Abraham Eidses in Fischau. On the 29th, Giesbrechts left for America. Sometimes a small profit could even be made. Thus Friesen has reported that he drove to Borosenko on May 24th where he purchased a mare for 75 rubles. Shortly after his return to the Molotschna he sold the mare to a Russian for 95 rubles. This illustrates that the property and livestock market

was far more depressed in the newer Borosenko settlements where entire villages were being vacated by the emigration. In Borosenko the emigration was in full flow. On August 29, 1874, Abraham R. Friesen noted that he had already received a letter from his parents which they had posted to him from Liverpool.

By this time the Kleine Gemeinde families planning to emigrate in 1875 were starting to sell their properties. On September 2, 1874 Friesen was at the auction sale of Ohm Heinrich Enns, (1801-1881), in Fischau. Ohm Enns had sold his Wirtschaft for 3500 rubles. In so far as is known this was the original Feuerstelle number 13 in Fischau taken up in 1804 by Cornelius Enns (1782-?), the father of Ohm Enns. On September 29, Friesen was at the auction sale of Heinrich Warkentin, a Kleine Gemeinde farmer in Lichtenau, who had usually hosted the Kleine Gemeinde worship services in that village. Warkentin had sold his Wirtschaft for 3056 rubles. Warkentin must have been a substantial farmer for it is recorded that he realized 1118 rubles at his auction sale.

By this time Abraham R. Friesen was regularly writing letters to his parents and siblings who are already settled in Manitoba. He also recorded the frequent receipt of letters from America during this time. As a well known school teacher, Friesen was frequently called upon to write letters, petitions and other documents for his family, neighbours, friends and even for the Russians. On January 20th he noted his resolve to do everything within his power to work for freedom of faith. On Saturday, February 2, 1875, an auction sale was held at the home of his father-in-law, Gerhard S. Kornelsen. Total receipts were 744 rubles. On February 18, Friesen put his own goods up for auction but noted that the prices were only very average. Two days later he sold his gelding for 65 rubles.

On March 29, 1875, Friesen conducted school examinations for the last time in Russia. The guests included Aeltester Johan Harder of Blumstein, Ohm W. Berg, Lindenau, Ohm Korn. Enns, Fischau; and the school teachers from Fischau, Lindenau, and Blumenort; the village Schulz Johan Bolt, and twelve others. No doubt the attendance of a good number of distinguished visitors was a tribute to an active and gifted school teacher who was now preparing for his own departure from Russia.

But the less favourable aspects of Molotschna Mennonite society were equally in evidence. Friesen noted that the Lichtenau villagers were having difficulties with the Russians and that they had imprisoned three of them on February 14.

On May 1, 1875, the Abraham R. Friesens finally left for America, together with the last contingent of 30 Kleine Gemeinde families under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews. A few families such as the Martin Rempels of Margenau, would remain in Russia for another winter and emigrate individually in the spring of 1876.

### 19.03 Preparation for Emigration in Borosenko

The sale of property and the disposition of goods and livestock in the Borosenko area was an entirely different proposition. Here the market was far more depressed because of the concentration of Kleine Gemeinde villages in which almost every family had decided to emigrate. At the same time there were fewer farmers and entrepreneurs in the area who had the means to purchase such properties. The result was a buyer's market which was made even worse by the fact that the emigrants were committed to a day of departure as deposits had been paid on account of the sea voyage and elsewhere. As a result the purchasers knew that if they were patient they would eventually be able to buy at their own price. The effects which this had on the equity of many an emigrant has already been discussed in a previous chapter.

The experience of the farmers of the village of Rosenfeld was probably typical. The property of the 14 villagers was sold by disposal auctions which went on for three days.<sup>3</sup> The widow of deacon Heinrich Wiebe later recalled that the 14 farmers from Rosenfeld sold their farms as a village unit to farmers from the Chortitz or Old Colony who drove very hard bargains.<sup>4</sup> After receiving payment the leaders of the village, which included Heinrich Wiebe, distributed the sale proceeds among the villagers according to the previously determined values of the properties. But even here some bargaining took place as the more prosperous farmers felt that they had been underpaid.<sup>5</sup> John B. Toews (1865-1967) who was nine years old at the time, later recalled that his father, Peter W. Toews and Peter Penner (1813-1884) did not leave Borosenko with the first emigration group because they had been given the responsibility of completing the final legal documents with Uncle Heese who was presumably the agent of the purchasers. They were also to receive and bring with them, the final payment of the purchase monies.<sup>6</sup>

Another Kleine Gemeinde village from which several accounts are available, is Gruenfeld, which was located some 10 miles north of the Borosenko village of Rosenfeld. The village school teacher,



Abram P. Isaac, has reported in his memoirs that the disposal of properties started right after New Years in 1874. The Gruenfeld land was sold to Lutherans and to Russians who were mainly Catholics. All other property was sold through auction sales. Abram Isaac recalls that:

“all through the spring months there was much undertaking in brisk form. Nearly every-day witnessed a sale. In order to save time some would number their property and merge their sale. This also took place in the new settlements which were established away from the mother colony. The buyers were mostly non-Mennonites, although a few Mennonites possibly looking at our emigration as if we were mocking them, also purchased. But today 50 years later (1924), many have woefully regretted and bemoaned their mistake that they did not forsake their lovely places in Russia and establish a new home in free America.”

It seems that the Gruenfeld village was relatively fortunate in being able to dispose of their properties. But the village was unique in that one side was settled by Russians who were now apparently also the first to purchase the fine properties of their former neighbours. Peter Toews (1866-1935), the son of Gruenfeld farmer, Johan Toews (1829-1895), recalled that as their village was quite small all the sales were held at one place. He remembered how he rode to the place of the auction with their best mare. His father also sold one horse to a Russian. His mother had said that the family would cross the great ocean on a ship and not on horses. One old mare was simply shot.<sup>7</sup> From this one would conclude that the prices were not all the best even though the buyers paid in cash money. Others were not so fortunate and had to finance the sale of their properties over time payments by the extension of credit if they wanted to make any sale. Sometimes these payments were never received.

Another Gruenfeld villager, Cornelius Loewen, has recorded various events in his diary pertaining to the emigration. The disposal sale of the Cornelius Loewen property took place in February of 1874. He has recorded the selling price of some of the items: Miscellaneous - Gerhard Friesen 0.25; Dish - Johan Wolf - 0.06; Barrels - Johan Wolfe of Mischaifof - 0.06; Harrows - Franz Isaac of Hochstaedt - 1.20; Clothes closet - Herman Wiens 14.00; Dishes - Abram Friesen - 14.00; Ladle - Peter Penner - Friedensfeld - 1.00; Barrel - Abraham Penner - Ebenfeld - 0.15; Table - Peter Penner - Friedensfeld - 2.15; Bed - Cornelius Plett - 3.30; Gelding - Cornelius Plett - 48.00; Board - Franz Kajawski - 0.21.

Cornelius Loewen has also recorded that he made a trip to the Molotschna in 1874 in order to settle his accounts there in anticipation of his emigration. Somewhat later he made another trip together with fellow Gruenfelder, Johan Toews (1829-1895), in order to attend to the obtaining of emigration passes. Others also made the trip to the Molotschna in order to visit relatives whom they might never see again. A son recalled that Gruenfeld farmer, Johan Toews (1829-1895), travelled to the Molotschna one last time just before the emigration in order to visit his sister, Helena, who had married Jakob Buller of Alexanderwohl, and his sister Maria, who was married to Peter Loewen of Fischau.<sup>8</sup>

By the spring of 1874 the process of selling and disposing of properties was well underway in all the settlements which had decided in favour of emigration. It appears that the Kleine Gemeinde in general was quite fortunate in having been able to sell and dispose of property. Other groups such as the Bergthaler were not so fortunate and finally had to sell their entire complex of five villages at a give away price and even then also had to finance the deal in order to make a sale at all. In the Borosenko area there were individual colonists who purchased entire villages for 30 to 50 rubles per desjatine. This included all buildings and improvements. Johan W. Dueck (1865-1932) a young lad at the time, also recalled that the goods of the emigrants had to be sold by auction and that Peter Loewen (1825-1887) had fulfilled the function of auctioneer for the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>9</sup>

One example of a sale in the Borosenko area is reported by Aeltester Peter Toews who stated that his farm together with the farm of his aunt, Carolina Friesen, the widow of the aged minister Klaas Friesen, formerly of Rosenort in the Molotschna, had sold for 3800 rubles or about \$2800 at the 1874 exchange rate. Together the two farms consisted of 100 desjatinas or 280 acres of land. This amounted to a purchase price of \$10.00 per acre including buildings, yard, trees, orchards, and all other improvements made in the ten years since the founding of the Borosenko colony. The reader might note that this was approximately the same price per acre which the Kleine Gemeinde had paid for the entire 18,000 acre Borosenko complex when it was purchased in 1865. This would seem to confirm American newspaper reports of the time which stated that many of the Russian Mennonite immigrants had been forced to dispose of properties normally worth from \$6,000.00 to 7,000.00 for as little as \$2,000.00 and even as low as \$1,000.00. Interestingly the very same land sold by the 1874 emigrants would appreciate to a value of over \$100.00 per acre by the time of the first World War.<sup>10</sup>

## 19.04 "Let My People Go"

By early spring of 1874 a good portion of the Kleine Gemeinde had managed to sell their properties and was ready and anxious to be on their way. But a problem now developed in that the Russian Government had not yet issued any emigration passes. Obviously the Government was stalling in the hope that the main thrust of the emigration could be diverted and that it would fizzle out. Then suddenly on April 17, 1874, Aeltester Peter Toews was summoned to the Vollost offices and charged to appear before General-Adjutant von Totleben in Halbstadt on April 19, together with his fellow ministers. During the night of April 17 to 18, Toews was especially brought over the Dneiper for this purpose, but he was only summoned into the presence of General von Totleben on Saturday the 20.

Here Totleben advised the leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde as well as all the other Mennonite Aeltesten and ministers assembled there that the Czar had sent him as a special emissary in order to advise the Mennonites against emigration. Totleben had been instructed to advise that the Czar had reconsidered the faith of the Mennonites and had now decided that they would not be placed in the War Ministry as had originally been planned. Instead the Mennonites would only have to serve in firefighting, forestry service, technical establishments and civilian hospitals or medical services. Totleben admonished the Mennonites that they should not emigrate but rather remain in Russia as the dearly beloved subjects of the Czar.

On the evening of Thursday, the 25th of April, the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial was again summoned to appear before Totleben in Chortitz. Here Totleben made the same presentation and earnestly advised them to remain in Russia. Finally the Kleine Gemeinde representatives submitted to Totleben a letter of thanksgiving for the freedom which they had enjoyed in Russia for almost three-quarters of a century and a petition for a favourable disposition for those who had already sold their properties and who were now ready to emigrate.<sup>11</sup>

On Monday, April 29, 1874, Aeltester Peter Toews and a number of members of the Kleine Gemeinde who had not yet disposed of their properties were summoned to another audience with Totleben together with the Oberschulz of the Nikolaithal Vollost. The men who accompanied Aeltester Toews on this delegation were Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) and Heinrich Reimer (1818-1876). Here the Governor-General reiterated what he had presented in Halbstadt and again in Chortitz. Finally Aeltester Toews added the request that those families who had already completed the sale of their property and therefore would soon be without a place to live and who had a long journey ahead of them, be allowed to receive their emigration passes. In closing Aeltester Toews also asked that Totleben present the Letter of Thanks and Petition to the Czar personally which the General-Adjutant also promised to do. Toews also requested that they might soon receive the necessary passes. This presentation was successful as within thirty days the first contingent of Kleine Gemeinde emigrants was underway.

On May 4, 1874, a deposit for the ocean fare of 15 dollars per family was mailed to Hamburg in order to reserve passage for 84 families. The reader should bear in mind that a great deal of effort was involved in the planning and organization of such an emigration which included an entire community complete with grandparents, infants, widows, and greatgrandparents. The extant documents of Aeltester Peter Toews include a good number of letters received from various parties involved in this great effort. These include: Richard & Boas-Hamburg; August Bolten; Winkler and Jakob in Odessa; Joseph Breuer-Lemberg; Cornelius Jansen-Berdjansk; Mayer & Co. - Hamburg; P. Jamen-Weichhof bei Danzig; Oberschulz Rempel of the Nikolaithal Vollost; Falck & Co. - Hamburg; Jakob Y. Schantz-Berlin; Spiro & Co. Hamburg - agent for the Allen Line; Jakob E. Klosz-Hamburg; Elias Schmieder-Waterloo County, Ontario; Heinrich Schuett-Hamburg, Heinrich Eggly, Gerhard Wiebe-Heuboden, and others. This includes correspondence from Government representatives, ship's agents, and many others. These writings constitute an invaluable source of detail pertaining to the planning of the emigration and the actual implementation of the same.

With the arrangements made, the emigration was finally underway. The first contingent of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde departed from Nikopol for America on May 30, 1874. This group consisted of some 25 families, including Johan Toews and Cornelius Toews, the brothers of Aeltester Peter Toews. The second group which included the ministers Abraham Loewen and Peter Kroeker, left on June 2. Both groups were accompanied to Nikopol by numerous brothers and sisters, including Aeltester Peter Toews. On June 4th another group consisting of the Rosenfelders departed from Nikopol. This group included the deacons Peter Wiebe and Heinrich Wiebe. On Monday, June 17 the remaining Rosenfelders, and Peter Isaacs from Hochfeld, left for Nikopol in order that they could depart from there by steamship on the following day. On July 18, 19 additional families were underway.

These were from Steinbach and elsewhere. The remaining families from Steinbach and Annafeld left on Sunday the 21st. This group was under the leadership of the minister, Jakob Barkman.

This concluded the emigration for 1874. Only some 30 Kleine Gemeinde families remained in Russia and these would join their brethren in America in the following year. This concludes the examination of the events and preparations leading up to the emigration of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from Russia.

### 19.05 Journey to the New Homeland

Many accounts of the journey of the Kleine Gemeinde emigrants from Southern Russia to America have been preserved. The trip was an unforgettable experience for all who took part. One such recollection of this journey by Johan W. Dueck (1865-1932) has already been published in **History and Events**.<sup>12</sup> This was the story of the first groups of Kleine Gemeinde emigrants who departed from Nikopol in late May and early June of 1874. These groups joined together in Hamburg from where they travelled as one emigration party of 65 families. The group left Liverpool, England on June 30, 1874, arrived in Quebec on July 17, and landed in Winnipeg on July 31, 1874. This was the first group of Mennonite settlers in Manitoba and also the largest single group of Kleine Gemeinde pioneers.

Another detailed account of the journey of this group was included in the Memorial book of Katherina Loewen of Neuanlage. Apparently she transcribed the same from another source in 1888, perhaps as a writing exercise which was common at the time. The author of the report itself remains unidentified, although at least one historian suggests that it was Peter W. Loewen (1852-1919) the father of Katherina. Nevertheless, the account will be included here in its entirety as it consists of accurate historical detail.

#### **“Daily Chronicle recorded during our journey from Russia to America 1874.”**

On Monday, June 3, 1874, we commenced with our journey to America. We took our leave from our parents, siblings, and neighbours. Then we had Franz Isaac, a colonist, drive us to Nikopol. At 5 o'clock in the morning of June 4, we embarked upon the ship Gesson and departed from Nikopol and at 6 o'clock that evening we arrived in Kherson. We stayed the night at the ship's offices. During the night our trunks were reloaded into the ship going to Odessa. At 9 o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, June 5, we left Kherson for Odessa. The ride and the weather was very beautiful for us with the exception that I was awakened from my sleep at 2 o'clock that afternoon. I noticed immediately that the sailors were busily engaged in attempting to roll up the sails which had protected us from the sun. They were making all necessary preparations to encounter the ever increasing storm and rain. Soon the inclement weather was upon us and the wind whistled through the rigging. The sea was heaving and the ship started to sway to and fro. Vomitting and seasickness resulted among the passengers below. But soon the storm was past and the weather beautiful and clear again.

At 7 o'clock in the evening we arrived in Odessa, disembarked from the ship with our hand luggage and proceeded to the ship's offices. From here Peter Wiebe, Gerhard Schellenberg and I drove to Maibach. Here we received a letter to Gerhard Schellenberg from David Klassen in which he described the events of their journey from Odessa onward. From Maibach we drove to the small train station where we discussed our further journey with the station master. Then we returned to the harbour and transported our families and hand luggage to the small train station where we also stayed the night. Our crates remained in the ship overnight and were only unloaded by the ship's agent the following morning, Thursday, June 6. We then hired conveyances and also had our belongings transported to the train station.

We purchased tickets from Odessa into Prussia to the city of Breslau. The cost was 18 rubles per ticket and 3 rubles and 50 kopeks per pud although each person was allowed one pud of freight. We departed from Odessa on Thursday, June 6 at 25 minutes past 9 o'clock in the morning. We arrived in Wollotschisk on the Austrian border at 6 o'clock in the morning of Friday June 7. Within 21 hours we had put 513 verst behind us, sometimes as much as 1 verst per minute. In Wollotschisk our emigration passes were examined and then we drove five verst over the border into Austria to Podwollatschiska. Here we alighted from the train and our crates were unloaded. At 11 o'clock before dinner the contents of one crate and one trunk was examined. When nothing illegal was found therein they also inquired as to whether we had any tobacco. The inspection was terminated when we replied in the negative.

We departed from Podwollatschiska at 7 o'clock that evening travelling by way of Tarnepol, Lemberg, Krakau, Oszuim, and from there to Breslau. We arrived in Tarnopol at 7 o'clock in the evening on Saturday June 8. Up to this point we had given the conductor 20 kopeks per family as beer money for which he provided comfortable places for the wives and children and made sure that they were well treated. In Russia one was able to obtain hot water for tea and coffee at almost every station and stopping point, a practice which we now missed. We stopped for 20 minutes at Tarnopol and transferred to another train. We then proceeded on our way through Lemberg to Krakau where we again changed to another train during a 20 minute stop. From here we proceeded to Oszuim

on the Prussian border where we arrived at 6 o'clock in the evening. Here we took our hand luggage and alighted from the train proceeding to the hotel where we spent the night. In the cool evening air we went for a walk into the country. We received greater joy from the freedom of God's great creation than from the many magnificent cities. Everything was in bloom and in its luscious growth. This was a great refreshment for us. Indeed the orchards and vegetable gardens were in their finest glory.

Then at 20 minutes after 8 o'clock on Sunday morning June 9, we left Oszuim and went non-stop to Breslau where we arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We alighted with our hand luggage and proceeded to the control offices (Comptor). But the crates were not reloaded as the freight wagon would go all the way to Hamburg after it was hitched in accordance with the identification papers from the agent. From Breslau to Berlin we were given a discount of 50 pfennig per adult person. After purchasing our tickets we left Breslau for Berlin at 10 o'clock in the evening. Thus we had time here to rest up. We went into the city for a tour where the beautiful gardens and fragrant growth gave us greater joy than the magnificent four and five-storey buildings.

We arrived in Berlin at 9 o'clock in the morning of June 22, according to the Gregorian calendar. (As opposed to the older Julian calendar used in Russia.) We alighted and proceeded to the waiting room where two young persons soon made their way to us. They wanted to take our company into their charge but when we noticed that they represented the German Line and not the Allan Line we ignored them. Very soon Spiro arrived and identified himself with papers from the Allan Line, whereupon we place our faith in him. Immediately we gathered our luggage and stepped into the street cars and drove through the magnificent capital city of Berlin to the Hamburg train station. Here Spiro obtained the tickets for us. We then entrained for the harbour city of Hamburg where we arrived at approximately 6 o'clock in the evening. Here at the offices of Maiyer & Co. we found all our beloved fellow brothers and sisters who had departed on the journey ahead of us. We were quartered in a large four-storey emigration building. We left Hamburg at 10 o'clock in the evening of Friday June 26, travelling by steamship along the Elbe and by way of the North Sea towards England.

We arrived in Hull at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, June 28, but because of the religious practices of the English we could not disembark on Sunday. Consequently this only occurred at 7 o'clock Monday morning. Our hand luggage and trunks were transported on the railway wagons. We proceeded to the hotel where we were dined by the Government or the shipping company with white bread, butter and cheese. When we were finished we proceeded to the train station where we obtained our tickets and again got onto the train. Then we were off towards Liverpool. We proceeded across high bridges and through long dark tunnels. But the fire iron horse took us forward without hesitation. At times we became very anxious in the tunnels which were so dark that one could only barely see the hands before the eyes. The smoke which was unable to rise here enveloped our wagons whereupon they travelled even faster in order to once again attain the open air. Having arrived in Liverpool we had a considerable distance to walk to the hotel where we were to spend the night. Here we ate our evening meal and went to bed.

After we had eaten breakfast the next morning, June 30, we went to the great harbor, where we embarked upon the Austrian, in order to continue our journey over the immense ocean. During the first three days on the ocean we made only poor progress for the wind and elements were against us and almost all the passengers were prostrated with seasickness. Indeed, the almighty hand of God and His sovereignty over creation was most evident here. By comparison the operation of the railways on land had made it appear as if man was Lord of nature directing everything according to his will. I had the good fortune to remain free of seasickness and was able to serve others. I should have done this even more energetically as it was pitiful to observe the mothers and their children afflicted by seasickness and prostrated in bed without help, because their husbands were in the same predicament. Thanks be to God, for the wind subsided on the fourth day. Beautiful weather set in and those suffering from seasickness became stronger and started eating. The operation of the English ship was efficient and clean. Only the interpreter was unworthy of commendation. For those who were well, the food was tasty and sufficient.

On Thursday, the 5th of July, we neared the Island of Newfoundland and the two cannons on our ship were fired, whereupon the pilot came and guided us into the harbour. Here products and passengers were unloaded and loaded. After dinner we left for Halifax after one cannon had again been fired. We arrived in Halifax Sunday morning, July 12th. Again the cannons were first fired to announce our arrival whereupon the pilot directed us into the harbour. Here they were observing Sunday. On Monday, the 13th, the freight was unloaded. At 6 o'clock in the evening we departed non-stop for Quebec. On the 14th of July, Katherinà the daughter of Franz Froese, and Jakob the son of Jakob Friesens died. Both were less than a year old. Their bodies were committed to the depth of the sea without the presence of the parents.

On the morning of Friday, June the 17th, we arrived in Quebec, healthy and well. We disembarked from the ship with great joy to finally walk on American soil. We proceeded to the waiting room at the train station. Oh God how great is your goodness! Indeed, we could once more revive ourselves in the freedom of God's creation, and there was much beauty to be seen in Quebec for the observance of which we had until 8 o'clock that evening. By then our luggage had been loaded onto the train and after we had obtained tickets we also entered the coaches, but only after the Government had provided us with a fine repast. The government had provided our meals since leaving Hull and also on the North Sea. But this was not the case on Lake Superior, the Red River, nor in Minnesota.

From Quebec we drove to Montreal where we arrived at 45 minutes before 8 o'clock on Saturday, July 18. Here we changed trains and then travelled throughout the night arriving in Toronto at 8 o'clock in the morning of July 19. Here we alighted from the coaches and because it was Sunday we also had to unload our own crates. We remained in Toronto until Tuesday the 21 of July. The reason was that a decision had to be made as to whether we would continue by the Dawson route or through Minnesota. The Canadian Mennonites advised us against travelling by the Dawson route. Consequently telegraph dispatches were exchanged with the government in this regard during these two days. Finally on Tuesday at noon the news came that upon the payment of a supplementary \$2.00 per adult person we would be able to avoid the difficult route.

Quickly the crates were loaded and we entered the coaches taking our hand luggage. Then we were on our way and in six hours we were in Collingwood. In Toronto we had been assisted in all our matters by six Canadian Mennonite brethren. Among them was an Aeltester and a minister who also served us with the word of God on Sunday. Ohm Baerg also preached. At 9 o'clock in the evening we arrived in Collingwood but we were unable to speak with anyone as everything was in English. But the ships personnel unloaded our crates from the train and transferred the same to the ship as quickly as possible. They knew exactly what to do with us and no doubt all of this had earlier been prearranged by telegraph.

At 10 o'clock in the evening we departed from the shore in order to embark upon our journey across Lake Superior to Duluth. On Thursday, the 23rd of July we proceeded over a waterfall against the current. After we had entered one door it was closed behind us and then the door ahead of us opened and the lock filled with water until we reached the level necessary to drive through the second door. By now we had been raised quite a distance from the sea mirrored behind us. We were in a compartment with sheer walls on each side and with a door behind and in front of us, and then the water poured towards us through the second door until the lock was filled to the height necessary for us to proceed through the second door which was then closed behind us. We then proceeded through the third door in the same manner. Now we were once again on the open sea.

We arrived in Duluth at 12 midnight of Saturday to Sunday, the 25th to 26th of July. We disembarked from our steamship and together with our hand luggage we were brought to the emigration house where we spent the Sunday. Here Ohm Abraham Loewen presented the word. The sailors on Lake Superior were more benevolent than on the ocean. At 1:30 in the afternoon of Monday the 27th day of July we entered the coaches of the Pacific Railway and departed for Moorehead where we arrived at 6 o'clock on Tuesday the 28th of July. We remained under the open skies of nature until 4 o'clock when we embarked on the steamship International on the Red River and departed for Winnipeg.

We arrived in Winnipeg safe and sound on Friday, the 31st of July. In Winnipeg we were received into the friendly care of W. Hespeler. He shared his counsel with us and assisted us in our purchase of many supplies. In this he probably sought not only our benefit but also that of the merchants and his own. On Saturday August 1 we returned on the same ship to a point opposite to our land where we disembarked. Finally all our travelling over water and by railway had come to an end. Thanks be to God our journey to America was now over. We now had approximately 6 miles to go to the Schanz immigration houses. Presently W. Hespeler hired half-breeds to transport our crates and also those of us who preferred to ride on the carts. Three days were required to transfer all our goods from the river to the immigration buildings." "Katherina Loewen 1888."<sup>12</sup>

### 19.06 Epistle to the Gemeinde in Manitoba, 1874

The 65 families in the Kleine Gemeinde group which experienced the journey described above were soon followed by another seven families travelling with the Berghaler on the S.S. Peruvian which left Liverpool on July 14th, 1874. These were followed on August 4, 1874, by another Kleine Gemeinde group of 20 families travelling on the S.S. Hiberian. Another Kleine Gemeinde group of 24 families left Liverpool on the S.S. Austrian on August 20, 1874. A group of 25 families of the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde left Liverpool on the S.S. Hammoina arriving in New York on July 17. They had been preceded by some 30 families of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren group by only two days.<sup>13</sup> This essentially completed the Kleine Gemeinde emigration for 1874. A smaller group of some 30 Kleine Gemeinde families under the leadership of Aeltester Peter Toews remained in Russia until the spring of 1875. This final contingent departed from Nikopol on May 4, (Julian calendar) and arrived at the site of their new homes in Manitoba on June 30, 1875. (Gregorian calendar). Except for a handful of families who would undertake the journey on their own, the Kleine Gemeinde emigration from Russia was now complete.

The Kleine Gemeinde departed from Russia with heartrending tears of love and affection for their former homeland, and for the Czars under whose benevolent patronage they had enjoyed almost three-quarters of a century of religious freedom in Russia. This gratitude found beautiful expression in a Letter of Thanksgiving and Petition which was submitted to the Czar on April 25th through his plenipotentiary Governor-General Totleben. This petition is already published in **History and Events** and therefore will not be repeated here.<sup>14</sup>

The Kleine Gemeinde also retained a loving memory of the land of Russia and the people themselves. Here they had pioneered and prospered and buried several generations of their own. The favourable climate and physical surroundings would long be remembered as synonymous with the bountiful blessing which God had bestowed upon his people. The serene and idyllic Molotschna was remembered as a beautiful promised Caanan of milk and honey.

Such sentiments find expression in a letter written by Aeltester Peter Toews in the fall of 1874 to his brethren and sisters who had already departed for America earlier that summer. In this epistle Aeltester Peter Toews reminisces about the Russia in which he was born and raised. On a trip to the Molotschna he visited the family farm in Fischau where even the trees in the woodlot seem to bid him a tearful farewell and adieu. Aeltester Toews returns to the harsh realities of life by referring to the continuing progress of the emigration movement. He also forwards the latest news regarding the remnants of the Kleine Gemeinde who are concluding their arrangements to depart from Russia. As such this letter forms an appropriate parting view and conclusion to the history of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. Here follows the **Epistle to the Gemeinde in Manitoba** by Aeltester Peter Toews:

“Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord:

I wish you all the precious peace of God, which is higher than all understanding, and the gentle spirit of Jesus Christ as an example and evidence of the filiation of God through the Holy Spirit. This I wish you as a brotherly greeting.

Now my inwardly dearest beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. When I travelled to the Molotschna on the first of October I mailed a letter containing the report of the death of our beloved mother in Hochfeld and of the accidental fire at Hieberts. And thus we drove to the Molotschna, my wife and children and myself. At our night lodging during our journey we met a man with a broken leg who walked on crutches. He had already broken his leg previously and now he had not been careful enough with the result that the leg was broken again in the same place. At this I thought of you beloved brothers and sisters over there on the other side; if only you might truly be careful in order that you would take precise steps with your feet, so that no one would stumble like a lamb and remain behind.

In the evening of the previous day of our journey we arrived in Fischau. The following morning in order to refresh myself from the journey I went into the woods which my father had planted in his time, in order to see once more the place where I had frequently gone back and forth; it was the time of which the Apostle speaks, “in which we were enlightened and endured a great battle of affliction”. Many a tree was still completely familiar to me as if I had never been gone. I remembered at that moment what the beloved Savior says; “every plant which our heavenly father has not planted shall be rooted out”.

Then in prayer to God the groaning in my heart came forth. “Lasz mich niemals die Kreuzes Dornen fliehen, weil sie das Zeichen deiner Freundschaft sind, wobei der Geist doch Kraft und Liebe sind, So werd ich der wie eine Rose bluehen, die wenn gleich Thau und Suedwind drueber weht, doch in der Kraft in deinem Garten stehn”.

On the third day after our arrival there we drove on, first of all to Lindenau to find and leave there my old familiar surroundings. Then we drove to the remaining brethren and held worship services in Lichtenau, Alexanderkron, and Alexanderwohl. Contrary to our expectations our little son again became sick in Alexanderwohl. We had to remain there for many days as it seemed as if he would die there, in order to be buried besides his sister who had died there a little over a year ago. But he again became well, God be thanked, so that we could again hurry on our way.

The sister Mrs. Hiebert required of me that in her stead I relate to her children Johan and David and their wives and families that she only narrowly escaped the flames of the fire with great burn wounds and much pain. How much hotter will not hell be someday for the disobedient and the thankless. This should always be born in mind only for this reason, that at that time we would not be found among those who will suffer pain there. Oh, the countenance of the Lord and His glorious might. By now your beloved mother finds herself better again, and she extended her right hand to me in greeting, and she has already been able to do a little knitting. She has received 1000 rubles for her insured property.

During the time that we were in the Molotschna the news was spreading that Aeltester Isaac Peters had received an order that he was to remove himself from the borders of Russia by November 1 of this year, because he was rousing up the people to emigrate. Later this information was confirmed by an authoritative source. He has not yet sold his Wirtschaft, but he had planned to emigrate together with many others this coming spring. It is believed that this occurrence will cause many who are wavering to make a decision, and in fact, in favour of emigration.

When we arrived in Nikopol on our return journey, we immediately learnt that Klaas F. Reimer from Heuboden had died in Nikopol and we have buried him there on Friday. Two of his sons had already gone to Berlin earlier in order to seek medical assistance there. His wife and children including the oldest son Peter now dearly want to come to Heuboden again. We expect that she will elect to

come to Manitoba with us in the spring, at least with her little children, together with her mother and siblings. But they shall shortly have to exchange their passes for the second time. According to her declarations and of Peter, which are in agreement, their property still consists of over 4000 rubles.

Now my beloved siblings, in my absence I frequently think of you. If only you will all have love for each other and pursue peace towards every man, then the God of love and peace will also be with you. How much good has the Lord not done for you? He has stood by you in so many dangers, especially on the great ocean. Which reminds me of a letter, I believe written by Cor. Eidse, saying how he had frequently thought of the prayer of Abraham when he had interceded with the Lord for Sodom. He thought to himself on the ship, that the fact that there might still be so and so many righteous on the ship might also help. Behold, the Lord did help and stand by, and He also deserves the honour. Therefore give Him the honour, and let everyone recognize from your love that you are His disciples.

The brethren in Ontario have approached us with the friendly offer that we can remain with them over winter, which we have accepted with many thanks. But we are unable to come at the present time as you will have seen from the letter sent to Mr. Falk. I do hope that you will be able to recompense the Canadian brethren for this act of benevolence in some way. And if they do not wish to accept anything in return then do rather keep the poor among yourself. Thereby you will be breaking your bread with them, without your demands on them becoming too great. For they also are admonished by the Spirit of God toward the objective that in a quiet manner they may work with their hands. Therefore engage all your gifts in these times in the manner in which you will wish you had done after body and soul are separated. I have related much regarding our temporal circumstances in the letters which have been forwarded through Falk & Co. You will have received these letters already.

Finally a greeting to all you beloved brothers and sisters. Also greet yourselves among each other with the kiss of love and peace, and in all your assemblies remember in prayer the beloved brothers and sisters who at all times also remember you in their prayers. May the wings of love and the peace of the Lord hover over you and protect you from all evil, and thus I commit you to Him and the words of His grace.”

“Your brother and servant, Peter Toews”.<sup>15</sup>

## 19.07 Conclusion

This concludes the saga of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. In reflecting upon this story it might be of value to refer to a number of focal points which attain to special importance.

One, the Kleine Gemeinde represented the sound middle centre on the Russian Mennonite religious scene between the sometimes fanatical separatist pietists on the one hand and the cultural reactionaries on the other. The Kleine Gemeinde initially regarded the Chortitza Frisian Gemeinde as a sister fellowship. Frequent cooperation was also possible with Johan Cornies and Aeltester Johan Harder of the mildly pietist Orloff Gemeinde. In socio-economic terms the Kleine Gemeinde represented the solid upper middle class of Russian Mennonite society.

Two, in spiritual terms the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde frequently represented the best of biblical Christianity. Their three-quarter century sojourn in Russia provided a dramatic testimony of the efficacy of Christian discipleship. This included: a strict stand for evangelical self-sacrifice, meekness and humility; the denial of sensual desires for expensive lifestyles and prestige; biblical sharing with the weak and the oppressed; and finally, a prophetic witness for social justice and the peace of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

Three, the documents and writings pertaining to the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia challenge and contradict certain aspects of the interpretation of Russian Mennonite history which have been widely accepted to date. Serious questions are raised with respect to the integrity and reliability of the historical work of Peter M. Friesen in so far as it relates to any Mennonite group other than the radical separatist pietists. At the same time the manifold Kleine Gemeinde source material provides a historical tunnel through which the historians of evangelical Christianity can look with a renewed interest, to the centre of Russian Mennonite society, as well as earlier in Prussia, to see that the fires of biblical Christianity had burned without interruption since the days of the Reformation.

Four, the inroads of pietism, and particularly that of separatist pietism, was a disaster for the Russian Mennonites in several respects. It turned many of the most capable people within that society away from once more seeking spiritual renewal from the true fountain of biblical Christianity by providing a “far lesser, but still Christian way” as an alternative. At its catagorical worst, the acceptance and practice of the spiritual terror and fanaticism of separatist pietism, casts a blot of shame on the annals of Christendom which reverberates through the centuries. Scholars of the 19th century evangelical movement would do well to take another look at the results of the so-called pietist evangelization effort in Russia. From the viewpoint of biblical Christianity it was frequently hard to discern whether they were for or against the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. For the Russian Mennonites the

abandonment of the full gospel faith of the forefathers could best be compared with the rejection of the gold standard in favour of one based on sand and straw.

Five, the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde had its share of human failings and difficulties and should not be idealized or glorified. Its story only represents one group, in a particular situation, at a certain point in time and history, which can never be exactly duplicated or recreated. Nevertheless the earnestness of the Kleine Gemeinde in achieving its ideals and the consequential contributions to the evangelical faith within Russian Mennonite society and beyond, must be given due credit. As much as humanly possible the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde fulfilled its God given mission as a "leaven in the bread" to the Russian Mennonites. Harold J. Dyck expresses this view as follows:

"In spite of its many shortcomings, the Kleine Gemeinde made one important contribution in Russia. It consistently bore witness to the importance of being the people of God . . . It never lost sight of the historic Anabaptist conviction of the radical difference between the Kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God. In their deliberate attempt to return to the integrity of primitive Anabaptism, they kept before the Mennonite Church as a whole that aspect of the vision of their forefathers, and continued to call in question the Russian Mennonite application of that vision".<sup>16</sup>

## FOOTNOTES. CHAPTER NINETEEN. FAREWELL TO RUSSIA.

1. **History and Events**, 68.
2. **Ibid.**
3. John B. Toews, *op.cit.*, 6.
4. Roy Loewen, *op.cit.*, 25.
5. **Ibid.**
6. John C. Reimer, *op.cit.*, 51.
7. Peter W. Toews, "Errinerungen" Steinbach Post, September 6, 1944.
8. Johan Toews, Unpublished manuscript, 71.
9. **History and Events**, *op.cit.*, 110.
10. **Ibid.**, 135.
11. **Ibid.**, 71-72.
12. Courtesy of E.M.C. Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba. Also quoted in R. Loewen *op. cit.*, 29-31.
13. Clarence Hiebert, **Brothers in Need** (Newton, Kansas, Faith and Life Press, 1974), 167-169.
14. **History and Events**, 71-72.
15. This letter was preserved by someone in the East Reserve Gemeinde and eventually found its way into the collection of John E. Friesen, a Blumenort area farmer who had the foresight to preserve many documents pertaining to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde.
16. Harold J. Dyck, "The Theological Development of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference formerly the Kleine Gemeinde from its Roots to the Present Day", Unpublished Masters Thesis, M.B. Bible Seminary, Fresno, California, (1977), 79.



## Index

- Agricultural Society ..... 98, 111  
 Alexanderwohl Gemeinde ..... 231, 247-248, 273  
 Andreasfeld ..... 22, 186  
 Annafeld, Borosenko ..... 193  
 Annenfeld, Crimea ..... 189
- Baerg, Peter (Minister) ... 43, 189, 201, 210, 272, 324, 332  
 Balzer, Heinrich (Minister) ..... 68, 95, 157  
 Barkman, Jacob J. [1794-1875] ..... 27  
 Barkman, Jacob M. (Minister) ..... 324  
 Barkman, Martin J. [1796-1872] ..... 137  
 Bergthaler ..... 229, 255-259, 302  
 Blumenhof, Borosenko ..... 192-193  
 Borosenko ..... 191-194  
 Braght, Thielman J. (Aeltester) ..... 285  
 Braun Jacob ..... 17, 324  
 Braun, Peter ..... 195
- Chiliasm ..... 122-124  
 Cornies, Johan ..... 94, 104, 128, 140  
 Crimea ..... 188-191
- Danzig, Gemeinde ..... 25  
 Dirks, Heinrich (Missionary) ..... 241  
 Dueck, Abram L. [1841-1899] (Aeltester) ..... 194  
 Dueck, Bernhard L. .... 195  
 Dueck, Jacob L. (Aeltester) ..... 198, 201, 273  
 Dueck, Johan [1801-1866] (Minister) 55, 146, 160, 166, 175, 177  
 Dueck, Johan L. [1833-1894] 52, 154, 193, 198, 274, 279, 324  
 Dueck, Johan W. [1865-1932] ..... 33, 192, 328, 330  
 Dueck, Peter L. (Teacher) ..... 8, 41, 59-62, 192, 195, 222  
 Duehren, Isaac van ..... 307
- Eidse, Cornelius ..... 194, 332  
 Enns, Cornelius ..... 33-34  
 Enns, Heinrich [1801-1881] (Aeltester) ..... 49, 146, 155, 158, 163, 172, 183, 198, 201, 272  
 Enns, Jacob (Aeltester) ..... 39, 139, 227, 255  
 Enns, Johan T. [1850-1917] ..... 198  
 Epp, David ..... 157  
 Epp, Klaas [1838-1913] ..... 122-123, 219  
 Epp, Peter (Aeltester) ..... 25
- Fast, Bernhard (Aeltester) ... 107, 118, 128  
 Fast, Cornelius [1849-1927] ..... 192  
 Fast, Martin G. .... 17, 69, 124, 137, 140  
 Friedensfeld, Russia ..... 194-196  
 Friedrichsthal ..... 22, 188  
 Friesen, Abram [1752-1810] ..... 25  
 Friesen, Abraham R. (Teacher) 6, 35, 40, 98, 198, 326-327  
 Friesen, Rev. Abram F. [1807-1891] 59, 110, 154, 167, 175, 201  
 Friesen, Abraham L. [1831-1917] (Aeltester) 193, 201, 219  
 ..... 225, 232, 324  
 Friesen, Abram M. .... 21, 192  
 Friesen, Abram S. [1848-1916] ..... 17  
 Friesen, Abraham [1782-1849] (Aeltester) ..... 7, 68, 73-89, 95, 96-97, 99, 164, 283  
 Friesen, Rev. Cornelius L. .... 324  
 Friesen, Cornelius F. [1812-1892] (Teacher) ..... 7, 55  
 Friesen, Cornelius P. [1844-1899] (Teacher) ..... 6, 192  
 Friesen, Diedrich S. [1849-1901] (Teacher) ..... 6, 35, 193  
 Friesen, David Oberschulz ..... 131, 235, 255  
 Friesen, Isaac (Minister) ..... 186, 201  
 Friesen, Jacob W. [1808-1889] (Deacon) 166, 173, 193, 201, 324
- Friesen, Johan F. [1808-1872] (Aeltester) ..... 22, 42, 105, 107, 110, 119, 146, 148, 163, 190, 201, 219  
 Friesen, Johan K. (Minister) ..... 147  
 Friesen, Klaas F. [1818-1871] (Deacon) 146, 176, 193, 201  
 Friesen, Klaas [1793-1870] (Minister) 9, 25, 160, 166, 180, 328  
 Friesen, Peter W. [1815-1892] ..... 23, 154, 201, 324  
 Friesen, Peter M. (Historian) ..... 39-40, 68, 101, 114-115, 120-121, 141, 196, 218, 241-242, 309  
 "Friesen's" Gemeinde ..... 201  
 Funk, John F. .... 284-291, 296, 309
- Gaeddert, Dietrich ..... 231, 247-248  
 Gnadenfeld Gemeinde ..... 235-236, 241  
 Goossen, Gerhard P. [1836-1872] (Minister) ..... 49, 197, 201, 210, 213-214, 226, 269  
 Goossen, Johan P. .... 193, 325  
 Gruenfeld, Russia ..... 196-197, 327-328
- Hahn, Eugen Von ..... 229, 274-275, 278  
 Hans, Theodor ..... 238-240  
 Halbstadt, Molotschna ..... 234  
 Hansen, George ..... 215  
 Harder, Bernhard (Preacher) ..... 7, 125, 157, 309  
 Harder, Johan [1811-1875] ..... 107, 125, 128, 130, 160, 163, 221, 275, 309-310, 327  
 Harms, Isaac [1811-1891] ..... 22, 186  
 Harms, John F. [1855-1945] ..... 18-21  
 Herald der Wahrheit ..... 292, 303  
 Hespeller, William ..... 332  
 Heuboden, Borosenko ..... 193  
 Heuboden, Gemeinde ..... 193, 275  
 Hiebert, Johan [1816-1890] ..... 198, 333  
 Hochfeld, Russia ..... 197  
 Hutterian Brethren ..... 278-279, 283, 293-300
- Isaac, Abram P. [1852-1928] (Teacher) ..... 8  
 Issac, Franz [1816-1900] 102, 104, 129, 135, 220, 229, 232, 275  
 Isaac, John [1809-1864] ..... 15-16, 131, 197  
 Isaac, Peter P. .... 15  
 Jansen, Peter (Senator) ..... 29, 92-93  
 Jansen, Cornelius (Consul) 31, 228, 231, 253-255, 325, 329  
 Janzen, Cornelius (Minister) ..... 103  
 Jung-Stilling, Heinrich ..... 123, 219, 222
- Klassen, Abram B. [1850-1935] ..... 68  
 Klassen, Abram [1828-1906] (Minister) ..... 48, 58, 66, 193, 198, 220, 232, 272, 273, 276  
 Klassen, David [1813-1900] (Delegate) ..... 31, 154, 193, 219, 279, 293, 294  
 Klassen, Martin ..... 47, 194  
 Kleefeld, Molotschna ..... 18-21, 23  
 Koop, Johan [1831-1897] ..... 194  
 Kornelsen, Abraham S. [1806-1888] ..... 191, 326  
 Kornelsen, Gerhard S. [1816-1894] (Teacher) ..... 8, 15, 146, 198, 327  
 Krimmer Mennonite Brethren ..... 125  
 Kroeker, Franz ..... 18, 40, 154, 192, 326  
 Kroeker, Jacob ..... 193, 324  
 Kroeker, Peter ..... 324
- Lange, Wihelm (Aeltester) ..... 227  
 Loewen, Abraham [1833-1886] (Minister) ..... 154, 201, 210, 324  
 Loewen, Cornelius [1827-1893] ..... 13-15, 328

Loewen, David [1836-1915]	13, 197	Rempel, Martin	326
Loewen, Heinrich [1830-1863]	157-158	Ries, Han de	308
Loewen, Johan	18, 192, 279	Rosenfeld, Borosenko	193, 327
Loewen, Isaac [1787-1873]	27, 41-44, 54, 66, 146, 158, 197, 223-224	Schellenberg, Gerhard [1827-1908]	193, 201, 330
Loewen, Peter	325	Schijn, Herman	307
Luther, Martin	308	Schmidt, Peter	12, 14, 128, 136
Mannhardt, Jacob	147, 249	Siemens, Gerhard [1805-1877]	22-23, 193
Markuslandt	23, 32, 185-188	Siemens, Gerhard [1834-1908]	191
M.B. Church	116-118, 125, 140	Simons, Menno [1496-1561] (Aeltester)	5, 147, 152, 155, 231
Mennonitische Blaetter	147, 154, 284, 285, 291	Steinbach, Borosenko	191-192
Millennium	309-321	Suderman, Leonard [1821-1900]	249-251, 298
Neuanlage, Russia	194	Thielmann, Jacob [1810-1862]	195
Nikolaihal, Borosenko	269-272	Thiessen, Abraham F. [1838-1889]	69, 131-137, 141-143, 160, 165, 169, 182, 259-265, 324
Orloff Gemeinde	118, 164, 227, 235	Thiessen, Peter	146, 158
Penner, Abram	193	Toews, Cornelius P. [1837-1908] (Delegate)	6, 32, 187, 204-206, 279, 293-301, 323, 329
Penner, Jacob	195	Toews, Peter P. [1841-1922] (Aeltester)	34, 41, 53, 68, 145, 181, 201, 206, 210, 215-232, 268, 281, 308-310, 324, 333-334
Penner, Peter [1813-1884]	12, 268, 278, 329	Toews, Johan H. [1829-1895]	328, 329
Peters, Isaac (Aeltester)	273, 335	Toews, Peter W. [1831-1922]	154, 193, 327
Peters, Peter (Aeltester)	43, 99-101, 152, 171, 179, 231, 307	Toews, Peter W. [1866-1935]	33333333333333333333333333333333, 328
Plett, Cornelius S. [1820-1900]	17-18, 21, 24, 185, 192, 235, 328, 329	Toews, Johan (1793-1873)	30, 31, 56-57, 97, 102, 146, 186, 197
Plett, Cornelius L. (Preacher)	18, 192	Totleben, Eduard von	325, 329
Plett, Isaac L.	195, 223	Tschetter, Paul	293-300
Plett, Johan [1765-1833]	17-18, 26, 54-55	Twisck, Peter J. (Aeltester)	5, 307-321
Ratzlaw, Heinrich	193	Von Kotzebu	229, 276
Reimer, Abraham R. F. [1808-1896]	21	Vort Reisen, Peter	25, 231
Reimer, Abram R. [1841-1891] (Deacon)	22, 23	Warkentin, Johan	14, 23, 185, 197
Reimer, Heinrich [1818-1876]	50, 192, 235, 329	Wohlgemuth, Heinrich [1849-1901]	272-273
Reimer, Heinrich [1792-1884]	27, 55-56, 192	Wiebe, Gerhard [1827-1900] (Aeltester)	232, 233, 256-259, 329
Reimer, Klaas E. [1770-1837] (Aeltester)	21, 39, 67, 94, 103, 114, 173, 255, 317	Wiebe, Heinrich (Minister)	298
Reimer, Klaas R. [1837-1906]	21-24, 186, 187, 192	Wiebe, Jacob [1799-1856] (Deacon)	51, 193, 324, 327, 329
Reimer, Klaas F. [1812-1874]	23, 146, 333	Wiebe, Jacob [1799-1856]	27
Reimer, Rev. Peter R. [1845-1915] (Minister)	192	Wiebe, Jacob [1827-1901]	16-17, 146, 188, 193
Rempel, Abraham [1798-1878]	185	Wiebe, Jacob. A. [1837-1921] (Aeltester)	44, 189, 203, 210, 249, 323
Rempel, Gerhard	11	Wiebe, Peter (Deacon)	187, 329, 330