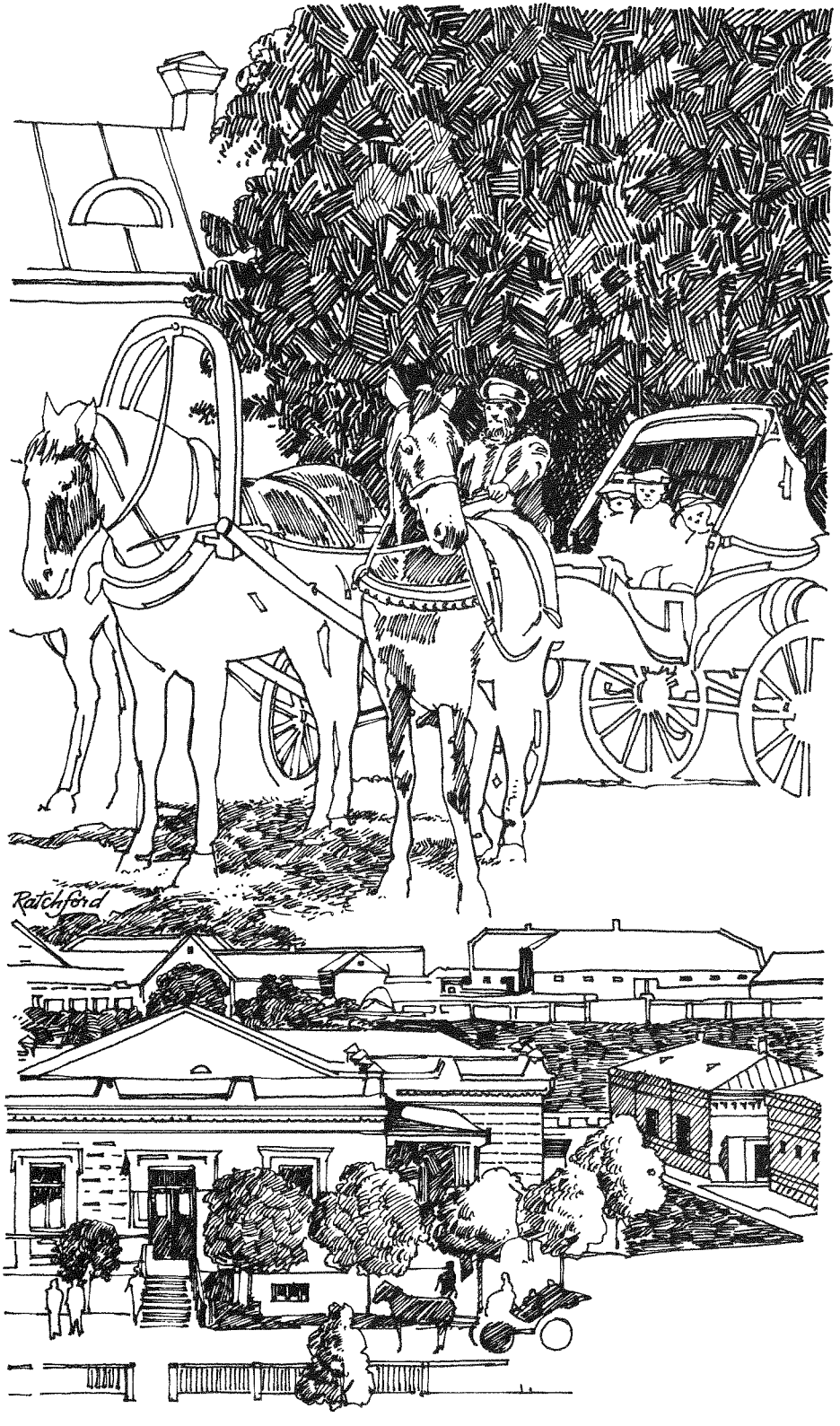
Provenance



Village Scene in Russia

7. Revitalization and Separation in Russia

The formation of a separate body within the brotherhood was necessary and to a certain extent salutary for the whole of Mennonitism — P. M. FRIESEN.[1]

MENNONITES HAD first entered into Canada and Russia in 1786 and since then their parallel developments became manifest — especially their attempts to revitalize the the brotherhood. In Russia as in Canada the migration to virgin agricultural frontiers had by itself not produced the desired utopia. There arose a conviction that the salvation of a people could not come solely from traditional religion or from an abundant environment, though there was hardly a Mennonite to whom both culture and agriculture had not become essential. In both countries dissatisfied elements became the nuclei of dissenting movements which almost duplicated the events reported for North America in the previous chapter.

The reason for recounting the Russian story here does not lie in the fascinating similarities between the eastern and western Mennonite societies. The parallels, after all, appeared quite in isolation. Whatever desire there might have been for real contact between the two communities (as for instance by Benjamin Eby), there could be no easy communication between Mennonite bodies

so distant from each other. Furthermore, few common outside influences have been traced, unless one identifies some commonality in the bi-directional spread of European pietism or unless the wars of 1812 and the mid-century European revolutions created similar stirrings. It might be noted here that there was an exchange of subscriptions between editors J. Mannhardt (*Mennonitische Blaetter*) of Prussia, which had a small Russian readership, and J. Oberholtzer (*Religioeser Botschafter*) of the United States. Another link between East and West was the Dutch Mennonite Mission Association of which Prussian and Russian, as well as American, Mennonites became aware and to which they made contributions around 1851, when the Dutch sent their first missionary to Java.

The main significance of the Russian story arises from the eventual transfer to the West of all the Mennonite institutions, movements and characteristics as they developed in the East. Beginning in the 1870s and continuing for more than 100 years, several major migrations transplanted the Russian experience to North America and thereby substantially affected the Canadian Mennonite story.[2] That story cannot be completely understood without at least a glimpse at the formation and revitalization of those communities which in due course would constitute the bulk of Canadian Mennonitism.

The movement into Russia was itself an experience of revitalization and the shaping of new and different viewpoints. Only a handful of fanatics expected a physical meeting in the East with the returning Christ,[3] but even moderates felt an excitement in their souls at the thought of movement eastward toward new horizons. In that sense, the easterly migrations were as revitalizing for their participants as movements westward were for the westerners. They would not soon come to an end, and the debate between the easternizers and westernizers likewise would continue seemingly endlessly. Indeed, even while some easternizers began to look westward beyond the seas, others became the more determined to find new frontiers still farther eastward beyond the Ural mountain range that divides European and Asiatic Russia.

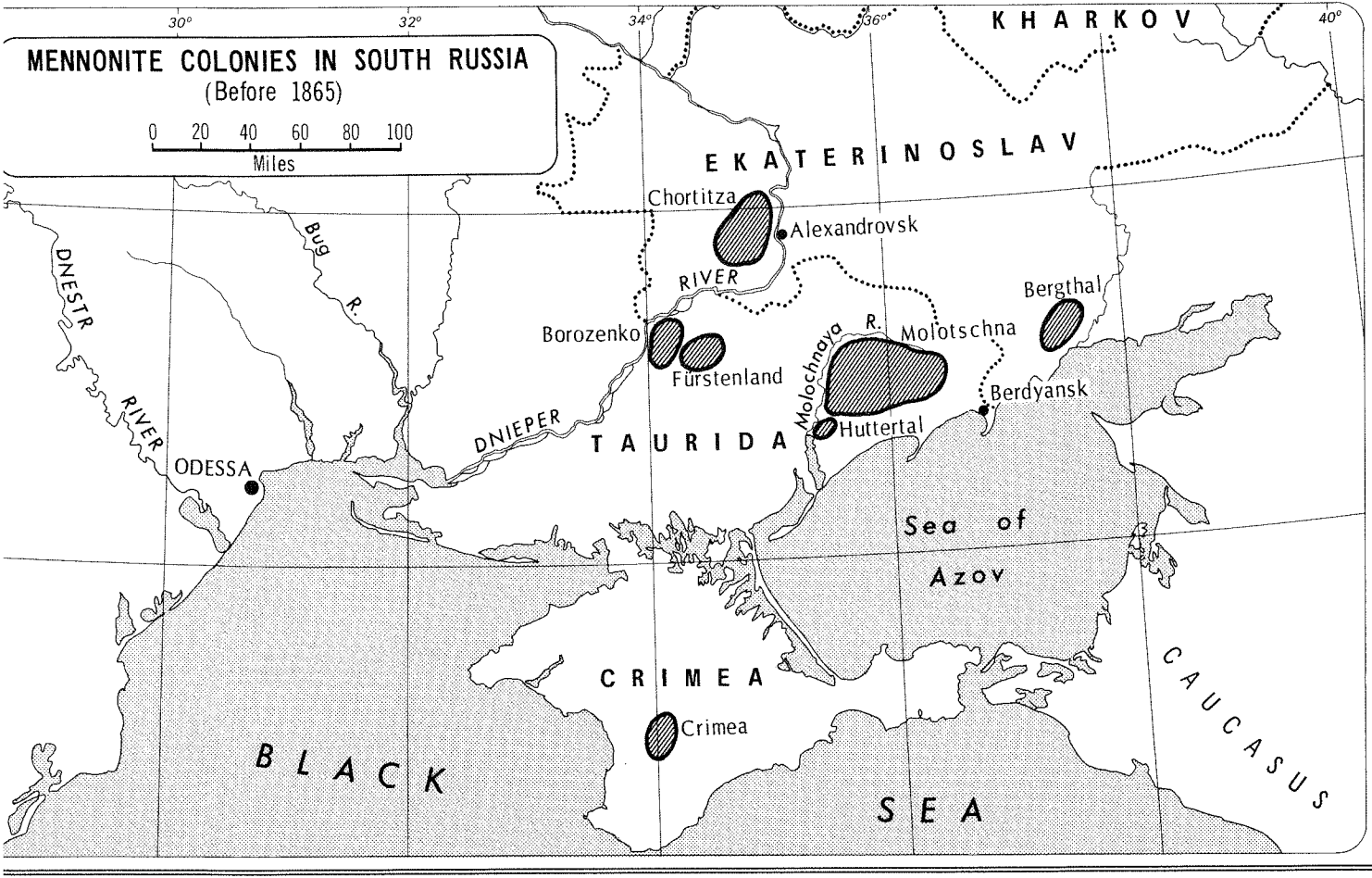
Apart from the migrations themselves, any major transplant and new beginning required in and of itself a clarification of ideological purpose and intent. To be sure, an abundance of land and satisfactory legal provisions were sufficient attractions, but the formal and official explanation always concerned the maximization of the faith and a unique way of life. For Mennonites,

migration was almost always a question of conscience. Rare indeed were the leaders and followers for whom an undertaking as great as movement to a new country did not bring about some soul-searching and rededication.

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 (Table 1, Chapter 3). 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.[4]

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.[5] 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. The latter included the *Schulze* and *Oberschulze* (village mayor and colony reeve), and the *Lehrer* (minister) and *Aelteste* (elders, fulfilling the same role as Mennonite bishops in North America).

Although these Russian conditions were favourable and would lead, a century later, to a golden age for Mennonitism, the commonwealth experienced all the growing pains which are common to most immigrant societies. To begin with, the newcomers in Russia were not immediately compatible with one another and with the new environment. The treeless steppes at first permitted only a primitive existence, and the Russian government was slow in keeping its promises of settlement aid. There were great economic disparities among the immigrants and great variations


MENNONITE COLONIES IN SOUTH RUSSIA
(Before 1865)
0 20 40 60 80 100
Miles
30°
32°
34°
36°
40°
KHARKOV
EKATERINOSLAV
Chortitza
Alexandrovsk
RIVER
DNESTR
RIVER
Bug
R.
Borozenko
Fürstenland
Molochnaya
R.
Molotschna
Bergthal
Berdyansk
Huttertal
DNIEPER
TAURIDA
ODESSA
Sea of
Azov
CRIMEA
Crimea
BLACK
SEA
CAUCASUS

in farming skills. Many of the Prussian landless, for instance, had lost some of the traditional agricultural expertise, though they had become wise in all manner of craftsmanship and trades. Among them were blacksmiths, cartwrights, carpenters, tanners, harness makers, tailors, cobblers, spinners, weavers, millers and brewers. The manifold skills eventually contributed to a diversified economy, but in the beginning all were bound to the land. How best to till the black soils of the steppes remained a contentious issue, until aggressive leadership showed the best way.

There were other differences among these Mennonite immigrants. Varying cultural and religious viewpoints, for instance, were represented by the Flemish and Frisian parties, which had arisen among the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and which had survived 200 years in Prussia. Thus, there were those who eschewed ostentation in the home but allowed luxury in dress, while others reversed the order. One party preferred sermons to be read, the other not to have them read. One baptized by pouring, the other by sprinkling. One *Aelteste* (elder) brought communion bread to the people, while another expected the participating people to come to him. There were also differences of viewpoint in ordination, marriage and excommunication.[6] The traditional parties representing these differences, and some of the differences themselves, disappeared in the Russian environment, but not because Mennonites learned to overcome their squabbles over minutiae. Old ways of differentiation disappeared only when these could be expressed in new ways. In the self-contained commonwealth the continuous struggle for a superior righteousness (i.e. religiosity, real or artificial) expressed itself not so much with reference to outside enemies as with regard to internally felt threats.

One of the earliest religious dissenters was Klaas Reimer (1770–1837), who became dissatisfied with the entire *Grosze Gemeinde* (large church), as he designated the collective church. Reimer brought his protest to a head in 1812, in the same year that John Herr started the Pennsylvania Reform Movement which later came to Ontario. Herr was distant from Reimer, but not entirely unrelated to him. Like Herr, Reimer was a dissenter whose credentials as an ordained leader would come not from the established church but from his family and other immediate followers. Reimer similarly wanted to establish the true church, although not necessarily to modernize it. This meant a reversion to the fundamentals of the faith as expressed in the Scriptures and

interpreted by Menno Simons, as well as by Klaas Reimer himself.[7]

Reimer's objections related to the very nature of the commonwealth, though he tended to express his dissent with reference to such particulars as card-playing, smoking and drinking. All such worldly amusements were signs of lax discipline and, consequently, of infidelity and the lack of spirituality. In some ways his dissent was not unlike that of the early Anabaptists who objected to a Grosze Gemeinde and, like the Mennonite commonwealth, baptized all their citizens into the Holy Roman Empire. The Mennonites, of course, baptized not infants but adults. However, so routinized did the baptism of marrying-age young adults sometimes become that the signs of individual faith were not sufficiently evident to the critics. Indeed, it was in Russia that the ethnic quality of being a Mennonite became mixed and sometimes confused with the religious quality.

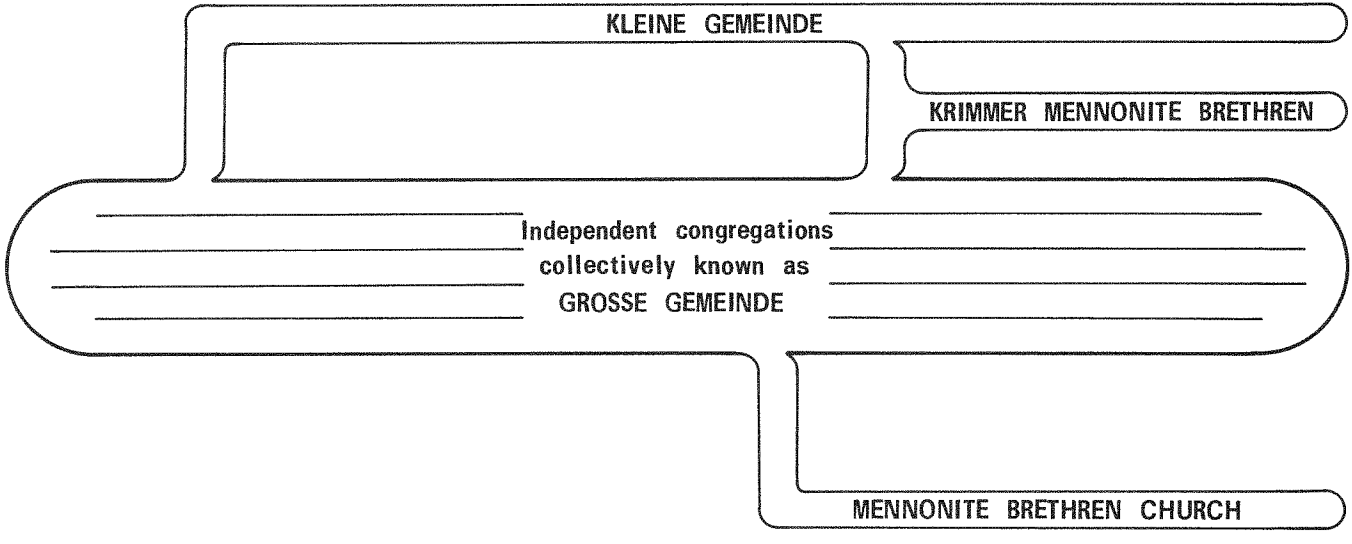
Reimer's definition of worldliness extended to higher education, to playing musical instruments, to mission work, and to marriage. He also objected strenuously to the use of force and coercion as a disciplinary measure in the Molotschna colony affairs and to contributions, however few in number, made to the Russian government during its war with Napoleon.[8] While objecting to coercive civic measures, Reimer himself practised a strict ecclesiastical discipline. This prevented some sympathizers from joining his movement and others, having joined, from staying with it. The movement remained a small one and his people were derisively called *De Kleen-Gemeenta* in Low German (in High German *Kleine Gemeinde*), meaning little church.

Internal divisiveness, such as usually accompanied narrowness of viewpoint and legalistic discipline, also plagued the Kleine Gemeinde. In due course, the faithful remnant left both Molotschna and Chortitza and began a new settlement called Borozenko south of Chortitza. Another group moved into the Crimea where it adopted an immersion form of baptism and consequently a different identity. None the less, the Kleine Gemeinde as such did not disappear and its peculiar understanding of, and zeal for, the true church was felt by the entire Mennonite brotherhood for years to come.[9] In any event, the Kleine Gemeinde was a prelude to other dissenting movements to follow.

To report that Klaas Reimer and his Kleine Gemeinde stood out against the Grosze Gemeinde requires some qualification. There was no single Russian Mennonite church at the time. As

MENNONITE GROUPS IN RUSSIA

(Nineteenth Century)



elsewhere in the Mennonite world, the focus of all church life was on the congregation and its leaders, the ministers and the bishop. In Russia, as in America, there was not yet an all-inclusive conference or denomination. The congregational principle was still central to Mennonite thinking and bigness was frowned upon by all. Whenever the population of a congregation, sometimes spread over many villages or over entire settlements, grew too large for one Aelteste, there were divisions and new ordinations to maintain a manageable size for the congregations.

By the mid-1850s there were at least ten such congregations, each with its own Aelteste. Factors contributing to the election of new Aelteste and the formation of new congregations included geography, numbers and differing points of view. The emergence of the Kleine Gemeinde, therefore, was not entirely unique, except in the extent to which it was a nonconformist group and in the severity of its judgement against the rest.

Meanwhile, new life and direction had come to the commonwealth through an entirely different source, again personified in one man. He was Johann Cornies (1789–1848) who "became the most famous man the Mennonites were to produce during the entire period of their life in Russia."[10] Unlike Reimer, Cornies widened the Mennonite horizons, though his efforts were concentrated in economic, agricultural and cultural affairs, rather than ecclesiastical matters. He achieved his earliest renown as a horse and cattle breeder. At age 28 the government named him life-time president of the Commission for the Effective Propagation of Afforestation, Horticulture, Silk Culture and Vine Culture, more commonly known as the Agricultural Union. In this capacity he was given almost unlimited powers as a mediator between Mennonites and the government and as a promoter of all those causes which he held dear. He compelled the Mennonites to do what he considered good "for the economic well-being and cultural advance of the colonies."[11] His co-religionists often referred to him as "that Mennonite tsar" and a later novelist referred to him as *Der Steppenhengst* (the stallion of the steppes).[12] There was little they could do against the prestige which he had earned as a successful farmer. By the time of his death at the age of 59, he was cultivating about 25,000 acres and caring for 500 horses, 8,000 sheep, and 200 cattle. His nursery became the source of forestation programs which in Molotschna alone meant the planting of over half a million trees, many of them fruit-bearing, by 1845.

Cornies' influence in Odessa and St. Petersburg was so great that his authority was extended to include such diverse groups as Hutterites and Russian sectarians. The latter included the Molokans, Doukhobors, and the nomadic Nogais, 17,000 of whom he helped resettle.[13] The Hutterian Brethren, whose steady eastward movements brought them into the western Ukraine by 1770, were helped to successful resettlement near the Mennonites in 1842.[14] Another minority championed by Cornies was the Kleine Gemeinde. The elders of the Grosze Gemeinde had consistently opposed its recognition and registration by the Russian government. Cornies saw to it that the Kleine Gemeinde was recognized, thus setting a precedent for other separatist movements to follow.

Cornies was as much a child of Mennonite agricultural genius as he was a father of it, and the commonwealth would have prospered without him. Yet, he accelerated that prosperity by disciplining, directing and motivating many young creative farmers. The full flowering of the revitalization which he brought, however, did not appear in his own lifetime. Instead it bore its best fruits in later Russian generations and in North America, where the determined tillers of the Russian steppes would repeat their brilliant achievement on the American and Canadian prairies.

Some results, however, were not wanting in the first half-century of settlement. In the first and second generation of colonization, scores of high Russian officials, including the tsars themselves, and many foreigners came to inspect the commonwealth and to behold the wonderful colonization. As early as 1821 agents of the British and Foreign Bible Society gave extravagant praise for "their industry, the prosperity of their villages," calling them "a light in a dark place" and pointing out how they have "frequently called for the panegyric of the traveller."[15] Another traveller confirmed that "the Mennonites are the most prosperous in their estates . . . having good houses, barns, and with abundance of cattle, fruitful gardens and flourishing plantations. The contrast between these colonies and Russian villages is very great."[16]

In inviting the Mennonites to come to Russia, Tsarina Catherine had intended that they provide a model for an improved agriculture for the native Russians. As the nineteenth century progressed it appeared that her intention could be justified. Through Johann Cornies, at least a modest influence had been extended to some of the peoples of Russia. The possibility

that the Mennonite agricultural model would benefit the Russian peasantry as a whole led to a closer examination of the colonies by scores of investigators, both independent and government-sponsored. In the words of D. G. Rempel, the foremost Mennonite scholar of the Russian situation:

> The subjects of Mennonite agriculture in general and of achievements made in grain-farming, stock-raising, and many other farm-related enterprizes in Southern Russia in particular were extensively studied and commented on throughout the nineteenth century by government officials, foreign visitors, agricultural experts of one kind or another, and by publicists.[17]

At one point it was recommended that "all the state peasants of Little and Great Russian stock throughout the northern littoral of the Black Sea area might be placed under the supervision of Cornies."[18] This did not happen. Whatever influence Cornies as an individual and the Mennonites as a people were able to exert, it was insufficient to alleviate the great peasant handicaps which had been produced by generations of agriculturalists. The colonists' failure to help the peasants stemmed partly from the fact that they underestimated the extent to which their own success was due to a rich cultural endowment and to the economics of the Privilegium. In addition, the peasants had been robbed both of a positive development and of most of their privileges.[19]

Historians differ in their views on this aspect of the Russian story. Some writers maintained "that Mennonites were actually living on inherited traits from their one-time homeland, Holland, and now were actually doing everything by rote." Further, they concluded that "were the Russian peasant given even a modicum of the privileges, land grants, educational opportunities, etc., this disadvantaged native son would in a short time surpass the accomplishments of the Mennonites."[20] Others thought that the Mennonite impact upon neighbouring people was salutary and beneficial and that "altogether their value to Russia was unquestionably great."[21]

Seen from another perspective, the Mennonites were becoming part of the Russian problem rather than of its solution by mid-nineteenth century. By 1850 they were rapidly developing their own large class of landless "peasants." The land ownership regulations prevented the division of the colony lands into smaller units. Thus only one son could "inherit" the land, leaving the other

sons of the large Mennonite families landless. By 1841, out of the total number of 2,733 families in the Molotschna settlement, only 1,033 were land-owning farmers, and the remaining 1,700 families were either small tenant farmers or were engaged in various trades and businesses.[22]

A similar situation with many landless families was building up in Chortitza, where a solution through the so-called "daughter colonies" was first devised. As early as 1836 a group of 145 families established a new colony, Bergthal, with five villages on 30,000 acres of land. A second such colony was Fuerstenland. But a real solution was not implemented until the mid-1860s when the power of the landowners was broken with the help of the Russian government and the surplus and reserve land funds were used to establish new daughter colonies.[23] The struggle between the landless and the landowners produced much dissatisfaction and bitterness, in both economic and religious terms. As one historian summarized the conflict:

> These land quarrels, therefore, must be regarded as a very sad feature in the history of the Russian Mennonites. The conditions in the colonies were such that they fostered selfishness and rudeness of the human heart, instead of the noble and the good.[24]

Once the problem had been solved, however, with an 1866 statute, a way had been found to spread the Mennonite presence and influence not only into other areas of the Ukraine but also into the Caucasus and even Siberia. After 1869, Chortitza alone founded 37 villages in eight colonies for 1,197 families and Molotschna settled 1,974 families in 62 villages in six separate colonies.[25] Another more independent way in which the colonies were expanded was by the acquiring of large estates from Russian landowners by wealthy families. In this development of a strongly capitalistic *Gutsbesitzer* class (owners of large estates), Johann Cornies had also led the way.

These territorial expansions, however, intensified another problem from the very beginning, namely the relations and obligations of Mennonites to their Russian neighbours. The source of uneasiness, at least for the mission-minded, was the absolute prohibition of evangelism among members of the Orthodox Church, i.e., the majority of Russians. Excluded from this provision, which dated back to 1763, were people of the Islamic faith. Both church and state worked together to prevent evangelical proselytizing

among the Orthodox, through administrative measures and, if this did not work, through full application of the punishment provided by the law.[26]

All this dissatisfaction and uneasiness came to a head in the 1860s, when a group of reform-minded Mennonites established a new Mennonite movement, similar to that emerging in America at the same time, though unknown to them. To these revitalizers the new spiritual frontier was as important as, or more so than, the physical frontiers being opened up through the resolution of the land problem.

A fundamental cause of dissent lay in the close ties between the church and colony leadership. In other words, the Mennonites in Russia had become somewhat of a state church. Although adult or believers' baptism was still practised, for all practical purposes one entered the society at birth. The development, to the extent that it was noticed, was not necessarily considered to be a negative phenomenon. On the contrary, was it not the goal of the church to incorporate all of humanity into the community of God? And could not that community be like a Mennonite congregational family to which everyone belonged and in which everyone was exposed to Christian teaching? They had also become an elite cultural group. In the words of one scholar, who studied the Russian Mennonites from an anthropological point of view:

> 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 orientated life style to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker but merely one amongst many.[27]

Whatever virtues the integration of church and society in the commonwealth might represent, there was little allowance for dissent and deviation. Recall that the practically harmless protest of the Kleine Gemeinde was seen by the leaders of the Grosze Gemeinde as a considerable threat. Yet at least a degree of dissent

and nonconformity was demanded by the historic Anabaptist theology and also by the existing ecclesiastical situation, which compounded and could easily become the focus of economic unrest. The elders and ministers were of the landed class, and were frequently very well situated. Thus the economics, politics, and religion of the colonies were very much tied together in a single establishment.

It was inevitable that dissatisfaction should surface. The vehicle provided for the protest, however, was not a social gospel or a reform movement that focused on the religio-socio-economic situation, but rather pietism, which emphasized the fine issues of personal morality and personal salvation. Points of mid-century protest were alcoholism, materialism, lack of missionary zeal and frivolity of the kind already frowned upon by Klaas Reimer.

The pietistic religious emphases typical of the followers of the new movement had been introduced to the Russian colonies from time to time since the early decades of settlement, notably by agents of the British and Foreign Bible Society. The church elders had not been entirely closed to this influence. In 1821, for instance, they agreed to the establishment of a branch of the Bible Society in Molotschna.[28] Also, a missioner reported having established "missionary prayer meetings" in Molotschna with the consent of the elders.[29] Similar efforts were being made with success in Chortitza. Incidentally, through these British representatives and their English hymn tunes, the Mennonite colonists in Russia were introduced quite early to a language which they would one day need.[30]

As time passed, the concerns of missions, free prayer and revival meetings were carried by small groups of people who in turn were influenced by the writings of continental pietists. Among these was Tobias Voth, a progressive teacher whom Cornies had persuaded to come from Prussia to help spearhead his educational reforms. Voth organized prayer meetings, *Missionsstunden* (hours devoted to missions), and the production and distribution of Christian literature. Of Voth it was said:

> [he] has given expression for the first time to something which we call "brotherhood" (*Brudertum*) or intimate Christian fellowship . . .[31]

It was left, however, to a Lutheran pietist, Edward Hugo Wuest, to bring about the stirring that led to the new religious

formation. A native of Germany, he had arrived in Russia in 1845 to serve as a Lutheran pastor. A tall man with a winsome personality, Wuest was an outstanding preacher with a deep melodious voice; he had learned well the art of communication.[32] In his oratorical gifts he resembled other leaders of the new Mennonite movements such as John Oberholtzer in Pennsylvania, Daniel Brenneman in Indiana, and Daniel Hoch in Ontario.

Very soon Wuest was accepting invitations from Elder August Lenzmann of the Gnadenfeld Church. He also met with eager Bible students in the Mennonite settlements. Those participating in the gatherings called themselves "Brethren." The centre of their movement was the village of Gnadenfeld in Russia. As in Ontario and in Pennsylvania, there was immediate resistance to the new influences. Some objected because of the disorder which dissent brought to the community, others because they resisted an extremely emotional Christian expression. In the same way that the new Mennonites of Ontario struggled with Pentecostalism, the brethren in Russia wrestled with the *Froehliche Richtung* (the exuberant movement) which they could not easily escape.[33] Neither individuals nor congregations were in a mood to adjust their way of life. Reference to dancing, drinking and disciplining was offensive enough, but downright insulting was the implication that the dissenters were spiritually superior. There was, of course, no way of arriving at a unanimous position, because the viewpoints could be as many as there were elders, ministers, congregations and members.

The Brethren of Gnadenfeld asked Elder August Lenzmann to conduct a separate and private communion for them as true believers. This he declined to do, and thus the Brethren administered it among themselves. They were then called to appear before the elder to give an account of this but instead 18 of their members gathered privately on January 6, 1860, and, in a statement to the Molotschna elders, declared the founding of a new church, as follows:

> We, the undersigned, by the grace of God perceive the disintegration of the entire Mennonite brotherhood and because of the Lord and our conscience we can no longer be part of it; we fear the unavoidable judgement of God . . . We also fear the loss of the rights and privileges granted to us by our benevolent government . . . It is sad to see (O Jesus, be merciful! Open the eyes of the spiritually blind!) the satanic life of our Mennonites at the annual fairs openly

> before our neighbours . . . We separate ourselves completely from these fallen churches, but we pray for our brothers that they may be saved . . . We have in mind the entire Mennonite brotherhood, because our imperial government considers it to be a true brotherhood.[34]

The elders, however, had the whole brotherhood in mind and perceived the rights and privileges of that brotherhood to be in danger if they allowed internal dissent to bring about a disintegration. They, therefore, sought to end the protest and secession by turning the matter over to the *Gebietsamt*, the civic authority in the colony. The efforts to bring the dissenters back failed, however, even in the face of harassment, persecution, and threatened exile.[35] After a prolonged effort and in spite of the stiff opposition from the Grosze Gemeinde, the Mennonite Brethren were granted legal status and recognition by the imperial government.

One of the ironies of the new formation and the relationship of August Lenzmann to it was that he had been a proponent of the movement until its request for a separate communion. Indeed, Lenzmann's Gnadenfeld congregation had itself been the centre of a new movement, giving birth among other things to a *Bruderschule* (a brotherhood school to nurture the new ideas). It had also been the cradle for the Mennonite zionists, more properly called "Jerusalem Friends" or "Templers" who later left for Palestine.[36]

The new Mennonite Brethren movement confessed the teachings of Menno Simons, emphasizing particularly a baptism upon confession of the new birth, communion with foot-washing only for true believers, and discipline and excommunication for carnally-minded and intentional sinners. Ministers could be called directly by God (they could declare themselves) or by the church (the initiative could come from the congregation). To distinguish themselves in other ways from the Grosze Gemeinde, the Brethren adopted an immersion form of baptism, which meant rebaptism for all the followers of the movement already baptized by the elder. Before long, especially as they migrated to North America, they discarded a hierarchical structure in the ministry, though an early election produced an elder. Ordinary, i.e. unordained, members of the Mennonite Brethren Church could have leadership roles at public functions. They could serve as *Vorsaenger* (choristers), speak public prayers, and conduct opening worship exercises.

Speaking generally, the Brethren thought of themselves as Mennonites, though their borrowings from the Lutheran Pietists and German Baptists were so considerable that a certain theological ambivalence entered the movement from the beginning. In that sense, they shared the identity problem of the new North American movement known as Mennonite Brethren in Christ, whose relation to revivalistic Methodism left doubt about the relation to a pacifistic Mennonitism. The Russian Mennonite Brethren were born of both Anabaptism and Pietism.[37]

The Mennonite Brethren idea and fellowship took hold elsewhere, and congregations were formed at Chortitza. Others were established with new daughter colonies in the Kuban. There was constant growth in Russia and by 1872, the year of the first *Bundeskonferenz*, the membership had passed 600. Eventually, however, when the movement was transplanted to North America, it became the second largest in Canada and the third largest in the United States.

Although the Brethren were the leading renewal movement, there were others closely related. In the Crimea, for instance, a small settlement consisting of Molotschna and Kleine Gemeinde elements adopted a trine-immersion baptism for themselves in 1869. They too emphasized conversion, assurance and salvation experience, and integrated these with the otherwise conservative spirit of the Kleine Gemeinde. The group's Russian membership never exceeded 40 members. They came to be known as Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, appropriate to their Crimean location and to distinguish themselves from the larger group.

In Russia, as in North America, not all the renewal-minded people left the mother church. On the contrary, many whose diagnosis of the church's spiritual condition was similar to that of the Brethren chose not to separate. Among them was a young man, Heinrich Dirks, who became the first Mennonite missionary from Russia to go abroad. Baptized in Gnadenfeld by Elder August Lenzmann in 1860, he went to Germany and the Netherlands for nearly a decade to study before going on to the Dutch colony of Sumatra in 1870 as a missionary under the auspices of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Association. Another was Bernhard Harder, teacher, poet and evangelist, who ardently desired and worked for reform but remained in the Grosze Gemeinde.

Alternatively, not all of the church needed renewing in the Mennonite Brethren sense, unless, of course, the emotional character of crisis conversion experiences and immersion baptism

were equated with the desired spirituality. There was among the Russian Mennonites another kind of spirituality expressing itself in more passive and quietistic ways. "Their original simplicity of manners, their purity of faith, and consistency of Christian conduct"[38] was noted early. One who had witnessed the catechetical instruction of over 300 young people praised "their sweetness" and "their tenderness of spirit."[39] And the elders too were not all lacking in pietistic spirituality. One author writing close to the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren movement, in 1855, spoke as follows about a Chortitza elder, just deceased:

> This past autumn I had to lament the loss of a very dear and aged friend, the bishop or elder of the Mennonite Church at Chortitza . . . For a number of years that worthy man was a warm friend to Scripture distribution in his own community. All the ministers greatly respected him and cooperated with him in labours of love, wherefore that district is well supplied with Scriptures. There never was any difficulty in settling accounts with him . . . [After his death his books were found to be] in perfect order.[40]

Members of the Bible Society said of the Mennonite people themselves that they "are our chief cooperators in the Bible work."[41] In the words of the Odessa agent who worked primarily in the Chortitza region:

> They are a simple, frugal, well-behaved religious people, carefully cultivating elementary education, but not going beyond it. Their preachers are uneducated men, chosen from among themselves. Their homes present a picture of neatness, comfort and plenty, their villages serve as models to those around showing what may be done by industry and perseverance in turning the barren steppes into a pleasant abode, surrounded by trees where formerly for miles around not one was to be seen. Their moral condition is high, and although not free from prejudices chiefly of a harmless nature, their sympathies extend to the well-being of their fellowmen outside of their own community . . . your agent has found them to be those who purchase the largest number of Scriptures and among whom is to be found the greatest proportion of the friends of Bible circulation.[42]

There were thus not only great differences but also some similarities between the Grosze Gemeinde and the new movements.

The differences of emphasis and style tended to run deep, however, because both groups had so greatly offended each other's religious egos. One denied the other a fair measure of religious spirituality; the other withheld a fair measure of ecclesiastical recognition. These feelings were carried to North America where they were nurtured for years to come and where they were most often defined in doctrinal terms.

The similarities between the old and the new brethren, however, permitted some cooperation in the great migration about to break upon the Russian colonies. Both groups found themselves internally divided on the subject of their future destinies. And some of both groups decided to leave while others decided to stay. Furthermore, the similarity did not end there. Those of the Grosze Gemeinde who migrated to the United States joined the new Mennonite movement there known as the General Conference Mennonite Church. And those of the Grosze Gemeinde who stayed in Russia proceeded to found as another dimension of its own renewal a *Bundeskonferenz*, a General Conference of Mennonite congregations in Russia. That event culminated in 1883, the same year that the new North American movement, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, completed their own ecumenical assembly.

It is possible, of course, that some of the events in the Grosze Gemeinde occurred only because they first happened in the small new movements — for instance, the Bundeskonferenz was instituted by the Grosze Gemeinde a full decade after the Brethren had initiated *their* Bundeskonferenz. It is in that sense of pioneering that the movement's foremost historian, P. M. Friesen, concluded that the separatist Brethren helped not only themselves but also those they left behind.

Meanwhile, the Mennonite destinies were being affected not only by internal religious ferment and ecclesiastical realignment but also by external imperial rivalries. Russia had been confronted and miserably humiliated by the British Empire and its allies in the Crimean War (1854–56). Recognizing that her weaknesses were due at least in part to her domestic situation, some long overdue reforms had finally been initiated. These were accelerated when a new threat to Russia appeared from the West. At the heart of that threat stood the new German Empire, proclaimed as such by Bismarck in 1871 and feared by both France and Russia. Others, including some Mennonites, admired it. Thus was accelerated a flirtation with German politics that had begun with the Fredericks of Prussia and which survived even the Third Reich.

Some, however, feared the emerging power struggle. The resistance to the 5,000-thaler annual tax for the support of a military school was the cause of a continuous Prussian Mennonite emigration from 1852 to 1870, mostly to Russia but also to America. A further exodus was planned when the Bismarckian laws further reduced Mennonite privileges and ordered them either to accept some national service or to leave the country.

The Prussian Mennonites were torn in two directions. To the majority, acceptance of the situation was the most logical response. Led by Pastor-editor Jacob Mannhardt, the urbanized Danzig Mennonites favoured the formal abandonment of the principle of nonresistance. The young people, who had learned to identify with Bismarck's military successes, likewise favoured integration. There remained in Prussia, however, a minority of determined conscientious objectors for whom emigration now appeared to be the only option. In May of 1870 they delegated Elder Wilhelm Ewert and Minister Peter Dyck to investigate settlement opportunities in Russia. This they did, only to discover that in Russia the climate for military exemption had changed as well. They were encouraged to look to America instead.

Tsar Alexander II viewed German imperial growth with considerable misgivings, and consequently the introduction of universal military service in Russia seemed inevitable. The desirability of such service was reinforced domestically by the great reforms underway since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. In every area of life there were demands for a greater egalitarianism and the abolition of special privileges. The military system could not remain unaffected. A huge professional army of "volunteers" (many of them peasants forced into service by their lords) had to be replaced by a conscripted force involving several years of military training and service for all Russian males over 21. Alexander proposed not only to distribute equally the national burden but also to increase the strength of the Russian nation in the face of German imperial ambition. He announced his plans on July 16, 1870, implying at the same time that nonconformists would, within a 10-year period, be allowed to emigrate if they could not in good conscience submit to conscription. Thus, the Mennonites were being confronted with fundamental decisions.

The nationalist emphasis on great reforms, however, had other implications for minority groups. The abolition of the Odessa-based German Guardians Committee ended a special administrative link between the foreign colonists and St. Petersburg.

This meant the loss of autonomy for the Mennonites who were not placed under the direct administration of the municipal and provincial authorities. Russification called for the replacement of German by Russian as the official language of instruction in the schools. Land redistribution also was in the offing, though "equalized ownership" through wholesale nationalization had to await a greater revolution.

The Mennonites had no difficulty understanding the negative meaning for them of these measures, positive as they might be for Russia as a whole. The growth of the national spirit and administration had been against them in Prussia, and the same would be true in Russia. Perhaps it would be even more so in Russia, where a language transition meant, in the Mennonite mind, the adoption of an inferior culture. As difficult as had been the transition from Dutch to German in Prussia, that acculturation was eventually recognized as a cultural advancement. In Russia there could only be a cultural debasement. In addition, life without the Privilegium had become quite unthinkable. Thus, the idea that a better future might lie in a new land once again occupied the Mennonite mind.

FOOTNOTES

1. Adapted from P. M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland, 1789–1910* (Halbstadt, Taurien: Raduga, 1911), p. 165.
2. See C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), 296 pp.; and F. H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 571 pp.
3. See F. Bartsch, *Unser Auszug Nach Mittelasien* (Winnipeg: Echo Verlag, 1948); and Fred Richard Belk, "The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia, 1880–84" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1973).
4. David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1933), pp. 44–97.
5. David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia,

1890–1919" (unpublished manuscript in CGC archives), 72 pp.; see also E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), pp. 20–27.

6. Christian Neff, "Flemish Mennonites," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, pp. 337–40; "Frisian Mennonites," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, pp. 413–14.
7. See Friesen, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–6, 106–13; Harold S. Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 198–200. See also: "Ein Schreiben von Klaas Reimer" (CGC).
8. Bender, *op. cit.* D. G. Rempel has referred the author to a Russian source (Apollon Shal 'kovskii, *Khronologicheskve obozrenie istorii Novorossiiskago Kraia*, Vol. II, 1796–1823, Odessa, 1836) in which appeals to the colonists are quoted and in which contributions from Crimea and Chortitza areas are cited, though without breakdowns. In September of 1812 the colonists, including the Mennonites, had to make a special oath or affirmation of allegiance. Later Mennonite responses in military situations might be noted here. The Molotschna Mennonites contributed 130 horses as a voluntary contribution to the Emperor Tsar Nicholas I for the purpose of restoring law and order in Germany in 1848. During the Crimean War, Mennonites also made extensive contributions — a monument to express recognition was erected in Halbstadt. See Peter G. Epp, "At the Molotshnaya — A Visit, 1890," *Mennonite Life*, XXIV, 4 (October 1969), pp. 151–55.
9. For the complete story of the movement see P. J. B. Reimer, ed., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference (1812–1952)* (Steinbach, Man.: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 180 pp.
10. Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," *op. cit.*, p. 34ff.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Ernst Behrends, *Der Steppenhengst* (Bodensee: Hohenstaufen Verlag, 1969).
13. Walter Quiring, "Johann Cornies," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, pp. 716–18.
14. Victor Peters, *All Things Common: The Hutterian Way of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 233 pp.
15. BFBS. From letters by Doctors Paterson and Henderson (August 4, 1821) in *Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. 7, 1822–24, London, pp. 1–27. See also John Paterson, *The Book for Every Land* (London: John Snow, 1858).
16. FHL. From narrative of John Yeardley's visit to South Russia, 1853, Case 33, Casual Correspondence, pp. 363–64.
17. David G. Rempel, "Mennonite Agriculture and Model Farming as Issues of Economic Study and Political Controversy, 1870–1917"

(unpublished manuscript, 1973). Rempel's study is based on Russian documents in Leningrad and Moscow Archives. 101 pp. (CGC).

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
19. For comments on inherited characteristics in this context see Rempel, *ibid.*, p. 25ff.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
22. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," *op. cit.*, p. 43ff.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 45ff.
24. C. H. Wedel, *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten*, Vol. III (Newton, Kans.: 1901), pp. 163–64.
25. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," *op. cit.*, p. 49.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–8.
27. James Urry, Oxford, England, in a letter to the author, February 18, 1974 (CGC).
28. BFBS. Paterson Letters. See *Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. 7, 1822–24, London, p. 21. The branch was closed on orders of Nicholas I in 1826.
29. CCWM. Russian Correspondence 1804–24, Box 1, Folder 5, Jacket c. Letter from Richard Knill to London Missionary Society Bible House, St. Petersburg, April 3, 1822. See also Friesen, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–14.
30. Dr. J. J. Thiessen of Saskatoon recalls (Letter from James Urry to the author, January 26, 1974) that his grandmother had learned some of these English hymns as a child. See also Reimer and Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar*, pp. 19–22.
31. Friesen, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
32. J. A. Toews, "The History of the Mennonite Brethren Church" (unpublished manuscript, 1973), pp. 40–41.
33. See Friesen, *op. cit.*, pp. 221–30.
34. A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedgergemeinde* (Hillsboro, Ka.: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955), p. 52.
35. See Friesen, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–220.
36. Toews, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
37. See Toews, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44; Victor Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 26, 1965; A. J. Klassen, "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914" (M.A. dissertation).
38. Paterson, *loc. cit.*
39. FHL. Stephen Grellet and William Allens. Account of their visit to Russia in 1819, Case 33, Casual Correspondence, p. 119.

40. BFBS. Foreign Correspondence, 1855, Box K-O. Letter from John Melville to Henry Knolleke, February 19, 1855.
41. BFBS. Russia Agents Book No. 125. James Watt, Odessa to H. Knolleke, March 28, 1871.
42. BFBS. Russia Agents Book No. 149. Report for 1873 on Odessa Agency, pp. 320–22.