THE DUNKERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

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JOHN LEWIS GILLIN

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BY

JOHN LEWIS GILLIN, A. M., B. D.

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PREFACE.

This paper is an attempt to apply the principles of sociological theory to the interpretation of the denomination of Christians variously known in early history in Germany, sometimes as Pietists, because most of them had originally been Pietists, often as Anabaptists because they baptised those who had been christened when infants, or, again, as Dompelaers, from the fact that their mode of baptism was immersion. Today they are popularly known by the various names, Dunkards, Dunkers, Tunkers, but among themselves as Brethren, or officially as German Baptist Brethren. Their popular cogneman today, Dunkers, is simply the anglicised form of the German noun, derived from the old German verb "tunken", *to dip*, which corresponds to the modern German verb "taufen," and means what our anglicised Greek word "baptists" means. By their very name, therefore, the Dunkers are to be classed as baptists.

From the sociological standpoint they must be classified as a voluntary, cultural association, whose purpose was the promotion of certain doctrines and customs. It was one of the constituent societies of the larger, half feudal, half civil, social unit, the province of Wittgenstein. Therefore, from the standpoint of the historical study of society, the Dunker church belongs to that stage called civilization, or Demogenic Association, as Professor Giddings has called it. Its origin lay within the military-religious subdivision of that stage, the greatest part of its history within the subdivision called the liberal-legal, and the latter part within the economic-ethical. Nevertheless, within these narrow limits historically, the Dunker church represents in its his-

tory all the steps found in the development to be observed in the evolution of any society.

The method of approach might have been strictly sociological, were it not for the fact that the Dunker church began its development in Europe, but was interrupted in its history there, and had to start again from the beginning in America. Therefore, the study of the movement in Europe will be largely a study of social origins, and only in a minor degree of social development. On the other hand, while the origin of the movement in America must be noticed, because it originated there independently of the movement in Europe, the major part of attention will be given to the steps in the evolution of the Dunkers in social population, social mind and social organization.

The multiplication of the Dunker population from a small company of discouraged members fleeing from the evil conditions in Crefeld, Prussia, and settling in Germantown, Pennsylvania and vicinity, to a great company of more than one hundred thousand people, and its expansion from the eastern part of Pennsylvania along the natural routes of travel into all the agricultural parts of the United States will be traced, and the causes noticed.

Then the evolution of the social mind of this sect will be traced from the mental and practical resemblance that was based upon the like response to stimulus, which living under similar circumstances in Germany had produced, on through concerted volition, which resulted in the purposive organization.

Then, the evolution of the organization will be traced from the first spontaneous association of the simplest kind up through the various stages of development that led to a firmly compacted

organization with an increasingly complex composition and a clearly defined constitution.

Lastly, the influence upon them in every way of the democratic society in which the Dunkers found themselves, as the country developed about them and population increased, and democratic ideas were disseminated, will be noticed.

In the last chapter a summary of the processes described in the previous chapters, will be made.

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