



COMMUNISM is a term which just now is associated with the violent and bloody chaos of Bolshevik Russia, with the scourge of Trotsky's armies and with the menace to all order and civilization of the Third Internationale and its propaganda of disorder and destruction everywhere. But the spirit and aims, as well as the method, of the noisy revolutionary self-styled Communists of today are at all points the very antitheses of those of the people who for more than one hundred years have exemplified on American soil the blessings and the possibilities of the genuine communal life. There is nothing "red" about the Shakers. Not the bloody banner of Revolt, but the white flag of Peace is the standard they lift aloft.

Revisiting the community at Mount Lebanon, New York, recently, after more than twenty years, the writer anticipated possible changes. The passing of almost a generation must mean the passing of old friends. It is something new in Shakerism, however, to find it exemplifying the maxim, "other times, other manners." This was the first surprise experienced. The visitor found that those he had known as the younger men and women, less wedded to the past and more concerned with the future, had come into control. Despite the traditional conservatism of advancing years, they had justified the radical promise of their youth and become daring innovators—comparatively speaking.

That the Shakers are "dying out," is a frequently recurring news report. It was recently announced that three aged survivors of a once large colony at South Union, Kentucky, were making arrangements to have their lands which are valued at more than a million dollars revert to the state. Only a few years ago the United Brethren Church bought at a bargain some 20,000 acres of good land and many buildings at Lebanon, near Dayton, Ohio, thrown on the market by the demise of the Shaker society there. I remembered that Charles Nordhoff in his "Communitic Societies in the United States," had predicted, 45 years ago, the early vanishing of the Shakers, who then numbered about 3,000, and whose total wealth was then estimated at about ten million dollars. Early in the nineteenth century, following a phenomenal accretion to their membership flowing out of that "Kentucky Revival," which occupies so important a place in William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience," there were some twenty Shaker societies with an aggregate of 18,000 members. This was the high-water mark. There are now but nine "societies"—those located at Mount Lebanon, and Watervliet, New York; West Pittsfield, Massachusetts; Canterbury, New Hampshire; Enfield, Connecticut; Alfred and Sabbath Day Lake, Maine; South Union, Kentucky; and St. Cloud, Florida, with a total of 14 "families" or communes and less than 500 members. The present is the low-water mark in membership.

Mount Lebanon is situated in one of the most charming and picturesque spots in the Berkshire Hills close to the New York-Massachusetts state line, and the splendid concrete interstate road between Pittsfield and Albany runs through the Shaker lands just above the village. It is also reached from Chatham on the Boston & Albany Railroad by a Rutland branch

Top, left—Elder JOHN VANCE. At 92 he was an excellent specimen of the old-time Shaker Elder. He was more than six feet tall and straight as an arrow. Like all the Shakers he was typical of the best American blood and exemplified the longevity of the communal life in which the average is about twenty per cent better than the average in New York City. Center—The Shaker meeting-house at Mount Lebanon, N. Y. Next to the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, it has the largest arched ceiling, entirely unsupported by pillars, in this country. Right—Eldress ANNA WHITE. Bottom—Sister MARTHA ANDERSON and Elder FREDERICK W. EVANS.

The White Communists

Shakers Preparing for New Era of Development

By PAUL TYNER

line that runs to New Lebanon, the birthplace of Samuel J. Tilden and of Martin Van Buren and still the home of the Tilden Chemical Company owned by nephews of the Democratic leader of a generation ago. Driving up the hill from the station on a recent spring-like morning, the visitor was struck again as a quarter of a century before by the beauty of the scenery and the bracing quality of the air. Westward stretched the Lebanon Valley, dotted with cultivated fields and pastures and merging into the gentle slopes of well-wooded hills. "Beautiful for situation is Mount Zion!" has always been a favorite quotation of the Shakers. For a century and more Mount Lebanon has been to them a hallowed spot—a veritable "Zion," hilltop of past glories and of future hopes.

One is struck too by the marvelous quiet of the place, as, after a turn in the road just past a beautiful oval-shaped pond bordered by willows and neighbored by saw mill and grist mill, on a rise of ground, we turned in at the broad entrance-gate and drew up at the door of the white two-story and attic building reserved for the reception of visitors and administrative offices. Shaker villages are never noisy. The very atmosphere suggests unshaking and unwavering activity. But this morning there was something different in the silence everywhere to that of a generation ago. It was deeper with a certain indefinable intensity in it. Yet there was nothing of the quietness of death or decay about it. It had, instead, a brooding and expectant quality, such as one might imagine filled the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. It seemed to soak into the visitor standing for a moment on the porch and looking across the garden to the big dwelling house, north to the great stone barn, with the stables and the laundry on one side and the sisters' shops on the terrace ascending to the main road, on the other; south to the village stretching for half a mile along the main road. In the old days, the scene would have been marked by the figures of bonneted and kerchiefed sisters and broad-brimmed brothers in overalls or long

coats passing briskly to and fro on their various errands. Now there was not a human being in sight. Again one sensed that feeling of anticipation, of a general waiting for the word that would wake the whole place into brisk and purposeful activity.

This impression was strengthened by the appearance of the buildings. For the most part they looked as if they might have been erected within the year. Yet all were anywhere from 40 to 70 years old. The Shakers build solidly and substantially, to start with, and then they religiously keep buildings in excellent repair and renewal. A knock soon brought Sister Martha Burger to the door. Almost from her first words of kindly greeting, the visitor's sense that there was a spirit of Shakerdom facing forward rather than backward was confirmed. On his previous visit, Martha had been one of the "younger sisters"; but as even then her hair was prematurely white, one had no difficulty in recognizing her. Her younger sister Sarah, she said, had succeeded the beloved and widely known Eldress Anna White as Eldress of the "North Family" (in every Shaker village there is a north, south, center church and south family—named from their locations), and Martha herself had succeeded Sister Catherine Allen

as the sister charged with the reception of visitors and leading the young sisters' classes, among many other duties. Sister Catherine herself had for years been called to the joint leadership, or "ministry," of the whole Shaker Order with the visitor's old friend, Walter Shepherd, a sturdy reformer from that great breeding place of reformers, Manchester in England, who had been "Second Elder" in the old days.

While waiting for Sister Catherine to come from the dwelling of the Church Family in the center of the village, Sister Martha told the visitor of changes the years had brought. Significantly enough, it was learned that the old distinctive dress (as severely austere as that of nuns for the women), had been abandoned. It seemed strange to find the sisters reveling unabashed in "woman's crowning glory" undisguised by stiffly starched and ironed white bonnets, and to note the disappearance of the old puritanically kerchiefed necks. Let it not be imagined, however, that the modernized costume of the Shaker sisters comes within a thousand miles of the low-necked and short-skirted dress now seen everywhere in Philistia. Modesty and simplicity still characterize it, if not as ostentatiously as of yore. It gives one a little bit of a shock, however, to find the good sisters quite frankly and humanly shaking hands with a brother. During the previous visit it was rigorously taboo—and had been for nearly a century—for a sister to touch a brother or a brother a sister. The brother could not even lend a helping hand to a sister getting in or out of a vehicle. And they never sat at table together.

So one surprise followed another. "I'm going to give myself the pleasure of dining with you, Brother Paul!" exclaimed bright and earnest little Sister Catherine with smiling enjoyment of the visitor's surprise. In old days there were no pictures on the walls. Now one found pictures everywhere—photographs, etchings, excellent landscapes in water colors and pastels and an oil portrait of Elder Walter by a noted

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