

Worship Services in Hesse

Concerning the midnight worship services of the Brethren in the lonely forest there are two graphic reports. On May 22, 1578, Christ of Eckhartts, Rentmeister at Alsfeld, reports to the landgrave, that on Easter Monday in the Jorg Dieden woods known as the Spangenberische Dicke, on a clearing, about 60 rods from Your Excellency's border, eight Anabaptists who call themselves Hutterian Brethren met at midnight, and on Tuesday of Pentecost 15 Swiss Brethren met in the same woods, near a well called Friedrichsbronn. To these came about 150 persons from the adjacent villages, such as Gericht Oetra and other places, for they intended, as they say, to watch them. Those who were there report that, when they have assembled, one of them steps forward and preaches, and at their last meeting a man from Hatzbach, whom they call Kuchenbecker, preached. After the sermon they baptize those who wish to join their brotherhood. After this, they spread a white cloth upon the ground, take bread, cut it into slices, and break it. Afterward, wine in a silver cup, and before they distribute it they recite the words of the institution. Finally, when they have embraced and kissed one another, they part.

More explicit is the record of a hearing of Pastor Tilemann Nolte at Schwarz in July, 1578. He says it happened on Monday of Pentecost that a peasant called Hen Klint of Stordorff came to him in the churchyard and said the Anabaptists were holding a preaching; did he not wish to go along and find out what they did? He said he would like to go along and listen so he would know their doctrine, life, and conduct, so in case a pious man should come to him, he would know what to tell him about them. Thus, his simplicity and curiosity deceived him to the extent that he went. But when he got there, he discovered that they did not want to hold a preaching service, although 300 persons were present. They sent two men to him and announced they were poor people; they, like Nicodemus, had sought the Lord at night. Although they would like to teach and preach openly, the authorities would not permit it. Further the two said: 'Parson, if you ever know that the authorities are looking for us, notify us.' Then he said, 'I know nothing about it, you may do whatever you wish; I am here neither for good reasons nor for bad.' Then they first sang a psalm, and then Kuchenbecker preached.

Asked what Kuchenbecker preached, he said he had not taken a particular text. He said first: 'My dear brethren and sisters, you know that from the beginning of the world it has gone badly with the pious,' and cited the example of Cain and Abel. Then he turned to the chapter of Luke and said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' and further to the prophet Jeremiah chapter 6. He writes that they shall walk in the old way, and so he preached about two hours, often repeating the texts he had referred to, and admonished to repentance and humility.

Asked if Kuchenbecker urged the hearers to be re-baptized he said, no, he did not hear that. The prayer pleased him most, for he prayed on behalf of all kinds of trouble of all Christendom, also for emperor, king, princes and lords, that God might enlighten them and give them understanding, that they might honour and praise God. Then he asked his brethren: 'Brother, if you know something to add, indicate it.' One stepped forward whom he did not know. He said: 'My dear brethren, we have a fellow-brother who wishes you peace and requests that you remember him in your prayer, that God may strengthen him in his faith. Whoever wishes it, say amen!'

Then another stepped forward and also said, there was a sister who wished them peace and requested intercession. Others did the same. This lasted about an hour, then all fell on their knees and prayed the Lord's Prayer aloud; then they parted. They did not distribute the sacraments this time. This was (as he reported) done on Easter Monday.

The proceeding against Hans Paul Kuchenbecker ended, as usual, with expulsion from the country. His further fate is unknown.