

# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

---

---

VOL. II

ISSUED IN JULY 1921

NO. 7

---

---

COPYRIGHT 1921 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

## Amana

### WHAT IS AMANA

In one of the garden spots of Iowa there is a charming little valley through which the historic Iowa River flows peacefully to the eastward. A closer view reveals seven old-fashioned villages nestling among the trees or sleeping on the hillsides. About these seven villages stretch twenty-six thousand goodly acres clothed with fields of corn, pastures, meadows, gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and seas of waving grain. Beyond and above, surrounding the little valley, are richly timbered hills forming as though by design a frame for this quaint picture of Amana—the home of the Community of True Inspiration.

And what is Amana? To the traveller, viewing the fleeting landscape from the observation car of the Rocky Mountain Limited, it is a singular cluster of unpainted houses and barns amid battalions of vine-covered bean poles and blossoming onion tops,

surrounded by well tilled fields. To the speeding motorist on the River to River Road, bent on making the distance between Davenport and Des Moines in a day, it furnishes a curiously delightful stopping place for rest and refreshment and a fresh supply of gasoline. To the historian it is a bit of Europe in America, a voice out of the past on the world's western frontier; while to the political and social philosopher it is the nearest approach in our day to the Utopian's dream of a community of men and women living together in peace, plenty, and happiness, away from the "world" and its many distractions.

To the villagers themselves, with their aversion to mixing "philosophy and human science with divine wisdom", Amana with its villages and gardens, its orchards and vineyards, its mills and factories, its rich harvest fields and wooded hills, and its abiding peace and cheerfulness is the visible expression of the Lord's will: to them the establishment of villages, the growth and development of industries, and the success of communism are all incidental to the life and thought of the Community whose chief concern is spiritual. Born of religious enthusiasm and disciplined by persecution, it has ever remained primarily a Church. And so the *real* Amana is Amana the Church — Amana the Community of True Inspiration.

In language, in manners, in dress, in traditions, as well as in religious and economic institutions, the

Community of True Inspiration is foreign to its surroundings — so much so that the visitor is at once impressed with the fact that here is something *different* from the surrounding world. In the eighteenth century the Inspirationists paid the penalty in the Old World for their non-conformity to established customs by imprisonment and exile: in the twentieth century they are objects of curiosity to their neighbors and the subject of no little speculation. The Inspirationist is by nature and by discipline given to attending quietly to his own business; and much impertinent inquiry on the part of visitors has intensified his reticence. But Amana has no secrets to hide from the world. To be granted full liberty to worship in their own way and to work out their own salvation is all that the men and women of this Community have ever asked.

There is much in the life of the people of Amana that seems plain and monotonous to the outside world. And yet we are compelled to acknowledge that in many respects theirs is a more rational and ideal life than that which is found in the average country village. It is more genuine and uniform. There is less extravagance; less of shallow striving; no keeping up of "appearances"; and fewer attempts to seem what one is not.

But of more fundamental concern than plain living is the fact that the Community of True Inspiration has throughout its history been dominated by a spiritual ideal and a determined purpose to realize

that ideal. To this end the Inspirationists persevered, suffered, and sacrificed for more than two hundred years. And finally, that their ideal of a simple religious life might prevail, they substituted a system of brotherly coöperation for one of individual competition.

It is apparent, however, that that isolation from the "world" for which the Community of True Inspiration has so earnestly striven and which it has so jealously guarded for six generations becomes less and less easy to preserve. The railroad and airplane, the telephone and telegraph, the newspaper and magazine, the endless procession of automobiles, and the great World War have at last brought the Community and the "world" so close together that marked changes are taking place in the customs of the people and in their attitude toward life. Indeed, it is the intelligent adjustment of the life of the Community to the new order that explains the "blessed continuation" of Amana in this day and generation.

#### WHENCE CAME THESE PEOPLE

To the German Mystics and Pietists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Community of True Inspiration traces its origin — developing into a distinct religious sect about the year 1714. Protesting against the dogmatism of the Lutheran Church and refusing to conform to its ritual, the Inspirationists were persecuted and prosecuted.