

A Life of Köbner.

Julius Köbner. Sein Leben. von Ruth Baresel, geb. Köbner.
Kassel, 1930. Verlag von J. G. Oncken Nachfolger. 310 pp.

THE long-promised life of Julius Köbner by his daughter, to which allusion was made in the *Baptist Quarterly* for October 1929, has at length appeared. Frau Baresel was not born until 1876, when her father was nearly seventy, and he died when she was barely eight, so that her personal recollections can play only a small part in the story. She is able to give us, however, some attractive glimpses of the great pioneer during his last Barmen days and during the final months in Berlin, and for the rest she has made careful study of the materials available, and has produced a well-documented and useful life. The illustrations, which include portraits of Köbner, his father, his two wives, and scenes in Denmark, add greatly to the interest of the volume. The Baptist Publication Department at Kassel are to be congratulated on their part in the work.

It is strange to find that, apart from a series of articles by Eduard Scheve published in 1891-2, no biography of Köbner has till now been written, though histories of the German Baptist movement, and of the church in Barmen, give many details regarding him. He played so decisive a rôle in the early development of our work, not only in Germany, but in Denmark and other countries, and was himself so interesting a figure, that it is well that this gap has now been filled. Frau Barasel has told the story of his life and work in straightforward and judicious fashion. Her volume is a most useful companion to the selection from Köbner's writings published three years ago by Dr. Gieselbusch, Frau Baresel's son-in-law.

The family name is connected with Köben on the Oder, but Köbner's father was born in the colony of German Jews at Lissa in Poland. Isaac Aaron Köbner left home when he was about twenty-five, and after brief stays in several German cities, settled at Odense, on the Danish island of Fünen. There he married, and soon became the Rabbi of the local Jewish community. His eldest son, the subject of this biography, was born in 1806, and received the name of Solomon. As a boy he was serious and studious, learned early of Christianity from books, and was attracted by what seemed to him its greater spirituality and reasonableness. When he was sent, at eighteen years of age, to

Lübeck to seek employment, he at once visited the Pastor of the Reformed Church to learn more about the religion of Jesus Christ. Of that interview he afterwards wrote: "I heard then for the first time why Christ had come. I received the most worthwhile of all gifts, the teaching of the divinity of Christ." To avoid interference by his Jewish acquaintances he moved on to Hamburg, but for a while made no public profession of faith. He was a skilled engraver, and found time also to teach languages and to write poetry. It was when he wished to become engaged to one of his pupils, the daughter of a German officer, that he sought baptism, and took the names of Julius Johann Wilhelm. He was then twenty years old, and was baptised in St. Peter's, Hamburg.

A special licence from the King of Denmark was necessary before he could marry, as the families of both parties objected. The young couple settled first in Denmark, in a little town on the west coast. Both Köbner and his wife were attracted to the town, however, and when the chance came of employment in Hamburg, they quickly took it. There a chance meeting with Oncken changed the whole course of their lives. The first Baptist church on the Continent of Europe had been formed in Hamburg in 1834; it had at first only six members. Köbner and his wife were baptised by immersion on confession of their faith in 1836.

It is difficult to overestimate all that the association of Oncken and Köbner meant to the small Baptist community. The one was a great and statesmanlike organiser as well as a burning evangelist, the other had unusual imaginative gifts, and an interest in theology, history, and literature. Together with G. W. Lehmann they made up the famous *Kleeblatt*, or cloverleaf, a threefold cord, which, though once nearly broken, was never completely severed, in spite of all the strain and stress of nearly half a century of pioneer work in the face of persecution and misunderstanding.

Köbner's pen was at once placed at the disposal of the Baptists. He wrote hymns for them. He contributed much to the early confessions of faith. He supplied them with books for edification and propaganda. All his time and energies he lavished on the growing movement. For some years he worked with Oncken in Hamburg, sharing in the sufferings which resulted from the hostility of the civil and religious authorities, and helping to reap the harvest which followed the public-spirited action of the Baptists during the fire of 1842. He journeyed over all parts of Germany as "missioner," and laid the foundations of Baptist work in Denmark, his native land. Then, in 1852, Oncken asked him to go as pastor to Barmen, the centre of

an industrial area, which was rightly regarded as a key position. For thirteen years he worked at the building-up of the church there, finding time also for much visitation throughout Germany, for work in connection with the Evangelical Alliance, and for the writing of a poetical drama, "The Waldensians," and other literary activity.

In 1865 Köbner resigned the Barmen charge, and Oncken suggested he return to Denmark as pastor of the church at Copenhagen. He would have gone with great zest and gladness but that it involved separation from his wife, who, during the Barmen days, had developed eccentricities, which caused comment and inconvenience among a somewhat critical congregation, and for some of which she undoubtedly deserved severe censure. Oncken suggested that she be left in Hamburg under his care, and there she died in 1868. Meantime Köbner had met with considerable success in his native land. Things seemed to promise well, when suddenly the whole denomination was involved in an unfortunate dispute, which, beginning in Hamburg, soon spread throughout Germany and the neighbouring lands, and in the end divided even the "cloverleaf." Into its details it is unnecessary now to enter. Many unwise things were said and done by all parties. It came gradually to concern questions not only of personalities and policy, but of organisation and principle. The time was over-ripe for some kind of stocktaking after years of expansion, but it was most unfortunate that seven crucial years should be spent in bickering. Not till 1876 did an end come to the trouble. There was a revision of the constitution of the German Union, which aimed at making it more democratic, and the personal divisions were gradually healed.

Köbner played a leading part in the work of reconciliation and rebuilding. A journey through Germany and Switzerland in 1877 showed what a hold he still had over the Baptist community. He was getting on in years, but spared himself not at all. During the long-drawn-out conflict he had married again. Dorothea Stagsted was thirty years younger than her husband, but the union was a very happy one, though all too brief. A daughter, Ruth, the author of this volume, was born in 1876, and almost at once Frau Köbner became seriously ill. She died in the early hours of 1879, to her husband's great grief. He felt he must make a new start, and at the age of seventy-three accepted an invitation to return to Barmen. There he resumed most of his old activities and added some new enthusiasms. Oncken and Lehmann were both ageing rapidly, and to Köbner there came wider influence and authority. He was still busy with his pen, and though the pamphlets and books which he issued are not of permanent significance, they show remarkable

mental alertness. When in 1882 Lehmann died, Köbner was asked to go to Berlin to succeed him. It was a strange final chapter to his life. He was nearly seventy-seven when he preached his induction sermon. For the first time in his life he started with a united and loyal people, but he had not long in which to serve them. A cold caught at Oncken's funeral in the early days of 1884 developed into his last illness, and on February 2nd he passed peacefully away.

He was a shrewd, kindly man, an able speaker, an interesting preacher, wide in his interests and sympathies, a writer and poet of no mean ability. He has left his mark deep on the life of the Baptist movement on the Continent, and since there have been few who have come near him in mental and spiritual stature in the years since his death, his importance is still great. He retained always a few marks of his origin. The Jew Spinoza was described as "God-intoxicated." Köbner was dominated throughout his life by a sense of God's majesty and power. But he was, before all else, a dedicated man, one who had surrendered all of himself to the service of Jesus Christ.

Baptists throughout the world will be grateful to Frau Baresel for having adequately told her father's story.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

THE MENNONITES IN RUSSIA continue to suffer, and stories as to their hardships reach us in very circuitous routes, through Germany, America and New Zealand. One group settled in Turkestan nearly sixty years ago, and did much to reclaim land. But the Soviet policy is to break up these self-contained colonies, however communistic each may be in itself. Their property has been socialized, their societies broken up, and they are scattered. One bishop is now in a new colony in Brazil. A careful study of the whole flight from Russia is appearing from the pen of Professor Unruh, at Cassel. After reviewing the political and economic background before 1923, he states the two incompatible aims of the government, to bring about a world revolution, and to reconstruct Russia. With 1929, each village commune was empowered to fine and to deport all who refused to join. On the economic side, this ruins the Mennonite system which reclaimed a third of Russia. On the religious, the Soviets "want to destroy everything which claims to be supernatural and superhuman." And having shattered the institutions of the former State Church, it now girds itself to wrestle with the life of the evangelicals, and last year issued at Moscow and at Kharkov two pamphlets against the Sects.