



## ONE

# *Pennsylvania!*

“**COME BACK** here,” Christian ordered Buttercup, the most troublesome goat of the flock. Buttercup paid no attention. With a sigh, Christian got up to chase the annoying goat back to the others. Sometimes he wondered if he would herd goats for the rest of his life. This had once been his brother Ulrich’s job. Then it had been passed on to Peter, and now to Christian.

He did not really mind herding goats. It was a good job for a six-year-old boy. He loved to be outdoors, and some of the goats were his best friends. It was just at times when Buttercup or one of the other goats got a stubborn streak that Christian wished he were old enough to do fieldwork. But since he was the youngest in the family, he was likely to be stuck with the job for a long time.



At home in Germany

Buttercup seemed to think the chase was a game. She led Christian up and down the gently rolling German Palatinate hills, keeping just out of his reach. At last he got close enough to give her a whack across the hindquarters with his forked stick. Buttercup turned and bolted toward home. Christian followed in hot pursuit through the cobblestone streets of the little farming village of Gerolsheim. Buttercup charged through the open gate of the fence which surrounded the Burkholder family farm buildings and headed into the courtyard. This was home not only to Christian's family, but also to his uncle, Abraham Burkholder, and his family, as well as Grandfather Hans Burkholder.

Christian skidded to a stop as he rounded the corner of the house. Grandfather was sitting on a chair under the tree in the courtyard eating some of the cherries Peter had just picked from a fallen branch of the overloaded cherry tree. Buttercup stood there calmly eating the leaves from the branch as though that was why she had come home in the first place.

Christian grabbed the bell rope around Buttercup's neck and switched her as he led her away to the goat stall across the courtyard. Then he ran back to see Grandfather.

Christian had not known that Grandfather was back in Gerolsheim. He had been on a trip to give Communion to some of the five German Swisser<sup>1</sup> churches over which he was bishop. It was good to see him again.

Christian stepped over the handles of the wooden rake and pitchfork his oldest sisters, Barbara and Anna, had dropped when they came in from helping Ulrich make hay. He sat down on the edge of the well beside Anna and slowly sipped the glass of water she dipped from a bucket Barbara had just brought up from the cool depths below. He could see his mother and sister, both

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<sup>1</sup> The name *Mennonite* was not used in Germany at this time. They were known as *Swissers* rather than *Mennonites*.

named Elizabeth, preparing supper through the open doorway of their ordinary, German, half-timbered house. The outer walls of the house were made of vertical and horizontal timbers which framed spaces filled with stone and mortar masonry. The brown timbers contrasted pleasantly with the cream-colored wall.

Grandfather took another handful of cherries from the bowl Peter held out to him. He continued speaking to Father, who sat on a log nearby looking thoughtfully at a letter in his lap.

"I see the whole congregation here will never agree to all go at once, as I had hoped," Grandfather was saying. "Those who want to go will have to go as it suits them. But I have waited too long. I am too old now to make such a trip. Yet I am sure it is the right thing to do. I remember my father, Hans, often telling how he was persecuted in Switzerland. Twice he was in prison and escaped. Then he was driven from home and came here to Germany. I was still very young when Mother brought me and my six brothers and sisters here to be with Father in 1671. I will never forget that long walk from Switzerland to Germany.

"My father hoped Germany would be a place where we could worship God in peace and live according to our beliefs. It is true that we are not burned at the stake and beheaded as they were in Switzerland, but you know how it is. The government is still trying to get rid of us. They make us pay such high taxes we have hardly anything left. We pay extra taxes so our young men do not have to join the army. We pay extra taxes to bury our dead. They don't let us marry or pass our belongings on to our children without going through a long legal process and great expense. Even with paying these taxes, we are almost considered outlaws because we will not help fight Germany's wars. We are not able to teach anyone but our own children our faith without danger and trouble. The freedom my father wanted is not found here."

"This letter from Daniel Groff sure makes Pennsylvania sound good," Father agreed. "He says the government there touches them so lightly they hardly feel it. He promises to help us find a home if we want to come."

"We have often talked of going to Pennsylvania," Grandfather said. "Others have gone and have found good land. I will not live much longer. I shall never leave Germany. But you can go, Christian. You have these boys, Ulrich, Peter, and little Christli, to think of. In Pennsylvania they could grow up free to believe the Bible and practice it without all these restrictions of the state. I wish you would go before the boys are any older."

Young Christian leaned forward eagerly to hear what Father would say. He had often heard Father and Grandfather talk of going to Pennsylvania, but this time Grandfather was serious. He really wanted them to go.

Father remained silent. At last he said slowly, "We will pray and ask God to tell us His will. I am a minister. I cannot just walk away and leave my church without a shepherd. But you are right. I must think of the boys too. I will make the decision to go or stay as the Lord tells me."

"Yah, that is the only way," Grandfather agreed, stroking his white beard. "I will pray too that He will tell you. Now I must go lie down."

Leaning heavily on his walking stick, Grandfather got stiffly to his feet and started toward his room.