

WANDERING PEOPLES

The Doukhobors are not the only trail vagabonds in the history of clothes and civilisation.

By RODEN KINGSMILL

ONCE more recently from out the Canadian West have come tidings of another Doukhobor pilgrimage. These Slavs—or some few of them—a little while ago started on one of their migrations *in puris naturalibus*. The troopers of the Mounted Police, pursuing, herded them as aforetime, back to their reservation, just as, three decades ago, the Indians whose lands these once were, suffered themselves to be shepherded back to their abiding places that the white men had given them. The Doukhobors will return the more quietly.

And the Doukhobors, unlike the Indians, were only following an ancient and authentic habit when they broke bounds five years ago, and two years ago, and the other day. All through their iron-bound, melancholy history, they and their race-mates have been nomads. These migrations are merely indicative of old sense associations returning to their former track. Among Oriental peoples tribal or even national migrations are recognised as completely intelligible. And we Anglo-Saxons, if what certain ethnologists tell us is true, should have no difficulty in understanding these movements, for our race is in itself the outcome of one of them. Back in the misty centuries, we are told, the two tribes from which we sprung rebelled against and emancipated themselves from the odious tyranny of the Medes, broke bounds from the scene of their captivity on the banks of the river Gozon and marched across country, diagonally traversing Europe, until they found their abiding place for a few centuries in the swampy Elbe Valley, thence after a time to sweep with fire and sword over the Roman Empire. And these Franks and Saxons and Vandals and Ostrogoths were themselves fleeing from the Asiatics. "Somewhere in the north of China a storm centre did what it may very well do again. The human volcano blew its top off and Europe was covered with the destructive debris." It was not the conquerors who over-ran the Roman Empire; but it was the terrified fugitives who, like a drove of stampeded cattle, blundered over everything that barred their way. The nations came whirling in out of Eastern Europe like dust-storms and it seems beyond doubt that these wanderers in our Canadian West are the legitimate descendants of some of the Tartars or their allies.

The Doukhobors' migratory habit is a clear case of atavism. It

it true that, submerged as they are—and increasingly will be—by the overwhelming body of descendants of Western Europeans who surround them, they will find it impossible to perpetuate their wandering customs. But the tendency—harmless enough—will still be there. The fact that it is allied with religious belief will only make its extirpation the more difficult. Writers will continue to describe them as fanatics, but fanaticism is only a matter of time and age and nationality. Almost within touching distance in the history of the world, and even of our own people, we can find some amazing instances of it. Take up your Taine or your Macaulay and there you shall read how in the seventeenth century Englishmen and Englishwomen by the hundred appeared in the streets naked and unashamed—as they thought for the greater glory of God. Hear Green speak of John Wesley, the greatest religious leader this race has produced (and Green revered the man and his work): "Throughout his life his asceticism was that of a monk. At times he lived on bread only, and often slept on the bare boards. He lived in a world of wonders and divine interpositions. It was a miracle if the rain stopped and allowed him to set forth upon a journey. It was a judgment of Heaven if a hailstorm burst over a town which had been deaf to his preaching. One day, he tells us, when he was tired and his horse fell lame, 'I thought, cannot God heal either man or beast by any means or without any — immediately my headache ceased and my horse's lameness in the same instant.' With a still more childish fanaticism he guided his conduct, whether in ordinary events or in the great crisis of his life, by drawing lots or watching the particular texts at which his Bible opened."

Thus believed a man of our race who had a mind that was essentially practical, orderly and conservative. Even in our own time, and on this continent we have seen waves of fanaticism, such as the Mormon movement of the forties, seize bodies of men and women large enough to populate an European principality.

"Old sense associations returning to their former track." On the plains of Saskatchewan, half a world away from the steppes of Tartary and the plains of Little Russia, we have a recrudescence of an ancient and authentic Oriental habit. The aimless wandering that the pilgrims desire is an instance of atavism, of a craving to do what some unremembered ancestor did. It is fanaticism; but it is fanaticism which is historically intelligible. We have elevated our Promised Land to the terms of ethics and religion. They have not. They are looking for the Christ much as Peter the Hermit and the leaders of the Children's Crusade sought the Holy Sepulchre.

But the former times were not better than these. In their three western pilgrimages, no Doukhobors starved. Canadians fed them freely and gave them to drink. No dog was set on them. No children stoned them. When the Doukhobors had lost their reason, Canadians had not lost their charity.

HOW MARITIME CANADA IS ADOPTING LIVE BOOM METHODS



Here is the Cherry Carnival Parade, held annually at Bear River, N.S. Just when the cherries are ripening, this unique fete takes place, out of which the citizens get a big holiday and incidentally boost the industries of their town. Bear River is situated on the Bear River, it is chiefly noted for its lumber which is shipped direct to South America.

Photograph by R. N. Harris, Bear River.