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THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., MONDAY, MAY 23, 1921

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WEST LOOKING ASKANCE UPON THE MENNONITE

Refusal to Send Children to
Schools is Responsible.

The Schools are Empty—The
Teachers There Courageous
but With Little or Nothing
to Do.

Staff Correspondence of The Toronto
Globe.

Swift Current, Sask., May 16.—The
youth morning some forty or fifty
Mennonite farmers of Saskatchewan
will appear in court in this place
to pay their customary fine
for the persistent non-attendance of
their children at public school. They
will come in sullen response to papers
served upon them, as in other months,
the provincial police, and the sum
of their payments for immunity
from observation of Canadian law will
be, I suppose, into several hundred
dollars. The business transaction, con-
sidered, they will return to their farms.
Whether or not the above is "as bad
it sounds" depends entirely upon
one's viewpoint. To the citizens of
this country it is neither here nor
there, at least it will occasion among
no comment. It is to them, as to
the police, the usual monthly parade
of stunted offenders, an event so com-
monly recurrent as to be nothing more
than a nuisance and a monotony.

at the fact will convey to Canadians
note from Mennonite areas, is, as I
before, dependent entirely upon
point of view and upon their atti-
tude to what are, or should be, matters
of national import. To many it
be a "bit of news", to a few, I hope,
something more than that.

year ago this month, some read-
ers may remember, I described in a
column to The Globe my police-con-
duct to a public school not far from
Mennonite colonies near Wymark,
a of this city. I told of the com-
mable schoolroom, the waiting
teacher and the utter absence of pupils;
mentioned the groups of children
in the colony, and their deplorable
ignorance of the simplest phrases of our
everyday language. More than likely
my interview with the local
shop, and his blunt assertion that
children would continue to "go
man school". In that same letter,
I mistake not, I referred to the
stuffy hall-up-and-fine process, to
my police-complaints then re-
corded in terms of complete disgust.

Teacher's View.
Last Saturday I revisited that school,
found a new teacher—a courageous
girl from Nova Scotia. She was,
I remember her statement correctly,
the third or fourth to follow the young
man whom I had seen one year ago. She
was interested in her work and pleased
to find words that a few Mennonite
children were coming to school. Were
I of school age coming? I asked. No,
by any means; but—this with a
slight highly commendable—she was
not scorned. Perhaps the teacher was
working, she said. With the children
she knew she could do something, but
for their parents, well, "You don't
know the Mennonites."

"The so-called 'Progressives' are all
right," she told me. "Their chil-
dren come and give no trouble. But
the 'Old Colony' people! I shouldn't
say so, I suppose, but it's pretty hard
on a teacher under these conditions. I
have tried to mix with them as best I
could. I have visited every home in
the colony—"

"And your reception in the homes?"
interrupted. "Where you able to—"

I did not press that query, for I saw
at it hurt. A teacher is human, after
all; a young woman teacher in a prairie
school, laboring among people not of
her kind, cannot but be hurt by studied
insolence and inhuman coldness on the
part of the parents of her pupils.

"I'm going to stick,"
"My reception?" this one said, after a
pause. "I didn't get much of a recep-
tion. I tell you, it was pretty hard.
But I am not going to give it up! I am
here, and I'm going to stick!"

That dauntlessness of spirit on the
part of these young women teachers of
the prairie may win out in the end, of
course. But that has nothing to do with
the principles involved. What of the
responsibilities of the nation, now on in-
dividual shoulders? What of the young
Mennonites of the meantime, growing
up in ignorance of the language of what
is, after all, their native land, and grow-
ing up, too, in a callous disregard of the
sanctity of the common law? Are these
matters of no consequence to Canada?

"You needn't worry," these children
will never go to school," a young "Pro-
gressive" told me on Saturday last.
"Their parents are completely under
control of the religious leaders and you
needn't look for any change. It's these
leaders in the church that cause all this
trouble. The people themselves are not
bad. They would let the children learn
English, but they are afraid of their
leaders."

"Do you believe in today's report that
the Old Colony Mennonites are going to
Mexico?" I asked.
"I believe there is some ground for it,"
he replied. "I know that there have
been negotiations with the Mexican gov-
ernment and that certain large sums
have been deposited in the bank in con-
nection with the transfer of these farm
lands. I am told that difficulties of a
come up and that there is apt to be a
legal nature regarding the transfers have
good deal of trouble before they can
move. You see, a lot of the Mennonites
—even old colony ones, I mean—object
to giving up their land here; they don't
want to move, but I guess they will be
made to in the end."

Hold Valuable Land.
The three or four Mennonite settle-
ments on the prairie comprise large
areas of the finest agricultural lands in
the west, and a high valuation has been
placed upon Mennonite holdings by the
business supervisor or agent who re-
presents his people in all their dealings with
the outside world. Delicate announce-
ment of a move to Mexico, or anywhere
else, of the entire Mennonite population
would be hailed with delight by 80 per
cent of the people of the west, and the
fat lands that they have farmed
thoroughly and with such rich reward,
would not long wait for purchasers.

But whether these thrifty people
and they are thrifty to a fault—go or
stay, their present contemptuous treat-
ment of the school law surely calls for
the serious consideration of right-think-
ing Canadians. Each time I return to
Swift Current and find still in progress
the monthly fine system, I realize more
keenly the gravity of the moral and legal
problems involved.

Briefly, these well to do Canadians—
for people living here for years and
Canadian—dislike certain laws. They
raising their families in our midst are
refuse to obey those laws and they en-
courage their offspring to disobey them.
To satisfy the ends of justice or to sat-
isfy public opinion, or perhaps just to
purchase immunity, they go once a month
to their nearest town and make a cash
payment by virtue of which the law
is temporarily satisfied for their children be-
come null and void. In other words, the law
of the nation is a thing of barter—increased
and binding upon ordinary individuals
to whom it applies, but a negligible
entity to those financially able
to purchase release from its impositions.
Ignorant Children.

And, apart from that aspect, should
we forget the children—merely be-
cause we are so gracious in considering
the whims of their misguided parents?
Has a young Canadian a fair chance in
life knowing not the language of the
land into which he comes as a potential
citizen? I asked a little Mennonite boy
of 12 or thereabouts a simple question—
"Where is your father?" He gazed at
me in utter innocence of my meaning.
I repeated my query several times, al-
tering it in turn to apply to his mother, his
home, his father's farm. With the per-
fect candor and confidence of childhood
he came near me, wholly unafraid, but
the questioning of his wide blue eyes
assured me that I might as well address
him in the tongue of the Cree as in
the language of Canada.

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city engineer and Geoffrey Stead, of the
federal public works department, made
a trip of inspection to Musquash. The
party was much impressed with the
amount of development that has taken
place there.

At an auction sale at Chubb's corner
on Saturday morning the motor boat
"Mimosa" was sold by auctioneer Potts.
The boat was purchased by W. E. A.
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