

THEY NEVER ASK FOR AID.

Remarkable Success in Agriculture of Mennonite Exiles From Russia.

Quick as are Americans to criticise the manners and customs of Russia, and infer as the subjects of the czar are frequently considered, the settlers on the western prairies might well learn a lesson of the Russians who have their unique settlements among them. The Mennonites, exiled from southern Russia, because of their religion, made as systematic an exodus as did the Israelites of old, says a Kansas correspondent of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. They sent out their agents to buy out the land, and purchased 100,000 acres of the Santa Fe and Kansas Pacific railways for homes. Then the people packed up their household goods and came to America. On the depot platforms they landed wearing sheepskin coats, the woolly side out, and black kerchiefs over their heads. They carried iron tea kettles, and regarded the gazing Americans with as much curiosity as they themselves attracted. They built their villages of yellow limestone, the houses having queer hip roofs, green blinds and double doors like those seen in a mill. Curious ovens in which prairie hay or straw could be burned overcame the lack of fuel, and a street looked for all the world as though it had dropped out of an illustration in a Siberian sketch. Such names as "Catherine Stadt," "Leberthal" and "Pfeiffer" grace their towns, and no man not of Mennonite persuasion is allowed inside the limits as a resident, though visitors are cordially welcomed.

The Mennonites number several thousand, but they are never heard of in politics. They are busy tilling their 100,000 acres, raising stock, planting orchards and piling up wealth. The wide-awake westerner, standing on the street corner explaining the "contraction of the currency" to a knot of listeners, sees a half-dozen odd-looking wagons come toiling up the road. They are loaded with wheat and sole on faced Mennonites, who guide the soberer teams, pocket the payment and trudge homeward. The orators hold forth in the country schoolhouse, and the eager real estate agent plate additions to the towns, but the Mennonites pay no attention to either. They keep on selling wheat and corn and cattle until they have become the richest class of farmers, probably, their number considered, that Kansas affords. They take few papers, they do not vote, they care nothing whether the government is Republican or Democratic in its management. They are as isolated as though they were upon a sea island, except as they bring in their produce to the shipping station.

It is noticeable that nearly all the lands are in the much discussed "arid belt," yet the Mennonites never ask and or seed wheat. They prosper every year, and their homes are veritable storehouses of garden and field products. To step into them is like a visit to the land of the Volga. Curious furniture, strange garb and peculiar habits impress one with the feeling that he is in another land and another age. The houses are for the most part, surrounded by stone walls and old country fashions in fencing; barns and implements are everywhere apparent. They have their own minister, their own church and their own schools. When a "higher" education is desired (and some of the young people are as forward in their ambition for learning as American youth) there is plenty of money in the village bank to send them to Europe or to some eastern college to acquire it. During the last year, when common complaint of hard times

went up from the dwellers on the plains, when seed wheat has been sent by the thousand bushels to American settlers, the Russians have continued to thrive. Their old-fashioned vehicles have come regularly to the railroads, and car load after car load of wheat has been sent east. Lumber dealers in the towns where they do their buying say that there has been no diminution in their purchases, and that by far the larger portion of their yards' sales have gone to their Russian customers. There is an important lesson in their success. They have shown by their works what industry and frugality can accomplish upon the prairies, and what can be done with the right kind of effort. Still, it is doubtful if the American settler could bring himself and his family to the grinding economy of European peasant life which the Mennonites have transplanted in their settlements.

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