

Communications.

GERMAN IN OUR SCHOOLS.

By Geo. R. Belton.

Mr. Lerew asks in his article in December number, "Are the German children learning the English language?" and also advises the teaching of English only to the Mennonites.

Perhaps some older German teacher may be better fitted than I to answer, but as one who was for two years principal of the largest bi-lingual German school in the province, and one viewing the question from a purely English or rather Canadian standpoint, I would like to answer the question. But before an answer can be made, I must shortly explain the conditions which exist on the reserves.

The Mennonites number about 10,000 all told. Roughly speaking they live in Rhineland and Hanover Municipalities, although many are also in Stanley. There are several sects of them, but all agree on these doctrines of not going to war and not taking an oath nor going to law. None baptize infants, and one sect, "The Bredergemeine," immerse (which practice they have learned from the English Baptists.) The Mennonites were nearly all of the "Old Colonies" church when they settled here, which church has a doctrine (not formulated by Menno Simon) that they must hold no communication with the world. This forbids them from being a civil officer, thus effectually shutting out public schools, as to have a public school they must have trustees and receive the grant from the civil government. This sect is by far the greatest, and they have no public schools, only private schools taught by inferior men. Often the man who herds the cattle in summer teaches during the winter. They teach only the Three R's., further knowledge being considered unnecessary. These people are *retrograding*. The fathers can read and write Russian and German, but few of the children can do as well. No English is taught in these schools; no advancement whatever is being made amongst them, and none of their schools are inspected by the German inspector (who is of the Bergthaler sect) and none of their children attend any of the district schools. This sect comprises by far the greater part of the Mennonites.

The Bergthaler sect is probably next in numbers, and they and the Bredergemeine differ in only a few forms of practice and minor doctrines. These are very progressive people and amongst them are the district schools (numbering about 40) situated in a sort of fringe around the reserve. All the Mennonites of Winkler village belong to these two sects and most of those in the other villages which are on the railroad. (The Bergthalers are sub-divided, I forgot to add.)

These 40 schools compare favorably with the average English country schools. They teach English rather more hours than German, and are taught chiefly by men from Kansas, who teach on permits, owing to the scarcity of qualified teachers who can converse in German.

The language spoken by these people is a dialect of Plautt Dutch or Low German, closely related to Lowland Scotch (many words are the same.) It is an unwritten jargon. They read and write in Hoch Dutch or High German, and sing their hymns, read their Bible, and often attempt to preach in it also. One