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WHEN WRITING TO ADVERTISERS PLEASE MENTION THE GUIDE

The Community

Our Mennonite Neighbors

By J. S. Woodsworth, Secretary of the Social Welfare League



Rev. J. S. Woodsworth

There are few of the districts in the newer settlements of the West that have not groups of non-English speaking settlers. Often we English speaking people are prejudiced against them simply because of our ignorance of their language, customs and ideals. From the standpoint of the community it is desirable that we should get to know one another. Suppose we begin with the Mennonites—one of our earliest groups of immigrants. The Mennonites are a religious sect that began about 1525. They are named after one of their early leaders, Menno Simons, a Hollander. They represent one of the earliest Protestant movements. The two outstanding doctrines are perhaps non-conformity and peace. In a country in which there was a state church and compulsory military service, their doctrines brought them into conflict with the authorities. They were bitterly persecuted. Some fled to the settlements which were being established by the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania. At the time of the Revolutionary war many of this group trekked to Canada and settled in Ontario. Others of the persecuted Hollanders joined their co-religionists in Prussia and afterwards emigrated to Russia. In 1783-8 the Empress Catherine II granted them lands and special exemptions. After about a century these were withdrawn.

In 1875 a large number came to Canada, settling in southern Manitoba. They were given a reserve of 720 square miles. The Canadian government guaranteed a loan of \$75,000 made to them by the Ontario Mennonites. This was repaid within twenty years. The Mennonites first settled in villages in the Russian style. Afterwards many of them moved out to their own homesteads. As another generation grew up there was a migration to Saskatchewan where more land could be obtained.

A young Mennonite, born in Manitoba and now resident in Saskatchewan, has given me the following account of the Mennonites of Saskatchewan. Where his information is inaccurate or incomplete he would welcome correction or supplemental information.

The Saskatchewan Mennonites

The Mennonites live in colonies with centres at Rosthern, Hague, Osler, Laird, Warman, Waldheim, Hepburn, Dalmeny, Langham, Aberdeen and Herbert. They are similar to the Conference Mennonite, except in their religious life, which is on a par with the Baptists. Immersion in baptism, and abstinence from the use of liquor, tobacco, and from dancing and such-like, are the most outstanding differences. A large number of their people come from the United States. They are perhaps the most progressive. Nearly all of these have good farms, good buildings and good stock. Telephones are found in nearly every home; quite a number of them possess automobiles.

The community at Aberdeen consists largely of later arrivals from Russia. They made a good beginning, but went heavily in debt and now the majority of them suffer from the results. They are well educated in German and are rapidly acquiring a knowledge of English.

On the whole the newer type of Mennonites in Saskatchewan are making much greater progress than those of the old settlements in Manitoba. This is partly due to the influence of their neighbors, partly to the government, partly to the institutions of learning such as the normal and high schools. They take a great interest in education and the many of them still wish to have some German taught in their schools; they will lose that idea in time.

If the authorities and the people in general adopt the proper attitude towards these people and have just a little patience their efforts will, in a very short time, be crowned with success.

qualifications of any kind and in many cases are not able to speak correct High German. No boy is allowed to go to school after his fourteenth year, and no girl after her twelfth. When the age of eighteen is reached they join the church in the spring of the year and they are then ready to get married. The marriage ceremony always takes place in the home of the bride and lasts sometimes for several days, during which there is much merry-making, such as dancing and drinking. The chief virtue of these people is their contentedness. They believe that all that is worth having is theirs already.

The Berthaler Mennonite is not so narrow-minded as the Old Colonier. He lives on his farm and goes about his duty peacefully. If there happens to be a school in the district he sends his children to school during the winter months. The condition of these people is rapidly improving and if the right steps are taken by the authorities and by their neighbors they will soon be a good class of people. The main settlements are at Rosthern, Hague, Herbert, Morse and Waldeck.

The Conference Mennonite is made up of the newer type of Mennonites. Many have come from Kansas, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota and have settled in districts around Rosthern, Langham, Laird, Quill Lake and Herbert. They take great interest in education. Schools are found everywhere and the attendance is fair. There is a small colony north of Laird who have come direct from Germany. They are of a more refined type. In their homes they speak High German, but they have practically all acquired a fair knowledge of English. They have splendid homes, some of them fitted up with all modern conveniences, such as waterworks, electric light and telephones.

A High Standard

The most important settlements of the Mennonite Brethren are at Dalmeny, Hepburn, Langham, Borden, Waldheim, Laird, Aberdeen and Herbert. They are similar to the Conference Mennonite, except in their religious life, which is on a par with the Baptists. Immersion in baptism, and abstinence from the use of liquor, tobacco, and from dancing and such-like, are the most outstanding differences. A large number of their people come from the United States. They are perhaps the most progressive. Nearly all of these have good farms, good buildings and good stock. Telephones are found in nearly every home; quite a number of them possess automobiles.

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The Guide goes into many immigrant homes. Why should not a member of some other nationality give us some account of his people?



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