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MANITOBA'S MENNONITE POPULATION.

Many people in Manitoba have an idea the Mennonite settlers are not a desirable acquisition to the population of the country, and not unfrequently remarks of a disparaging nature will be heard regarding these people. These remarks are based on the belief that they are a penurious and non-progressive people, who refuse to become Canadianized, but persist in perpetuating their peculiar Old World customs here, and who subsist on the barest necessities of life. True the Mennonites have some peculiarities, which tend to make them a distinctive people, but some of these peculiarities could be copied by the English speaking residents to the general advantage of the country.

One peculiarity of the Mennonites is, that as a class they are remarkably honest. This is not to be taken as meaning that other residents are notoriously dishonest; but it is the general testimony of business men having dealings with these people, that they are far more reliable than other residents. Of course there are a few black sheep among them, but the number is surprisingly small. The word of a Mennonite can generally be accepted with the utmost confidence, and they are a safe people to credit in trade transactions. A member of a firm in Manitoba which does a large trade with the Mennonites, says that they have lost more from trusting English speaking people than from the Mennonites, though only about one per cent. of their trade is with persons other than Mennonites.

Another peculiarity with the Mennonites is, that they invariably sell their grain early in the fall, as soon as they can get it threshed, and at once pay off their debts. A Mennonite's love of money never prevents him from paying his debts as soon as he gets the money; and he always pays cash for his purchases when he has the money. He does not hold his grain for higher prices, and compel the merchant to wait an unreasonable time for money which the latter may be very much in need of. He does not invest his money with the object of making a profit upon it, as some English speaking farmers are known to do, while accounts with the merchant are allowed to run for years. The first thing he does is to pay

his debts, when he gets the money. Many people will run an account with a merchant for a length of time, and when they get money, will go to a competitor and buy for cash, allowing the account to stand. This is a dishonorable custom which the Mennonite is not guilty of.

The Mennonite has a peculiarity of endeavouring to treat all his creditors alike. If he has \$100, and owes \$200 to several different persons, he will give each creditor his just portion of what he has. He will not pay the \$100 to say an implement agent, who would charge him interest, and "stand off" the merchant who would not be so liable to add interest to the bill.

The Mennonite is a close buyer, and he always wants the best price going for what he has to sell, hence he is sometimes said to be mean or stingy; but he is only doing what he has a perfect right to do. Buying close and selling to the best advantage is the great secret of success in the lives of many great merchants, the world over. Besides, the Mennonite is largely a cash buyer, and he is therefore the more justified in endeavoring to buy close. He does not put his money out at interest, and expect to buy on credit without paying interest.

In the early days of the Mennonite settlements in Manitoba, a good many "sharp tricks" were played upon these people, by unprincipled persons. They were honest themselves and imagined others to be the same, hence they were easy victims to the cupidity of others. They were unacquainted with the customs and requirements of the country, and were led into purchasing articles in farm implements, animals, etc., which were of little use to them. They knew nothing about legal procedure in this country, and frequently had their effects seized on account of disregard of legal papers served upon them. This has led them to be careful in transacting business with strangers, almost to the extent of suspiciousness, but for this they are not much to blame.

The idea that the Mennonites are a non-progressive people, and determined to remain just as they were when they first came to Manitoba, is a very great mistake. A visit to the Mennonite settlements will show that quite the opposite is the case. They are economical in their habits, and very wisely they chose to live frugally during the early years of their settlement in the country. They were starting anew in life, not knowing what

was before them, and it was necessary for them to be careful about their expenditures. But now that they have learned the mode of successful agriculture in this country, and have become established and are getting ahead, they are commencing to spend their money quite freely, not only for the necessities of life, but for some things that may be termed luxuries. If all our immigrants would live frugally until they are in a position to launch out a little, failures would be few indeed. The Mennonites have had splendid crops for three years in succession, and the result is readily noticeable. They have made money, and they are spending it in a way to better their condition. New frame houses are rapidly taking the place of their original habitations, with thatched roofs, and it is said by an authority that next season a great deal of building will be done in the Mennonite settlements. They are also investing freely in better household effects.

Already the influence of Canadian customs is telling upon them, in their mode of living. The system of living together in villages is now breaking up, and now only a few families are left in some of their largest villages. One by one they are dropping out, and going out to live separately, each on his own farm. They are also commencing to take an interest in politics. At the last provincial elections, 170 votes were cast on the Mennonite reserve, which was a larger number than was given in all previous elections. In one direction, however, there is great neglect, and that is in the important matter of education. Many of the schools are of a very inferior character, and it is said the rising generation will not be as well cared for in the matter of education as the parents have been. Religious sentiment is at the bottom of the trouble. A number of the Mennonites, especially several of the leaders in matters of religion, are strongly opposed to the introduction of the public school system, and to a more liberal course of education, on the ground that it will militate to the disadvantage of the Mennonite form of religion. This is a matter very greatly to be regretted, and one which is worthy of special investigation by the government.

Altogether, however, the Manitoba Mennonites have made great advancement since coming to the province, and that advancement has been especially marked during the last two years. They have shown themselves to be an honest,