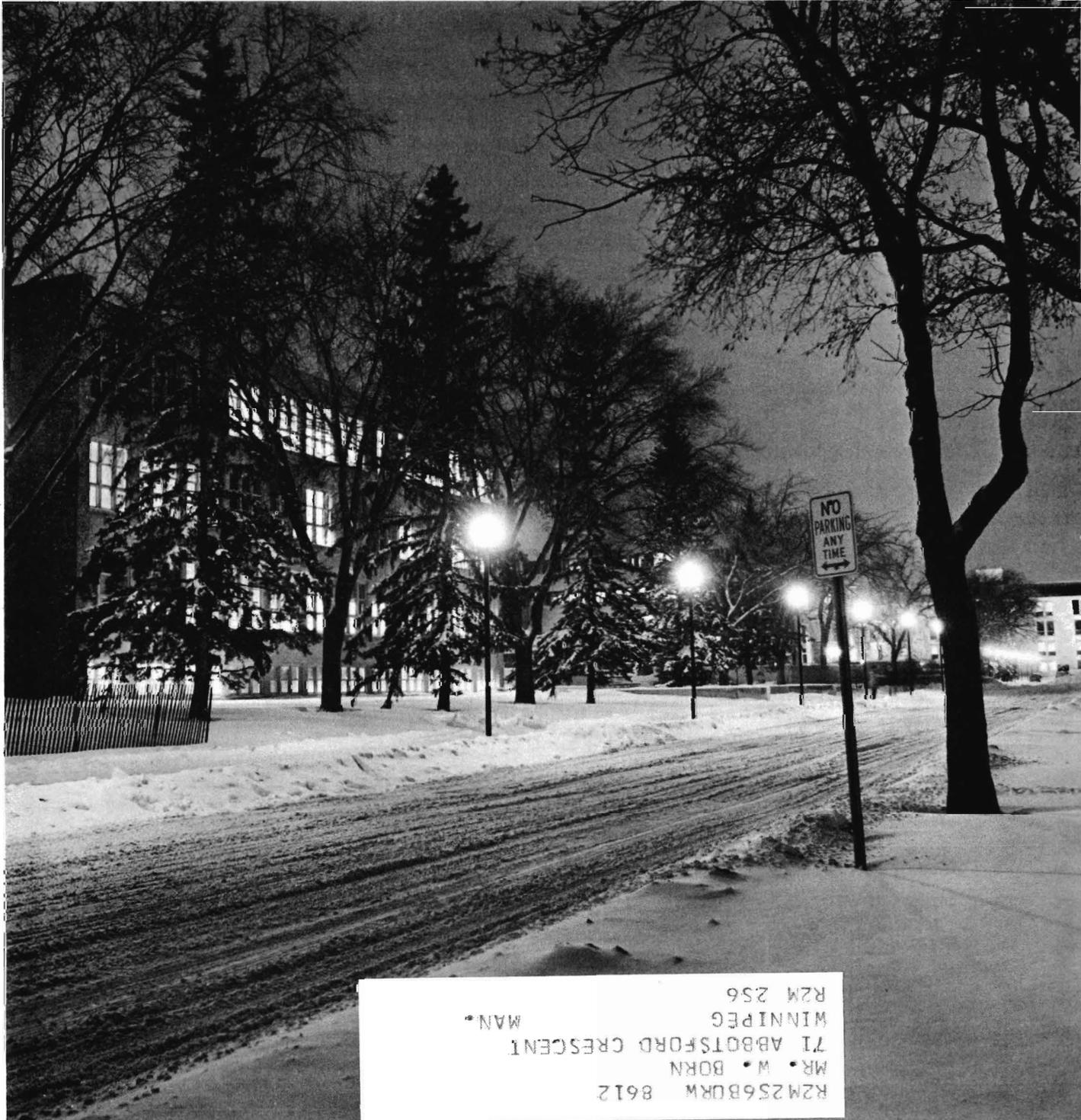


# mennonite mirror

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# ForeWord

Welcome to 1985, and the middle of our publishing year.

Every now and then someone asks how the editor manages to get all the articles to exactly "fit" the space available. It's not easy, although it does get easier with experience. The best way to understand how this magazine comes together is to see it as a jig-saw puzzle, but a puzzle that has pieces you can shape to fit the right place. Accordingly, the make-up editor has to visualize the whole 32 pages and its individual parts at the same time. The *Mirror's* make-up editor starts at the end of the magazine by setting up the Our Word and the German pages first; then he goes to the beginning of the magazine and works towards the back. Articles are generally categorized into "must use," "maybe," and "can wait" categories, so that after the "must use" items are in, the other two categories are used to fill in the remaining space. Sometimes articles are "pasted-up" from their beginning, other times one begins with the end of the article and works to the front. The ads are selected to best use the space. The foregoing is, of course, an oversimplified view of how the magazine is put together, but the idea is to measure, cut, and fit, till you get it right. It is not at all like building a model or sewing a dress, because in those cases one follows a pattern; in the case of making up a magazine there is no such pattern, each edition is unique and the pattern, if one exists, exists in the mind of the make-up editor arises from his experience.

Now down to this issue.

The magazine opens with an article by Mary Enns, who during her recent

European tour, met with the *Umseidler* and used the experience to write about one family in particular. Leaving a homeland to make a new life in a new land is always difficult and finding the right balance between the old and the new is a process that lasts as long as family members have a direct link with the past.

Peter G. Epp, came to the U.S. from Russia in 1924 where he taught at Bluffton College. During his "spare" time he wrote short stories and novels. In an excerpt from *Eine Mutter*, translated into English by Peter Pauls, the main character Agatha Epp relates the history of her father's numerous descendants. Her perspective is unique in that she looks back as a person who decided not to leave.

Roy Vogt is back with his *Observed Along the Way*, after sitting out last edition. In addition to treating us to his usual observations, he begins by observing that 1984 was a good year.

There are again an abundance of reviews this issue: three performances and two books.

Peter Lorenze Neufeld writes an essay for this issue on being Mennonite, from the rather interesting perspective of someone who has the right "name," the right roots, but who chose to make another church his place of worship. He explores what being Mennonite can mean.

The main Low German feature this month is yet another translation from the German of Wilhelm Busch by Jack Thiessen. Complete with its illustrations it is a rather long item consuming all of eight pages.

So settle back, and ignore the cold outside while you read this edition of MM.

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Subscriptions cost \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years; send your address label along with a cheque payable to Mennonite Mirror, 203-818 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, R3G 0N4.

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# New Life, New Ways; a family looks back at 10 years in West Germany

by Mary M. Enns

August 27 finds us in Schuttern, 18 km from Offenburg, Germany. Our plans to attend the *Umsiedler Treffen* in Neuwied fell through since we had at that point not yet left the Soviet Union. The article which was to have concerned itself with the situation of the Umsiedler in Germany today, that is, how they had progressed since we interviewed some of them nine years ago, will now deal with the life of one Umsiedler family.

Sasha (Alexander) and Agnes Enns Penner of Schuttern and their daughters Anne 17, Larisa 14 and Helene 5, left Uzbekistan, in Central Asia, in 1971, to live in Estonia. Here the children were allowed to attend school regularly instead of being required to pick cotton part of the school year. They were also nearer their real goal, the move into Germany.

The family was finally allowed to emigrate in 1974. Within two weeks they were settled in a newly-built apartment (tenanted chiefly by Umsiedler) in Offenburg, in the heart of Germany's Schwarzwald. For the first year they received financial help from the German government. How grateful they felt for their new freedom, the peace, the quiet. The fear and depression of their former life, the night when Grandfather Penner was held at pistol-point — all this seemed far away, but was never forgotten. "The search for freedom and peace was the reason we had come here," says Sasha.

Within four months after their arrival in Germany, Agnes started her job in an old folks home. The greatest difficulty was the language problem. As was the case with many Mennonite Umsiedler, they had spoken Low German at home and Russian on the job in the Soviet Union. They had heard some High Ger-

man, but mainly Russian in church. Now, in order to get a job, they needed to speak a good German. They understood the language well enough but could not speak it. Arrangements were soon made for Sasha to enter a six-month concentrated German language study course in Stuaffen, 70 km away. During these months he received *Unterhaltungsgeld* — support from the government. With this and Agnes' wages — both not great but adequate — they managed well and were contented.

While some of the Umsiedler complained bitterly, wishing they had stayed in the *alte Heimat*, the Penners felt their lot was a very good one. Nevertheless, the first year was rough. Agnes could not afford the bus fare to go to work the 3 km four times a day and the day seemed long and tiring. Four months after graduating from language school Sasha found a job dispensing electrical material for building projects with a firm. Today he heads that department, enjoying his work and grateful for the wage he earns.

In 1977 Agnes, in order to improve her situation, left her job for the six-month German language course in Offenburg, also with financial help from the government. Today both speak a fluent standard German but have difficulty with the various German dialects spoken by the villagers and day laborers. Agnes now works as a dispatcher in a meat-processing plant where various German sausages are made and sent to retail firms. Certainly they would have preferred work in the profession for which they had originally been trained. They are convinced they could have enjoyed this privilege had they made

their move into Germany four years sooner.

Since apartment rental rates were ever on the increase, they decided four years ago to buy a lot, not in Offenburg where property is very expensive but in the quiet little village of Schuttern, barely half an hour away by car. They built a large two-family home (in case of need for a home for Sasha's elderly parents, or in case one of their daughters needed an apartment after marriage). They planted fruit trees and varieties of berries (gooseberries here are large, dark brown and succulent), as well as a big vegetable garden. This has not only cut down their cost of living enormously, but they can now help others who need it.

Their church affiliation is with the General Conference church in Freiburg. Because this is 60 km from Schuttern, they are frequent worshippers in the *Evangelische Methodisten Kirche* 7 km away in Lahr. At present Helene, now 14, was away in Freiburg enjoying a week of *Freizeit* with other young people and their *Pfarrer-Familie* Franz Esau. Helene is a student at the gymnasium working toward a career in children's work. Annie, now 26, after some years of studying, several of these at the Bienenberg Bible School in Switzerland, works in Bad Mergentheim at a Kur-Ort or sanatorium as a nurse's aid. Larisa, 23, a graduate of the gymnasium, is married to Thomas Kuntz, a computer student. With Baby Angelika they live 10 km from Schuttern. They were our hosts at a delightful coffee party during the time we were guests at their parents' home.

Germans, like most Europeans, are inordinately fond of flowers and it is

customary to bring a bouquet when one is a guest in a German home. With such an abundance of fresh flowers it was never quite clear to us why plastic flowers were not put away for the summer: Daily we found new delight in Agnes' passion — her 12 or more varieties of gorgeous roses ranging from white through pale and deep yellow, and deep pink and darkest rose, to red and deep velvety wine — and one quite delightful pale mauve.

We wondered if, in general, the Umsiedler are allowing themselves to assimilate or meld into the German life and system. "It depends," explained our hosts, "on the individual. But fitting in takes time and certainly effort. We found we needed to humble ourselves at times, but are now accepted by our fellow-workers and neighbours. We have their trust and friendship. But it is always give and take."

And the Umsiedler Youth? We thought we had detected a problem nine years ago of rebellion toward parents who were overly strict and straight-laced in their ways. Now our question was very frank: Did these parents need to mellow a little, to soften their philosophy and their methods of dealing with a new situation for their thinking young sons and daughters? "Yes", agreed Sasha, "we all did have to adjust. Once again it was a give and take and a letting go of some old traditions. It depended on whether one had moved into a region where there were already Mennonites and a Mennonite church — in other words a spiritual growth atmosphere — or whether one was part of a large city without Mennonites or spiritual connections. The latter did not necessarily need to be Umsiedler connections but any evangelical church groups. One must adjust to the Christians here, not just isolate oneself as though one were different or better. We would not want to create the impression of building another *Reich*. Exactly this has happened with some of our Umsiedler groups, and that is unnecessary. There are differences among the Umsiedler. Each group feels they are in the right. One example is that some wear the head kerchief as a necessity and ban the pant-suit for women. Others are more liberal."

And for the future? "Very clearly," say the Penners, "today we have everything we need and more and are able to pay our debts. We are more than grateful. But we don't know what is in store for us. A Russian saying goes this way: 'If I knew in which direction I would fall I would lay straw on that side.'" mm

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# The Great Migration: An Excerpt from Peter G. Epp's Novel, *Eine Mutter*

translated by Peter Pauls

*Peter G. Epp, 1888-1954, emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1924. He taught Russian and German at Bluffton College and Ohio State University for more than 25 years. In his leisure time he wrote novels and short stories which provide detailed descriptions of life in the Mennonite colonies of pre-revolutionary Russia.*

*In the novel, **Eine Mutter**, an old woman named Agatha Epp relates the history of her father's numerous descendants. In the following excerpt, she recalls the great migration of the 1870's.*

*Her perspective is unique in that she is looking back on this event not as one of the emigrants but as one of those who decided not to leave. She is one who has seen many migrations both within and beyond Russia's borders. At the time of this narration, the great migration of the 1920's is about to begin.*

*Peter Pauls, a professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, hopes to have his translation of **Eine Mutter** published in the near future. In the meantime, to whet the reader's appetites, the **Mirror** is publishing several excerpts from this interesting work.*

How well I remember the great migration to America. It seems that, from time to time, our people feel compelled to seek out new settlements in new countries. This is so accepted by now that no one ever asks why. I'm always surprised that our leaders continue to find these new homes for our people. I'm really amazed that our people are so ready to follow these men into the wilderness. Not just the young people, who are always a bit impulsive, but old grandmothers and grandfathers who are already weak and helpless feel they must go too. I'm over eighty and I don't think I'll migrate much farther than to the cemetery, which is just outside the village of Barwenke. I find this impulsiveness hard to understand. People live for years in the same place and then, suddenly, they take it into their heads to pull up roots and move to a new home thousands of miles away. How could I die in America or in some place I can't even name as yet? I was always a little afraid when my sons-in-law sat around the table and talked about migrating. When I shook my head in disbelief at such talk, my oldest grandchildren laughed at me.

"Grandma," they said, "we don't think it would be at all hard for you!"

"Really?"

"Not at all. We'd just bundle you up nice and warm and then away we'd go. You're no more trouble than the little folk!"

That was forty years ago. A great restlessness seemed to come over our people. Everyone was excited and filled with anticipation. I don't really remember why anymore and I don't think I knew why even then. There had been some difficult times, economically, and the general feeling was that life would be easier in the New World. There were many reports about people who had

become very rich there. There were also the newly-established military service requirements for our young men and a general restriction of our religious freedom. Our people were very much divided at that time. Some wanted to go and some argued it would be better to stay. And, human nature being what it is, there was soon much quarrelling and bickering. Both groups prophesied doom and gloom. Some began to waver and didn't know which faction to join. There were meetings at which many problems were openly discussed. If one of the leaders was seen sitting at these meetings with his head bowed, people said he couldn't make up his mind. If another spoke enthusiastically and waved his hands back and forth they said that he too was undecided.

"He doesn't know if he's for America or Russia," they would say.

My brothers, Gerhard, Abram and David, were among those who were undecided. My husband thought we should stay.

"No, Agatchen," he said, "after all this happiness and prosperity, why should I seek the unknown? I'm afraid, I tell you, of starting all over again at my age. If we stay in the land that the Lord our God has given us he will surely bless us."

"But think of the children," I reminded him. "We are well on in years. They still have a lifetime to look forward to. It's for them that we would go, not for ourselves."

Then my husband became quiet and thoughtful.

"Perhaps you are right, Agatchen," he said. "Whatever you say. If you feel strongly about it, we'll go."

But his words only raised doubts in my own mind. And so we continued to discuss the matter endlessly. We had two *Kleinwirtschaften*, a reasonably

good living. As long as the children were young, it would be enough. However, would we be able to provide land for them when they were grown up? The number of farms in our colony would always be limited. The existing farms would not be sub-divided. We knew that, in the long term, there was no future for our children in the colony. If they hoped to gain their living from the land, more land would have to be found. Would it not, therefore, be better to go together and sooner rather than later? This was how we talked at our house, and this is how they talked at Gerhard's house, and at David's also. My brother Gerhard at that time had seven children — Gerhard, Jacob, Maria, who are still living, and four more girls who are all dead now. Gerhard had a *Halbwirtschaft* and his carpenter shop. He was not poor. His family never lacked the necessities of life. But he knew that he would never be really prosperous. He would never have enough, say, to buy another *Halbwirtschaft*. His children would never inherit enough to make much headway either. They would be able to supplement their incomes by learning a trade, as he had done, but they would not be able to live on that alone. So Gerhard was quite sure he would have to go. When we travelled to Rückenau to visit our brother Abram, who had five children, we heard the same argument. There was no other way. We would all have to migrate.

And so, just when we were decided and happy with our decision, we began to have second thoughts. Our homes and land would have to be sold. Part of the money would, of course, be spent paying for the voyage. Much more would be needed to make a beginning in the New World. All beginnings are difficult. But what of misfortunes? Crop failures? We might be giving up our security for poverty and suffering. It might be better to stay, after all. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Then we considered migrating once again until we were all tired and irritable.

"No, my brothers," I said at last, "we'll never reach a decision this way. We'll have to leave it to God. As long as we don't have complete faith in Him, we'll look to the future and see only uncertainty. Let's stop worrying about it. Almighty God, who has sustained and protected our people thus far, will not forsake our children in the future."

"You are right, Agatchen," Gerhard said, "I think we should stay."

I sighed with relief at these words. I was sure we would not be the only ones

who would decide to stay. God would continue to protect and bless all His children. I never doubted that for a moment.

When I think back now on the forty years that have passed since then I'm still convinced that, under the circumstances, we did what was best. We could never have foreseen what did happen. Only a few of our children actually stayed in the mother colony. My oldest daughter moved to Shostak after she married. Shostak was a new settlement approximately twenty-five *Werst* from where I now live. My daughter Agatchen settled in Ohrenburg, a place we hadn't even heard of at the time of the great migration to America. Mariechen went to Schönfeld, also a new settlement made up of large estates. My stepson Kornelius moved to Terek, where my daughter-in-law, the wife of my only son Hans still lives. My dear Tienchen later went to America. All, except my daughter Mariechen, who has gone to her eternal rest, have found security and prosperity and have a much better life than their father and I had. So all the worrying that my second husband and I did at that time was pointless. Most of our children were able to find enough land here in Russia. A number of Gerhard's and Abram's children also moved to new settlements in Russia. However, my stepbrothers and sisters, my father's children from his first marriage, all went to America.

Those were difficult times, those years when so many left for the New World. After all the discussion, the waiting and the preparation, the emigrants were finally ready. Everywhere there were auction sales. Whole farms, complete with stock, were sold. The emigrants took only their clothing and bedding which they packed in huge chests or boxes. Because there were so many auction sales all at the same time, prices were very low. I was very sad to see one piece of furniture after another carried out of my sister Tiene's house and put up for sale, in the yard. All those things they had accumulated over the years, in the kitchen, in the cellar, in the attic and all the other rooms, all those things which had a purpose and a place in these people's lives were now suddenly thrown carelessly into a heap and discarded. I stood in the midst of this crowd of people which moved restlessly from the street to the yard and back to the street again. Such a big auction sale would normally take place after someone's death, when a farm or household had to be liquidated. I couldn't help thinking of my sister as

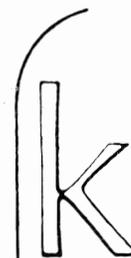
someone who had died. Cheerfully, she continued to carry more and more of her belongings out of her house.

"Doesn't it hurt you, to have to do this?" I asked. "Look at him, there, carrying off the chairs on which you and your children sat for so many years. And there is someone else making off with the table, the *Ruhbank* and the *Kleiderschrank*. All these things stood in your house day after day, right next to you, and so have almost become part of you. And now these personal belongings are being scattered about as if they were nothing more than dried leaves to be blown away by the autumn wind. When you reach that distant land far across the ocean, you'll remember how it was once, and you will weep bitter tears of regret."

"No, it doesn't bother me in the least," she replied. "Someday you may be sorry that you stayed."

I mentioned earlier the harsh words that were sometimes spoken by both groups, those who left and those who stayed. It's always hard for people to let others go their own ways without finding fault or scolding them. Martens, my sister Tiene's husband, had some particularly bitter words for those of us who were staying. He said we would starve

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and be persecuted for our faith and then, much too late, we would regret our stubbornness. He was also fond of telling us how easy it was to become rich in the New World. I believed then, as I believe now, that it was right for some to go and just as right for others to stay. Those self-righteous pronouncements on both sides hurt me deeply. I began to fear for my sister and her husband. When people are self-sufficient, self-centred, they lose their faith in God and begin to treat their neighbours with contempt. They can no longer reason clearly and they make all kinds of mistakes. That's what happened to my brother-in-law. Two years after they migrated he and my sister found themselves once again in a tiny house owned by our village. They had owned one of the largest farms in the colony but, after their return, lived in abject poverty for the rest of their lives. To this day their children are struggling to make ends meet. Their daughter Anna, I'm told, would like to migrate again, now that another great migration is being planned. Will she succeed where her parents failed forty years earlier? I doubt that I will live long enough to see the outcome of this second exodus. But, it doesn't really matter. Ultimately all the different roads that members of my clan have travelled will lead to our eternal home where there will be no more parting. Sometimes I try to imagine what that glorious reunion will be like!

By evening of that day, Tiene's furniture and other belongings had all been sold. Their house, their barn and their *Scheune* stood empty — everything gone. Only their personal belongings, things they wanted to take with them, were left. I took my sister by the hand and, silently we walked through the barn and into the garden. In two days they too would be gone. I thought I would never again look into those eyes or clasp that hand in mine. As we sat together on the bench there in the garden, I studied my sister's face carefully so that no matter how far she might be removed from me physically, I would never be able to forget her. I told her that she was giving up this life to begin a new one. New challenges, new hopes, new worries, new joys and new sorrows undoubtedly awaited her in that new land. Her children would have enough room there. They would multiply and move to new settlements in that world just as our her children but I assured her that they would still be the children of our dear father who now rests peacefully in his grave.

Well, my sisters plans didn't quite turn out like that. However, my half-brothers and sisters, who also left at the same time, did begin a new life far beyond the sea and I never did see them again, except for my half-sister Aganetha. Aganetha was only a small girl when her parents emigrated and she visited us many years later. She and her family became very prosperous, far more prosperous than any of us who remained in Russia.

At that auction sale I was talking about, my husband bought a few things that had been handed down to us by our parents, things that had been part of their household — a *Schlafbank*, an old wooden bed that opened up, and other smaller articles. We had no great need for these things but I couldn't bear to see that old worn *Schlafbank* sold, the bench in which I and Tiene, then Abram and Gerhard and finally David had all slept. It was the same bench on which the apprentices used to sit whenever we all ate at the long table. It made me sad to think that this bench should pass into strange hands. This is how I felt about our parents' bed as well. Little did we suspect, as we carried those pieces of furniture into our attic, that in two years they would be the only pieces of furni-



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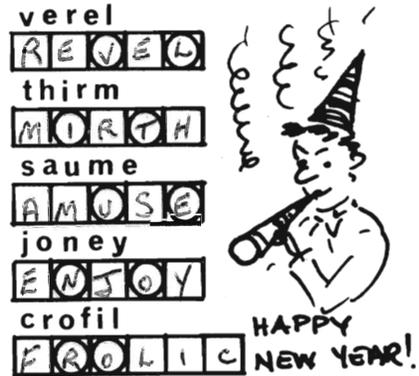
Don has been with the Kona Group for the past 3 years working in real estate sales. Prior to joining Kona he was involved in both real estate and farm equipment sales.

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# mm mirror mix-up



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This edition we announce the winner of the contest published in the November edition: from the 49 entries, Martha Friesen of Manitou was selected a winner. A cash prize has been sent.

In the next edition (February) we will announce the winner for the December contest. We are giving extra time so that more of you can enter and not have to be concerned if the mail delays your edition of the *Mirror*.

The answers to November were snow, bleak, chill, arctic, frozen and hibernate.

The letters are to be re-arranged and written in the squares to form words. Letters which fall into the squares with circles are to be arranged to complete the answer at the bottom of the puzzle; the drawing to the right provides a clue.

A winner will be drawn from among the contest entries and the prize awarded.

**Entries must be sent to the Mirror office by February 11, 1985.**

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ture my sister's family would possess. Later, when I saw my sister sitting again on this bench, dejected, downcast, trying to earn a little money with her knitting and sewing, I said to myself: "Did you really have to experience that great misfortune, that odyssey of so many weeks and months across strange seas and lands and rivers, only to come back and rest on this bench on which you sat as a small child?"

After the auction, my brother Gerhard, who had a big house, took the Martens into his home. He had made the big wooden chests in which the belongings of the emigrants were packed. It was not the last time that he would be called upon to do this work. Gerhard found it painful to bid his friends and relatives farewell but he always managed to hide his feelings as he busied himself, hammering, sawing, nailing, lying on his knees in the *Grosse Stube*, packing the chests and boxes he had built and tying them securely with rope. I can still see him today. That's how he hammered and sawed and lay on his knees when my daughter Agatchen was preparing to move to Ohrenburg, when his oldest children and their children left our colony, and again when his son Peter left to study in Switzerland.

At last, all was packed and ready. The boxes, the baskets, the chests, some of which our father had made, stood, piled up, in the *Vorhaus*. Heavily loaded wagons could already be seen moving through the village on their way to the railroad station. We sat down to our last meal with my sister's family but nobody was really hungry. And what could we talk about in these last hours together? Once again I looked into the eyes of my sister and my brother-in-law, into the eyes of each one of the children, as though I were trying to get a glimpse of the future which seemed so dark and foreboding. We were so crestfallen, so sorrowful, you would have thought we were going to a funeral. I found it hard to believe that we were really celebrating a new beginning. How could that be? They had nothing left — no land, no house, no furniture. How would they survive in a strange, new environment? Would they find neighbours who would be charitable and give them help and advice? The room in which we were sitting was as quiet as a morgue. The ticking of the large wall clock seemed unusually loud. That old clock was ticking when my father died and later when my brother Gerhard died and again when his wife Elizabeth died. It is still ticking today.

"Na, ja, I think it's time to go," broth-

er Gerhard said, "people are beginning to leave."

It was very quiet too that day in Gerhard's carpenter shop. No sounds of hammering or sawing or the happy whistling of the apprentices. Everyone was watching the emigrants leave. The men loaded the boxes on the wagon. Again it was brother Gerhard who arranged them and tied everything down securely. He walked around the wagon more than once, examining it and making sure all was ready. I noticed his hands trembling a little as he tightened the ropes. Martens and the children climbed onto the wagon. Tiene, my husband and I got into the *Droschke* and waited, ready to follow them to the station. Tiene and I were in the back seat with some of the smaller bundles at our feet. Slowly we drove out into the street and became part of a long convoy of people moving out of the village.

As I sit here now in my little room in *Barwenke*, far removed from all the noise and restlessness of the world with nothing to do but let my thoughts run back over the past — almost half a century — I can still hear my sister's voice and my husband's "Come on, come on," as he encouraged the horses on the steep sandy slope on the road to Prieschib. My husband and most of the people who were at the station that day are no longer among the living. Only I am left now to tell their story.

mm

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# observed along the way

by Roy Vogt

## The Last Weeks of Last Year

● It is hard to say whether 1984 was a good year. All of our friends got older, a few of them got sick. But I can truthfully say that we did more than just survive. There was very much to enjoy, and a lot to be grateful for. Heading the blessings are: a good marriage, a wonderful family, enjoyable work, loyal and interesting friends, and many times of relaxation. That being true, 1984 was a good year!

● Before the university closes down for the Christmas break there are dozens of essays and examinations to mark. This is always the painful part of being a teacher. I sometimes feel that I would sooner write my own paper than mark someone else's. There is no question that students of today are as bright and industrious as at any time in the past, but many of them are woefully weak at writing. Are we losing our word skills because of television, or because some misguided language teachers earlier in the chain of learning thought that spelling and grammar were not important for good writing? In many of the papers I mark there are more than 20 spelling mistakes, in addition to constant switches in tenses and wrong uses of pronouns. On the back of one paper I write: "You have no right to inflict such a paper on anyone. I will not grade it because I can't read it." The strange thing is that I offer all of my students the opportunity to hand in a rough draft before the final deadline, which I will correct and return to them for re-writing. Never have more than 10 per cent taken advantage of the offer.

● Before the end of the year there are several interesting banquets to attend.

We hold the annual *Mennonite Mirror* dinner meeting at the St. Regis Hotel, with about 60 loyal supporters from all over the province. We are royally entertained by Heidi Geddert, who must surely rank as one of the most talented singers in Winnipeg today. We thought that we had better get her to sing for us before she advances to leagues beyond our reach. We are not disappointed. Another dinner takes place in the Friedensfeld Hall south of Steinbach. The energetic supporters of the Mennonite Village Museum manage to fill the hall at \$50 a plate. The food is excellent and after the political sermon of the Hon. Jac Epp (having thrown snowballs at him in our youth I still swallow at having to call him "Honorable" now), the antics of Clint Toews, and the sparkling singing of Ed and Millie Hildebrand, none of us is sorry to have made the trip. I can't resist telling the Hon. Epp that for a Conservative he is not a bad guy. After some of the comments made this evening he must wonder, though, whether people admire him mostly for the large budget that he controls. The multi-billion dollar figure is repeated often enough to awe even the most jaded listener.

A noon-hour luncheon of MEDA brings almost 100 Mennonite business and professional people to the Fort Garry Hotel for a discussion of profit sharing. It is good to see "Mennonite" firms like Palliser, Loewen Millwork, D. W. Friesens, and Assiniboine Travel Service, (among others) take the lead in sharing their profits with their workers. I have hired a student to do some research on this for me, and we have discovered that there are currently about 25,000 profit-sharing schemes in Cana-

da but only about 300 of these (or less than two per cent) involve workers. The rest distribute profits only to company executives. It is true, of course, that every company distributes "profits" to workers in the form of wages and other benefits but, as David DeFehr points out at this meeting, by distributing profits in addition to wages a company also begins to distribute information and responsibility. The enterprise, through such action, begins to demonstrate the deep interdependence of all who work in it. That kind of brotherhood is both idealistic and very concrete.

● An evening in November is spent at the Concert Hall to watch the new, brief film on Koop and Buhr, and to listen to Mennonite music. Since the program is reviewed elsewhere in this issue I will comment only on the film. I go with great expectations, having loved Koop and Buhr ever since the late Mr. Jake Peters introduced us to them in our Grade IX German class many moons ago, but am quite disappointed. The actors throw their lines at the audience, as they would in a play. Instead of "listening in" on the subtle comic exchanges of two characters we are assaulted by set speeches which make us laugh at the characters rather than with them. I hope, however, that this effort will not discourage others from mining this rich lode of humour.

● Another evening late in the year takes us to a 10th anniversary celebration of the faculty union at the university. A decade has passed since some of us decided, rather reluctantly, to challenge the way in which basic decisions were being made at the university. When I found myself the elected head of this protest movement I was often

reminded of one of Charlie Chaplin's movies, in which he emerges from a manhole only to find a protest group moving down the street toward him. He grabs the red flag that warned pedestrians about the open manhole, and, flag in hand, runs down the street trying to get away from the mob. Instead he is swept along by it, and before long he is marching at the front of it, red flag waving. The poor fellow is eventually arrested as one of the leaders. I couldn't claim quite such innocence when some of us requested the right to bargain over basic working conditions, but none of us knew in the beginning that this would lead to the first faculty union at any large English-speaking university in Canada. It has, on the whole, worked well, as even the current administration acknowledges. The cake at the party is donated by the university president. We wonder whether we should be suspicious about that, or whether it is poisoned. Since I am on one of my tri-annual diets I have a good excuse for not trying it.

• I awake one morning in mid-December to a shattering realization. I have reached the **Big 50!** How did this happen? A few years ago I was in the prime of youth. Now suddenly half a century has passed, without my being any the wiser for it. I decide that some decisive action is necessary, but my wife is not amused when I tell her my plan. I will take a plane to Churchill, walk out onto the ice of Hudson's Bay, and continue walking till I come face to face with my first polar bear. If it leaves me alone, I will return home and take it as a sign that the next few decades are filled with promise. If I am not left alone — well . . . After a good cup of tea and a warm slap on the back the crisis is over. This too will pass, when I turn 51.

• The end of the year itself brings great promise. There are numerous visits with good friends. The Christmas eve candle service works its usual magic, and the message of Christmas is enough to cheer even a 50-year-old. Between Christmas and New Year there is a conference to attend in Dallas, Texas, and after the New Year we will all be together as a family for a week. There are also many good books to read, having nothing to do with economics. I look forward especially to Gerald Friesen's history of western Canada, to Jack Thiessen's volume of sermons (yes, you read right), and to Sylvia Fraser's new book about one of my favorite cities, *Berlin Solstice*. Greetings to you in the New Year. May we do more than survive '85. **mm**

## Playhouse no place for Choir's performance

a review by Ed Unrau

If Helen Litz, director of the Mennonite Children's Choir, had attended the performance of her choir's *Scrooge* on December 8 as a purchaser of a green ticket, she might well have decided to refund the admission fee to the green ticket holders who had the misfortune of sitting in the far reaches of the balcony. The people sitting in the last eight rows of the balcony were two storeys above the stage and against the front street wall; so high and so far away in fact that both the visual and vocal detail was lost. The last eight rows of the upper balcony should never have been sold for this event and those who had the misfortune of paying \$8 per seat to attend were cheated in that they had no way of enjoying the fine performance the children's choir is capable of. Their disappointment was evident in their comments to each other and in the fact that few in the upper section where this reviewer sat even bothered to applaud the performance far below.

The evening opened with a medley of Christmas carols, which were sung with the polish and precision that has made this choir famous. Unfortunately, the voices of the soloists did not reach more than half way up the balcony; their voices were so faint that it was hard to tell whether they were singing or whispering. In spite of the lost voices of the soloists, this medley of carols was the one part of the evening's program the people in the upper reaches of the balcony could enjoy and hear.

After an intermission the choir along with an adult cast presented *Scrooge*, an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* by Leslie Brirusse. For those in the upper balcony, there was not much to enjoy because at least a third of the production's dialogue and music was simply lost, another third was barely audible, while the remaining third could be heard. Accordingly, this reviewer can't comment too accurately on how well the musical was performed.

But there are two things that deserve comment. The sets were marvellous in creating the appropriate visual effect, although one felt that there were too many scene changes because time seems twice as long when you are sitting in the dark waiting for the curtain to re-open. Second, why the caricature of Scrooge as a bent-over old man? Scrooge would have been more believable as an erect, thin, imperious ascetic-looking gentleman. Instead he looked merely silly.

On the whole, however, the production moved from one scene to the other visually and vocally the way it was planned. Mrs. Litz, her choir, their parents, the adult cast, and the support staff are to be commended for their effort and encouraged to do another major production soon, but in a hall where *everyone* has a reasonable chance of enjoying a production that is worth the price of the admission. **mm**



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## A study of Christian growth to be cherished for honesty

a review by Harry Loewen

The appearance of this book is a most unusual event. It is the biographical profile of a man who is still alive — in fact he is not much past his middle-age prime — and whose activities are not as yet safely concluded so as not to embarrass anyone. It is also a book about an ordinary Mennonite, a member of the traditionally "quiet" in the land, whose achievements do not lie in scholarship, published books, or other accomplishments of the mind. This man did not even make it into big business, or the teaching profession, or into provincial or federal politics.

Moreover, the story of Peter Rempel is a puzzle in many ways. What do you think of a man who at one time condemned many human joys as being worldly and sinful and later was the first and loudest in singing "O My Darling Clementine?" How do you explain a person's transition from pounding younger Bible school students into submission to rigid rules, to becoming the pastor of one of the most liberal and radical Mennonite churches in Canada? And yet, all those who knew Peter Rempel and read this story would not think of calling him a hypocrite. Both his colleagues and the many persons he counselled respected and loved him.

This book, written by an accomplished story teller, is not hagiography — the story of a saint — but the image of a man as he really was. In a sense it is somewhat surprising that the writer is so scrupulously honest and frank about the man he respects and learned to love. At times it is painful to read about a man who was domineering, traditional and patriarchal in his dealings with his family, and sometimes difficult to get along with. Peter's wife Mary sheds much light on the bright and darker sides of the man she married and loved, yet who

was sometimes the cause of her own tensions and difficulties. But in this area, too, Peter Rempel experienced later a veritable revolution in his life.

It was Peter Rempel's good fortune to transcend the many limitations that life in the closed Mennonite communities had placed upon him. The reader of this biography learns that in spite of odds against him and the lack of an advanced and liberating formal education, Rempel, with an almost super-human determination and inner strength was able to overcome religious, social and institutional obstacles and in the end become a spiritual mentor and religious-social leader in his Alberta environment and beyond.

It may not be inappropriate or far-fetched to compare the purpose of Peter Rempel's life and work to that of Jesus of Nazareth whom he sought to follow. Like Jesus, Peter believes in addressing the many needs of the whole person — not only the spiritual needs which many others seek to satisfy with God-talk and a sweet Jesus as Saviour of souls. Rempel knows that it is of little value to speak to a delinquent boy from a correctional institution about his soul's salvation when he is in need of bodily, social and psychological mending and healing. In this respect Peter certainly has his theology straight. He believes and lives according to the words of Christ to his followers: ". . . as you did . . . to . . . the least of . . . my brethren, you did it to me."

The story of Peter Rempel, however, is more than an interesting account of a man. It is also the portrait of a changing Mennonite community in Alberta. In sketching the Mennonite world in which Rempel lived and developed, Urie Bender shows how the western Canadian Mennonites in the '20s, '30s and '40s not only had to contend with

harsh pioneer beginnings but also struggle against narrow thinking, religious fanaticism, and often misguided leaders of church-communities in which youth, human joys, and genuine feelings and love were often repressed. Once he had struggled through to his own freedom, Peter Rempel became one of those young leaders in Alberta who was able to help Mennonite young people and middle-aged prisoners of a closed system to experience the liberty which Christ brings.

The book is divided into five unequal parts, with chapters dealing with Peter as a growing boy, a rebel, a student, a bus driver, a husband and father, a camp director, a pastor, a counselor, and the builder of a dream — the Youth Orientation Units (YOU), a lodge west of Edmonton where drug and alcohol abusers and boys who are in trouble with the law are helped toward rehabilitation and wholeness.

Like a *Bildungsroman*, this book is the story of Peter Rempel's education, development, change, and coming to spiritual maturity. The story is as interesting as a well-written novel. The reader can identify with the protagonist who is an ordinary person but whose life takes on universal dimensions and significance. The book will be enjoyed by young and older readers, especially all those who like to see Christianity with a very human face.

A useful index and seven-colored photographs are included in the book and Rudy Wiebe has written the foreword. The author, the Alberta Mennonite Heritage Organization, sponsors of the biography, and the publisher are to be commended for producing an excellent book.

Urie A. Bender, *Stumbling Heavenward: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man Peter Rempel* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1984), 304 pages, Softcover \$12.95.

The book may be purchased from your bookstore or from: Hyperion Press Limited, 300 Wales Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2M 2S9.

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## A "multi-media" evening, Mennonite-style

a review by Ed Unrau

It defies all conventional wisdom to put Heischraitje 'n Willa Honig, a selection of a *capella Kernleider*, a movie premiere, a pitch for funds, and a chamber presentation of part of the *Mennonite Piano Concerto* on the same program. The problem with such a diverse program is that you have no way of knowing if it will work until it's over. In the case of "an evening of Mennonite music and entertainment," presented by the Mennonite Media Society Inc. at the Centennial Concert Hall, November 29, this diverse program worked rather well. Indeed, as one of the speakers observed, "Mennonites are more qualified than most to move from humor to seriousness in one evening."

The virtually full-house audience warmed to the "down home" music and Low German lyrics of Heischraitje 'n Willa Honig. Even though Low German words set to well-known English melodies doesn't always sound "comfortable," the stories thus told in song were the kind of anecdotal humor many Mennonites enjoy. Having demonstrated that they can entertain, this group should now develop material in

its own right to show that its talents run deeper than that required to recycle well-known tunes through humorous lyrics.

The premiere of *Koop en Bua enn Dietschlaund* followed. Although the audience laughed at the right places, they laughed superficially, not heartily as they would if they had really been charmed by the movie. The fact that the film was somewhat out of its element in that it was screened in a huge cavern of a hall with a sound track that reverberated from the walls to no advantage, may have undermined its qualities. Most viewers were simply too far away to appreciate the fine points.

The story takes Koop and Buhr into a "luxury" restaurant where their country manners and expectations put them out of their element. But their efforts to adjust to the situation lacked the charm that's needed to rouse the sympathy of all of us who have found ourselves in similar situations. Further, the script did not show Koop and Buhr as having innate qualities of character to make up for their lack of "city sophistication."

At intermission there were similar comments. As well, some felt that the actors themselves were not at ease enough with Low German to be convincingly authentic as Koop and Buhr. At least one person thought that the filmmakers had made the mistake of treating the sketch the way they would handle it on stage, and did not exploit it cinematically. Finally, the script was not a straightforward adaptation of an Arnold Dyck original sketch, instead it was a kind of composite, so it was not Arnold Dyck's story we saw, but the script writer's.

It should be possible to capture in film the wry humor of Arnold Dyck and the contrasting, but complementary, characters of Koop and Buhr. The situations they find themselves in are situations that are more or less common to us all, full of natural humor even while they strike a thoughtful chord within. The people who shepherded this film to completion must certainly undertake another.

After intermission the collage of "Bua bloopers," that is the error outtakes from the featured movie, as well as clips from the making of *And When They Shall Ask*, presented with in-person voice-over narration by David Dueck, was a valuable insight into the problems of film-making. Interwoven throughout this section was an appeal for funds; although each member of the audience paid an admission, they were, however, encouraged to contribute more. There were some who later objected to the fund drive, but the appeal should hardly have come as a surprise because all the advance advertising and the night's program billed it as a "fund-raising event."

The Mennonite Media Society also presented a plaque to Dr. B. B. Fast to pay tribute to the support the Fast foundation gave to the writing of the *Mennonite Concerto*, recognition that is richly deserved because the investment was amply rewarded by a concerto of high quality and relevance to the Mennonite community.

William Baerg demonstrated his considerable talent in blending voices into a choral instrument with a medley of six *Kernlieder*. Although somewhat out of place, being juxtaposed with the Low-German music that opened the evening and the movie, it did not take long for the audience to "shift gears" into a serious mood as the strains of these familiar German melodies filled the hall.

The evening concluded with a perfor-

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mance of the second movement of the *Mennonite Piano Concerto* by pianist Irmgard Baerg. Victor Davies' score was adapted for performance with five string players and second piano by Arthur Polson. The scaling down of the work from orchestra to chamber group was entirely successful. One hesitates to say that it was an improvement, because that would be unfair to the composer's original vision for the piece, but one must say that in some respects, the chamber-size presentation of the second movement was much closer to the spirit of the *Kernlied* that comprises the theme and variations, a kind of contemplative reverence. *Wehrlos und verlassen*, a hymn with one of those gently rememberable melodies, is the theme for the movement, and one hears this melody in various ways throughout (with even a touch of Gershwin), but the power of the movement is the constant return to the original *Kernlied* melody, reassuring and always reverent. The performance was for many the highlight of the evening. It was also a performance to be cherished.

If the Fast Foundation deserves a plaque for awarding a grant to commission the Mennonite concerto in the first instance, Mr. Polson deserves a medal (with a large cheque) for his work in scaling it down from orchestra to cham-

ber ensemble. The reason is that it is now within the resources of gifted amateurs to perform the work in our churches.

Although this reviewer thinks that the "evening of Mennonite music and entertainment" worked over all, he was hard-pressed to find anyone who shared his view. There was no one who thoroughly enjoyed the movie, and these observers voiced essentially the same criticisms as those expressed in this review and then some. As well, these casual spokesmen questioned the wisdom of combining so many diverse elements into one evening, and of not

grouping the "light" and the "heavy" components before and after the intermission. There was, however, the feeling that it would have worked better if the master of ceremonies had used a prepared script to provide continuity from one part of the program to the next.

Finally, the members of the audience who insisted on whispering and complaining about the fact that the Mennonite concerto seemed always to start over again should know that their mutterings not only disturbed those who sat near them but carried throughout the concert hall, spoiling the performance for almost everyone else. **mm**

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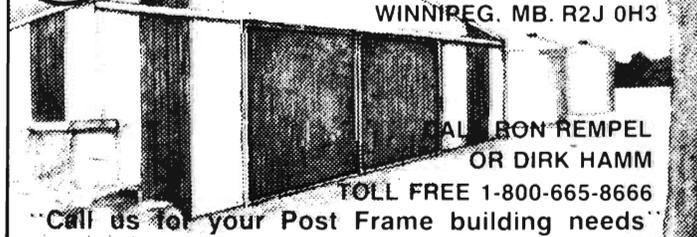


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# Mennonite schools sing for their Christmas

a review by Al Reimer

*The Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools in Manitoba, Christmas Carol Concert '84, Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall, December 3, 1984.*

For all those who were there to receive it, this choral concert by the seven Mennonite private schools of Manitoba proved to be a generous Christmas gift. Not since the big centennial choral concert in 1974 has this kind of Mennonite musical evening been held at the Concert Hall. Crosstown Credit Union, who sponsored it, as well as the co-ordinators — Ken H. Loewen and John Friesen — and the many participants who made it work, deserve sincere congratulations. While not capacity, the audience was large enough to fill up most of the seats of Winnipeg's premier concert hall.

From an artistic point of view, however, the Concert Hall is not entirely satisfactory for this type of concert. A school choir of 30-40 voices simply cannot produce enough sound to fill its cavernous acoustical spaces. Perhaps, also, conductors, not fully aware of the

problem, had selected too much quiet and delicately sealed Christmas music for this vast hall. Or perhaps they just didn't get enough rehearsal time in the hall to make the necessary adjustments. Whatever the reasons, the singing of the seven school choirs in the first half sounded much too subdued, too "lost" to give the audience that sense of excitement required to make an evening of special entertainment truly memorable.

Fortunately, the second half of the concert made the evening. Here the individual choirs were combined into a fine, youthfully robust mass choir of 300 voices singing with full-throated exuberance under the energetic and experienced baton of Bill Baerg. The sound and mood produced by this augmented choir was just right for the place and the occasion and perfectly fulfilled the expectations of an audience that had come to have its Christmas spirit stimulated by a joyous celebration of Christmas music. The highlight was Daniel Pinkham's three-part *Christmas Cantata*, which contained just enough modern dissonances and tricky harmonies and rhythms to make a powerful and satisfying impression. The popular carols sung by the audience before and after the choir offerings also helped to enrich the worshipful mood of the evening.

That is not to say that all the good singing was done by the mass choir. The individual choirs, given their acoustical limitations, did some beautiful work in the first half as well. From the colorfully dressed tots of the Mennonite Elementary School choir on up, all the choirs had been well prepared and given worthwhile music to sing. But here again the larger choirs like the MB Collegiate Institute Concert Choir and the Steinbach Bible College Collegiate Choir, conducted by Rudy Schellenberg, had a distinct advantage in being able to produce an adequate volume of sound. The MB choir had a particularly good bass section, I thought, as did the Westgate choir. The Steinbach choir rose to the challenge of Mendelsohn's intricate *There Shall a Star Come Out of Jacob*, and the Winkler Bible Institute

Choir, although small, was very effective in its two carols, under the direction of Harold Siebert. And a special word of praise for the latter choirs's accompanist Janice Defehr, who played with a musical touch not often heard at this level. Peter Braun conducted the MB choir entirely from memory, a practise other directors might do well to emulate.

On reflection, it was a concert that left one filled with gratitude for the excellent work being done in choral music by a host of dedicated young conductors and eager choristers in our private schools. Mennonite choral music is alive and thriving, if this concert is any indication. And once again I was struck by the superb diction — both in English and in German — that seems to be a hallmark of Mennonite choirs.

One other minor criticism comes to mind. I realize that welcomes, dedications and thank-yous spoken on stage are very much in the Mennonite tradition on such occasions as this. Could not the speeches, however, be relegated to the printed program rather than being read in their entirety to an assembled audience eager for the musical entertainment to get underway?

One can only hope that this kind of Christmas choral concert by our schools will become an annual event. If it does, it might be a good idea to hold it in one of our larger churches and give it twice in order to accommodate everybody, rather than dissipating its effect in the Concert Hall.

mm

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# On 'Being Mennonite'

by Dr. Peter Lorenz Neufeld

During this era of strong focus on multiculturalism and ethnic roots, there's a large group of Canadians whose ethnic status is frequently doubted by some: those of us who don't belong to a Mennonite church denomination; somewhat akin to the Jewish situation except that Mennonites don't have a country of their own. My guess is this category includes at least one third of all ethnic Mennonites.

Some of my Mennonite relatives and friends claim that when my wife (of same ethnic background) and I left the Mennonite Church in late 1950s and joined the United Church, we ceased being Mennonites. Presumably, overnight we reverted to being simply a mixture of ethnic Dutch, Swiss, etc.

To many, it seems, ethnicity (at least where this particular group is concerned) somehow revolves around holding membership in an active Mennonite denomination. Yet, if that silly criteria is applied, then even the children and young people aren't truly ethnic Mennonites either until they are baptized and actually join a congregation. Also, is there a cut-off date: 18 years, 25, 30, 40, 50, 60 by when someone must join to become a Mennonite? If not, then someone of similar ethnic background who never joins that church, or one who leaves it, is every bit as ethnically Mennonite as the most ardent church member.

As an historian, I can readily see why immigration officials had trouble categorizing 'Mennonites' migrating to Canada during the 1920s: 'Dutch Mennonites', 'German Mennonites', 'Russian Mennonites', 'Swiss Mennonites', 'Prussian Mennonites'!

Perhaps 'being a Mennonite' does refer more to ethnicity than church membership? About nine years ago, a comprehensive study in Manitoba dealt

with Changes in Rural Manitoba's 'Ethnic Mosaic' 1921 to 1961. Population figures were divided into four broad groups: British, French, other whites, non-whites. From the 'other whites' category, two ethnic groups were chosen for concentrated study. One was Mennonite because, "Not only does this group most clearly meet the qualifications of 'ethnicity,' but numerically it represents one of the more important ethnic groups in the province."

Ethnicity stems from the genetic structure of a group of people who intermarry within that group for centuries. Somewhat like man developing a new breed of farm animals, for instance. Even if there's no country Menno, the term 'Mennonite' as commonly used now revolves around ethno-nationality factors — relates to terms like Anglo-Saxon, Swede and Ukrainian, rather than in narrow church affiliation context like Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic. It may have started out like that four centuries ago, but it's obviously not like that today.

That the Mennonites face a much greater identity problem in the future goes without saying. Many of us (myself included) already have brothers- and sisters-in-law, daughters- and sons-in-law of ethnic backgrounds other than Mennonite; consequently, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of partly one, partly another (or even more) ethnic background.

For those readers who don't know me, I'm the former high school teacher turned school trustee, research farmer and writer who wrote the 1968 true historical novel *Aurora: Rebellion of a Manitoba Farm Boy* which created a bit of a furore in some Mennonite circles. Set in communities like Boissevain, Altona, Morden, Winnipeg, Victoria

Beach, Brandon, Glenboro, Portage la Prairie and Minnedosa, though financially a failure (a few copies still available at \$5 delivered from publisher Glendosa Research Centre, Minnedosa, MB), the book was nevertheless purchased by hundreds of public, collegiate and university libraries, used as text and reference by several university classes and generally launched me into the professional writing field. Subsequent writing accomplishments, including a second book and some 500 feature newspaper and magazine articles (several dozen related to Mennonite history) may be checked out in 'Who's Who' type books like *Contemporary Authors*, *Writers Directory*, *World Who's Who of Authors*, *Who's Who in the Midwest*, *Marquis' Who's Who* and *Dictionary of International Biography*.

Don't get me wrong. I have no axe to grind with Mennonites. Far from it! I harbor only positive feelings towards most Mennonites, respect them, grew up as one, count many as personal friends and am related to countless more, consider myself an ethnic Mennonite and am proud of it. But I do see red whenever someone suggests that changing to another denomination somehow changes my ethnicity. No way! That revolves around conceiving babies, not a pen stroke. Nothing on earth can change the fact that an ethnic Mennonite I was born and an ethnic Mennonite I will die.

I'm deeply proud of my ethnic roots. My deceased mother, Agatha Lohrenz Neufeld, was truly the best Christian and Mennonite I've ever known. I find Mennonite history not only fascinating but often also of real historical significance internationally. For example, in my own immediate family, two uncles might have affected Russian history; both died in Manitoba in recent years. During the Russian Revolution as a young teen-ager, one almost shot the moderate socialist general and briefly Russian premier Alexander Kerensky who was billeted in my mother's home. It was an "on purpose by accident" incident with a soldier's rifle he believed unloaded but wasn't and simply misfired. The other fought in the czarist (White) Army for years and, together with other ethnic brothers in like circumstance, was later hunted by the victorious Reds. Fortunately a former classmate, by then a high-ranking Communist official, devised a plan to help those veterans escape to Canada by supplying two sets of passports: one with names and data of men with simi-

lar statistics killed during that terrible civil war and aftermath but with applicants' own photos and the second being fully legitimate. The latter were well hidden while the former was used within Russia, destroyed after crossing the border and with the latter used subsequently. I wonder if Russian officialdom ever tumbled to the fact that some 100 "enemies of the state" vanished into thin air, whereas another 100 "dead men" emigrated.

As a local school trustee with both Manitoba Association of School Trustees executive and Manitoba Department of Education curriculum responsibilities, I'm becoming increasingly concerned about the new Heritage Languages program in our schools, which supposedly relates to our ethnicity. I'm definitely not opposed to languages like German, Ukrainian and Hebrew being taught, because I took German myself in a public high school, as my wife and various of our siblings did in a private one. However, the Heritage Languages concept goes vastly deeper than acquiring a second language. Already, several school divisions, who opted for the program and became deeply involved, have their resources not only strained to the breaking-point but equally important their regular (English-French) program beginning to suffer. And those are the better-off divisions. If the Heritage Languages trend continues to mushroom, I believe, the whole education system could grind to a halt within a decade. Frankly, regarding our own ethnicity, does the German language equate that closely to Mennonite heritage? Seems to me I read somewhere that during our people's sojourn in Prussia (now Poland), Mennonites dropped the Dutch language hitherto used in their schools and churches to switch to German — the official language of the country to which they had emigrated.

Some claim that losing a particular language means losing a supposedly related culture. I just don't buy that. At most, it might mean losing the uniqueness of a static (as it once existed) culture. But there's no such thing as ever losing a culture. If you created a new country (Utopia!) on an isolated island with no outside communication with 200 Mennonite, 500 Anglo-Saxon and 300 French residents, left them a century to inter-marry, you wouldn't have LOST the Mennonite, Anglo-Saxon or French cultures. A new (Utopian) culture would have evolved consisting roughly of one-fifth Mennonite, one-half Anglo-Saxon and three-tenth

French characteristics.

All that equating a particular language with a certain culture and heritage does, it seems to me, is try to recapture a culture as it was years ago.

People change daily, and with it culture. Is a Mennonite who speaks only German somehow more ethnic Mennonite than one who speaks only English? Or French? **mm**

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**Southern View**

Enclosed is cheque for donation to your magazine which we enjoy very much. I wish to draw your attention to a couple of things.

In one of the recent issues a writer gives an interesting account and history of two CPR ships which brought immigrants across the ocean in the 20's. He failed to mention one very important ship "The Empress of France" on which my family arrived in Quebec City on August 8, 1924. I was a young lad among the 1,000 Mennonites who stepped onto Canadian soil from the famous boat. Why was it not mentioned in the article? It made a number of trips in the mid-twenties and many of us who travelled on it would have been interested to hear what happened to it.

We do not often see coverage of important events and achievements of Mennonites in Ontario, so I want to draw your attention to the outstanding performance of a young student of Eden Christian College this year. This school is a MB private high school which is planning its 40th anniversary in 1985. I taught math and science in the late 40's and early 50's when it was a fledgling institution struggling for survival. During these 40 years it has produced scores of excellent graduates serving in many parts of the world in many professions. You should cover the anniversary and history of the school in one of your issues next year.

Arthur Harder,  
Lantana, Fla.

**Unloved Mirror**

Kindly cancel our *Mennonite Mirror* which has been sent to us for the past few years.

We did not request it and during the time we have received it, I have been looking for some redeeming articles and have found them to be rare. I do not think we need a magazine which extols the virtues of "Mennonite culture". I believe I am a Mennonite because of my faith and commitment to this religion and not because of birth or name. Once we mix ethnicity and religion, we are in trouble. My children are Mennonites by choice and not by birth.

Articles in German or Low German are just not read at our house and I fail to feel guilty about it. Much could be done to make this a truly fine and excellent magazine.

Charlotte Klassen,  
Winnipeg.



**review**

**Amish Quilts**

**A review by Andre Oberle**

*Pellman, Rachel T. Amish Quilt Patterns. Intercourse: Good Books, 1984. Paperback, 128 pages, \$10.95.*

This fascinating book is an important companion volume to *The World of Amish Quilts* (see H. Loewen's review in the *Mennonite Mirror*, September 1984). Antique Amish quilts are noted for their strikingly unpretentious composition, their unique display of colour and their intricate and meticulously executed quilting. They are voraciously sought by collectors everywhere. Since they have become increasingly difficult to find, the author suggests that you make your own reproductions which might well become the heirlooms of tomorrow.

The manual *Amish Quilt Patterns*, written by Rachel Pellman, gives very detailed information on the construction of 31 Amish quilts, patterned on precious antiques, and provides twelve of the most important quilting patterns. All patterns are given full size, so that they can be readily traced to make accurate templates and each quilt is analyzed and presented in easy to follow scale drawings.

The projects include relatively simple as well as highly complex patterns and should prove to be a creative challenge for both the beginner and the experienced quilter. Especially useful is the introductory section in which the reader is given valuable information on fab-

ric and colour selection and many helpful hints on all aspects of quilt construction, such as planning the layout, colour composition, framing, quilting techniques and the binding of the finished quilt. Even seasoned quilters will be surprised by the many helpful suggestions offered in this section. A selective bibliography on quilts and their construction and on the Amish, as well as an index and a detailed table of content make the book easy to use. The pages with the quilting patterns are perforated and may be removed from the book without damaging it. This feature should make tracing particularly easy.

The book *Amish Quilt Patterns* will not only prove invaluable to the would-be quilter but is also an essential tool to a full understanding of the intricate structure of some two hundred antique quilts presented in full colour in the companion volume *The World of Amish Quilts*. In both works the author's thorough understanding of Amish quilting practices and her insights into the world of the Amish is exemplary.

Anyone interested in the quilt patterns of the Amish or in textiles and crafts in general will find this book invaluable. For those who already own *The World of Amish Quilts* this pattern book presents a most essential companion volume. For all lovers and makers of fine quilts the two books are a must.

*Andre Oberle is associate professor of German at the University of Winnipeg.*

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# Leichenzug im Schneesturm

## Vor zehn Jahren starb die bekannte Kindergärtnerin Tante Anna

Eine Erinnerung von Hedi Knoop

**K**aum sind wir im January 1975, aus Deutschland kommend, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Kanada eingetroffen, mein Sohn Wieland und ich, da machen wir uns bereits auf den Weg zu meiner neunzigjährigen Tante. Sie lebt seit längerem in dem mennonitischen Alters- und Pflegeheim Bethania. Wir fragen einfach nach "Tante Anna". Unter diesem Namen kennt sie jeder, denn sie hat mehrere Jahrzehnte lang als Kindergärtnerin unter den Mennoniten Winnepegs gearbeitet.

Jetzt aber liegt sie vor uns und will sterben. Wir begrüßen sie; sie erkennt uns und lächelt. Und sie streckt Wieland die knochigen Arme entgegen und sagt: Gib mir einen Kuss.

Himmel hilf! Was wird geschehen? Wird mein vierzehnzähriger Irrwisch von einem Sohn seine sterbende Gross-tante nun küssen oder nicht?

Er tritt dicht an ihr Bett, beugt sich über sie, hackt mit seinem Gesicht in Richtung ihres Gesichts und ist fertig. Ich atme auf; Tante Anna aber ist unzufrieden: Er hat ja gar nicht getroffen, sagt sie trocken.

Jeden Tag besuchen wir sie, fünfmal insgesamt. Dann stirbt sie und verlässt diese Welt. Ihre Beerdigung wird auf den folgenden Freitag festgesetzt.

An diesem Tag sehen wir sie zum letzten Mal. In ihrem Sarg im Vorraum der Kirche. Im Altersheim hatte sie eingefallene Backen und einen winzigen, faltigen Mund. Nun ist sie vollwangig und rosig wie Schneewittchen inmitten einer Fülle von echten und unechten Blumen. Der Deckel wird geschlossen, und nach den Anweisungen des Beerdigungsdirektors folgen wir, die nahen Verwandten, dem Sarg in den fast voll besetzten grossen Kirchenraum. Dass nicht sämtliche Plätze besetzt sind, so erfahre ich, ist darauf zurückzuführen, dass es draussen schneit und dass ein Schneesturm angesagt worden ist. Wieland sitzt erstaunlich ruhig neben mir, obwohl die Trauerfeier, teils deutsch, teils englisch, eineinhalb Stunden dauert.

Während der nachfolgenden Kaffeetafel im Kirchenkeller setzt bereits das Schneetreiben ein, und als wir hinaus-treten wollen, schlägt uns der Sturm ins Gesicht, und die parkenden Autos stehen unter einer dicken Decke aus Neuschnee.

Wir wollen Tante Anna in das 40 Meilen entfernte Städtchen Steinbach bringen. Dort hat sie viele Jahre gelebt und als Kindergärtnerin gewirkt, und dort will sie begraben werden. Bei dem Unwetter werden nur die Trauergäste aus Steinbach sie begleiten. Wieland und ich fahren im Auto meiner Kusine Frieda mit.

Hermann, ihr Mann und unser Fahrer, drückt sich nun den Hut ins Gesicht und arbeitet sich durch den wirbelnden Schnee hindurch zum Auto. Wir folgen ihm und gelangen atemlos ins Wageninnere. Hermann lässt den Motor an und wir warten, bis der Leichenwagen langsam und schwerfällig vom Parkplatz auf die Strasse biegt. Ihm folgt der zweite, dann der dritte Wagen, und nun ist die Reihe an uns. Wir pflügen durch den Schneeteppich des Parkplatzes und steuern die Ausfahrt an. Auf der Strasse folgen wir dem Vordermann in die Richtung auf den Transcanada Highway. Bereits an der ersten roten Ampel verlieren wir den Leichenzug im Schneegestöber.

Unser Scheibenwischer tut sein Äusserstes, jedoch bleibt es dunkel im Auto, und die Strasse ist kaum zu erkennen. Nach längerer Stadtfahrt biegen wir nun auf den sechsspurigen Highway in Richtung Steinbach. Unseren Leichenzug haben wir nicht nur verloren, sondern auch vergessen, und wir denken nur noch daran, heil nach Hause zu kommen.

So ist das mit dem Schnee. Dir fallen zwei, drei Flocken auf die Handfläche, kleine, vergängliche Kristalle von eigenartiger Schönheit und Einmaligkeit, unvergleichlich zart und fein. Oder du siehst an einem Adventsmorgen zum Wohnzimmerfenster hinaus. Es fallen grosse Schneeflocken vom Himmel, lautlos, unendlich friedlich

und still. Sie legen sich sanft auf Bäume und Zäune, die Welt wird weihnachtlich weiss, und du stehst und schaust, auf besondere Weise beglückt.

Aber dein Sohn ballt die Flocken mit beiden Händen zusammen und wirft einen Schneeball. Er kann eine Fensterscheibe zertrümmern oder jemanden schmerzlich am Kopf treffen. Milliarden von Flocken zusammengesprengt können eine Lawine bilden, die sich löst, zu Tal stürzt und alles mit sich ins Verderben reisst.

Und die Flocken können wie jetzt, pulverisiert und vom Nordwind gepeitscht, die Luft mit winzigen Nadelspitzen füllen, die Sonne verdunkeln, über die Landschaft einen fliegenden, wirbelnden Teppich ziehen und die vertraute Welt in ein gestaltloses Inferno tauchen. Sind das dann noch die gleichen Flocken, die lieblichen Kristalle auf deiner Hand? Wer hat sie verzaubert, in bösartige Irrlichter verwandelt, in Erinnyen einer chaotischen Vorzeit?

Hermann fährt und schwitzt dabei. Es ist nicht sehr kalt, aber niemand kann sagen, wie sich dieser Blizzard weiter verhalten wird.

Plötzlich beginnt unser Motor zu stottern. Hermann verlangsamt instinktiv das ohnehin geringe Tempo. Im selben Augenblick rast ein Tollkühner in einem Lastwagen an uns vorbei und hüllt uns in eine undurchsichtige Wolke aus Schneestaub. Hermann fährt sekundenlang völlig blind. Kaum haben wir uns von diesem Schreck erholt, da erkennen wir die Umrisse eines gestrandeten Autos am Strassenrand. Es ist bereits von seinen Insassen verlassen worden. Dies wird auch das Schicksal unseres Autos sein, wenn der Motor ganz aussetzt.

Zum Glück taucht nun unmittelbar hinter uns ein Scheinwerfer auf. Wir sind also nicht allein auf der Welt; auch andere kämpfen wie wir mit dem entfesselten Element. Nun wird auch vor uns ein Autoheck sichtbar, und unsere Stimmung steigt.

Aber der Sturm schwillt von neuem an, Vorder- und Hintermann sowie die Strassenränder gehen wieder verloren und für eine Orientierung bleiben nur die schnell verwehenden Reifenspuren in Schnee.

Hermann beisst die Zähne zusammen, Frieda sieht angestrengt auf den Weg hinaus und selbst Wieland vergisst, ein gelangweiltes Teenager-Gesicht zu produzieren.

Endlich, nach einer Ewigkeit, erreichen wir die Abbiegung vom Transcanada nach Steinbach. Und o Wun-

der: wir haben Sicht! Natürlich, denn der Wind weht uns nicht mehr ins Gesicht, vielmehr fegt er uns, nun von der Seite kommend, rigoros die Strasse frei. O Jubel! Nun kann auf den verbliebenen zehn Meilen eigentlich nichts Schlimmes mehr geschehen. Das meint auch unser Motor und erholt sich auf der Stelle.

Wirklich, nicht lange, so biegen wir in das Städtchen ein und gelangen auf den tiefverschneiten Parkplatz des Friedhofes. Es stehen bereits mehrere Autos unseres Leichenzuges da, und wir stapfen nun durch den kniehohen Schnee zur Grabstätte. Dort wird Tante Annas Sarg soeben von kräftigen Männern an einem Stangengestell befestigt, und dann schwebt sie, vom Sturm unsanft hin und her geschaukelt, über ihrem halbverschneiten Grab. Hüte werden vom Kopf gezogen und Hände gefaltet, als der junge Prediger mutig seinen Segen ins Schneegestöber spricht.

Als wir dann gehen, um in Friedas gemütlichem Wohnzimmer einen tröstlichen Imbiss einzunehmen, lassen wir meine arme Tante auf dem Friedhof zurück, auf abenteuerliche Weise zwischen Himmel und Erde schaukelnd. Hoffentlich wird sie nicht noch von einer kräftigen Boe erfasst, die sie vom Gestänge reisst und mit ihr im Hui ins Ungewisse davonfegt . . .

Ach ja, diese meine besonders geliebte Tante, die Tante Anna ungezählter Kindergenerationen, sie ist in ihrem langen, bewegten Leben mit so vielem fertig geworden: mit der schwachen Gesundheit ihrer Jugendjahre in Russland inmitten einer lebhaften, zehnköpfigen Geschwisterschar, dann mit der verspäteten Ausbildung zur Kindergärtnerin im fernen Berlin, danach als Erzieherin in einer Fabrikantenfamilie während der schrecklichen Jahre der russischen Revolution, aber auch als Schriftsetzerin an der „Steinbach Post“ im Einwanderungsland Kanada und vor allem mit dem Aufbau deutscher Kindergärten, erst in Steinbach und danach in Winnipeg, wo sie noch als Achtzigjährige eine Schar von nahezu hundert Kindern in ihren unvergleichlichen und unvergesslichen Bann zog.

Mit alledem ist sie fertig geworden. Und sie wird nun auch zu guter Letzt mit einem Manitoba-Blizzard fertig werden, das glaube ich. Und irgendwie wird sie in dieser stürmischen Nacht hinübergelangen in jene andere und bessere Welt, in die Welt der stillen, weissen Kristalle vielleicht, jedenfalls in den von ihr schon lange ersehnten ewigen Frieden.

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# Plautdietsche Gedichte Aus Nowosibirsk

*In einer Anthologie der sowjet-deutschen Literatur gedruckt in Alma-Ata im Jahre 1981 stehen folgende Gedichte von Hildegard Wiebe, geboren 1941 in Tiegenhagen. Aufgewachsen im Gebiet Orenburg, studierte Frau Wiebe in Nowosibirsk und ist dort in der Pädagogischen Hochschule tätig. Sie soll schon viele Gedichte veröffentlicht haben. (Wir danken Professor A. Malicky, Calgary, für die freundliche Zusage dieser Texte!)*

## Mien Leara

Etj sie die noch soo, aus du weascht  
fää lange, lange Tiet.

Etj dentj aun die soo foaken, doch  
du best fonndoag soo wiet.

Jung kaume wie too di. Du gauft  
een Buak ons enn'e Henj.

Wie sage donn: dee Welt nemmt nijch  
bie onsem Darp een Enj.

Wie weete meea nu aus daut,  
waut stunt enn dienem Buak;  
wie habe aundre Beatja nu  
enn aundre Learasch uck.

Wie weete fäl, jebläwe ess  
mau hia enn doa 'ne Froag.  
Du weetst de Auntwuat, oba du  
best fäl too wiet fonndoag.

## Daut kjeleene Hus

Draußen oft im Sonnenschein  
spielten wir als Kinder munter,  
aber ging die Sonne unter,  
wollten wir zu Hause sein

Tus, wua owends Lijchte brenne  
hinja onse Fenstarut.

Tus, wua Freide send enn Trone,  
tus, wua Dreem enn Merjche wone,  
enn daut Fia jeit nijch ut.

So sieht's nun im Leben aus:  
meistens ist man schon zufrieden,  
doch es kommt auch recht verschieden  
und oft anders als zu Haus.

Tus, wua proste Bloome bleaje  
hinja onse Fenstarut.

Tus, wua aule mie festone,  
wua de Sorje schwind fegone,  
wua daut Fia jeit nijch ut.

Ist es wahr, daß ich nur träum  
und die falsche Hoffnung hege,  
oder führen meine Wege  
mich noch einmal wieder heim?

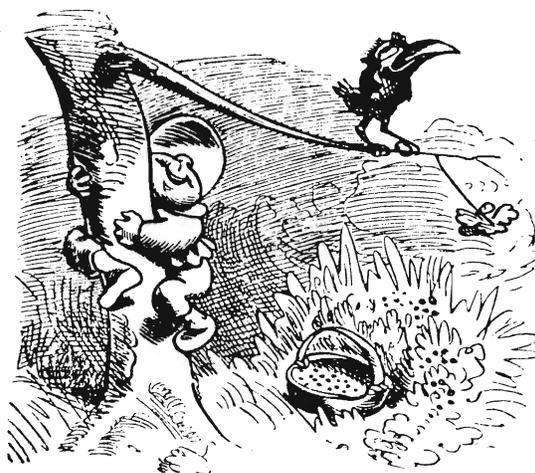
Wada enn daut kjeleene Hustje,  
daut mien Foda haft jebut . . .

Wann etj aulet ha jedone,  
wann mie miene Stund well schlone,  
enn daut Fia jeit sacht ut.

# Hauns Huckebeentje



Die koascha Jung, mett Nome Frets  
Sach 'ne Krauj emm Boomespets.



Enn Frets, daut lot mie junt fuats saje,  
Wull dise Krauj emm Kortje laje.



Doch must hee eascht dee Krauj noch jriepen,  
Dee pienich am deed Messtru piepen.



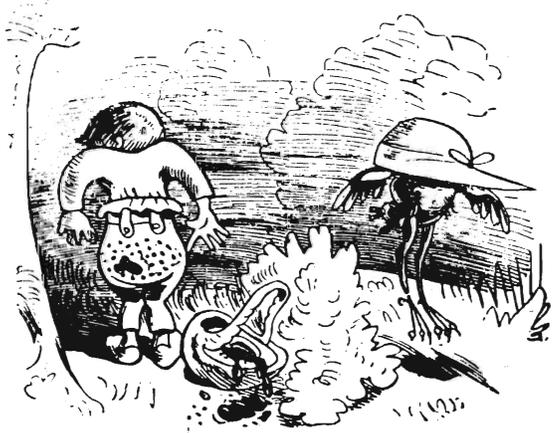
Schwupp! Nu moak dee Frets uck aul  
Ut siene Mets 'ne Foagelfaul.



Meist haud'a ar, doch paust nijch opp,  
Hee schmattad rauf, foll opp'em Kopp.



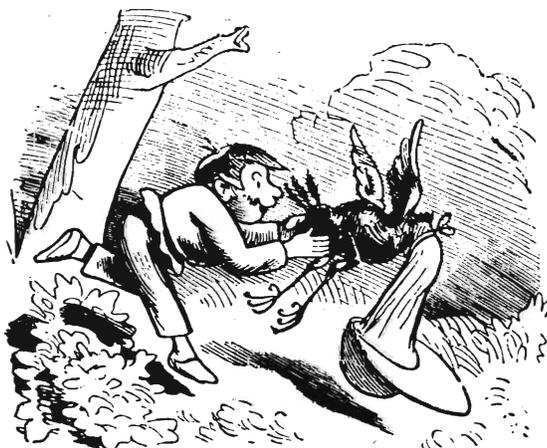
Mank schwoaate Beare, doa sett Frets,  
Dee Schwoaatbuck ess enn siene Mets.



Aum Tsint, daut prätjelt am enn schrinjt,  
Dee Foagel haft nu Angst enn sprinjt.



Dee Schwatbuck well schwind omm nu wenje  
Doch blift emm Bennefooda henje.



Nu hab etj die, Hauns Huckebeentje  
Waut woat sich freie Taunte Leentje.



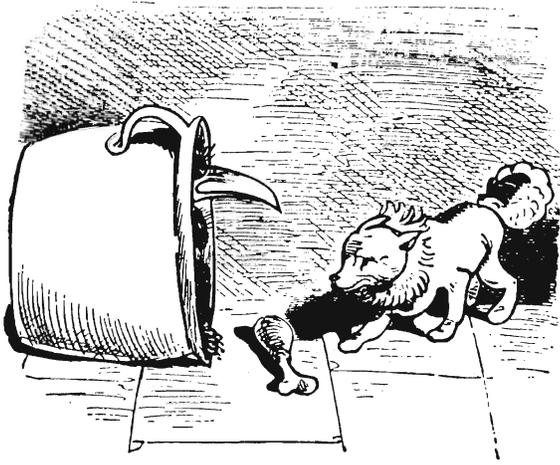
De Taunte kjemmt fonn äre Puat,  
"Een schmocket Tia", äa easchtet Wuat!



Doch fuats no disem Utjesproak,  
Jeit ar de schwoaate Krauj toodoak.



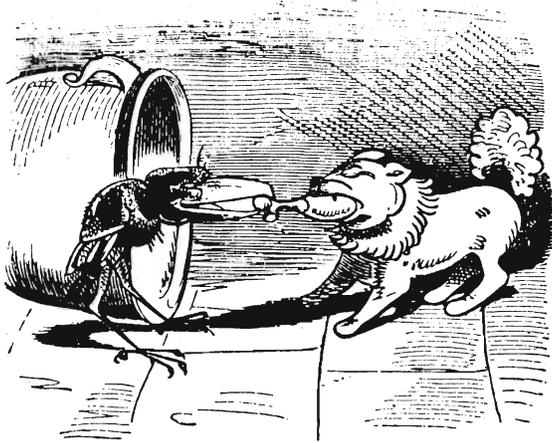
"Oh", schrijcht see, "Dee domme Kjrät,  
Dee bitt, etj hab mie soo fefeat!"



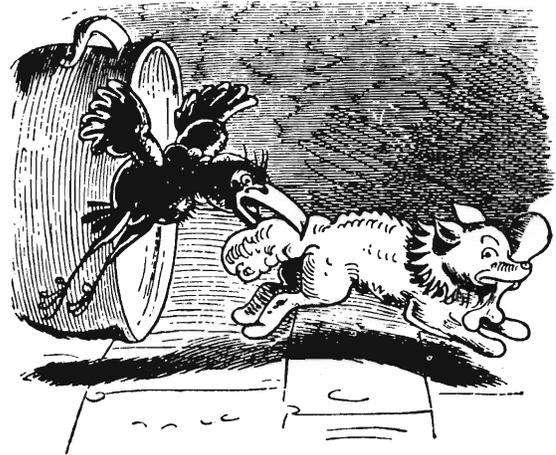
Beluat enn kijtcht fonn sienem Topp  
Hauns Huckebeen opp aules opp!



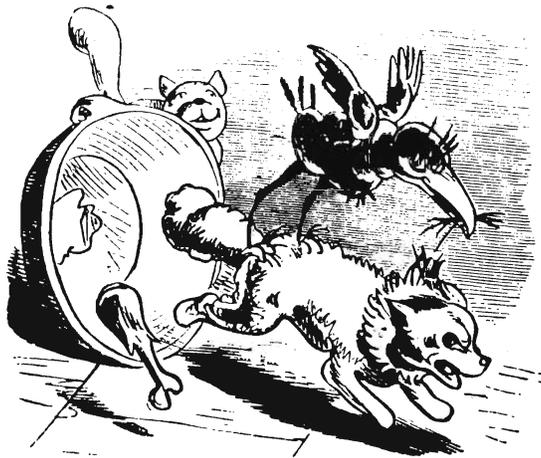
Den Knoake, dem hee Spets jestole  
Wel disa sich nu wada hole.



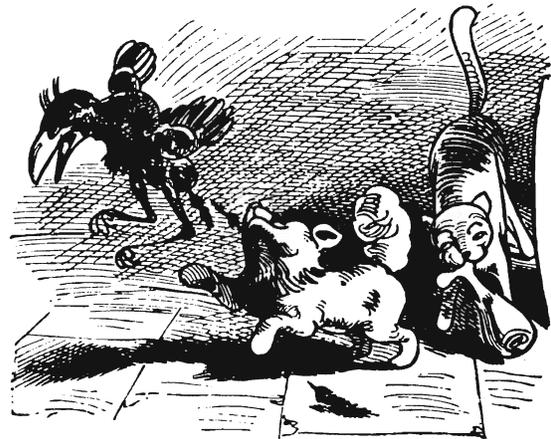
Beid bromme, send nu seea winjsh  
Enn tratje rajsch enn dann no linjsh.



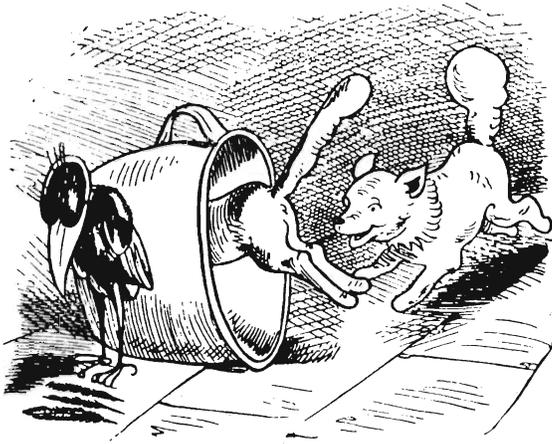
Etj hab jewonne, dentjt dee Spets,  
Donn knipt dee Krauj am aune Rets.



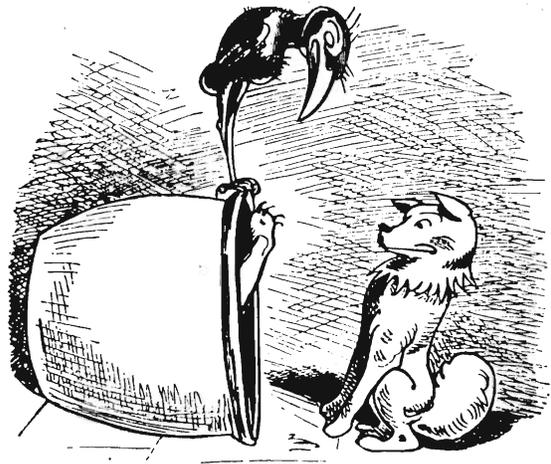
Oh wee, waut ess daut ferr een Schratje?  
De Krauj well am de Hoa uttratje.



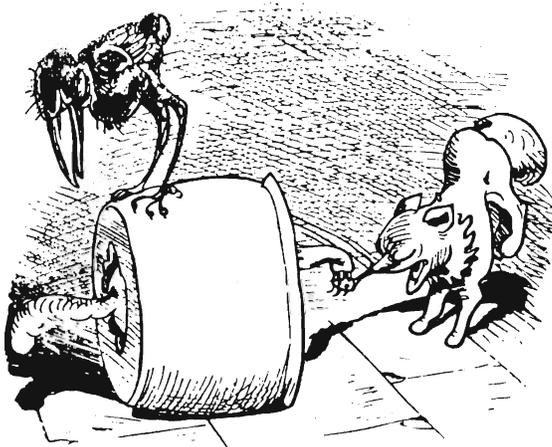
Dee Spets, dee fangt nu aun too biete,  
Dee Krauj emm Tsoagel, gauns mett fliete.



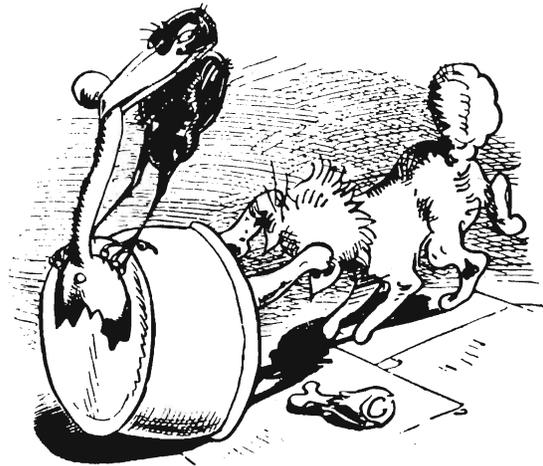
Nu sprinjt dee Kota mett dem Knoake  
Emm Grope nenn, sett doa festoake.



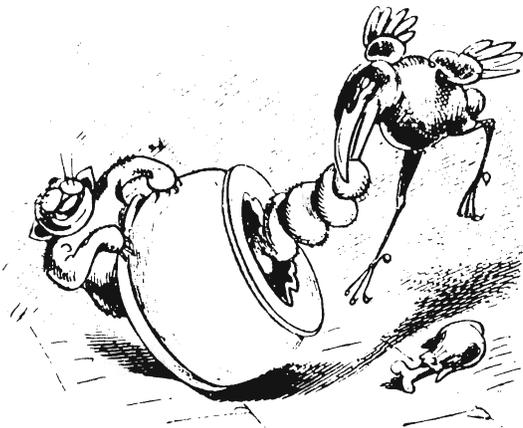
Doa sette see, enn kjitje, kjitje,  
Waut ewt de Kota doa fe Schlitje?



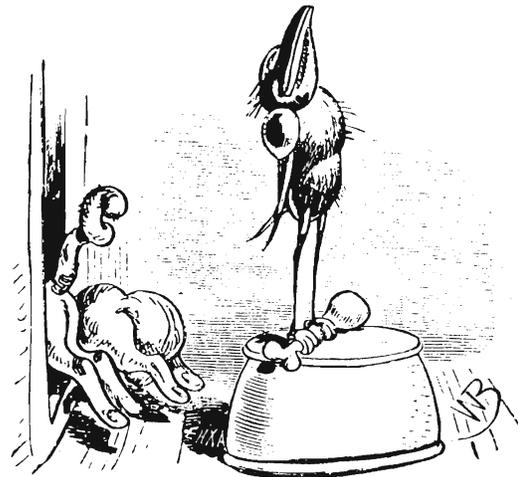
De Kota hackt den Spets, dee schrijcht,  
Dee Krauj, dee lacht. Soo'n Beesewijcht!



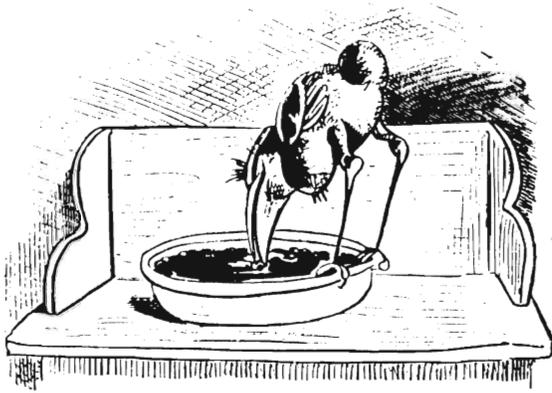
Schwind foot hee wiels dee Topp nich gauns,  
Mett schneiwa Lest den Kotaschwauns.



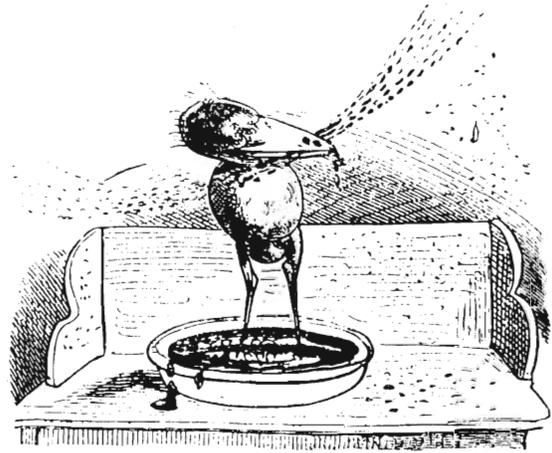
Nu rollt dee Topp, "mie schrinjt de Kjrinjel.  
Oh wee, oh wee," schrijcht Kotaschlinjel.



Enn Spets enn Kota sijch festoake  
Doch Hucklebeen steit oppem Knoake!



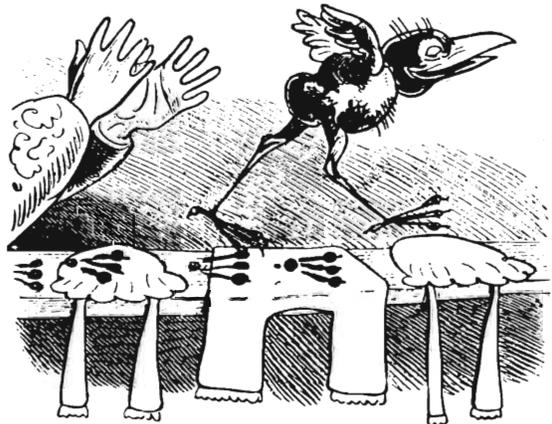
Nuscht bätret jefft fe Leentje Mumm  
Aus Bleiwebeare ut'ne Kumm.



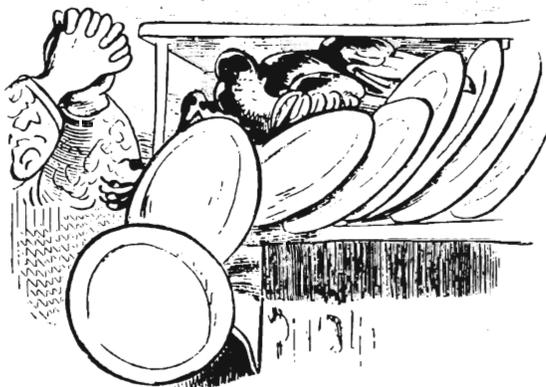
Doch Hucklebeen, dee haft sijch domm  
Enn schmitt dee enne Loft heromm.



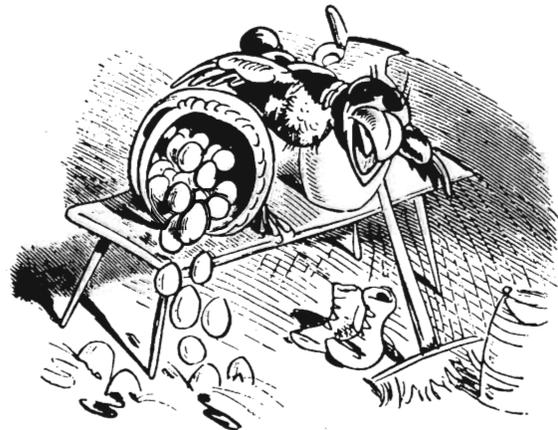
Nu kjemmt dee Taunte mettem Schleef,  
Doch wajch huppst schwind de Kraujedeef.



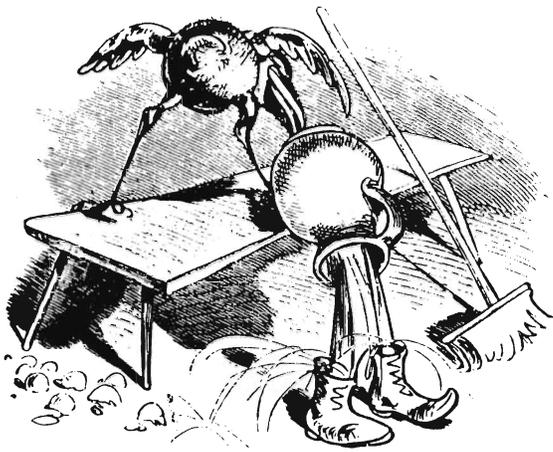
Oh Hare Goms, daut deit ar leed,  
Hee padeld opp daut witte Kjleed.



Oh Donna, nu mank ähre Schiewe  
Fangt hee fäl Dommheit aun too driewe.



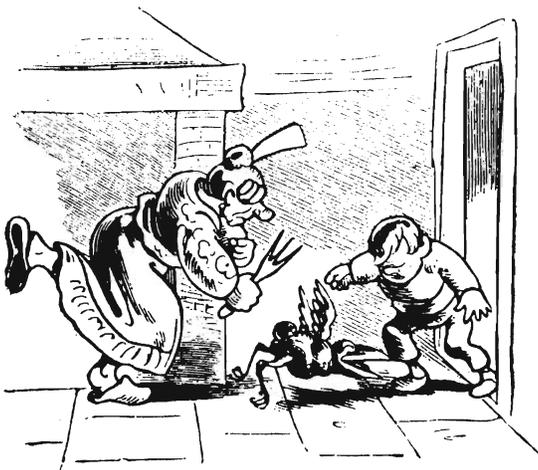
Nu felld dee Korf, daut woat soo dia,  
Enn aules wäjen diset Tia.



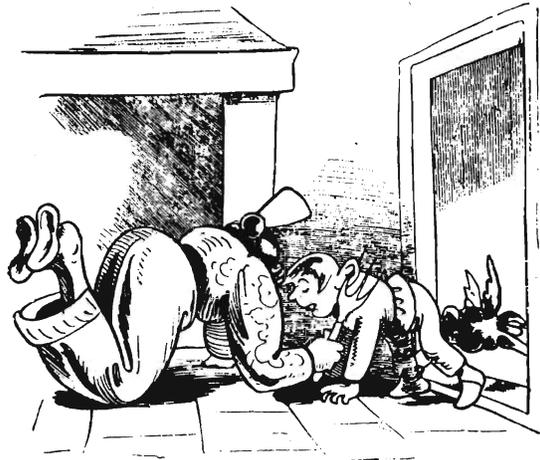
*Pautsch, fuats fellt nu de Beeakrücke  
Enn jitt de Steewel foll gauns flucke.*



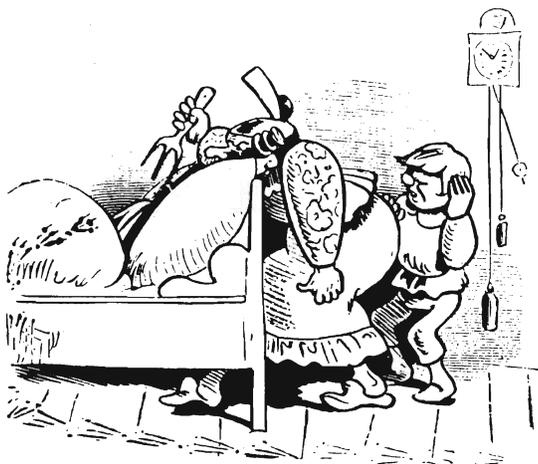
*Nu poascht opp onse Taunte Leentje  
Daut Wota opp äa lintjet Beentje.*



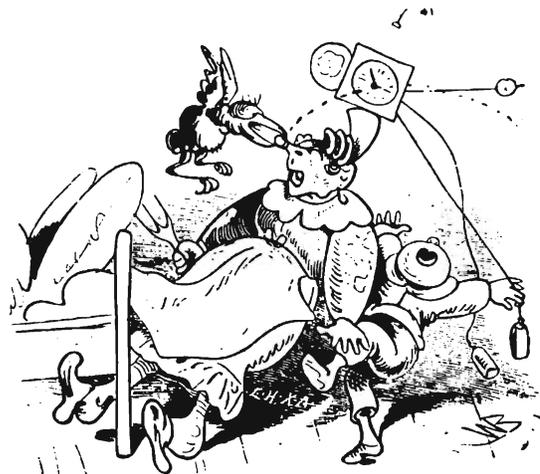
*See held dee Gaufel enne Fust,  
Enn uck de Frets kjemmt aunjestust.*



*Een Loch emm Oa haft dee Frets,  
Daut kjemmt woll fonne Gaufelspets.*



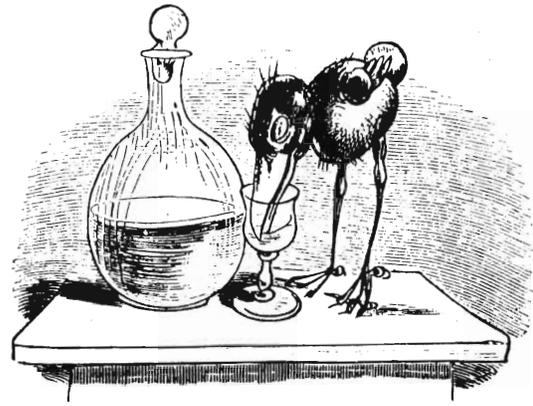
*Dits woll daut Enj fonn Hucklebeentje  
Soo dentj wie aul mett Taunte Leentje!*



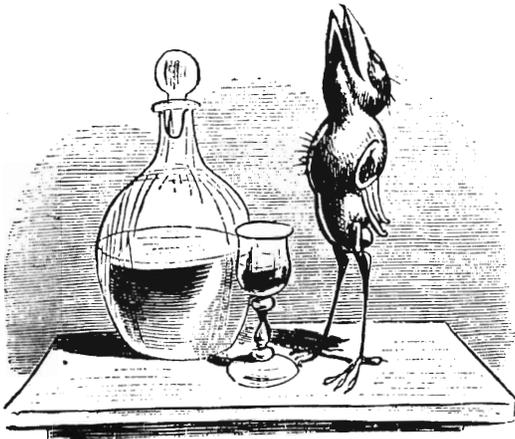
*Doch schwupp, nu bitt daut oole Os  
Aun äre Näs — meend dauts noch Spos.*



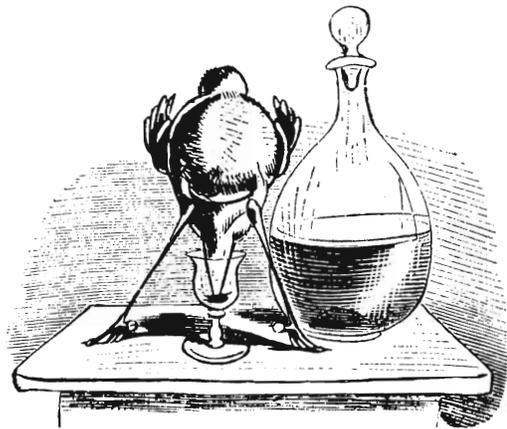
Doch daut jeit domm enn schwäel dem Laups  
 Wiels dit Jedrentj ess stoatja Schnaups.



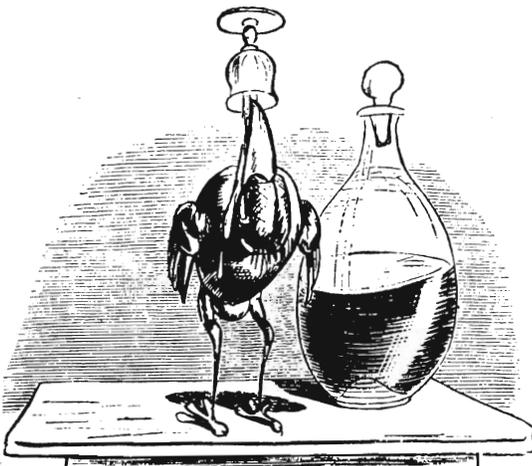
De riticht am goot, enn seea flucke  
 Deed Hauns sien Schnowel nenn doa dücke.



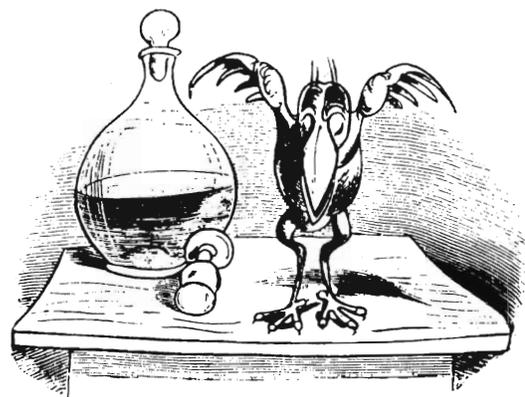
Enn fuats ess uck de easchta Schluck  
 Bie am enn sienen Kraujebuck.



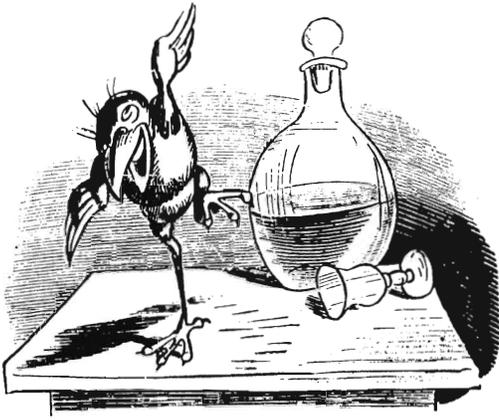
Nich schljacht, hee dückt nu noch mol wada,  
 Enn lat daut tweede Schlucktje nada.



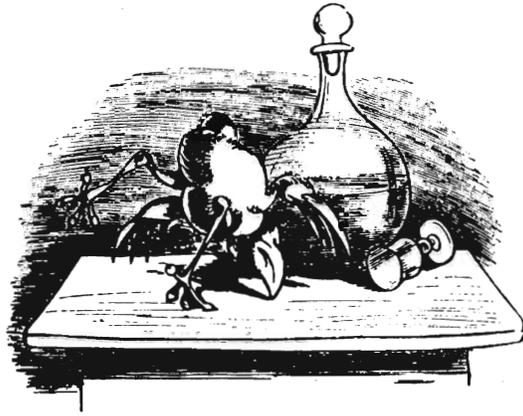
Hee häwt daut Glaus, deit äwadriewe,  
 Doa saul, meend hee, nuscht äwabliewe.



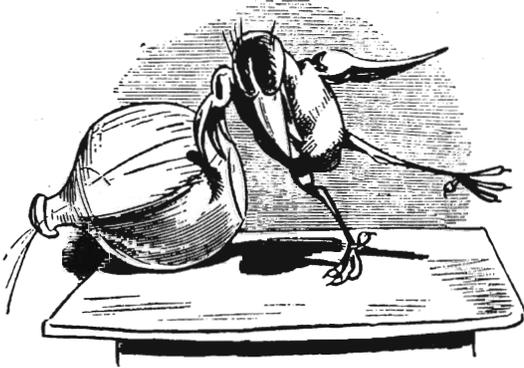
Uj, uj, nu woat dem Schnauptjefiesta,  
 Dee Kopp am drall enn seea biesta.



Hee kjreicht, woo woat daut wieda gone?  
Fangt nu opp eenem Been too stone.



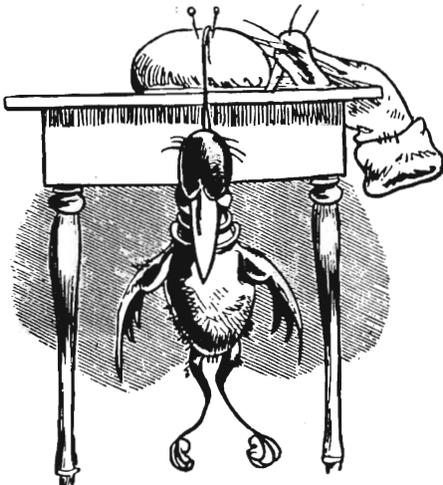
Dee Foagel, fangt nu no dem Supe,  
Opp aule Feea aun too krupe.



Woaat driest, enn doll, enn haft sijch domm  
Schleit aules zwei, heiwt aules omm!



Noch emma ess hee turtjisch enn doll  
Enn pult mank Taunte äre Woll.



Dee Desch ess glaut, febie de Spos,  
Henjt hia aum Twearm, daut schwoaate Os.



"Dee Dommheit jintj am fäl too goot,"  
Enn nu," säd Taunte, "ess hee doot!"



## our word

### Freedom in Mennonite Institutions

Traditionally institutions of higher learning have prided themselves in their so-called "academic freedom" that is, the privilege and right of a teacher or professor to teach, write and do research according to his best insights and intentions. Some such institutions have as their motto the following words of the Gospel engraved over their entrances: "The Truth Shall Make You Free." By this is meant that not only is there freedom to pursue knowledge and truth, but that the pursuit and acquisition of truth will make the scholars and students in those institutions free. While in reality there is no absolute academic freedom anywhere, most learning institutions have cherished and guarded at least the *ideal* of freedom and have sought to implement that ideal as much as possible.

How does the freedom to pursue knowledge and truth apply to sectarian and church-related schools and colleges? Specifically, what does "academic freedom" mean for Mennonite colleges, seminaries, high schools, and such denominational fields of endeavor as journalism and writing?

In the last few years the question of whether there is any academic freedom in Mennonite and other Christian institutions has been raised repeatedly. In one Mennonite college, for example, a principal and teacher of science was forced to resign because, among other things, he became involved in the creationist/evolutionist controversy, stressed the practical application of the Gospel rather than evangelism, and happened to be on the wrong side of those who opposed him on these and other issues. In another instance, the editors of a Mennonite magazine were severely censured by their constituency because they reviewed what many considered to be a "shocking" novel written by a Mennonite-Christian writer of high repute. According to reports, "concerned Mennonites" in the United States are "ready to dismiss educators who refuse correction." And recently a Bible college professor's tenure was not renewed because apparently his views on such things as missions and his preaching did not find favour with some of his colleagues and because influential persons in the churches evidently saw him as a threat. Examples of this kind from Mennonite and other Christian institutions could be multiplied.

This is not to say that a church-supported institution cannot uphold and promote its standards, values and faith. Nor does it mean that a privately or conference-sponsored college or high school cannot screen its applicants for teaching positions and expect them to adhere to its stated guidelines and confession of faith. In fact, any institution — especially a Christian institution — has the right and obligation to appoint highly qualified persons who will devote all their talents and energies toward upholding and furthering the principles, values and ideals of that institution.

However, once the person after due process has been selected and appointed, he or she should have the freedom to

teach, do research and write without fear that his or her activity might displease those who hold the purse-strings or power over him or her. Surely, in our day and age, diversity, different views and interpretations of Scriptures and of the Christian faith and life are not only a given fact of life in a pluralistic society but also a most desirable reality. It goes without saying that different views, debates on issues, and opposition to and arguments against the status quo — also in the spiritual or denominational realms — are most beneficial to students, readers of "controversial" articles and books, and all those who want to think and come to their own conclusions about anything that affects them. Moreover, the manifold views and interpretations of our Christian faith, including occasional confusions and doubts, can lead both to independent thinking and more firm individual commitments.

Are we in our institutions really afraid that novel or different ideas and views will weaken, undermine, or even destroy the faith of immature students or unsuspecting readers? This possibility may be the price to be paid for freedom and individual thinking. However, our fear in this regard does not speak well for the supposed strength of the more orthodox or traditional views of biblical interpretation and of the Christian life. It seems to me that the test for a view or argument in a Christian institution should be, as Martin Luther put it many centuries ago — although he himself did not always practice it — the Word of God and plain reason. Thus within the limits of faithfulness to the record of God's story of redemption and honest and persuasive argumentation or logic there should be complete freedom as well as unlimited possibilities to search, explore, teach, communicate and interpret one's faith and life. There is thus both freedom and responsibility.

The apparent limitation of academic freedom in some of our institutions is the more lamentable when one considers that the witch-hunting is directed not against atheists or agnostics but against often highly qualified and respected professionals and academics and members of Christian congregations. It seems that when it comes to differences of opinions, divergent views and "unorthodox" interpretations, such things as trust, Christian love and brotherhood take a back seat, whereas censure, negative criticism and lovelessness take over. The tragic results of such power struggles are often no different from what might be expected in non-Christian institutions.

A Christian — including the Christian professional in an institution — should be the freest person there is, for Christ came to set all men free from the powers that held them captive. The Apostle Paul speaks of the freedom we have in Christ, a freedom which surely extends to all areas of a Christian's life and not only to one's freedom from sinful bondage. Thus a teacher, professor or writer in a Mennonite institution should be free to pursue knowledge and truth without fear that he or she might offend colleagues or even lose the position and means of employment. But what is more important, talents and creativity in an institution can only unfold and flourish when there is an atmosphere of freedom and a large measure of mutual trust and independence.

God knows how much we need writers, teachers, editors and other leaders who are both courageous and free to speak and to write prophetically as they are led by the Spirit into all truths. When we muzzle our independent thinkers and critics and remove or push to the periphery those who are a thorn in our flesh — as we have done repeatedly — our institutions are headed for stagnation and eventually academic and spiritual death.

— Harry Loewen

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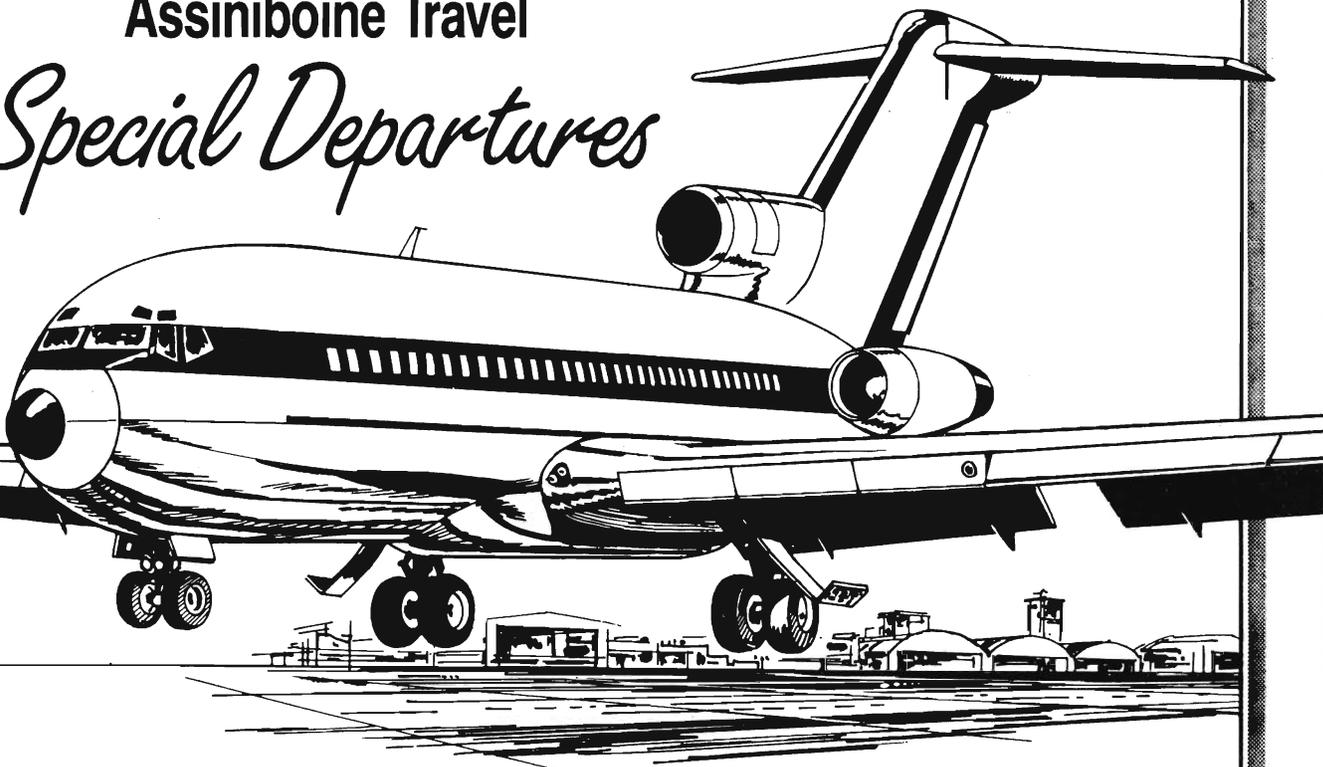


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