

PRINCIPAL EWERT'S ARGUMENT.

Elsewhere on this page the Free Press publishes an article upon the bilingual school situation by H. H. Ewert, Principal of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Grotna. The chief reason for publishing Mr. Ewert's views is that he is a Manitoba educationist of standing, and therefore entitled to be heard.

Mr. Ewert was the first Mennonite (German-speaking) organizer of public schools in Manitoba. He occupied this position for twelve years, viz., from 1891 to 1903, and during that time he raised the number of Mennonite public schools from some half dozen to over forty. This was a notable piece of work amongst a people by no means friendly to the public school system. Mr. Ewert, it may also be mentioned, is the father of a Rhodes scholar, now at the front.

Mr. Ewert is evidently just as satisfied as the Free Press that the present bilingual clause is indefensible and must be abolished. In our discussions of the bilingual question we have always pointed out that the abolition of the bilingual clause did not necessarily imply the abandonment of second-language teaching where circumstances are propitious. Allowing the last hour of the school day to be devoted, under carefully-defined Departmental regulations, to the teaching of a second language might be expedient where teacher, trustees, ratepayers and children belong with but few exceptions to the same race; but it is not desirable where the school attendance is mixed, as is increasingly the case in the Province. Mr. Ewert's experience has been largely in the Mennonite reserve, where the population is almost solidly Mennonite. What is practicable there is neither practicable nor desirable in the school district where two or three nationalities are represented in the school population. To give second language rights in such a district would simply be to encourage the organizing of national groups intent upon capturing the school board in order that they might secure the second

language privilege for their own children. There is already far too much of this; and it needs, not encouragement, but discouragement. Where conditions make it possible to permit for a short period of time each day the teaching of a second language, it ought to take place under permissive regulations—not by express authority of law. To the objection that this permits political manipulation, the answer must be that there will only be manipulation if the people put in office a Minister of Education who is not an educationist but a political heeler. We have had such Ministers of Education in the past; but we hope for better things in the future.

For these reasons we must also take exception to the statement in the very last sentence in Mr. Ewert's rather lengthy article, which reads: "In primary grades the teacher should have permission to use the native language of the child incidentally at any time of the day." In taking this view, Mr. Ewert is again no doubt thinking chiefly of the Mennonite public schools, which are those with which he is best acquainted. What language of instruction would Mr. Ewert suggest, to be fair all round, in a primary room where there are children of three or four different non-English-speaking nationalities? The language of instruction everywhere must be English. Upon this point there can be no compromise whatever.

Mr. Ewert's argument that strict monolingualism creates a bar between non-English-speaking parents and their children deserves the most serious consideration. If it can be shown that such a result ensues in any appreciable degree, it would form a strong argument for the second-language privilege of one hour at the close of school. But does not Mr. Ewert greatly exaggerate the effect of monolingualism in schools upon non-English children? What has been the experience of the Icelanders? They have never had anything but English schools; but are they not truly bilingual? None of the terrible consequences painted by Mr. Ewert have followed the failure to teach them Icelandic in the public schools. The Icelanders educated in this country do not find themselves cut off from their parents through ignorance of the paternal tongue; and the church services in their own language are not strange to them. The experience of the Icelanders is the complete answer to nine-tenths of the arguments in favor of bilingualism.

Further, admitting for arguments' sake that Mr. Ewert's contentions are not without force, an obvious question raises itself. How long are we going to have in Manitoba parents who cannot speak English? Surely the number, both absolute and relative, must be on the decrease. We cannot possibly act on the assumption that we are always to have in Manitoba a considerable proportion of parents who cannot speak the common language. One weakness in Mr. Ewert's position is that there are many adults and young persons, born in Manitoba, who today can practically speak not a word of English because they did not attend a public school in which the instruction was in English. For such a condition there is no excuse, and it cannot be countenanced.