

### School meetings

*It is the last Friday in September and the Amish children just started school a couple of weeks ago. I am sitting at the kitchen table with a family of eleven children, the mother, and the father who is a minister. It is supper-time, and as usual, the family is gathered. One of the girls just started working as a teacher this year and she is very excited about what is to happen later that evening. On the last Friday of each month, the school she works in has meetings where the parents, the school board members and the teachers come together to discuss matters regarding the school. This evening will be the first meeting she will attend as a teacher; however, today's meeting is a bit special. It is the first meeting of the school year and many issues need to be discussed. There are usually more participants at this meeting than the regular ones held throughout the school year. Since the younger children in the family attend a different school than the one their older sister works in, the parents will not be there to support her tonight. We head for another school, while the older children stay at home to take care of their younger siblings. The parents, the youngest child and I get into the buggy and head for the school for our meeting. The father parks the horse in front of the hitching rail between several other horses. We enter the building and leave our coats in the entrance room, which also contains two phone booths. When we enter the main room, the men take a seat at the children's desks, while the women gather in the back. Above the blackboard in the front the alphabet is written in big letters, both in regular English letters and the gothic letters from the Liedersammlung and the Martin Luther Bible. There are several drawings hanging on the wall and windows on each side of the school. In the middle of the room there is a big wood-burning stove, which is used during the cold wintertime. Some women bring their pre-school children to these meetings, especially if the children are babies or too young to be cared for by their older siblings. There are fifteen men and thirteen women present. One of the men is dressed somewhat different from the Amish men. A woman tells me that he belongs to the Old Colony Mennonites and is the father of the non-Amish boy who has attended the school. Two of the younger women are teachers at the school. One man, a member of the school board, is leading the meeting.*

*The meeting begins by singing a song in German. The mode for singing is faster than the singing at church, although it is slower than the English songs occasionally sung. The leader of the meeting has five questions he reads out loud. They are all on the matter of the relationships between the pupils and the teachers, and also the parents' role. The core is on how to discipline the children. Everybody, both men and women, are handed a piece of paper, and they all write down their answers on how to solve the matters. A man collects the notes in his hat. Only a couple of the women handed in their*

*piece of paper, and the women are not participating much in the following discussion. The answers appear to be united, and the main argument is to discipline the children through teaching them to respect authorities. The teacher should discuss the matter with the parents if a child is not obeying the teacher in class. When finishing the discussion and all five questions are answered, the discussion moves to the next topic on the agenda, that is, the financial aspects of the school. The chairman writes an amount on the blackboard, CAN \$ 4,400, which is the amount needed to provide educational books for the pupils and the teachers' pay salaries. A bucket, with a small hole in the lid, is sent around to the men. They all give, anonymously, as much money as they wish, and after all families have given a contribution, the money is counted and handed to the teachers. The meeting ended by singing another German song. It is already dark outside and everybody hurries home to finish up the day's work.*