

AN IOWA LOW GERMAN DIALECT

INTRODUCTION

The Low German dialect spoken in the four townships of Troy, York, Iowa, and Hilton of Iowa County, Iowa, is my native tongue. It is a spoken language only, and no dialect forms whatever were found in writing.

As can be seen from remarks in the chapter on phonology, English has had some influence on the sound system of the dialect, but the principal English influence is in the vocabulary. The vocabulary as here presented was obtained by the use of frequency lists, letters, by word of mouth, an illustrated dictionary and a mechanical phonetic gadget which was of considerable aid in finding pairs of words or the lack thereof. These rather round-about methods were necessary since it soon became clear that direct questioning often brought an answer worded to suit what the person being questioned thought was wanted rather than what he would normally say.

The vocabulary as originally collected contained approximately 4,200 words. Each word was checked in terms of a sentence; then where no actual use in a sentence was found, the word was dropped. This resulted in the present list of approximately 2,300 words. The transcription system is that of the International Phonetic Association.

The texts are stories I heard as a child from my father.

The names of the villages in Chapter I are as I found them in the church records except where I personally knew the village and its official spelling.

As might be suspected from the data in Chapter I, not all of the Low German speaking people of the communities in question spoke the same native dialect; however in the course of time a *Gemeinsprache* developed. In fact, among my relatives and friends three separate dialects are or were represented, which I shall designate as A, B, and C. Of these, C was spoken by one family only, which came from near Diebholz, Hanover. I do not know the descendants of this family personally. Dialect B was spoken originally by two families coming from Himmelreich near Osnabrück and Harpenfeld near Essen. How similar the native dialects of these two families may have been I could not determine. Of the

eight first generation descendants of the family from Harpenfeld, six speak dialect A; one speaks dialect B, but his descendants speak dialect A. The eighth moved away years ago, and I have no idea which dialect he speaks, if any. I do not know the descendants of the family from Himmelreich.

Dialect A is the *Gemeinsprache* of the great majority and also that of my own family. This dialect is or was spoken by three groups: (1) by those who came from an area between the Weser and Hunte rivers and the little divide in the south which runs from the northern edge of Wietings Moor in a northwesterly direction towards Attinghausen, (2) by the descendants of the above named group, and (3) by the majority of the descendants of those whose native dialect was B.

Where in a given home man and wife had different native dialects only one was normally used. This led to the development of a *Gemeinsprache*. How far the development of a *Gemeinsprache* really went can be seen from the following example. In one family, well known to me, where this *Gemeinsprache* was the language of the home, neither husband nor wife natively spoke dialect A.

The phonetic character of this *Gemeinsprache*, i.e. dialect A, differs but very slightly from the dialect spoken in Kirchweyhe, near Bremen, in 1937, the last time I was there.