

Life Building—The Great Rural Problem.

Some houses are built for use, some for ornament and some to sell. Some children are trained for use, some for adornment, and some are sold to King Midas. When we all get as wise as we might be, we shall make it our first aim to build the lives of our children as strong and beautiful as our homes—and we will give up the practice of preparing them for the highest bidder.

The life that is well built is physically sound, it is happy, useful, abounding in goodness and loyal to truth. The parent who is wise, will, therefore, watch over his children—protecting them against disease, and giving them the best nourishment in his power; he will surround them with all that is beautiful in sound and sight in the home and on the farm, for they grow to be like the things they listen to and gaze upon; he will teach them to work at something, however humble, for they must be found some day in the great army of producers; he will show them, by word and deed, that the crowning grace of life is joyful service, which can be rendered only by pure and generous hearts; he will instruct them by conversation and through books, so that they may use all intelligence in the discharge of their duties. So shall the young lives grow up in truth, beauty and goodness, and they will blossom and bear fruit to their own glory and the good of their fellows. And in such lives it would seem God is well pleased.

The time to begin building life is in its early childhood. It is then that permanent habits, tastes, and attitudes are formed. Sometimes men spend their youth in the pursuit of low pleasures and hope in their old age to enjoy the best that the world has to offer in art and culture and enjoyment, but they hope in vain. They must be trained to these things from the beginning. Childhood is the time to sow the seeds of all the human graces and gifts. The child is father to the man. So, if a parent would develop a self-controlled, well-poised life in his child, he must insist upon self-control and equipoise from the beginning.

The two great activities in which children should engage, in order to build out their lives, are work and play. Most country children know what work is. Perhaps they know only too well. It is probably because country children have learned how to work regularly, patiently and industriously that they achieve such distinction in life. It is next to impossible for one who has dawdled away his time in early years to become a steady worker in manhood. Of course there is a distasteful element in work at first—but when one grows accustomed to it he finds it difficult to give it up. More than that, he feels driven to it. He grudges every minute spent in other ways. Yet, if he does nothing more than work, his life will become sordid, unattractive, and lacking in charm. Play or recreation is necessary to full development. It is possibly true that boys and girls on the farm work too much and have too little recreation. Yet this is not necessary. A boy who has a half holiday a week to go fishing or shooting or playing with his companions will accomplish more in the balance of the week than if he had worked steadily the whole six days. It is not difficult for any farmer to erect for his children a swing, a horizontal bar, and to grow a little lawn and a few shade trees. The children will do the rest.

The children have to be housed and fed. What should the house be like? First of all, it should be situated as close to wood and water as possible. There should be a swimming-hole on every farm—where possible—and there should be trees for birds to nest in and for boys to climb (though not after the nests). The best way for children to preserve their purity and freshness is to live close to nature's heart.

When the situation of the home is decided upon, the plan of the home itself must be considered. Here is what one farmer said: "I have tried to make my home as comfortable, as convenient and as attractive as possible. It is, I believe, as attractive as the town homes. I have determined that my children shall not be enticed away from the farm by city attractions. So they have nooks and corners of their own, their own toy-shed, their own library shelf. And I have bought a gramophone and a good magic lantern and reflectoscope. I am going to make my children feel that not only in the fields but in the home have they the advantage over children in the town."

In the erection of buildings, the digging of a well, protection from the elements, the human are to be preferred to animal rights. Mr. McKeever, in his book on "Farm Boys and Girls," gives a beautiful picture of a small, three-roomed dwelling on the Kansas prairie in which lives a happy family of five. Among the shade trees there may be seen a children's room that would inspire and surprise any ordinary observer. "In a little attic room, facing the east and reached by a mere step-ladder arrangement, may be found the 'den,' which is the private place of the three children. A small window opens out to the east, and a small improvised dormer-window admits

light and air from the south. There is no plastering or other expensive covering upon the sloping roof walls, but the artistic mother has provided dainty white muslin for concealing the rough places and, with the help of the children, she has decorated the little room in a manner that would attract the very elect. None of this has required a money cost, but it has all been done beautifully, at the expense of thought and good sense and artistic taste, prompted by rare consideration for the needs of the boys and girls. Upon the walls are post cards, pictures from magazines and other sources. The children have their own collection of curios and their best school productions."

No home in these days is complete without a library and it is easy to supply what is necessary—children's magazines suited to age and sex, and books of information and inspiration that are mentioned in any good school library catalogue. After all, the printed page is the cheapest source of enjoyment and profit. If one wants the best thing of all for growing boys and girls let him buy such a set of works as "The Book of Knowledge," which is a whole library in itself.

Near Winnipeg there is a fine farm which is managed by a young fellow of about seventeen or eighteen years of age. His father gave him a chance to make good by furnishing him with a first-class machine and carpenter's shop. He does his own repairing in wood and iron. He has become an authority on all that pertains to the farm. He has had a decent opportunity. It is nearly always the case that the fellow who is encouraged to be the best in his class, makes a success of his work.

Young people, to attain their best, should go to church, and should in some way associate themselves with church work. The majority of active workers in city churches have been bred in rural communities. A man can not afford, either for himself or his family, to miss the inspiration that comes from contemplating divine purposes and methods. The cure for provincialism, selfishness and materialism is worship, and there is no place in which worship is more sincere and whole-souled than in the little village or country chapel. There is one fact in connection with church work that is worthy of observation. Children do not relish the sermons that are suitable to old folks, but older people understand and appreciate everything that appeals to children. A reorganization of church work is suggested by this very condition. The church of the future is to aim at saving the whole boy, the whole girl. It must reach every activity of life and transform it. It must spiritualize all effort. Therefore it must be an educational and a social centre. Who shall say that it should not be a centre for both work and play? If any single church in this broad land, under the guidance of a man, determined not to be governed by tradition, were to enter upon work in this spirit, perhaps it would be the beginning of a new movement that would make for righteousness.

Children, to live completely, must go to school. The ordinary rural school is not always as perfect as it might be, but its advantages are more than are usually attributed to it. Without touching upon such problems as consolidation and free transportation, both of which will come naturally with the organization of country school boards and the improvement of country roads, there is one condition of success that is worthy of special notice. The very heart and life of the school is the teacher. Any parents who earnestly desire the welfare of their children will see to it that the most competent teacher to be found is employed and retained. A short time ago one of the school boards in central Saskatchewan met to consider the reappointment of their teacher. She had been offered one hundred dollars more in a neighboring school. Two of the trustees wished to retain the young lady, as she had given great satisfaction, but the third member of the Board objected on the ground that the school tax was already too high and anyway he had no children at school. After a long discussion, the chairman of the Board said: "Mr. X—, I do not blame you, since you have no personal interest in this matter, and so I'll agree to pay your share of the extra tax if you will re-engage the young lady." And so the bargain was made and a calculation made as to the tax the chairman had to pay. It was found on calculation to be eighteen cents. This is an extreme illustration, no doubt, but not so extreme as it might seem. Let every farmer remember that an increase of fifty dollars to the teacher does not mean that his tax is to be increased by fifty dollars, but by only a small fraction of that amount. The question is this: Is it good policy to get a good teacher rather than a medium one, if it costs each ratepayer only a few cents or even a few dollars in addition to his usual tax? The answer given will depend upon the value that is placed upon the lives of the children. As a matter of common sense, the parent who considers his child his most valued possession will not only insist upon getting for her the best teacher, but will see to it that the build-

ing is comfortable and cheerful, that the grounds are large and beautiful; that the equipment is as complete, in comparison, as the equipment on his own farm, so that it will be possible for the teacher to plant the seeds of truth and morality or, in other words, to dispense sweetness and light.

With good homes, good churches, good schools, keeping pace with material advancement, we can hope for permanent welfare and prosperity. Are we ready to pay the price?

CHILD-LIFE IN THE CITIES AND TOWNS.

What has been said so far refers to the up-building of life on the farm. There remains the much more difficult problem of the up-building of life in towns and cities. It is more difficult because children are open to temptations that are more alluring, and because they have not so many steady occupations, in other words, so many "chores." The problem of town parents is that of providing protection for their family, and of arranging for them some form of work in which they may take delight.

On the protective side care must be taken to shield the children from those influences which make for physical and moral degradation. There is no surer way to ruin than that of allowing boys to smoke cigarettes, to visit unsupervised picture shows, to read obscene literature, to associate with older companions who are given to the use of profanity, and one might almost add, to peruse some of the alleged comic papers. In these days parents must be Argus-eyed. They must be watchful, especially during the hours of play, when life is at a white heat, for it is then that the young minds are most open to temptation.

But it is not enough to shield children from temptation. They must have something to do of a constructive nature or temptation will come to them from within. To provide honest and actual activity, three forces that have been already mentioned—the home, the church and the school—must join hands.

THE CITY HOME.

It is quite possible for any parents, no matter how poor, to give their children a home, because the central feature of home life is communion, and not grandeur. Unless a mother is prepared to find her greatest pleasure in the pleasure of her children; unless a father is prepared to put politics, club engagements and the making of money in the second place in his life, it is utterly impossible that there should be real home life, and it is certain that the children will lack the feelings and habits which are necessary to moral stamina. It would seem to be the duty of every man to feel responsible for the character of his children. He cannot afford to trust to schools and churches, excellent though these may be. Unless he gives himself away to his children he will not get a return of their love, and in the long run there is very little hope for a boy or a girl who has not reverence and affection for his parents.

THE CITY SCHOOL.

In towns and cities the schools can well supplement the work of the homes, and parents will be well advised if they go out of their way to see that the schools are all that they should be. In western Canada any casual observer will recognize that the class-rooms are overcrowded, and that it is impossible for the teachers to exercise personal supervision over their pupils. The lives of children demand supervision all the time. The teacher must supervise, not to notice faults, but in order to direct activity wisely. A man can help his children in no better way than by assisting to reduce the number of pupils in a school-room from fifty and sixty to twenty-five or thirty.

THE CITY CHURCH.

Church life has altered so much in the last twenty-five years that it is difficult to interest children in it. Perhaps it is not the life of the church that has altered so much as the attitude of parents towards the church. Even in its worst form religion is a force for good in the hearts of men, and the greatest mistake that a parent can make is to keep religion out of his own home, and to dissociate himself from the activities of his church. From the earliest years children should be taught to measure the eternal consequences of their acts. At some time during the week provision should be made for the thoughtful and intelligent worship of God.

THE UNION OF COUNTRY AND CITY.

Life on the farm, life in the town—neither is complete without the other. When it can be arranged, the children of the city should spend a few weeks or months of every year in the country, and children of the country should have the privilege of spending a few weeks of every winter in the city. The good old fashion of interchange of courtesies might well be revived. The fuller, richer life is what is needed, and the only way to such life is through inter-communication and exchange of experience.