

## Agricultural Education

By Geo. Batho, Editor Agricultural Publications, Manitoba Government.

What? Why? Who? How? When? Where?

**T**HESE are standard interrogations in almost any field, and perhaps they may very appropriately serve to lead us along towards a discussion of agricultural education—a subject, by the way, that was never more important than just now.

## What?

A great deal has been written on this question, but, after all, what is agricultural education? Is it simply a course at a school? Is it something that may be obtained only at a special institution?

Agricultural education is a great deal broader than that; and, of course, be it said to their credit, every agricultural college worthy of the name tries to impress this fact upon its students. No kind of knowledge can ever all be gathered and put into books; and, even if it could, the reading of the books could never be confined to the students of the colleges where special courses on these subjects are given.

It is really hard to frame a definition that is quite big enough to tell just all that agricultural education really is. The best I could write would be something like this: Agricultural education is that knowledge and that development of spirit that help a farmer to understand the natural laws that operate about him; that enable him to realize satisfaction and delight in a rural environment; and that relate his life as a farmer to other lives in the most helpful way.

Such a definition may seem to be abstract and vague; it provides a very large landscape, and its boundaries are almost lost in the remote distance. In the truest sense, however, an education might be compared even to a physical landscape. It is composed—or rather it grows out of—a great breadth of varying experiences; but it is always more than any single one of them. Here in the middle of the landscape is a field that we will call personal observation. In the realm of agricultural education it is a very important spot; but it is not the whole landscape. Over there is a plot that we may speak of as practical skill in doing farm work. That also is a fine field, and many a "greenhorn" at farming finds that it seems to be fenced with about ten strands of sharp barb wire, so hard is it for him to place himself in the realm where he can do things with ease and skill; but, important as it is, it is not the whole landscape. Yonder, again, is another beautiful and productive field with an agricultural college in the midst of it, and it seems to occupy the most commanding swell in all the country that the eye can sweep; but still it is not the whole landscape. Here is another field, and in it there is a library of agricultural reading, open and practically free to all those who roam in. It is an important field; but it, again, fills only part of the landscape. One might go on and point out several more fields, each of which in turn would seem, upon examination, to be very important; but there is no need to do so because I think the point I had in mind has been made clear, namely, that our thought of education—whether agricultural or otherwise—ought to be broad enough to include all those experiences that come into a person's life with light and leading, and that makes for a fuller understanding and an easier harmony with one's environment.

## Why?

Why should anyone wish an agricultural education rather than some other kind of training? In such a land as Western Canada it seems almost needless to write an answer. Our one conspicuous natural asset is our great heritage of fertile soil, only a small proportion of which is as yet being employed in any way comparable with its maximum use.

Offhand I can think of two special reasons furnished by the war. They are these:

First—The war will cripple and in-

capacitate for active farm life many a man who, before he went away, was a tiller of the soil. Here is a young man—I could tell you his name. Before the war he was a Saskatchewan homesteader. Today, with a permanently stiff knee, rendering it impossible for him to stoop or move about freely, he is learning a sedentary trade. Though the war is far from over, the name of such is already legion. The forced withdrawal from agriculture of every such young man means a vacancy and a need that must be filled by someone else who might not, under pre-war conditions, have taken to farming as a calling. This is one reason why an agricultural education is valuable.

Second—The second reason I think of, growing out of the war, is this: More and more it becomes plain that this is a war of exhaustion. It is a long and bitter process of national attrition. When the war ends, the world's cupboard will be about as bare as the famous larder of Old Mother Hubbard. Think of the long, long list of deaths among the soldiers on all the "fronts," and then think of the fact that in Europe, because of the war, more civilians, within the past four years, have died of starvation than the number of soldiers who have expired. It is true that there are surplus stocks of food in Australia and some of the other distant lands, but we have the authority of members of the Food Control Board for the statement that the proclamation of peace will almost surely increase, rather than diminish, the demand for food. I believe that to be strictly true. If peace were declared tomorrow, the whole of Europe would call to the outside world for food, and, even though the submarines were all swept from the seas, the depletion of the world's shipping would still continue to demand the shortest possible trips for the ships, with the increased demand for cargoes from such near at hand countries as Canada. Every scrap of knowledge that will help to increase Canadian food production will be of value not only so long as the war lasts, but also in a special way for years afterward. It is one of the functions of agricultural education to spread such knowledge.

But, quite apart from monetary or even humanitarian considerations, there are still other strong reasons for everyone learning all he can about farming.

Let us think of the matter of personal resourcefulness. That is a very important question; and I venture the statement that the well prepared farmer has, on the average, a greater sense of security for the years to come than almost any other class of citizen. We stumble against this fact almost every day. The doctor may poison his patient, and lose part of his practice; the dimmed sight of the artist makes him forsake his pen and brush; the voice of the preacher may fail him and force him to desert the pulpit; a new railroad may kill the town where the merchant owns his store. These things are happening every day, and very many men are finding that they must commence in mid-life to build their success on a foundation that they have never tried. Some of them turn to farming. During the past two years I have been surprised at the demand for agricultural bulletins that comes from city addresses—from people who, in some cases at least, wonder if they are going to be driven out of their present callings, and who think of farming as an occupation more stable than their own. An intimate knowledge of farming—an agricultural education—gives a comfortable and abiding sense of resourcefulness to its possession.

So true is this that sometimes I feel that in a country such as Canada there should almost be a compulsory measure to force all young people for their own future protection, to perform a certain amount of farm work, and thus acquire at least a rudimentary knowledge of farm methods. Even civilization will never carry us beyond the basic fact that farming must be done by somebody every year for the support of every person who does

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