



The Roundabout Club

Some More of the Best Essays, (Study No. III. Continued).

THE OLD SCHOOLMASTER.

I was ten years old and had just been promoted to the Third Reader the summer he came to our school. I remember well how, having been accustomed to gentle Miss Reid, I stood in awe of my new teacher, so erect and soldier-like, though even then his hair was very white.

His name was Michael Morrison; he had been educated in Scotland, but had lived in Toronto before he came to us. It was supposed there had been some tragedy in his life, for he never spoke of his past nor of his family, nor did any one, except a daughter who came twice, ever visit him. Certainly it was well for us that something induced a man of his education and ability to take up his residence in our straggling country village at a salary which surely could not have tempted him.

He boarded at the hotel for a few weeks, then rented a small house and lived in it, got his own breakfast, but the other meals he got at Mrs. Henry's. His holidays and evenings were mostly spent in his garden, and surely it repaid his care; even now, as I think of various fine displays in pretentious grounds, I remember that little house as it became after he had lived there a few years. Along each side of the walk was a strip in which flaunted the gay colors of the earliest tulips and daffodils, succeeded as the season advanced by poppies, asters, and gladioli; then there was a strip along each fence, the shady side full of ferns, violets and forget-me-nots, the sunny side filled with columbine, daisies, June pinks and other old-fashioned favorites. Clematis and honeysuckle clambered over the fences, while a purple wistaria, which before his coming had climbed over the porch, now responded to his care so generously that in June the low stone cottage seemed a mass of purple and green.

Nature study and school gardens had not then been "invented," but he used frequently to invite a few of us into his garden, sometimes cutting flowers for us, or commending any efforts we had made in gardens of our own. He was by no means ungenerous with seeds and plants, yet if we neglected what he gave us it was long ere we had another gift. Motorists who pass through our village now often admire the flowers and vines which add so much to its beauty; many of them came from the garden of "Micky."

Not that he ever heard us call him by so familiar a title—we knew better—he always exacted the utmost respect, and besides teaching with all thoroughness the subjects on the curriculum, he taught us a good deal more. If Earl Grey had criticized our manners it would not have been Mr. Morrison's training that was in fault. He found some of the boys had a habit of loitering around the post office in the evening, and exerted himself to break that up, and when he found Ethelinda Colfax in a secluded corner of the school-yard absorbed in "The Duke's Secret," he said not so much to her, but he talked with her mother, who had got her daughter's name from such a book, with the minister, and with the school board. We soon had a small library. No "trash" in it; some of Scott's, some of Dickens', Hoosier Schoolmaster, Tom Sawyer, and Ben Hur. In the winter we had a school concert, and the library was enriched with the proceeds.

He was just—we pupils often thought severe—in his discipline, but his percep-

tion of humor was keen, and a witty answer sometimes turned away wrath. A list of "big" words from the reader to spell and give the meaning of was one of our tasks. "Inveigle" came to John Paye; he plodded laboriously through the spelling, hesitated over the meaning, then with the light of inspiration on his face, responded, "not veigle." Those who knew the meaning were horrified. Mr. Morrison's lips twitched, but he merely passed the word on to the reliable boy, and John escaped censure. So also Andrew, who in reading that a prisoner's cry brought a turnkey to see what was the matter, missed the n, and to our great amusement read the word "turkey." He escaped reproof, though the rest of us bestowed the word on him as a nickname. For a Fourth Class pupil to stumble in reciting the Commandments was a serious matter, but when Norman added to the tenth the startling prohibition that the neighbor's daughter was not to be coveted, the master only remarked grimly: "No, no, lad, human nature couldn't endure that."

His failings? Oh yes, while we were his pupils we could have pointed out many. There was no doubt he was too severe; he was over strict on such trivial matters as being late or neglecting our work; it wasn't his affair whether our shoes were polished or our finger nails in order. The older people would have said—and as we grew older we agreed with them—that he had but one serious fault. Yet since he has been so long buried we seldom mention it even among ourselves, so I will not here "draw his frailties from their dread abode."

So time passed; those who had been his pupils now sent their children to him, but the erect figure began to droop, the gray eyes grew less keen. Picking up an exercise book in a neighbor's house one day, I was surprised to find misspelled words uncorrected, errors in other work unnoticed. Remembering what he had been, people were unwilling to complain, yet the children were making little progress. We wished he would resign; finally the school board, with Tom Lenox the chairman at their head, called at school. "I tell you, Ruth," said Tom afterwards, "I had thought it over and over, and could see no other way out, yet I felt guiltier than I did the time Dick and Andrew Brown and I played truant to go fishing over at Schwartz's pond. I kept thinking of that day, and almost expected him to grasp me by the collar, but after we had made our lame speeches about our appreciation of his services, and it being time to leave the burden to younger men, all he said was, 'Very well, gentlemen,' and we filed out, glad to escape as ever schoolboys were." Mrs. Henry said he didn't go home till after dark, and didn't come for his tea at all that night.

Nothing did the old schoolmaster say on the subject, save a remark to Mrs. Henry, that he had hoped to die in harness, but it was not to be. Yet as I stopped to look at his flowers, or to read a magazine article to him—he had always commended my reading—we often talked of his old pupils who had gone out into the world; of Clara, whose book we read with so much interest; of Margaret, superintendent of a large hospital in a western city; of Andrew, a missionary in China, and of Fred, the M.P.; but oftener we talked of the less fortunate than these: Dora, whom we used to accuse of being "Micky's pet," though, indeed, we all peered her, but who has for years been a helpless invalid; poor headstrong Charlotte, who wrecked her life by marrying an unprincipled rascal; Jack, who lies in South Africa, and Murray, whose accounts were short; his father refunded the money,

and we occasionally hear of him in western towns. The master grieved over him. I know he wrote to him and received letters from him occasionally.

So passed two years; then one severe winter he failed rapidly. Mrs. Henry offered him a bed in her house, but he preferred to stay in his own, and for a week the neighbors took turns caring for him. He grew better for a day or two, then failed suddenly, and died in a few hours. He had left directions with the minister, who arranged for the funeral and sent for the daughter. Six of his "boys" carried him to his resting place in the old churchyard. We never knew the story of his life, but we trust he has joined "those immortal souls who live again in minds made better by their presence."

RUE.

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WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION TENDS MOST TO MAKE A FARMER USEFUL AND HAPPY?

In general, that education which broadens the outlook, enriches the minds, enlarges the heart and produces thoughtful, intelligent men of practical ability is the highest and best education that can be procured. It is my purpose, then, to discuss ways and means of producing this desideratum of education in the particular case of the tiller of the soil.

It is an idea, only too common, that the farmer requires little or no education, anything beyond a common-school course being considered superfluous. But more and more with the advance of scientific research and the application of scientific methods to agriculture is a good education necessary to the successful farmer. And since his work is in the fields and provides unlimited opportunities for observing nature and nature's laws, the æsthetic value of education to the farmer can hardly be estimated.

What should he know? This is a question difficult to answer, directly. At least he should know enough of practical farming to be able to follow agricultural pursuits with success. Some men with a very limited education will do more, and take more out of life, than others with much more extensive educational opportunities. But education is not merely the imbibing of knowledge at school and college. It is a process that is going on all the time, and the great essential for reaching the ideal in education consists in the cultivation of a taste for wholesome reading. "Reading maketh a full man," and the common university of to-day consists of a well-selected library of the world's best authors.

A public-school education is not sufficient for the twentieth century agriculturalist. A boy passing the High School Entrance examination at the immature age of thirteen years has not, as a rule, received a sufficient grounding in the essential subjects of the common school course. Students who enter the High Schools are too often woefully deficient in many subjects, especially in writing, spelling and arithmetic. Therefore, after passing the Entrance it is highly advisable that a solid year or more be spent in post-graduate work, taken in the fifth classes of the public school (or in a Continuation or High School, if such be convenient). It is a notorious fact that in our rural schools the decrease of male teachers has been accompanied by a corresponding decrease in the fifth class attendance. For these bigger boys do not seem to be so willing to be taught by a slip of a girl, and such a thing as a winter class of big boys is becoming an almost unheard of thing in the public schools of to-day. The fifth class should have a place in every rural school, not only for the purpose of crystallizing and

perfecting the knowledge obtained in the lower forms.

Careful attention must be given to the reading of the youth. The home library can be supplemented by the public, school, and other libraries. Novels in limited number give spice to a reading course, but there is too much of the world's best literature obtainable to waste time in reading the worthless and trashy. Every farm home should be provided with at least one good Canadian magazine, one agricultural journal, a representative daily and several weeklies, including a local paper. The library should contain a number of scientific treatises on farming, nature study and kindred subjects, most of them of an elementary character, but well illustrated and reliable in authority. A careful course of reading will induce a spirit of inquiry and excite interest in farm problems, besides tending to keep the reader abreast of the times. Literary societies and rural clubs are proving in many instances wonderful means for improving the mental and moral tone of farm communities. Thus, during the slack winter season, there is provided a social and educational factor of great importance in quickening the intellect and brightening the social side of rural life. The Farmers' Institute, the fall fairs, the fat stock and poultry shows are interesting and instructive and should be attended, if only on account of their educative value.

With a public school education and proper conditions of home life and surroundings the farmer's son may develop into a first-class, all-round citizen of this Canada of ours, a nation of highly intelligent and thoughtful men and women. But to attain the highest point of perfection the farmer of to-day must gain scientific knowledge. He cannot farm successfully without the aid of science. The common "hit-and-miss" methods are rapidly losing ground in face of the wonderful success of scientific farming.

The necessary training in the science of farming is given at the agricultural colleges (and to less extent in the agricultural high schools that are being established). It means permit a two years' course (for a diploma) should be taken in an agricultural college. This should not be undertaken before the age of eighteen, and cannot be undertaken successfully unless the student has a thorough grasp of the public school studies, backed up by mental activity derived from intelligent reading and private study. The course at the agricultural colleges provides instruction in practical farming, including the care of all kinds of stock, poultry and bees. Instruction is given in the sciences with their agricultural applications; in the construction and operation of farm machinery, engines, silos, etc.; in farm bookkeeping and in English, in which course public speaking and debating are stressed.

With this educational equipment the young farmer could successfully cope with the problems of life on the farm. The ordinary routine of work which to many appears like so much drudgery would appear in a new light. The feeding of farm stock would present problems in the selection of the best balanced food ration for the various farm animals. The knowledge of soil physics would be invaluable in the application of manures and fertilizers and in the cultivation of the soil. Rotations of crops, drainage questions, old orchard problems, and other farm questions could be successfully solved by the practical application of scientific knowledge.

Overeducation is better, and in attempting to answer the question, "What should the farmer know?" I have directly shown that of what he should see and