

be fewer fences, and wider sweeps of tractor-worked acreage.

Hitherto slipshod methods have sufficed to provide the world with food, and farmers have been content to bask in the warmth of good seasons, and survive through poor ones losing much stock every year by their lack of proper methods in handling cases of sickness, and in carelessness in matters of feed, and shelter for them. The world has been making strides, and in commerce its demands have been met by new inventions. The man to-day who tries to do business without a telephone or typewriter or a cash register, as the case may be, or without an automobile finds that he is handicapped, and these are no good to him if he doesn't understand modern business usages in every form. There may be occasional cases where a man can keep in the running, but men want to do more than that as a rule, and the men who are forging ahead and making what is generally conceded to be a success commercially are those who know their businesses in every detail and know where the weak spots are, and how to stiffen them up before leaks begin. This is just what is going to happen in agriculture, and those farmers who wish their sons to remain on the soil must give them a scientific grounding in the basic principles of their profession by sending them to college. The greatest difficulty will be to finance the farming operations after that, though a thorough grounding in addition to inbred experience with farming operations will make it possible for a man to get a good start from which he can gradually build up to his capacity as a farmer and will give him a sense of security, and a position in his profession of which he need never be ashamed.

Huron Co., Ontario.

DERMOT McEVROY.

The Problem of the Rural School.

BY HENRY CONN.

In recent years much dissatisfaction has been expressed in relation to our schools. This is especially true of the schools in the rural districts and in the smaller urban centres. That these schools are decidedly inferior to our city schools is generally recognized. Unfortunately many people assume that the rural schools must necessarily be inferior. This assumption is not justified by the facts. In their attitude towards education the people of the rural parts of the Province are just as progressive and just as enlightened as the people in the cities. They are fully as interested in education, they are fully as desirous of having good schools, they are fully as able to pay for good schools and they are just as willing to pay for good schools as the people in the cities.

The lack of progress in the rural schools is not due to any inherent qualities in the character of the people but is incidental to an antiquated, cumbersome and wasteful system of school administration. The district system of school administration constitutes the one great obstacle to progress in rural schools. Till we get rid of it and substitute a larger administrative unit, real progress is impossible.

The district school system is not of divine origin. As a matter of fact, like Topsy, it just happened. The early settlers in this country were a simple people who derived their subsistence from a primitive type of agriculture. The apprentice system and the school of experience served their educational needs. The aristocratic conception of education prevailed, and there was little in the social and political life of the people which was calculated to develop a wider view of education, or create a demand for education for all and at public expense.

The school was organized as a purely local institution and to meet local needs. Many of our first schools were private undertakings. This is true of the school established in Sarnia in 1838 by Duncan McNaughton. He rented and fitted up a room in the upper part of a warehouse and conducted a school there for a year. It is easy to understand that these private ventures in many cases ultimately become community undertakings, and that these were ultimately recognized by law. In the New England States conditions were much the same; and one can understand that the United Empire Loyalists who settled in this Province endeavored to establish here the school system they had known in the land of their birth. It was natural, therefore, that the school district should become the educational unit for this Province.

It served well the somewhat primitive needs of the time. Districts could be formed anywhere if the demand existed. They might be of any size and shape. It was a simple and democratic arrangement. That the plan was well adapted to existing conditions is shown by the fact that it came into general use, both in Canada and United States. It was adopted not only in the rural districts, but also in the cities. Toronto had at one time 16 school sections and Hamilton 8 or 10.

The system was well adapted to a time of little general interest in public education, and before the period of county supervision and of a highly developed administrative organization. It was well suited to communities with small means of communication, and little interest in each other. It was well adapted, too, to the days of small undertakings, and to schools which gave instruction only in the rudiments of an education.

Social and economic conditions have undergone a radical change in the past fifty years. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that a system of school administration which gave fairly satisfactory results fifty years ago fails to meet the needs of to-day, and fails badly. As a matter of fact, the district system has been condemned by educators for more than fifty years.

Thoughtful men have described the system as expensive, inefficient, short-sighted, unprogressive and penurious. The large number of trustees required, more than 16,000 for the rural schools of the Province, makes it impossible to secure any large number of competent and progressive men. It leads to great and unnecessary multiplication of small schools; it results in unjust inequalities in educational advantages; it makes effective co-operation impossible; and it forms an almost insurmountable obstacle to consolidation of schools.

The system is wasteful. In the territory under my supervision 57 teachers are teaching more pupils in urban schools than 86 teachers are teaching in rural schools. In relation to the enrolment per teacher, if we could reach the same standard of efficiency in rural schools that we have in urban schools, the teaching staff, and the school accommodations could be reduced by one-third. But there are other sources of waste for which the system must be held responsible. The frequent changing of teachers, the employment of young and inexperienced teachers, the unsuitable character of the school buildings, the lack of necessary equipment, the irregular attendance, the small school; these are evils incidental to the district system and are fruitful sources of waste and inefficiency.

That a larger administrative unit would be productive of better results is indicated by the fact that our town schools are better than our rural and village schools, and our city schools are better than our town schools. That is to say, the efficiency of our schools is approximately proportional to the size of the unit of administration. The larger the administrative unit the better the school.

I have mentioned that the district system of rural schools was generally adopted in United States. As social and economic conditions in most of the older states are very similar to those obtaining in Ontario, the people of these states have been confronted with the same problem that now confronts us. It is interesting to find that in every case where a radical reorganization of the school system has been attempted it has invariably involved the adoption of a larger unit of administration. It is interesting to find also that the change has invariably been followed by an immense and immediate improvement in educational conditions.

Township boards have been adopted in about thirteen states and county boards in eleven states. In a general way the township board finds favor in the North and the county board in the South. As the movement began in the North and spread South, it is evident that the present trend in the United States is towards county boards, rather than township boards.

The township system has been in operation in some of the states for many years. It has been subjected to the test of experience, and it has been found infinitely superior to the district system which it has displaced. But the test of experience also indicates that with modern means of communication the townships are too small to give the best results. As our townships are considerably larger than those in the states, we are not likely to experience the same difficulty here.

There is another and more serious weakness in the township system due to the fact that our townships are purely artificial districts. The township area bears no relation whatever to natural community areas which vary in size and shape to meet local needs. The township boundaries run in straight lines and bear little or no relation to geographical features or to natural community boundaries; and it is commonly broken into by the incorporated town or village. If one imagines a city school district hampered and restricted in this manner he will readily recognize that the artificial and arbitrary nature of the township boundaries is a serious source of weakness in the township school system.

The schools in the incorporated villages and small towns could come under the control and supervision of the township board only by agreement. Experience shows that such agreements are very difficult to obtain. Consequently the township board can do little or nothing for the small village and town schools. This also is a serious weakness in the system.

The county system is free, or nearly free from these defects. It provides an administrative unit of adequate size; natural community boundaries are not disregarded to any great extent; and rural, village and town schools all benefit from an administration capable of transforming them into more useful social institutions.

The county system has greater possibilities than the township system. It may be expected to develop a better type of school boards; boards whose duties and powers are of sufficient scope and magnitude to place its members in touch with larger educational problems; of the work of the schools and its bearing on our future national welfare. The system would provide an effective barrier to over-centralization which smother local liberty in non-essentials and give the people a sense of freedom which would stimulate to greater and more enthusiastic educational activity.

The township system has the advantage of age, strong points have been clearly and accurately determined. This is not entirely true of the county system which is of comparatively recent origin. If we adopt the township system we know exactly what we are getting; we know its possibilities and we know its limitations. But if we adopt the county system we are, to some extent, making an experiment in school administration.

The county system is the natural system where there are no townships. In such cases it is simply a question of choosing between the district system and

the county system. I have the impression that this is true of British Columbia, where the county system is in satisfactory operation. But in Ontario we have townships and consequently the county is not a taxation unit. I am of the opinion that the fact that the county is not a taxation unit will prove a somewhat serious obstacle to the successful introduction and operation of the county system in Ontario. At any rate it is a point which should be very seriously considered.

Three systems of rural school administration have been developed on this continent; the district system, the township system and the county system. The first of these is cumbersome and inefficient. It has survived its usefulness and is in process of displacement. Either of the remaining systems offers immense advantages. It is to be hoped that one or other of them will be brought into operation in Ontario in the not too distant future.

School Reform Should be Evolutionary Not Revolutionary.

EDITOR "THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE":

It is with some trepidation that a casual observer of conditions in relation to our public schools system offers a few observations and suggestions as to improvement, when so many of professional standing are offering their propositions for reform, from the ground floor of experience. One almost naturally asks the question: "Is the lid off?" that so much suggestion comes at once from men who have been so long connected with the teaching profession. If autocracy has been hindering the men nearest the work from expressing criticism of a system whose defects had been appearing more clearly as time went on, then let us be thankful for the opportunity of public discussion, by men qualified to express opinions, that through this medium we may have evolved such reforms as will make our system of public school education as efficient as the boys and girls of Ontario deserve.

Criticism seems to direct attention to defects in efficiency of our educational system, particularly in relation to rural schools. In how far is it a defect of system, and in how far one of condition? Considering the latter phase of the question no one denies that rural depopulation through removal from the farm, and through smaller families in the farm home of to-day, are productive of conditions which demand solution. Even if school consolidation does not become general, provision must be made to suit conditions that exist where school population can be more economically and efficiently educated, by providing transportation to the school of an adjoining section, and payment of part cost of school maintenance there, rather than in continuing to keep up a school, equipment and teacher for 4, 8 or even 10 pupils. There are more instances than one in the Province where two or three adjoining sections have only a sufficient number of children of school age to justify the engagement of one teacher and the upkeep of one school.

Next, is the criticism of defects of our educational system justifiable in reference to rural schools? In some features yes; in others no. It seems to be the ordered duty of new Governments in Ontario to revolutionize the school system of the Province. The Government that attained power in 1905 began its reform by sweeping out of existence model schools, that by a longer professional course of teacher training, school teaching might cease to be a stepping-stone to other professions, and that teachers would stay longer in the profession. Any observer can tell, by briefly recounting his observations, if such object has been attained. Teaching has become an almost one-sex profession. Trustees complain of less permanency in individual schools than ever before, surely an undesirable condition for efficiency; and it appears as though the over-professionalizing of the profession has hindered many young men, who might have entered through the model school.

Then it was necessary to have a superintendent of education who would, with an advisory council, keep his finger on the pulse of the system. The trouble with this superb organization was that the advisory council did not advise or its advice was not taken, and the superintendent was not only superintendent, but some thought Kaiser. If initiative was present in the organization below the head it did not get opportunity to manifest itself. The inspectorate appointed by the county councils was made absolutely responsible to a dictatorial head. What opportunity had any one interested in public school improvement to make even a minor suggestion effective, unless he went to headquarters. The experience of the past fourteen years has brought Ontario public school supporters to the point where absolutism will no longer be allowed, even in a Department of Education, and those inspectors who have tried to see possibilities in the public school system in Ontario, and would have liked greater latitude in their work, may soon come into their own.

The text-books also went through the same mill, and capable teachers who refused to withhold criticism were finally listened to, and some changes made; but often it seemed as if changes were made not to suit changed teaching methods, but to keep a school-book editorial staff in permanent employment.

What will be the amending process to which the educational system will be subjected under the new Government? Will it be revolutionary or evolutionary? Even though conditions are acute in rural Ontario should we not hesitate in too drastic changes. No one objects to a more responsive directing head. All are