

# The Educational Weekly.

TORONTO, APRIL 30, 1885.

THE Honorable the Minister of Education has, by an official regulation, set apart the 8th day of May next to be an "Arbor Day," to be held as a holiday by all rural and village schools in Ontario, for the purpose of "improving the school premises, and planting suitable shade and ornamental trees and shrubbery."

The grounds for thus instituting an Arbor Day upon which the Minister of Education has more particularly laid stress, are, that the education to be gained from an ordered, neat, clean, and systematically arranged school yard is in many respects quite as important as the education to be gained from the school room. In this we entirely concur with Mr. Ross. In a short editorial in our last number we pointed out the want in our school system of any attention being paid to the artistic sensibilities of our pupils. No better plan could be chosen by which to fill up this deficiency than the school yard and perhaps no better way could be discovered of doing so than that proposed by the Minister of Education.

But there are other and highly important reasons for setting apart one day in the year for the planting of trees by the youth of the country. The nation is becoming aware of the necessity of conserving its forests, and also of the necessity of engaging men skilled in scientific and practical arboriculture for the purpose of promoting this conservation. Until very lately Canada took no step in this direction. Other nations, less abundantly provided with wooded land, have altogether outstripped us, as well in recognizing the importance of forestry as a science worthy to be fostered by the State, as in providing means and opportunity for practically applying its principles to the preservation of its timber, with all the attendant economic and climatic advantages to be therefrom derived. Germany has perhaps taken the lead in both the theoretical and practical advance made in the science of forestry; but other countries are not far behind. Our neighbor, the United States, has for many years studied the subject: to say nothing of Russia, India, Norway, Sweden, etc.

The chief difficulty in the promotion of forestry is in obtaining a sufficient number of properly trained men to whom to entrust the task of carrying out experiments and laying down rules for the protection of trees. Forestry, to be rightly studied, requires large tracts of wooded land, a large body of men with scientific knowledge and practical skill, and many years of research and experiment. The first of these Canada possesses to the full; the second can only be obtained by

rousing the people and the government to an appreciation of the importance of the subject; the third will naturally follow on the attainment of the second.

We can conceive of no measure more likely in years to come to benefit the promotion of forest conservation in this country than the official regulation now promulgated by the Minister of Education, provided it is yearly repeated and thoroughly carried out. To instil into the minds of our youth a love of trees, and a knowledge of their structure and growth; to acquaint them with the proper mode of preserving and caring for them, to cause them to regard all trees not as things requiring no care or notice, but as objects of beauty and value—as useful or more useful to the country than are to them the flowers and shrubs which adorn their own gardens, this, if carried out with patience and care year by year throughout our land must draw in its train benefits which it is impossible now fully to gauge or foretell.

This is one of the many advantages to be gained by the institution of an Arbor Day. There are many others not unimportant or unimportant. "Gardening," said the great Bacon, "is the purest of human pleasures." That this pleasure should be made the occasion of instruction, and in so inviting a way as described in the official regulations, is truly a legitimate source of gratification. It should have, indeed we may say it will have, a powerful influence for good upon the children. Accustomed only to learning from books and blackboards, within four walls, seated on hard seats, to accompany the teacher to the woods, to combine instruction of a novel and interesting kind with true and innocent enjoyment, and practically to notice and put in force the various maxims learned under an open sky, while surrounded by all that tends to impress upon the mind the lessons drawn from Nature itself,—all this must tend to elevate the tastes of the pupils, and to teach them that the search of knowledge need not be uninteresting or useless.

It will, too, have a lasting influence. The anticipations of delight with which they will look forward to the coming Arbor Day will enhance the pleasure of its duties when it comes round, and impress its lessons upon the mind. The novelty of the surroundings will aid in fixing in the memory all that has been taught under the leafy boughs and upon the green sward of the preciousness of all the vegetable and animal life which is now spread before them, and which is looked upon as something to be studied and reverently admired, and not as something altogether without the sphere of their notice or comprehension.

The subjects upon which the teacher can interestingly speak to the pupils in connexion with trees and tree-planting are multiplex. Fortunately, too, many of these subjects can be taught to the youngest without fear of their being unable to comprehend them. Indeed the opportunities which an Arbor Day presents for awakening new interests it is difficult to compute. Historical, geographical, botanical, and palaeontological subjects might be introduced which would never be forgotten. There is a large and varied field from which to cull, and it is one as yet untrodden. The actual work of planting and preparing will, of course, be looked upon by the children as the most enjoyable, but even in this many practical lessons may be learned. And our teachers must not lose sight of the fact that Arbor Day is instituted for educating purposes. It is a holiday, but a holiday upon which perhaps more may be learned than upon any other day. To make this the case teachers should prepare thoroughly what and how they shall teach.

We have touched only upon a few of the advantages of an Arbor Day, and only upon a few of the methods by which it may be made profitable. It is no unimportant event, and teachers will find it no loss of time to spend some hours in arranging the details both of its theoretical and practical side. It may be made a most powerful influence for good; it may also be unproductive of any beneficial results. All depends on the teacher. Let him look to it that he does not fail.

We can but hope that all masters will make full use of the opportunities now presented to them by the inauguration of an Arbor Day. It is the first experiment in this direction to be made by the rural and village schools of Ontario, and ought consequently to be carried out with careful thought. On the success of this our first Arbor Day may perhaps depend that of succeeding ones. There may be those who may depreciate or minimize its results, and it should be the duty of each teacher individually to see that there shall be no grounds for such depreciation and minimization. There is great scope for personal tastes; the official regulations leave a large margin for the enterprise and thought of teachers, and full use should be made of this judiciously allowed freedom. They should make themselves thoroughly acquainted beforehand of all they intend to teach their pupils on the day itself and on the following Friday, a part of which the Minister of Education recommends should be devoted to the teaching of "Canadian forestry and the different species of trees and shrubs to be found in Ontario, their uses, commercial value, characteristics, etc."