



Life, Literature and Education.

Advantages and Progress of School Consolidation.

I have followed with interest your debate on the advantage of consolidated schools, involving conveyance of pupils. The votes you counted were, in many cases, no doubt, influenced by the application of the general principle to some particular locality in the mind of the individual. I feel quite sure that the voters' conception of the application of the principle was not at all uniform.

One person had in mind an extreme case—a territory of say, eight schools, four miles apart, or perhaps an average of thirty pupils each. When consolidated, six teachers, with an average of 40 pupils, and a teacher each of (a) Mechanic Science (woodwork), and (b) Domestic Science, might be required. As a graded school, the principal at least would likely be more expensive, and also the two manual-training teachers. The staff in this case would not be reduced, and its cost might be greater.

The building and its equipment, including laboratories and garden, would be superior to any of the old buildings; but, with a special janitor, its initial cost and annual expense might be nearly equal to that of the superseded eight buildings. Possibly the new staff and building might be more expensive than the old.

To this, the cost of transporting seven schools of thirty children distances of from four to six miles, must be added. Assuming four schools to be four miles distant and three to be six miles, it will be at once seen that the extra cost of the consolidated arrangement will be likely to equal the local contribution to the schools for teachers' salaries. If local conditions are such that the teams and their drivers can be employed continuously between the morning and the evening trips, the cost will be a minimum; but even then probably equal to the salaries of the eight rural teachers.

This consolidation would, therefore, require an additional expenditure equal to, perhaps, another set of salaries for each original teacher. Would this pay? your voter asks.

Under the old conditions, the eight teachers may be assumed to have at least eight grades of common school pupils to instruct, each grade forming a class of from eight to one. Under the new conditions, none of the teachers will have more than two classes of twenty each. Each class can therefore have from three to five times the amount of drill and attention from each teacher. This advantage would more than compensate for the cost of conveyance. But this is not all of the advantages, for, as Mr. McGill has shown (23rd August), there would now be at least one High-school department, saving parents the expense of sending, perhaps,

twenty pupils abroad to a High School. This would save the community a very considerable, if not all, of the cost of conveyance.

But even this is not all, for the teaching, under the general direction of a superior principal, will be better co-ordinated; and the sympathy of numbers, manual training, household economy, general and practical nature study, as well as High-school advantages—all practically impossible under the original conditions—will be fully enjoyed and utilized. This is the extreme case; and, many rural educational personages, seeing that the plan involves an increased expenditure, conclude that, therefore, it will not pay. But a person who has seen the difference in the educational results, and has the power to estimate its value, may feel that the advance of 50 per cent. in expense gives an advance of 150 per cent. in profit.

But let us take another extreme case, and we find that the rural personage who understands no values except those of dollars and cents, will at once admit the advantage. There are four schools, with an average of from 10 to 15 or 20 pupils each, three or four miles from a central school. Sometimes, even now, we find the head of a family driving his children to a good school, past the door of the one he is taxed for. It would cost little more to take the whole school of 10 or 15 to the central school, or a portion of the way to it. In such cases it is possible to have the advantages of a larger and well-staffed school without increasing the cost necessary to support a number of listless schools, which, as a rule, can employ only the most incompetent teachers.

Mr. Theodore Ross shows (23rd August) what has been done in Prince Edward Island, and Mr. McGill what has been done in the MacDonald Consolidate School at Middleton. In the rest of Nova Scotia half a dozen small consolidations, of from two to four schools, are already working quite effectively, and many others are much improved. In these cases we have usually large and efficient schools of an advanced but ordinary type, under one strong teacher. In one case there are two, and in another an additional teacher may soon be necessary. About 40 small school sections have thus been consolidated within the last three years, and the number has been increasing each year.

Your correspondents (14th June) who had to argue for the negative did their duty, I presume, as effectively as possible. But nearly all their arguments, while in rare cases possibly applying, in normal cases and as general principles do not apply. In other words, such arguments as the following prove too little or too much, and are therefore invalid, except for exceptional cases:

1. "It is not the system, the school-house, or good equipment, which makes the best citizens. It is the teacher." But where is the good teacher most likely to be in demand and employed? Is it where there is a bad system, a miserable school-house, and an aboriginal equipment?

2. "The cost may be from 10 to 40 per cent. greater in some cases." But when the cost is not greater, or

when the efficiency is increased at a greater ratio than the cost—what then? When the general rule is that the most worthless things in the market are the cheapest, how does this test prove the "negative"?

3. "In the small school the teacher comes more into touch with the life of the child." But as the small school is more expensive than the large school, this is bad, according to (2). Let us waive this criticism, however, as it has already been shown to be no general argument. In which school—the large or the small one—is there the greater probability of procuring a teacher whose contact with the home life of the pupil would be uplifting, as desired?

4. "The consolidated school is a graded school. Herein lies its first weakness." This demonstrates—if it demonstrates anything—that all the leading educationists in Europe and America, in all our great cities and other educational centers, are blockheads, because they universally grade their schools wherever possible. Perhaps, after all, it may be that it is the solitary individual, and not the world of educationists, who may be "out."

5. "Abraham Lincoln, starting in a meagre, rural school, distanced his competitors from the city schools in his race for fame." Why does not the educational world, therefore, convert every city school into a rural school, nine miles distant from the pupil, which he must walk to and from each day for six weeks? If this is what made Abe Lincoln, the excessively big consolidated schools would offer superb inducements to those living on the outermost edges, if they should only be compelled to foot it. Our "negative" debater is here again the one against the world. Which of the two is more likely "out"?

But we must remember the "negative" debaters are merely trying to do their duty as critics; and if they find a barnacle growing on the swift turbine, they are bound to make it appear that the barnacle produced the speed; "for, see, the speed is admitted, and the barnacle too." The world will still think, however, that the ship would have made even more speed were the barnacle not there.

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Fairs and Fair Going.

There are several reasons why our farming population should attend the big exhibitions. In the first place, our fall fairs are just homeopathic doses of the big ones—the big, roaring, hustling, confusing, tiring Toronto Exhibition, for instance. When you go down to the big one, you get ideas for the little one—that is, if you have any brains, you do. You may choose, of necessity, and for a few other reasons, to cut out "The Pike." You may not be able to have the King's horses, and an immense process display, etc., ad infinitum, but you will be able to note how your pumpkins, or your apples, or your potatoes compare with the best there is to be seen in Canada, and if the difference is all on the wrong side for you, you will have received an inspiration, and will, henceforth, be on the lookout for hints as to "how the other fellow did it." In the end, of course, this will lead to the improving

of your own township or county exhibit.

Again, you will get ideas for the classes of things to be exhibited in the little agricultural hall at home. Henceforth, you will offer prizes for the pretty, useful white work, rather than for Berlin wool mats and "tidies." You will see how flowers may best be arranged to display all their beauty, and will set apart a liberal space for this most beautiful department; and you will recognize the advisability of encouraging children to take part in the fair, giving them also a goodly space for the work of their little hands.

Last of all, you should "take in" the big Exhibition because of the outing it affords you. The excitement of the little trip is a pleasing variation from the quiet monotony of the farm. How many flashlights on human nature, rippling up and down the railway coach all the time: the woman of importance rustling in silk and oblivious of everyone in the car but herself; the young girl gently steadying her old grandfather on his way to a seat; the two half-grown boys not much used to travelling and feeling under constraint to buy everything the wily train-boy brings them—butter—scotch, bananas, peanuts, picture post cards—they pick them up, and get rid of their dimes, but they are out for a big time, and they have it. What if they are a bit "smart-alecky"! They'll get over that, and their boyish enjoyment of everything is good to see. Ten chances to one if you ask those lads for a favor, it will be done you with all the alertness that only a lad just out of knickerbockers possesses. Soon enough they'll be settled down, soberly discussing politics like the two gray-beards behind you. . . . And so it goes—the trip is a change, the bustle of people is a change, the whirligig of the Fair itself is a change—and don't forget to top off the busy day with a glimpse into the Fairyland of the evening entertainment. You'll be tired out, no doubt, but never mind, when, like "Farmer John," you get your "good clothes off and your old clothes on," there will be time to rest.

THE TORONTO EXHIBITION.

The big Fair this year was much as usual. Of course, there are always some novelties. The King's horses were, of course, a great drawing-card; and the usual number of fine pictures in the Art Gallery were in evidence. Did you see Jules Breton's "First Communion"? And wasn't it fine? How every figure seemed to stand out in the keen white light, with the village and the landscape beyond appearing like a veritable glimpse into old France! One sometimes stands aghast at the things that talented men have been able to do, and certainly after seeing this painting one felt like taking off one's hat to Jules Breton. \$45,000 that picture cost, one of the valuable pictures belonging to a Canadian, for "The First Communion" belongs to Lord Strathcona. One wonders if he ever thinks nowadays of the little white house away up in The Labrador, where he used to live. But he is sure to. A man like Lord Strathcona is not one to be all fuddled up by present wealth into forgetfulness of a more humble past. His public spirit is always cropping out somewhere, and the visitors to the big Fair this time owe him a debt of gratitude for giving them a glimpse of "The Communicants."

There were other pictures, gems by Canadian artists, of course, attracting much attention. G. A. Reid was represented by some very dainty color work in his characteristic style. Then, there were