

FIELD INSTRUCTION

Proposal to Follow European Plan of Giving Personal Instruction to the Farmer by a Corps of Itinerant Teachers.

By W. P. Kirkwood.

Complaint has been made that agricultural education at the various provincial colleges does not reach far enough. It has been said that the instruction offered has been thorough enough, but that it does not reach as many as it should; that of the older farmers it misses, except now and then by an indirection, all but the few who can get away from their farms to take the courses offered at the schools. Those who make the complaint say that instruction should be carried to the farmer on the farm, that the farmer who cannot attend the school should have instruction, as well as the farmer who can.

This criticism is not without foundation, and those in charge of the schools are aware of the fact. What is more, some of them have devised means of overcoming the difficulty. They have worked out a scheme of taking the school to those who could not come to it, a scheme by which every farmer who could not attend the school or send his children could, merely for the asking, get the kind of instruction he and his children most needed. This was not by the means of establishing branch schools as some have proposed, or by sending out more bulletins and books; but by means of a corps of itinerant teachers, men trained in the various departments of schools and prepared to carry to others the very latest information about the best methods and practice in modern farming.

This plan has been tried and is increasing in use in Europe with excellent results. It would mean if rightly worked, added effectiveness for the school of agriculture and greater returns from the agricultural resources of the province.

Thus far the provinces have tried to disseminate agricultural information and traibing through well equipped central schools and through numerous bulletins setting forth results obtained by experiment. Now, however, the demand for the field instructor is becoming insistent. Prof. John Hamilton for the East voiced this idea before the Pennsylvania state board of Agriculture a year ago, in the following:—

"The movement, therefore, that looks toward the placing of the living teacher in direct contact with the tiller of the soil through farmers' institutes the moveable school of agriculture, and the itinerant advisory professor, as well as the teaching of agricultural subjects to children in the public schools, is in the right direction and in conformity with the best practice and most successful results secured after many years of experiment in foreign countries."

This demand in the East has been echoed in the West. In view of this fact it is worth while to take a look at the workings of the plan abroad. Ireland offers perhaps the best information on the subject, though the plan has been on trial there too short a time to show altogether what may be accomplished by it.

The following extract from the sixth annual report, 1905-6, of the department of agriculture and technical instruction for Ireland, gives a rather clear idea of the way the plan of taking agricultural instruction to the farmer on the farm has been worked out in Ireland:

"In the year 1905-6 thirty-one county committees of agriculture (there are thirty-two counties in Ireland) adopted the departments' scheme of itinerant instruction in agriculture, but, owing to lack of qualified candidates, only twenty-three instructors were appointed.

"The main branches of the work of the itinerant in-

structors in agriculture are the delivery of lectures to farmers at rural centers during the winter months, the carrying out of agricultural experiments and demonstrations, and the visiting of farms for the purpose of giving advice to farmers. In the year under review, the instructors delivered 12169 lectures which were attended by 66,114 persons, the average attendance being about 56. The instructors also superintended the laying down of 2,082 demonstrations plots, and instituted 439 experiments on the principal crops. The visits paid to the farmers reached a total of 8,294, representing an average of 365 for each instructor. As the visits are undertaken only at the request of the farmers concerned, the number affords an index to the place the instructor fills with reference to the agricultural industry where he is employed. A considerable portion of the instructors' time is occupied in affording advice to farmers by letter, a course which is adopted when a personal inspection of the farm is unnecessary or not feasible at the moment."

The lectures given by Ireland's instructors are usually delivered in the evening, and cover such subjects as soils, manures, vegetables, fruit and flower cultivation, plant diseases and insect pests. The demonstrations are held either at established plots or in the fields, gardens or orchards, and include practical work in pruning, spray-

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