

THE CONSOLIDATED RURAL SCHOOL

Progress in all things human depends upon the influence which education, or lack of education, exerts upon the life and activities of the community. In the rural districts the public school has always been depended upon to give the rural child all the knowledge thought to be necessary. From the day of the earliest log or frame schoolhouse until the rise of the new and modern rural school, a great percentage of our rural population have acquired their only education from the little school located in their midst. A very few have been privileged to attend high or town schools, and a still smaller percentage have acquired the benefits of a college education. If the farmer cannot send his children away from the home community in order to give them a good training it is obvious that the rural school must be kept at the highest plane of efficiency in order to give the rural child a fair start in life. The day has long passed when the three "R's" are sufficient to equip the child to battle with the keener intellects which may, and are, developed in the better equipped schools and in the higher seats of learning. It will be understood that we are not confusing education with worldly experience, or theory with practice. But we understand education to mean a preparation in those elements which are found essential to a well-balanced and successful life.

Right here it is permissible to claim that it is doubtful if the one-room rural public school ever can be developed to a point where the child receives the necessary education to properly equip it for competition against those who have had the advantage of early training in a consolidated school, or in a school where there are several teachers, each of whom is able to specialize in the particular grades under the care of that teacher. In the average rural school one teacher teaches all the grades. If there is any considerable number of pupils attending that school individual attention is something to be desired, but comparatively seldom is it possible. The grades, owing to lack of

time, must be taught wholesale. The clever pupils are held back by those who are not so quick to absorb the various subjects. The teacher must of necessity regulate the progress of the class to the child with the lowest average. And progress is naturally slow as the teacher cannot "coach" along those who may be behind for no fault of their own. It may be that they receive no assistance at home. It may be that they are temperamentally adapted to satisfactory progress in only certain subjects, or they may be naturally slow at acquiring new ideas. In any case, whatever the cause of the variation in the abilities of the pupils, individual attention is the only alternative to a dragging in the progress of the whole class. Without disparaging in any way the teaching abilities of any given teacher, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the average teacher is better qualified to teach some grades and some subjects better than others. If we grant the truth of this it is quite clear that the school with only one teacher cannot claim the same degree of efficiency in the education given as if there were several teachers.

Every child should be taught, not all that is being taught to others, but those specific subjects which fit in with the calling in life which will later demand that child's attention. The rural child should receive as much training in agricultural and nature study subjects as can be given in early school days. This will not be understood as replacing the practical experience which farm life will give, nor giving the expertness that is commonly ascribed to higher institutions. The average school teacher is not qualified to give either, and again, none have the time even if they were qualified. Of course, even with our present system of one-room schools, a properly trained teacher can give the tuition a trend towards those things which ordinarily enter into the child's outside life. Agriculture can be taught to a very limited extent. The school garden can be a feature of importance. For the girls, domestic science can re-