

Vocational Training

Rev. D. J. MacDonald, St. Francis Xavier College

(Continued from January)

WE HAVE pre-vocational agricultural training in the nature study of our common schools. This work is of undoubted value and should receive the intelligent and hearty co-operation of all. Nature study though is not sufficient. It is a method of study rather than a subject of study. It aims to give the pupil acquaintance with and interest in the common things and processes of nature; it aims to give training in accurate observation. The school garden movement too is a step in the right direction, but both, it seems to me, are not sufficient for our rural districts and we should try to take another step in advance. In the seventh and eighth grades more technical agricultural instruction might be given to prepare pupils for the vocation of farming, because many of the pupils in these two grades have their last chance of getting agricultural training in school. As to how this training can be best carried on it is difficult to say, but a solution of the difficulty should not be impossible. An attempt has been made to introduce agricultural instruction in the common schools of Ontario which seems to yield gratifying results.

The Dominion Royal Commission on Industrial Training recommended "that after twelve years of age for the children whose parents expect or desire them to follow manual occupations, the content of the courses, the methods of instruction, and the experience from work undertaken at school should have as close relation as practicable to the productive, constructive, and conserving occupations to be followed after the children leave school." The Commission is further of the opinion that the time and attention devoted to pre-vocational or trade-preparatory work in no way detracts from or hinders progress in general education of a cultural sort."

Whatever may be said about introducing vocational agricultural instruction in the primary school, there would seem to be little reason for omitting this instruction from our high school course of studies. Our high schools should not be preparatory schools for college alone. They should be the schools wherein all the people, industrial as well as professional, are fitted for their life work. Were our high schools adapted for the training of classes other than those who intend to take up the learned professions, more students would avail themselves of the training offered in them.

Education should be universal, that is, all classes

should be able to profit by it. Universal education means the education of all sorts of people for all sorts of purposes and in all sorts of subjects that can contribute to the efficiency of the people.

Primary school education is largely of this kind. The preliminary training of our youth is pretty well suited to all. Our university education is fairly universal because it offers courses in all kinds of professions. It is our high school education that is not yet universal. True, the high schools are open to all who have finished the lower grades, but the courses offered in them are suited as a rule only to the prospective professional man. To the great majority of our people they do not offer instruction that will fit them for their life's work. In a country such as this there would seem to be need for some secondary vocational agricultural instruction.

Some agricultural training in our high schools would help even students who do not intend to take up farming as their avocation. In the American high schools with their well equipped laboratories and competent instructors, it is claimed that the teaching of science has not been very successful. If such is the condition there, the condition here is probably even worse. The main reason for this is that the student lacks sufficient apperceptive basis for any special course dealing with the theories of pure science. The result is that the student is apt to be repelled by such work. For this reason the teaching of science should be related more closely to the life of the student, to his daily experiences with food, plants, and animals. It seems then that it would be good for all students, for those intending to become farmers and others to change the instruction in high school science and relate it more and more to agriculture. A few agriculturists and science men of the United States as early as 1910 began to feel that the solution of both the agricultural and the science problems of the first high school year lies in the agricultural general science course.

"By this combination of agriculture and science the usefulness of scientific knowledge is emphasized. Such a course not only presents and teaches certain scientific facts, but it provides values for them. It gives an economic, as well as a cultural, motive for further scientific study. It relates the scientific facts taught to the life of man, to certain of his fundamental needs,