



Life, Literature and Education.

[Contributions on all subjects of popular interest are always welcome in this Department.]

A QUESTION FOR RURAL-SCHOOL TRUSTEES AND TEACHERS.

The seed catalogues are being distributed from the seed-houses. What are you doing in regard to establishing a school garden this spring?

THE COMING OF THE SCHOOL GARDEN IN ONTARIO.

"The attempt to give instruction in the elements of agriculture in the rural district schools has been made at different times in this country and in other countries. . . . France, Ireland and Canada have all abandoned the experiment because of its failure to meet expectations. It is now being undertaken again in Canada, under somewhat unusual conditions, not through Governmental control, but through the philanthropy and public spirit of Sir William Macdonald, who is personally paying the expenses of an experiment which is now being made, but which has not been continued long enough to warrant a definite conclusion as to its success."

This is an extract from the report of the Committee on Industrial Education in Rural Schools, appointed by the National Council of Education of the United States. The experiment referred to is more or less widely known as "The Macdonald Nature Study and School Garden Movement," the work in Ontario being confined to the Macdonald Consolidated School at Guelph, and five schools in Carleton Co., viz., Bowesville, Carp, Richmond, North Gower and Galetta. Mr. E. A. Howes, now principal of the Consolidated School at Guelph, had full charge of the work at Bowesville, and the writer conducted the work at each of the other four schools, visiting them in order once every week. The work in Carleton Co. was begun in September, 1903, was supported for three years by Sir William, and is now being continued by the Provincial Government and by the ratepayers in the five school sections concerned.

Before proceeding to discuss the nature and merits of the Macdonald school-garden movement, it would be well to look for a moment at these "attempts" at the teaching of agriculture in rural schools which are referred to in the above extract.

Fortunate it is for the welfare of our country that, ever since our system of public schools was first established, a few men have been found who did not fear to leave the beaten path of educational traditions, who were alive to the real needs of the people, and especially of our rural population, which constitutes the majority of our citizens. And to the question has been in the minds of these men, and is becoming more and more insistent as the

years go by, "What kind of training should boys and girls receive in our public schools who are to spend their lives in the country?"

In an agricultural Province like Ontario there seems to be but one answer, and in these latter days we hear it variously stated, but perhaps few will deny that an intelligent interest in things agricultural, with some practical knowledge of at least a few of the fundamental principles underlying the science and art of agriculture, should receive a fair share of attention. The majority of people who take the trouble to think about these matters will agree that something should be done; but the question of how best to do it is not so easy to answer. Some person has told the members of the American Educational Committee that we tried to teach agriculture in our public schools in Ontario, but gave it up because "it failed to meet our expectations." And what did we expect? What could we expect? First of all, in 1896 the Department of Education intimated to the teachers of Ontario that they might give their pupils a little agriculture if they wished to do so; and if they needed to convince the ratepayers on what authority they indulged in these new ideas and practices, were there not the new regulations, with the one tremendous word, "agriculture," amongst the list of optional

became "the point of despair." The whole momentous question of HOW was disposed of in one short sentence, which stated that certain chapters in the text-book should be taken up, the more advanced classes being allowed to use the text-book, while, with the lower forms, "instruction was to be by conversation only." Can anyone imagine what kind of an "attempt" the teaching of agriculture "by conversation only" would be? Surely it would not need an educational commission to announce its "failure to meet expectations." And, after all this, men believed that something could and should be done, but how? The Normal Schools rallied for a time, and their teachers did as well as any such overworked men could be expected to do. A few teachers went out from our Normal Schools and made small beginnings in what was approaching to a rational method of teaching agriculture. Following the guidance of the prescribed text, they began a series of experimental studies at home and in the school-room, occasionally taking their classes into that greatest of all agricultural laboratories, the out-of-doors, "where even a clover-patch becomes a theatre." Still it would not "go," and, after a year or so spent in "attempts" that received no encouragement, official or otherwise, a dead silence followed, and "compul-

launched in five Provinces in Canada. Many who heard of it were at once convinced of its value, many doubted, and the rest looked wise and said nothing. The press of our Province has already done much to acquaint the reading public with the main facts regarding the school-garden movement, and "The Farmer's Advocate" is deserving of great credit for its recent series of admirable editorials on matters pertaining to educational reform and the rural-school problem. Simultaneously with the inauguration of the Macdonald school-garden movement, new regulations were issued by the Ontario Education Department, containing many valuable suggestions, covering a very wide field. These regulations have been needlessly abused by many of our teachers, who seem to have missed their meaning altogether. The regulations referred to are a long way in advance of anything in that line which has ever before appeared in this Province, showing, as they do, that the new light of modern rationalism in education has at last dawned, and that the era of book-cramming is drawing to its close. For the first time in the history of the Province, official recognition is given to nature study. Henceforth, agriculture is to be taught, not from the authorized text-book, nor "by conversation only," but BY MEANS OF THE SCHOOL GARDEN.

These regulations of 1904 also made provision for the establishing of school gardens throughout the Province, but only a very few school boards took advantage of the offer made by the Government or, rather, few felt that they could meet the conditions required by it. The impossibility of getting teachers with special training in agricultural subjects has been the greatest drawback. In Carleton Co. we have been fairly fortunate, as a previous article in this magazine, by one of our principals, amply shows. The teachers who have been actively engaged in the work, most of whom have never had the advantage of a special course in school-gardening, are to-day its strongest advocates. They have proved conclusively that the doubts and fears which were at first expressed on every hand were ill-founded. The educational ideals of people in rural communities are rapidly being elevated. It has been said that the time is not ripe for the introduction of school gardens, and that the people have not felt their need of them. Surely it is time to press into service every possible means of training the boys and girls of the country into greater efficiency, if our greatest industry is to count for anything in years to come. Surely their education should have some relation to the lives which they are to lead when school days are over. The people are very much ready indeed, and all they ask is to be shown by practical illustration what can be done to improve the conditions of life in the country for themselves and for their children, to gain their approval and co-operation. The Macdonald school gardens have afforded just such an illustration, and certainly the experiment has not "failed to meet our expect-



Scene in the Flower Section of the School Garden, Carp, Ontario.

subjects for rural public schools? Four years later the Department arrived at the conclusion that more heroic measures should be adopted if we were to lead in or even keep up with the onward march of civilization. Forthwith, a circular was issued, and copies sent to the poor, unsuspecting teachers throughout the Province, conveying the then startling information that the teaching of agriculture in rural communities had been made "compulsory"! Now for the "attempts"! A text-book was authorized, and was, and is yet, one of the best of its kind (prepared by the present Deputy Minister of Agriculture). The Department's instructions to teachers were certainly brief enough, but hardly to the point, unless, as in most cases, it

sory agriculture" was "down and out."

But dissatisfaction with the system did not end. Our more observant and thoughtful educators began to protest more and more against a system of education, the value of which was coming to be measured in terms by the number of pupils who passed the entrance examination admitting to High Schools and Collegiates. Men saw and read of what was being done in other countries. The dawn of a twentieth-century renaissance was at hand. The spirit of the new education was abroad in other lands, and its influence had already been felt in our own.

It was at this point that the Macdonald rural-schools movement was