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AGRICULTURE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

If there be one of our modern institutions, which, more than any other, typifies the principles of democracy, that one is the free public school. Supported by public money, and controlled by trustees, who are elected directly by the people, the school opens its doors to the children of all classes. No barrier is raised to exclude those of any nationality, creed, color, or social rank. The poorest day laborer has an equal right with the most opulent citizen to send his children that they may acquire at least the elements of an education. Further than this the state arrogates to itself a part of what was formally considered to be the parent's authority, and makes compulsory an attendance at school of all within a certain age.

Under such a system the interests of the majority must ever be kept in view, and it is highly important that no faction or party should obtain an ascendancy to use it to their own advantage, at the expense of the other members of the community. Instruction, which is suited to the requirements of the few, but is of little or no practical benefit to others, cannot properly form a part of the curriculum. The first care must be to provide a proper training for the child that he may understand his obligations to society and to the authority of the state; after this his equipment for a bread-winning occupation should be the most important consideration.

During the last quarter of a century the program of studies in our public schools has undergone considerable change through the remodelling of old, and the introduction of new subjects. But it is still dominated by the traditions of the past, and shows evidences of having been patterned after the earlier English schools, whose pupils were from the higher ranks of society, and were being trained with a view to public or professional service. History was required for those who were to enter law or politics; geography was essential to any who aspired for the naval service, while the technicalities of grammar and arithmetic must be mastered by all since they were considered to be the indispensable rudiments of an education. The idea of educating the laborer was not seriously considered until recent years.

But in a later age, and under another social system, quite different conditions prevail. The educational machine now takes a wider range, and the task of educating the masses is undertaken. The boy is to be prepared for citizenship, and not necessarily for a profession. With the choice of a thousand occupations, the curriculum cannot be modified to fit him for the particular one which he will enter upon. The most he can expect is the means for acquiring a general knowledge which will be of service to him whatever calling he chooses.

The educators who have led the movement for improved methods in our schools have had for their ideal a system of graded classes, ex-

tending without a break from the Kindergarten to the University, the controlling idea in each being to prepare the pupils for the grade next higher. The High School Entrance is the goal of the Public School course; the University Matriculation that of the High School course. The energy of the teachers is directed towards the preparation of the pupils for these examinations, since the passing of a goodly number is the popular test of a teacher's ability. This is done in spite of the fact that fully ninety per cent. of those attending the Public School complete their education there and never advance further. The requirements of these should surely receive first consideration, and a curriculum be chosen which would include subjects of general utility to all, and especially to those who will choose industrial occupations.

For the same reason that objection is taken to the preparation of pupils for any particular profession, so must any instruction in agriculture proper be unprofitable for Public Schools. The plea that most of the pupils of rural schools will become farmers does not justify its introduction. It would be an unprofitable task for the prospective lawyer or doctor to be compelled to master the technicalities of the different divisions of agricultural study. It might be well for him to know the points of distinction between a Devon and a Sussex cow, but life is too short to waste any time in acquiring superfluous knowledge which will never be applied.

Though it may appear inconsistent to discourage the teaching of agriculture in the schools, and at the same time to advocate the introduction of a few of the sciences beating up on it, yet some such scheme seems desirable for the reason that the sciences which help to a proper understanding of agriculture are also of practical value in almost every industrial occupation. Man lives only by utilizing the gifts of nature, and his labors are nothing more than a skillful adaptation of natural forces to the supply of his needs. Hence a knowledge of the principles which underlie the activities of nature is deserving of a place on the list of studies.

Such a study of the natural sciences as will explain some of the more obvious laws by which the wonderful phenomena of life and energy are governed might be undertaken in the higher forms of the public schools, more especially of rural schools. Where the child is surrounded by natural objects, which present an ever changing panorama, it is an easy matter to direct his inquisitiveness and give information of great practical value. The domestic animals, the birds, the insects, the wild flowers of the fields and woods all present a greater attraction to the average school boy than histories and geographies.

In botany there might be a course of instruction illustrating the germination of seeds, the growth of plants as influenced by heat, light and moisture, or by the absence of these essentials. The child's own observations would furnish many illustrations, so that, with the aid