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EDITORIAL.

Aestheticism in Rural Life.

It is a truism to say "surroundings have their effect upon the mind during its formation period." Environment certainly exercises its influence, particularly upon the young. Beautiful landscapes, nature's pictures, have been known to be the homes of the most highly-organized minds, the individuals not choosing their environments, but the surroundings assisting in the development of the better man. This truth has its application everywhere in rural life to-day. Artificial conditions not only mar the natural beauty of the landscape, but neglected, unkempt homesteads, roadsides and fence-rows are all too often accessories after the first general onslaught upon nature's beauty. Why should bare, bleak, cheerless farm buildings be found, when a little time and care would bedeck the surrounding fields and yards with a profusion of luxuriant trees, vines and shrubs? Why should roadsides be made the dumping ground for tin cans, packing boxes, orchard refuse, garbage, etc., or the pasture land of stock, so valueless that it is undeserving of better care than that accorded upon the King's highways? Or, why should the old fences remain year after year a black streak across an otherwise fair and fertile field, a nest for the propagation of insects, fungi and weeds? Doubtless the many different objects that tend to mar the generally kempt and tidy appearance of most farmyards, roadsides or fence-rows have become to those whose duty it is to improve appearances, so fixed in mind as part of the general color scheme or artistic arrangement of parts, that their presence is not noticed. The chief need, therefore, would appear to be a glass held up before the public, so that each man could see things as they are, and as they ought or might be. Such a revelation is afforded one who is privileged to enjoy a visit to districts where the people take pride in the appearance of their roads, farms and farmsteads, and who display a marked taste in the improvements they make from year to year.

It is not a settled question whether the wide roads that we have in most parts of Canada might not be more satisfactory were they a rod narrower. As they are to-day, starting from a town or village, the merchants first use the roadsides for a dumping ground for packing boxes or barrels, for wood piles, and many other unused articles of trade; further down, the blacksmith adds variation and unsightliness to the landscape by using the roadside for a vehicle hospital and old-iron repository, and beyond the limits of most small towns the worst of mongrel stock in the district make it necessary to maintain elaborate, costly fences in front of the farms.

What the rural districts might become if only there were a sentiment aroused for rural improvement, is beyond conjecture. With by-laws to protect the tidy from the annoyances of stock belonging to the shiftless or careless, and a public opinion making for all that is best and beautiful in country life, the irregular, neglected roads would soon become avenues between rows of maple, elm, pine, spruce and other trees. Unsightly country villages would be transformed into haunts of shade and shelter, the narrow, restricted fields so often seen would stretch their bounds into broad acres, and the effect upon both character and purse would be to the great advantage of all concerned. To this end rural improvement organizations might be fostered, Arbor Day

actively observed, rivalry worked up between towns and villages, and between neighbors of the same municipality, or in many other ways that would suggest themselves from time to time.

In country districts, competitions might be instituted similar to those carried on under the auspices of horticultural and civic improvement societies in some of our towns. The prizes in these competitions are awarded to the persons who keep the most attractive lawns, within specified classes, during the summer. Agricultural and horticultural societies, Farmers' Institutes and other organizations, if they undertook to inaugurate a movement for rural improvement and offer prizes for the best-kept home surroundings in each township, and a grand championship for each country, would be doing a work of inestimable value to the people they are anxious to serve, and would win the plaudits of every visitor to the districts so affected.

Rural School Improvement.

The "Farmer's Advocate" has devoted a good deal of space during the past couple of years to recording the progress of the idea of consolidating groups of small rural schools (say from seven to ten) into one large, well-equipped, modern school, for the education of the youth of the district. The subject involves a good many serious considerations, pro and con, and the last word has not yet been said. "Graded versus ungraded schools" has been debated many times, and will be again. High school principals, and others in a position to judge, have on more than one occasion declared that the best student material has come up from the ungraded school, where the one teacher instructs all the classes. Others see more in the specialization of the graded school.

To many it was no doubt in the nature of a surprise that the apostle of this new movement has not been an educationist in the ordinary acceptance of that term, nor the product of college and university. But Prof. Jas. W. Robertson, the Dominion Agricultural Commissioner, has the gift of seeing and the Scottish determination of doing. He is self educated in a remarkable degree, and is an enthusiastic believer in improved rural schools, manual training, school gardens, domestic science training, nature study, and all that might be summed up in what has been styled "the new education," which the new regulations just issued by the Department of Education in the Province of Ontario are evidently designed in some degree to realize. At the present time public education in Ontario is passing through a transition stage, and it will be some time before a degree of fixity or finality is arrived at.

Several consolidated rural schools are now being conducted in Canada, and others are contemplated. They are not altogether a new thing. In several of the adjoining States they have demonstrated their worth. They were badly needed there in consequence of the inferior character of the country schools, which are not to be compared with those of Canada. Prof. Robertson has studied this problem in many lands, and his work is not simply imitation. He has an enlightened theory of education, and he keeps in view its economic bearing in training young people to "do things." The question will be asked: Is the movement premature, or is it warranted by any contemporaneous tendency? Some facts that have come under our observation indicate that in many quarters of the Province of Ontario a very decided movement of that character has already been in progress. One prin-

cipal of a leading village school told us that in the three graded rooms of his school there were twenty pupils in attendance from adjacent rural school sections. In his own room were older outside pupils taking advanced work which they desired, in preference to going to a collegiate institute or high school. In the lower rooms were smaller pupils, down to those in the very rudiments. Their parents or guardians were evidently convinced that the latter were getting more personal instruction from the teacher than they could receive in an ungraded, one-teacher school. They were paying a fee for the privilege, and at the same time were contributing their regular share of the school rates of the section where they were resident. The trustees have power, under the school act, to exempt from taxes in such cases, but this we understand is rarely if ever done. There is little doubt that such people will be predisposed to the consolidated school proposition when it comes along. It may cost more on the whole, counting the outlay for the daily conveyance by vans or otherwise of pupils to and from school, but it ensures a better and more modern school and equipment, regularity of attendance and punctuality, and other improved features. But the Canadian people as a class are conservative in their habit of thought and action, consequently such changes will come about slowly. In the meantime, therefore, it is a question deserving of immediate and serious consideration, if more systematic and thorough-going efforts should not be made to improve the existing rural schools, by improving the buildings and equipment, by employing only the best qualified teachers, and paying them salaries sufficient to make the position held and the profession itself an inducement to remaining in it for such a length of time that a meritorious type of education in the section would be developed. The strictest regard should be paid to the moral standing of the teacher, and the latter, by interesting and identifying herself (or himself) with the home life of the pupils and their general well-being, would become, as they ought to be, a much more potent factor in the condition and progress of the community. We believe this is an ideal worth striving for, and that it is not impossible at the same time with a competent teacher in an ungraded rural school to introduce many of the features of nature study and constructive work now coming into vogue.

The Irrigation Problem.

This little book has been written with the object of supplying farmers in arid or semi-arid districts with information which may assist them in conserving the precarious rainfall, and utilizing it for the irrigation of crops, instead of allowing it to run to waste." This sentence, taken from the preface of Mason & Calthorpe's "Pioneer Irrigation and Light Railways," proclaims in few words the purpose, well carried out, of a volume which promises to bid strongly for popular favor with those inhabiting districts where such conditions obtain. It will be of special interest to those already located, or intending to locate, in such localities as those of the West, which the C. P. R.'s great irrigation scheme promises to transform into prosperous pasturage and farming lands. Beginning with the profits of irrigation, as already proven in Egypt, India, and other places, the authors proceed to demonstrate the whole problem of practical work in this line. The construction of dams and weirs, from those large enough to suit the projects of extensive corporations to those small enough to be built by the individual