

Home Journal

Whose Fault Is It?

EDITOR FARMER'S ADVOCATE :

A few weeks ago there was a letter in your journal regarding the management of our country schools that met with my entire approval, and which deserves the attention of every man and woman who has the interest of a child at heart. In our own school in this district there is no provision whatever made for drinking water for the children, and every pupil who has not a bottle of drink provided for them at home is likely to take a drink from a nearly-dry creek, which is foul from cattle and horses. No attention is paid to beautifying the school grounds, or of even keeping the buildings clean and in repair. Worse than that, last year there broke out an epidemic of mumps and whooping cough. Pupils and teacher alike attended this school affected with these diseases, and the school was never disinfected, and never even properly cleaned ever since. It is hard to believe that in this germ-enlightened age such a state of affairs can exist, and yet it does.

I am absolutely opposed to women suffrage, and yet that if there is one place in the management of public affairs where a woman would be of great value it would be on the school board, especially of country schools. As a usual thing a woman is not penurious where a child is concerned, and a woman would not be likely to favor the application of any teacher just because of the "lowest tender." By the expenditure of a few more dollars a very much more experienced and qualified teacher could be obtained. I feel quite certain that the neglected state of some of our schools would be immediately improved if a woman were on the school board, and, if the teacher happened to be a progressive kind, would she not be surer of sympathy in her efforts?

We boast of our school system as being inferior to none in the world, and, yet, I would like to point out two very grave mistakes which we are making. The first is in having so many inexperienced teachers in the country schools. Now, of course, every teacher has to put in their "first" year, but I do contend that an inexperienced girl will do less damage in a town school, where she is surrounded by those who can aid her with advice, and where she has a principal to rely on for guidance, in discipline, management, limit table requirements, etc., than if you take this same girl and place her in a country school, turn her loose to her own free will, with no overseer but the inspector, who may, or may not, visit her once a year; and we cannot wonder if the result is often an extremely disastrous, both to the moral and mental growth of the pupils. And why should the country nearly always have the inexperienced? One reason is that in some graded school at least the school board have a rule that none need apply without some experience, and perhaps another reason is that the young teacher asks a little less salary, and so is gobbled up by the country trustee. And, after all is said, the country school pays much the best salary. Few of our schools pay less than \$50 or \$55 a month, and expenses much less than in town.

Another great mistake we make, and one which parents should certainly ponder, is that if possible the country teacher selects a nearby boarding house, and is allowed to go home for

her dinner. I say she ought not to leave the children, no matter how near she is!

The evil that boys and girls of mixed ages and temperaments can learn from each other when left alone without chaperonage is scarcely conceivable, and I know of at least one school where absolutely criminal things are done during noon hour, which for the most part escape even detection.

Are our children not our most valuable possession, and are we not taking even ordinary care of them, while present evils exist? And yet what is the remedy? Can anyone make practical suggestions?

[The reform of the rural school, we believe more and more firmly, rests in the hands of the mothers of the school section. In all the prairie provinces any woman ratepayer has the school franchise and is eligible for office on school boards. There are many school sections in which there are women ratepayers, and these, if they are sensible, level-headed women, should be encouraged by all the others to take an interest in school matters and serve on school boards. The men of a section—the large majority of them—have no inclination, and say they have no time to interest themselves in school matters, and too often the trustees are men who

life that need remedying in most of our schools—heating, ventilation, water supply, clean floors, comfortable seats, adequate equipment for study, supervision of pupils in play time, and a hundred others. Let every one who can send even one suggestion be public spirited enough to send it in in the interests of prairie childhood.—Editor Home Department.]

On Teaching Mathematics

"I fixed myself to work today. After all, I am not an idler. I earn my right to live. When I publish my history the world will be thy richer by something, poor though it may be. I vow I have been more greatly, more noble employed of late years, than I was when I earned my living at school-slavery, teaching to children the most useless, the most disastrous, the most soul-cramping branch of knowledge, wherewith pedagogists in their insensate folly have crippled the minds of their fellow creatures—elementary mathematics. There is no more reason for any human being on God's earth to be acquainted with the binomial theorem or the solution of triangles—unless he is a professional scientist, when he can begin to specialize in mathematics at the same age as the lawyer begins to specialize in law or the surgeon in anatomy—than for him to be an expert in Choctaw, the Cabala or the Book of Mormon. I look back with feelings of shame and degradation to the days when, for the sake of a crust of bread, I prostituted my intelligence to wasting the precious hours of impressionable childhood, which could have been filled with so many beautiful and meaningful things, over this utterly futile and inhuman subject. It trains the mind—it teaches boys to think, they say. It doesn't. In reality, it is a cut and dried subject easy to fit into a school curriculum. Its sacrosanctity saves educationists an enormous amount of trouble, and its chief use is to enable mindless young men from the universities to make a dishonest living by teaching it to others, who, in their turn may teach it to a future generation."—Morals of Marcus.

THE GLEANERS

Across the stubble-field the wagons go
With lilting laughter and glad harvest song;
And in their fresh-made track, shy pensioners
Advance, vibrate, retreat the whole day long.
The proud, young, feathered mother from the barn
Brings here her fluffy, chirping, yellow brood;
The plump quail feeds, unfrighted and unharmed;
The squirrel feasts and flies; in bolder mood
The timid field mouse waits to fill her nest;
The wee ant staggers off with precious pelf;
And flocks of chattering birds, bold highwaymen,
Take tribute from the loaded wain itself.
The happy children, riding on the sheaves,
Would drive these daring bordermen away.
The farmer, turning hastily around
With kindling eyes and softening face, says: "Nay,
Our bins are bursting with God's gifts. Be still.
They are His gleaners. Let them eat their fill."
—The Independent.

like to hold office and who have an aptitude for keeping a keener eye on the teacher and her doings than on the equipment and general condition of the school. It is up to the women, if any improvement is to be made. The teacher coming new into the section cannot be blamed if she measures her enthusiasm and desire for improvement of the surroundings by that of the residents. If the mothers and fathers do not care that their children live the most of their waking day in a place a little less comfortable than the stable, and a little cleaner than the pig pen why should she be anxious? For the credit of the average teacher it must be said that she does care more and does work harder to make things better than the parents do, but she hasn't half the opportunity to make big reforms. Our system of education is as good as the best; our educational surroundings are nearly as bad as the worst.

It is sincerely to be hoped that the readers of THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE will reply to your appeal for practical suggestions. Probably no one person can solve all the problems, but the smallest bit of helpful experience will be appreciated. You have named many phases of school

Why is it that pity looks like a virtue when you bestow it and like an insult when you receive it?

There are some hearts like wells, green-mossed and deep
As ever summer saw;
And cool their water is—yea, cool and sweet—
But you must come to draw.
They hoard not, yet they rest in calm content,
And not unsought will give;
They can be quiet with their wealth unspent,
So self-contained they live.

A remarkable book find has just been made by a poor Jewish youth in Whitechapel. He bought for a half-penny from a barrow in Mile End Road a copy of Goethe's poems enriched with Thackeray's signature and crest, and a number of his thumbnail sketches scattered throughout the book. The covers were in bad condition, but the pages were clean. The youth had the shrewdness to make the most of his find, and after many negotiations he has now sold his volume for about £20.