

The Consolidated School

Some urgent rural problems--How the consolidated school meets the need

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

The problem of the country shows its most alarming symptom in the drift to the cities. Wherever modern civilization has reached, there is found the swollen city and the depleted countryside. It is so in Japan, in Russia, in Australia, as well as in western Europe and North America. The advent of steam and machinery means more goods but a lessening of the rate of increase of the population. There are more things to eat and fewer to eat them. The coming of new comforts raises the standard of living, and lessens the birth-rate. Thus the country suffers in a twofold fashion, both by the general drop in the birth-rate and by the drift to the city.

COMMUNITY OF FARMERS.

In spite of an almost unexampled haste on the part of Canadians to flock to the cities we are still to a large extent a community of independent farmers. How long we shall remain so is a difficult and insistent question. We cannot lean back and assure ourselves with the plausible rejoinder, "Somebody must produce the food, and so the farming class will continue." It is quite possible that the independent farmer may disappear and his place be taken by the renter and the big farm run by 'hands' like a factory. Something of this kind is appearing in some of the United States. If we wish to maintain upon the land a class of people who shall own and till the land it is high time that we began to think about the matter. England lost her yeomen in the industrial revolution which created her cities and made her rich. In like manner, and without the same compensation, we may incur the same fate.

THE COUNTRY SCHOOL.

It is apparent that one of the vital necessities in solving this problem is the education of the country child. What we must do is preserve what we have. Having done that we may go farther, and attempt to reverse the drift of population, so that the cities shall empty themselves into the country. But the first thing is to persuade and enable the farmer's children not to forsake the old home.

A vast amount of sentiment clings about the old-time country school. Our neighbors to the south have a phrase, "The little old red schoolhouse," which marks the affection with which it is commonly regarded. And the same feeling is prevalent in Canada. This is perfectly natural. It is one of the tricks of memory to gild the age of one's childhood. The old swimming-hole enjoys an extraordinary veneration also. But the fact is that the country school has not been worthy of the country nor fit for its task. In its place has come, in some regions of Canada, the consolidated school. This is a school formed, as the name suggests, by grouping together a number of adjacent school sections, providing it with a school having a number of teachers, and bringing the children to and from their homes by means of vans. It is now ten years or so since Manitoba started this sort of schools, and the results have been very happy. They are such as these:

RESULTS.

1. Regular attendance. Truancy is almost impossible when the child is called for, as is neglect on the part of parents. The weather does not count for so much when, instead of having to trudge through mud or snow, there is a comfortable conveyance for the child. Parents need not dread that their children will sit for hours with wet clothes or boots. To anyone who knows how irregular attendance often is in country schools this item alone stamps the consolidated school as a great gain to rural education.

2. The children become members of larger groups. In the playground, which is a real place of education and often as important as the classroom, larger numbers bring very distinct advantages. There are enough now to make sides for any game, and supply the valuable element of audience besides. The larger group makes a wider appeal to the child's emerging social consciousness. He gains in his preparation for life in the nation, church, and calling he may eventually become a part of.

3. Better instruction. Instead of one teacher handling all the grades, with a few pupils in each, and perhaps none at all in some, each child passes

through the hands of a number of teachers, each of whom can concentrate upon one or two of the grades. The principal is likely to be a man, to the great profit of the boys in the school.

4. More instruction. It is not uncommon for consolidated schools to take up the earlier grades of high school work. As the vast majority of pupils leave school, in either country or town, with the end of the primary school curriculum, this means that some pupils at least get this higher instruction who otherwise would never have gotten it.

5. Specialized rural instruction. This becomes possible through the division of the labor of teaching among a number of teachers. Moreover, such an addition or change in the course of studies goes readily with a school which represents a forward movement in education. The old-time country school had a curriculum far more suited to the city than the country, though, indeed, it was not well suited to either. It exercised a decided influence to make the ambitious youngster on the farm wish to get away. It helps to remedy this evil when country-life studies are pursued, and the farm and the life of nature about it are made objects of intellectual curiosity.

COUNTRY BOYS.

It is a commonplace that the prizes of the city are taken by the youth from the country. I suppose that this will continue to be the rule. No system of education will hold a certain small number of young men and women of high endowments and overflowing vitality from pressing into the thick of the most crowded centres. But the prize win-

ners are few, and one object of social endeavor should be to limit the prizes and the lure of them. Our attention should be directed rather to the average man, who is probably a little poorer because some prize-winner has gotten more than is good for either him or the community. And the average boy or girl from the country is not the prize-winner. Narrowness, dulness, poverty and ill-health are more likely to be the gifts which the city bestows. Often they long to be back in the country, or, if they do not, it is because unwholesome living conditions have taken from them the capacity for sane judgment. It is better for the farmer's children, as it is better for nations, that they remain on the farm.

The newspapers of the United States have been commenting on a disclosure made by the recent draft for the army as to the relative fitness of the young men from country and city. There has been some surprise that the city-bred youth is not only better educated, but has a better physique. He has better teeth, and runs ahead also in other particulars. It is plain that children in the country are comparatively neglected. They have not the same chance as their cousins in the city. The consolidated school helps to give these country children their chance.

If the choice were forced upon some educational dictator of benefiting either city or country children at the expense of the other, he might well choose that the country children should have the advantage. For they need it as against the day when they become adults. The organization of the city is mainly co-operative, whereas the organization of the country is individualistic. The average man in the city takes orders, while the average man in the country does not. The average man in the city has found somebody to think for him, but the farmer must think for himself. He is his own boss, and must plan his work and operate his business by means of his own unaided ability. One thing we have to dread, as I have indicated in an earlier paragraph, is that the city form of organization should seize upon the farms. So, if we are to preserve the farms for farmers, and not turn them into agricultural factories, we must face the problem of the country.

EMBARGO ON FOOD EXPORTS BY U. S.

A virtual embargo on the export of certain food-stuffs and feeds was declared on Thursday last at Washington, by the exports administrative board in adding a list of articles to those already denied shipment except where their export will contribute to the conduct of the war.

The commodities added are food grains and feed grains, oil cake and meal, animal fats, vegetable oils and soap, caustic soda and certain machinery. Where the foods and feeds named are permitted to go forward they can be licensed only with the approval of the food administration. The additional articles, it was announced, are placed under embargo because of diminishing supplies and to meet the actual needs of America. Licenses will be granted for their export, it is announced, only "when destined for actual war purposes, or when they will directly contribute thereto; in certain unusual cases where such exports will contribute directly to the immediate production of important commodities required by the United States; and in certain other cases where the articles may be exported in limited quantities without detriment to this country, such as food grains and fats, which require the approval of the food administration."

In making the announcement the exports board advised exporters and commission agents to obtain licenses before making purchases for export, and before reserving tonnage space.

Individual licenses will be granted for export of the commodities on the conservation list to Newfoundland, Mexico and Canada, shipments in small lots which will be licensed in small lots by Collectors of Customs.

RUSSIA'S WAR EXPENSES.

The Russian Finance Minister has issued a statement of the financial position of Russia, showing that the expenses of the war up to September 14 have amounted to 41,000,000,000 roubles.

The war costs are still further increasing owing to the demand for higher wages and the increased price of necessities. The Minister urges the people to postpone their wage demands until the end of the war.

DEALERS IN FRUIT TO COME UNDER SUPERVISION.

Ottawa, Sept. 27. — After Oct. 1st the wholesale fruit dealers of Canada will do business under strict supervision of the Food Controller's office. The fruit and vegetable committee has definitely decided upon the policy of registration and licensing, and will require regular statements from all persons engaged in the trade as to turnover and profits. Mr. J. Hastings, vice-president of the committee, and Mr. D. Johnson, Dominion fruit commissioner, stated today that they were confident that the licensing system would benefit the public by eliminating the food speculator. "If it is found that any wholesaler is taking any improper advantage of the public, his license may be cancelled or immediately suspended," Mr. Johnson said.

The decision of the committee is the result of an investigation in eastern Canada extending over several weeks. The committee's inquiries in the west have not yet been concluded. In the case of all the better known wholesale dealers and commission houses east of Port Arthur, it has been found that profits have been very moderate, but the committee believes that the method now decided upon will deal effectively with the fruit speculator, whose operations are frequently not in the public interest.

A list of the wholesale fruit dealers is now being prepared and instructions to register at once will be sent out from Ottawa in the course of the next few days.

WORLD'S WHEAT CROP.

The world's wheat crop this year for the principal countries which have reported, including the United States, is 1,665,489,000 bushels, an increase of 3.3 per cent. over 1916, according to reports from the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome, made public today by the Department of Agriculture.

The world's barley crop is 464,289,000, an increase of 2.4 per cent.; the rye crop, 89,950,000 bushels, an increase of 10.7 per cent.; the oats crop, 1,995,504,000 bushels, an increase of 19.9 per cent.; and the corn crop, 3,273,996,000 bushels, an increase of 25.3 per cent.

Algeria, the latest country to report, shows wheat production of 29,715,000 bushels, an increase of 1.9 per cent. over last year. Her oats crop is 18,946,000 bushels, an increase of 44.2 per cent.; and her barley crop, 33,208,000 bushels, a decrease of 7.7 per cent.