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WHY BOYS LEAVE THE FARM

A Budget of Views from Teachers and Journalists in Reply to the Courier's Criticism of our present Educational System

EASTERN Canada's most pressing problem is that of keeping her people on the land. In spite of improved farm machinery, better country roads, better service on steam and electric railways, rural telephones and rural mail delivery the people are crowding from the farms to the city. As has been pointed out in previous issues there is much farm land in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia which has not as great a value as it had forty years ago. In some communities the farms are occupied by the old people and hired help, because the younger generation have gone to the city or to the great West. It has been suggested in these pages that the present high school system is largely to blame. The high school teachers have been asked to educate farmers, mechanics and candidates for the professions—and have found it an impossible task. Because it was impossible the farmers and mechanics have not been receiving the education which should fit them for the occupation of their parents. There have been a few minor attempts to start the teaching of agriculture, but none of them have been taken seriously.

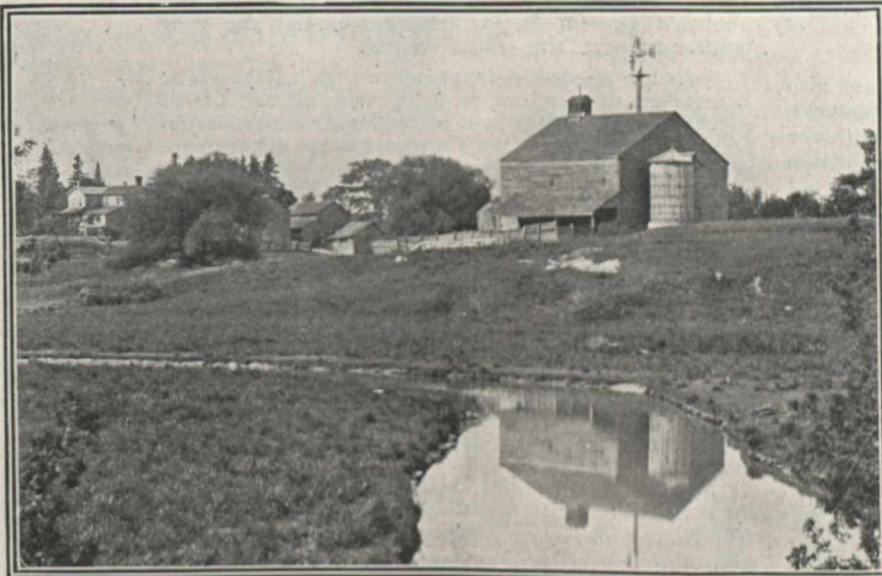
It may be that the source of all the trouble lies elsewhere than in the schools. The following letter from a high school principal is a fair presentation of the case from one who has studied the question at close quarters. Mr. Denyes is a graduate of Queen's University and has had considerable experience in high schools which were largely attended by farmers' sons and daughters. His letter follows:—

Oakville, Nov. 8th, 1910.

Editor Canadian Courier:—

Sir:—The COURIER will undoubtedly have the gratitude of all those interested in the present educational development in Ontario for its efforts towards the solution of the difficulties which are now presenting themselves. In the issue of Nov. 5 you have deplored the evident decadence of rural communities and have very pointedly laid a large share of the blame to the high school and the high school teacher. I submit that if there is such a decadence generally as you maintain, the causes are more complex than this high school argument would lead us to suppose, and you must look farther afield and farther back for an explanation of the exodus from the Ontario farm. And I submit further that it is scarcely fair to burden the high schools with so serious a charge without more definite proof.

In the first place, what are the facts as to the destination of the pupils leaving our high schools and collegiate institutes? According to the last annual report of the Minister of Education, covering the year 1908, there were enrolled in these secondary schools an attendance of 31,912. Of those leaving these schools in 1908 the numbers entering the different occupations and professions were as follows: Mercantile life, 20.89 p.c., agriculture, 11.02 p.c., profession of law, medicine or the ministry, 4.61 p.c., teaching profession, 17.10 p.c., other professions 5.99 p.c., other occupations 40.37 p.c.



Why do people prefer cramped apartments, ugly terrace houses and the impure air of large cities, to farm homesteads such as this?

When we consider the fact, that high schools are giving back to the farm practically half of those who enter these schools from the farm we may feel not unduly alarmed or concerned for the harmful influence they are said to exert. It is to be remembered that only a small proportion of public school graduates in rural communities, if we may properly use such a term at all, ever enter the high school. If the others leave the country for city life and occupation the high school is not responsible. Of those who do take advantage of the secondary school we may congratulate ourselves heartily that some considerable portion enter the professions, for it is a well-known fact that these very students it is who have risen to the front in all the learned professions and who have done noble work in advancing the interests which we cannot afford to neglect in our advancing civilisation. It would be a very interesting experiment to select a few representative counties of the Province and adopt some practical means of ascertaining under what circumstances the boys have left the farm. If it is found that more than a fair percentage have been led to do so through the influence of the high school alone it will be surprising to many people who have observed the situation pretty closely. The great majority who have forsaken the farm are those who have never attended the high school.

From this it is not intended to argue that our system of education as it is now organised has not tended to draw away the young people from the farm. But it is argued that the fault lies back of the high school. It is in the public school that the tendency should be given to the boy that will lead him to value more highly the appeal of the farm. It is here that his educational interest must be aroused. Just so long as the country boy can attend the public school for years without coming into actual work-

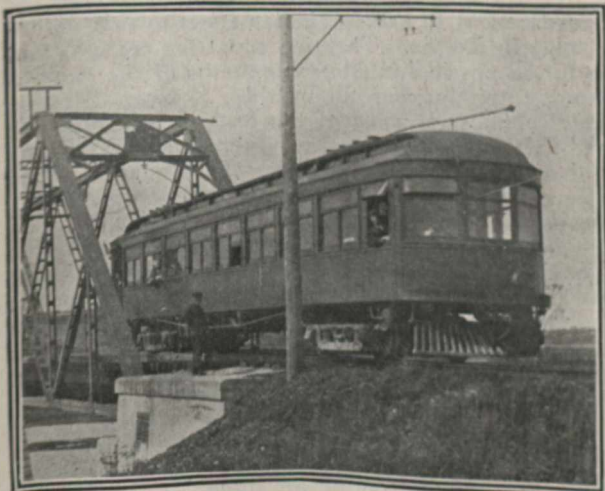
ing touch with the problem of the soil and with the thousand and one laws and principles that underlie the wonderful processes with which he comes in daily contact, just so long will he fail to catch the inspiration that ought to be filling him with a love of his home and its surroundings. No wonder that under such conditions he is ready to adopt the ambition of his neighbour to "be a lawyer," or perhaps a doctor, an ambition in which his parents very often encourage him.

Our great mistake of the past has been that we have over-emphasised the mental and quite underestimated or neglected the physical. Labour has its essential place in all mental as well as physical development. Dr. De Garmo well said in addressing the Ontario Educational Association in 1909 that the masses of mankind cannot be educated without work, nor will they respond to an education that has no labour in it. Let us put work into the schools then. The school-garden will provide the practical appeal to the boy's activities. It is not enough of course, as you point out, to put a text-book on agriculture into the pupil's hands. It does not mean anything. Correlate it with practical demonstrations of its principles and it will mean something. And place a definite objective before the rural pupil in a course of study centering in agricultural pursuit. Conclude this course with an examination which will entitle the successful student to a graduation diploma of the public school in agriculture. It will be said of course that under present conditions in our rural schools such a step is impossible. And the criticism is well made. Many of the rural schools are very small, and seventy-five per cent. of the teachers are females. The maximum age of attendance is about fourteen, of both boys and girls. The remedy to be suggested would include consolidated schools, a raising of compulsory school age, an increase of technically qualified teachers. And not the least important factor entering into the problem is a largely increased expenditure on the public schools. Is the farming community of the province prepared for this? The experience of the last few years would scarcely seem to justify an affirmative answer. You very rightly say that changing the spirit of high school education is not sufficient. "The spirit of the people must be changed." There is urgently needed an honest and intelligent eideavour on the part of the press and of our representatives in the legislature to educate public opinion to a point where reform or re-adjustment by the government will be met with at least a fair response.

It must be said that the government is moving constantly in the right direction. The steps they have already taken are making for more practical



Will Rural Mail Delivery help?



Will the Rural Trolley bring them back?