

HORTICULTURE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



THE fact, that, by far the largest interests of our province are agricultural, is of itself sufficient reason for giving agricultural subjects prominence in a rural school course ; but when we consider the practically indefinite expansion of which they are capable, it becomes a matter of natural importance that something should be done to bend the inclinations and direct the energies of a larger proportion of the population towards them. Not only is there a distaste for these pursuits, as shown by the disproportionate growth of urban population, but there is a lamentable ignorance of the scientific principles on which they rest. Among the many agencies to which we may look for improvement, none possess more advantages than the public schools, and horticulture presents the readiest means of introducing agricultural subjects in these schools. There is not a family represented that has not at least a small garden, so that many of the facts and theories of a class lesson could be verified or tested immediately by the pupils with little trouble and no expense. The material for the practical study of plant is always at hand. Horticultural subjects can be taken with pupils of all ages, along the lines of the most approved modern methods of teaching without disturbing the ordinary school work in the least. Indeed, natural science cannot well be introduced in primary schools except through the study of plants and their modes of growth. Any pupil who is old enough to notice the difference between a leaf and a root, or that a plant droops when pulled from the ground and revives again when placed in water, is old enough to begin the study of plants ; and no pupil is so far advanced that he does not find something to interest him in even a limited garden.

As a mental discipline, quite apart from its practical side, this subject would have as much value as any on the course, and in point of interest is much beyond many of them. I have seen a high school class of boys and girls, partly from the town and partly from the country, listen as they would to a fairy tale while their teacher told the story of the common red clover and its relation to other crops on the farm.

But the difficulty lies rather with the teacher ; unless he has an appreciation of the importance of the subject, and a living interest in it, I fear little progress would be made. Many of our teachers are young girls who, in addition to their intellectual immaturity, are supposed to have no interest in the theory and practice of horticulture, and possibly for that reason none. A large portion of the male teachers are from the country, but they too often think of the garden only as a place where they were forced to toil evenings after they had already done a fair day's work in the fields. The case, however, is not altogether hopeless.