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EDITORIAL.

The Question of Agricultural Schools.

A deputation lately waited upon Hon. Mr. Monteith, the Provincial Minister of Agriculture in Ontario, asking that an agricultural school and experimental farm be established in the Eastern part of the Province. The usual consideration was promised. Press reports of the conference do not indicate clearly the king of school which the delegation had in mind, but it occurs to us that a few observations of a general character on the subject might not be inappropriate at this juncture. In a recent letter to the "Farmer's Advocate," Prof. Thomas Shaw, now of Minnesota, described the inception of what is known as the "Agricultural High School idea," in Marathon County, Wisconsin, in 1902, a second school of that character being opened at a later date, and provision made for two others—or, four in all for the State. By those directly interested it is believed that there is a good future for some of those schools, but from information to hand, it seems to us that they have yet to demonstrate their permanency in the scheme of State education. In the adjoining State of Minnesota the subject is only under consideration in a tentative way.

Off and on, during late years, we have heard more or less of indefinite proposals in Ontario, looking toward the establishment of local agricultural schools, and the suggestion was made a few months ago that the Strathroy Dairy School building might be utilized for such an experiment. It is difficult to see just how an agricultural high school would be successfully grafted into the present educational system of Ontario. We have been experimenting with agricultural text-books for the rural public schools and the teaching of agriculture, but thus far there is very little in the way of results to show for it. The Agricultural College at Guelph has steadily gained ground, and has now a solid foothold in the appreciation of the agricultural public of Ontario, but it is not overcrowded, and if it were it could be indefinitely enlarged for the accommodation of students and the necessary additions made to the staff and equipment. Until there are signs of Guelph getting more students than it can properly train, Ontario does not need any more agricultural colleges. Primarily, the character of the education received by the pupils of the rural public schools, if it is to be modified, must begin with the training of the public-school teachers, and it will receive further shape and bent by the curricula of the public and high schools. But this does not answer the question as to the supposed need in our system of some other schools than those we now have. Do we need agricultural high schools? If so, is the time ripe for their introduction? It does seem to us that their establishment would be commencing at the wrong end of the business entirely. If a solution is to be sought of the problem of educating the rural youth, either in new schools or modifications of those in existence, why not pause until the outcome is seen of the Macdonald consolidated rural-school demonstration at Guelph? If all expectations are realized, consolidated schools will multiply, and may revolutionize the little single-room country school of the present time. It has been longer and more thoroughly tried in the Maritime Provinces, and Dr. A. H. McKay, Superintendent of Education in Nova Scotia, gives it

very unqualified endorsement, as seen by his review of the subject in these columns a few months ago. In the village of Kingston, New Brunswick, seven small rural districts consolidated in 1902, and the results are described in an illustrated article by Mr. D. W. Hamilton, in the Home Magazine department of this issue. We are told that "the prospects for consolidation in New Brunswick are very bright," and that the opening of other consolidated schools will follow in rapid succession. Reading this account, and looking over the beautiful school and its gardens for pupil-work, one could almost wish to enjoy the privilege of living over again the days of school life amid such congenial surroundings, calculated to give the pupil a new outlook upon nature and to develop activities which the old-style school repressed and enveloped too often with the gloominess of a veritable Dotheboy's Hall, or the educational system of a Mr. Gradgrind. Professor Robertson has given these schools an agricultural bent, but there is no guarantee that under different inspiration they might not lapse into the routine of any other four or five teacher school. It is to be hoped that the results will indicate the wisdom of the present policy.

Now, with regard to agricultural schools in Ontario: It is hardly twelve months since the new school curriculum went into effect. Teachers and people need education and training to make the agricultural phases of the new course of study effective in public and high schools. Every high school and collegiate institute in Ontario can and should do something in this direction—even those in the largest cities—and the great majority of them should do much. We do not see that an agricultural high school is needed either at Strathroy or Napanee, but considerable agricultural education at every high school already in existence. It seems to the "Farmer's Advocate" that the duty of the Ontario Government is improvement of the existing means of agricultural education all along the line, rather than any new experimental institutions.

The Scarcity of Sheep.

The mistake of farmers in dropping one class of live stock from their list because for a time prices rule low for that class, and taking up some other owing to a rise in values which may be only temporary, has seldom been more generally illustrated than in the abandonment of sheep-raising, which was formerly common on most Canadian farms. And no sound reason is given in the majority of cases for this neglect. In the districts and on the farms where dairying has been made a specialty it is claimed that sheep infringe upon the pastures and rob the cows. There is a modicum of truth in this assertion, but it amounts to less than is generally supposed, as sheep are best satisfied with short, sweet grass, and, besides, eat many weeds and plants that cattle despise, and they will thrive on forage where cattle will not deign to graze. Besides, dairying is not a specialty in one-half the area of older Canada. For the purpose of cleaning and keeping the farm clean of weeds, sheep, therefore, serve a special purpose, and the land is enriched by their voidings wherever they go. No class of farm stock require so little labor or attention in their care and feeding in summer or winter as do sheep. They need no expensive housing; there is no tying up and unloosing; no daily cleaning out of stables, once or twice in a winter being sufficient, as a rule; no currying or brushing, or milking. They increase the stock

generally by one hundred and often by one hundred and fifty per cent. annually, and declare a dividend in their fleece that more than pays for their year's keep, even when the price is low—a crop that no other stock returns—and the surplus of the flock is always salable at a fair profit on the cost of production. And yet, one may ride a hundred miles on a summer day in old Ontario to-day and not see a single sheep, even if looking for them—a statement that applies equally to the more eastern Provinces—and this in a country peculiarly adapted in every way to the healthful and profitable production of the ovine race. The plea that dogs are a menace to sheep-breeding applies in no greater degree here than in any other country, and is, in most cases, a flimsy excuse, as a reasonable amount of precaution will ensure a tolerable immunity from loss in that regard. In an experience of over forty years with a flock averaging over one hundred head on a farm two miles from a village and three miles from a town, the writer suffered the loss of but two sheep by dogs, the flock being only once attacked, and in that case the owner of the dog paid full value for the sheep. This may be an exceptionally fortunate record, and is not cited in extenuation of the dog nuisance, for which a confirmed hatred is confessed, but as an illustration of the readiness of the many to adopt an untenable excuse in the absence of valid reason for a certain course of action, or inaction.

With unwashed wool selling up to twenty-five cents a pound in the neighboring States, and lambs up to seven and a half to eight dollars a hundred, the sheep trade is booming in that country, and if Canadian farmers had sheep to sell at present they might realize extra good prices for them, as United States breeders look to Canada for breeding stock, and are already buying freely in this country; but the trouble is that, now when demand is keen and prices are advancing, few of our farmers have sheep to sell, and those who would buy to start flocks, in view of the improved prospect for the trade, will have to purchase at higher figures than they could have done a year or two ago. Those who have any liking for sheep-raising and who think of founding flocks, will do well to make their purchases early this summer, as it is certain that breeding stock will be in great demand for the American trade, and all the best available will be bought up before the breeding season this fall. And the probability is that the improved prices prevailing will continue for some years, as sheep are scarce both in Britain and America, and wool values are likely to rule high for some time to come.

The U. S. tariff heavily handicaps the Canadian farmer in regard to that product, but a large percentage of our neighbors are now favorable to a revision of the tariff on reciprocal lines, and when the proposition comes from their Government for a readjustment, as we believe it will, the duty on wool will doubtless be lowered to a considerable extent. As it is, the price of wool in this country has advanced at least twenty-five per cent. in the last three years, and the tendency is still upward, while the value of lambs and sheep has risen in greater proportion. We are not disposed to advise a general rush into the founding of pure-bred flocks, though we believe there will be money in so doing for those who understand the management of sheep and who buy judiciously, but there is the opportunity open to many to do well by purchasing good grade ewes at moderate prices, and by using pure-bred rams, producing stock that will command paying prices with reasonable certainty.