

The Farmer's Advocate AND HOME MAGAZINE.

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DOMINION.

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recently driven through a stretch of country not far distant from Winnipeg where from all one could tell from appearances on both sides of the road he might just as easily have been travelling through the Balkan States of Europe as through a fertile strip of Canadian prairie. All the various people of the states of Central Europe were there, and all their old customs had stuck with them. No Canadian is enthusiastic over the prospect of having within our borders a number of little Bulgarias, Roumanias, Galicias, etc. True, these people look after themselves once they settle here, but they are not "good mixers" and they still maintain native customs, languages, religious practices and stay mainly in colonies. They are difficult to Canadianize, but to avoid jealousies and other troubles they should all be taught one language and that the English language.

The end of the war will bring up new immigration problems. Canada has little right to turn away any immigrant who is up to a high standard of physical and mental fitness, but this much can be done—surely those in charge can avoid campaigns to induce people of races vastly different from our own to come out here in large numbers to settle in colonies. Canadian land is valuable and why so much hurry to give it to people who can scarcely be Canadianized? Canada wants all the men and women the British Isles can spare, and is ready to do all she can to assist them in making homes, but if high ideals of citizenship are to prevail and with them we are to enjoy the observance of law and order such as is only known in a country with high ideals, then there must be a high standard set with regard to immigrants coming to our shores. Canada's policy should be to turn away no fit man who comes voluntarily; to refrain from the use of special campaigns and literature to induce foreigners with ideals vastly different from our own to settle in this country; to get as many as Britain can spare to make their homes here and assist them in every way; to insist upon the use and teaching of the English language. We want no hyphenated Canadians.

Few there are who will have sufficient corn for an extra silo this year, but the dry spell which we have experienced demonstrates very well that a little silage for summer use would be profitable.

Some Cures for the Rural-school Problem.

BY SINCLAIR LAIRD, DEAN OF THE SCHOOL FOR TEACHERS,
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The improvement of rural schools is a pressing problem, and will be a vital problem for the prosperity of our fair Dominion till it is solved. Efficiency of city schools has progressed so far that it has now become practically standardized. The main danger in the city school is that it may be too uniform and stale. It may be too conservative in retaining useless subjects on its curriculum and may too easily be dominated by entrance requirements for a university course, instead of seeking to prepare the vast majority who never go to a university at all, but enter on their life work straight from school.

In the country, however, there is no such danger. The difficulty is not so pressing as far as the course of study is concerned, though that, too, may be traditional rather than useful. The chief trouble lies in securing efficiency of any sort, for the rural school which in a former generation once possessed a certain efficiency for its purpose has lost that efficiency in face of the changing farm life which marks the twentieth century.

Factors in the Problem.

I. The Social Factor—

The conditions that affect the schools are social and economic in their nature; the rural community has changed; farm practice has been revolutionized, and home industries have vanished in competition with machinery and factories. Two factors then which enter into the problem are: 1, the nature of the rural community which the school is designed to serve, and also, 2, the economic situation on the farm.

II. The Economic Situation—

If farming does not pay, then young farmers will leave the farm. If the alleged large bank deposits in the name of farmers are placed there by the unremitting toil of the parents and the misery and labor of the family, then rural life is no longer attractive as a source of livelihood. The struggle in pioneer days was for mere existence, for daily bread and warmth and clothing. The muscles of the pioneer met the resistance of nature's strength. It was a struggle of human brawn against natural forces, a struggle for the survival of the fittest. But modern civilization has transferred the struggle to the sphere of mind and intelligence. It is now a struggle of brains, and success goes to the cleverest and not to the strongest. Business and financial success in the farmer's work depends nowadays on his mental equipment and his education. Farming is no longer a job for unskilled labor, but it is a highly scientific profession. The economic situation then is this;—if farming pays, people will stay on farms and will even go back to the farms; if farming does not and cannot pay, then farmers will desert the farms and go to the towns. This is the point where farming and schooling meet. On the one hand if the farming population decreases, then the school loses its attendance and becomes small and inefficient. If the farming people increase in number, the school grows in size and can be better organized and do better work. On the other hand, if school education benefited boys and enabled them to become better farmers and more successful financially through the efficiency of their scientific agriculture, then the school would help the farmers to remain on their farms and rear another generation of farmers. Thus are agriculture and the rural school indissolubly linked together. Both stand and fall together.

III. The Administrative Factor—

The third factor in the problem lies in the provincial administration of education. This, of course, varies with the provinces. But in every case the great evil of excessive decentralization lies like a blight on our rural schools. In other words every province is cursed with the existence of small school districts and small school boards. These tiny districts pay most of the expenses of running the school, by means of local taxation. Only a small part of the educational revenue comes in the shape of government grants. The amount varies in each province, but it is a comparatively small portion of the total expense. This is very far from fair. In fact it is most unjust. Consider the assessable property of the country and the assessable value of city property. The property in the country is farm land, which is very largely the working capital of the farmer. Indeed about five-sevenths of his total working capital is invested in land and barns. It can hardly be said, however, that the city man has five-sevenths of his available capital so placed in the city that education taxes are paid on it. He may own or rent a house and pay taxes therefor directly or indirectly if a tenant, but if not married, except for higher cost of living through taxes, he escapes education taxes altogether, at least in the Province of Quebec. It is abundantly clear, however, that the farmer pays an unfair share of taxes for local purposes simply because his working capital is in a form which makes it assessable property. If a city man has one-seventh of his capital invested in a property he occupies, then he has a farmer at an immense disadvantage, for the latter in proportion pays on five times as much property as the city man if the rate is the same. It is very probable that insufficient attention has been paid to this aspect of the question.

Another unfairness lies in the education tax rates which vary so much in different localities. The education of a boy means the same thing to the province no matter where he lives and the fact that the boy lives in the country should not cause the cost of his education to be greater to his parents or to the local community. Education grants are too small to every school board,

but, in proportion to the city, rural school boards receive a microscopic share of provincial money. It is unfair to expect the local school district to pay three-fourths of the educational expenses of the children. In the case of Scotland, which has one of the best school systems in the world, the education taxes locally are only required to meet about one-third of the total expense. Government grants of various kinds meet the remaining two-thirds of the total expenditure. The cost of education, therefore, is more evenly spread over the whole of the country and does not bear hardly on the rural districts.

The farmer's vote is a very considerable one in every province and the tendency is to organize it to better advantage. Wherever farmers combine into some sort of a coherent trade's union to make its demands heard, and insist on getting the fair and equitable treatment that the country parts require, then the political parties will both be ready to lend a willing ear to this influential portion of the voting community.

We have seen that the difficulties of the present-day rural school have been caused by three main factors: 1, the social conditions of the rural communities; 2, the economic condition of farming as a life work; 3, the administration of education which depends on legislation and politics.

It must be clear, therefore, to any unbiased reader that if the present condition of our rural schools is due mainly to these causes, then the regeneration of them must come from a modification of these same far-reaching conditions. Rural schools can only be re-created by employment of these same large forces working together. Separate action through any one of them may bring some relief, but will never bring complete reform. They must all be employed in harmony.

It must not be thought that the rural school has escaped notice and that no effort has been made to effect an adequate improvement. On the contrary many cures have been suggested and tried. Some nostrums have been advertised very largely and have received a certain popularity for a time before being dropped. Now, they are nearly all good and should not be dropped but continued. The trouble is too deep-seated, however, to be cured by a superficial remedy. Nothing short of a radical, complete surgical operation is any use by itself. But it is interesting to consider the various cures that have been tried.

1—Better Teachers.

Any course of government action that will secure a better kind of teacher must receive our support, and the rural districts would do well to pay for a good teacher—for the best that is to be had, because the country boy deserves the best as well as the city boy. For a time, therefore, it looked as if improvement in the quality of our rural teachers would solve the problem. This improvement has been secured to a large extent, though a great deal remains to be done in this direction everywhere. Provincial Departments of Education are doing good work in this way. Normal colleges are training better teachers as the years pass by and numerous summer sessions, teachers' institutes and short courses in nature study and elementary agriculture are all designed to effect improvement in the supply of rural teachers. But the supply is still less than the demand. The new Normal Schools in the prairie provinces have special classes for training rural teachers and succeed in attracting a large number of men to the courses. Remodelling of the training course for rural teachers in Quebec has already taken place and will go into force in 1917 after due warning has been given to intending students and present untrained teachers. Third class certificates have almost disappeared from certain sections in Ontario and the schools are now staffed almost entirely by Normal trained teachers with the regular second class professional certificates. The result of all these improvements has been to increase the efficiency of the rural schools by raising the standard of qualification for the teachers. But still we have the rural school problem with us as insistent as ever. The reason is that the improvement of the teaching staff is only a partial remedy and can never solve the problem by itself.

2—Improved Course of Study.

Another means of tackling the problem of rural school improvement was by the introduction into the curriculum of subjects that were more in harmony with the needs of the rural community. The first subject, of course, was Nature Study which, however, was very general and related to all the phenomena of nature and was not specially fruitful as regards agriculture. Soon, however, the subject of elementary agriculture was added and, as was to be expected, it took the fancy of public men and educators of all classes. Probably it was introduced with extravagant hopes and with too great suddenness. For all new subjects must creep before they can walk or run. But now that provision for it has been made on the course of study, training colleges prepare students to take it, special short courses are held in summer to equip previous teachers who lacked this special training. School gardens were all the rage at one time and in some cases have since been found lacking and indeed in others have proved a failure. Home gardens will probably prove more satisfactory in the future. Provision has even been made in Ontario and Quebec for graduates in Science and Agriculture to become specialists in High Schools. Directors of Elementary Agriculture have been appointed in nearly every province of the Dominion to supervise this work in schools. Some observers profess to see no possibility of success ahead in this work. But the idea behind it is a very fruitful one and well conceived. It has awakened great interest and enthusiasm and is bound