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## EDITORIAL.

### Nature Study in Public Schools.

The "Farmer's Advocate" is indebted to Prof. Jas. W. Robertson, Commissioner of Agriculture for Canada, for a copy of the report of a conference of teachers held last summer at Bilton Grange, near Rugby, England, to consider the question of nature study in elementary schools, introduced by addresses by Messrs. T. G. Rooper, J. C. Medd, C. S. Roundell, and Prof. Robertson, describing what is being done in Germany, Holland, Cheshire, and Canada. An unimportant event, one might surmise in passing, but a perusal of the report leads to a very different conclusion. It has a bearing of decided moment both in relation to educational methods and to agriculture itself, and the subject presented deserves the careful consideration of leaders of thought in each of these departments.

Ten years ago the Inspector of Schools at Siegburg, Germany, began to interest the teachers of the hundred schools under his charge in the theory and practice of horticulture, and now has a school garden in connection with all his schools, save in two towns where the land is too expensive. Not having been taught science at their training colleges, his first difficulty was with the teachers; but this was in part overcome by an arrangement whereby they attended the horticultural schools at Cologne and Bonn. To the pupils the results have been most beneficial, and fruit-growing, once at a very low ebb, but now placed upon an intelligent basis, has become an important industry. In all rural schools in Prussia a garden and house are provided for the head masters. The boys do not spend less time over their books than formerly, but they make better use of their time. Purely memory work has been curtailed, and, finding that the boys take greater interest in the home garden through what is taught them at school, the parents are more friendly toward the school and co-operate with the teachers. The agricultural societies encourage the school gardens by offering prizes for the successful cultivation of fruit and flowers, but special care is taken that the school gardens do not go into competition with private fruit-growers, the production being limited to what is needed for instruction. School gardens were also carried on and special instruction in horticulture and agriculture given in connection with the Evening Continuation schools, at which the general educational course is connected with the practical requirements of students in their daily occupations. At Oppeln a specialist in agriculture visits each group of six villages, two hours' instruction one evening per week being given by him in the village school. In addition to the instruction of teachers at the training colleges, short courses are provided for them at the schools of agriculture and horticulture, expenses being paid out of funds provided by the Minister of Agriculture and Education. At Proskaw a Royal Pomological Institution exists to promote and improve gardening in all its branches, by (a) instruction courses, (b) cultivation of trees and plants, and (c) investigation and experiment. The courses of instruction are (1) a two-years course for students; (2) at least six months for guests; (3) for teachers in training colleges and elementary schools; (4) for foresters; (5) for apprentices in the Proskaw School of Forestry;

(6) for all interested in the diseases of plants and fruit trees; (7) for gentlemen's gardeners; and (8) for all interested in gardening and fruit-growing (land-owners, etc.). In the domain of higher education, chairs and professorships are established at the universities, and there the highest learning is devoted to research, the result of which is spread through secondary and intermediate schools, and through these to the continuation and elementary schools. The elementary instruction is provided either by agricultural societies or clubs (of which there are 1,600 or 1,700 in Prussia), by private enterprise or by provincial public funds.

In Cheshire, England, the county council is promoting the introduction of nature study combined with the literary courses. At the Burbury school, for example, a specialty is made of collecting insects, during the last half year 50,000 pests having been brought in, including 1,400 ox warble flies. The nature of these various insects is taught, with a view chiefly to develop the powers of observation—to train the hand and eye. Wild flowers and weeds are used in the same way. Now it has been found that the average attendance at these schools is greater and the children remain one year longer at school than where the old, purely bookish system is followed, and the children have a brighter, more intelligent look in place of what Mr. Roundell described as that "bovine expression" attending the bad system which he hoped was passing away. In order to the preparation of teachers for this class of work, the county council offer scholarships to boys and girls to take them to the secondary school, a place of higher education; scholarships to pupil teachers, enabling them to secure special courses in technical and higher subjects (science, art, and commercial); and a scholarship to head teachers to take them to the county agricultural and horticultural schools, of which large numbers are availing themselves. The scholarships cover fees and travelling expenses. The results of the system have already proved excellent.

The most interesting feature of the system of elementary education in Holland is the extent and perfection with which nature study is taught by means of object lessons in the urban primary schools. The objects such as plants and flowers are either brought to the school by the pupils or are secured out of the experimental or demonstration plot in the school yard. This teaching is not done with the idea of taking the child out of town and making a tiller of the soil out of him, but to arouse his interest and develop his faculties of observation. It shows how a practical people like the Dutch place a high value upon this feature of general education. In all their teacher-training schools there is excellent theoretical and practical instruction in subjects bearing on horticulture and agriculture. Mr. Medd said it was a wholly mistaken opinion to suppose that a different training was needed for urban and rural teachers. No greater mistake could be made than to differentiate and create two distinct classes. In protesting against the old idea, he thought it wise not to rush to the other extreme and convert the modern elementary teachers of general education into an expert in some particular branch of it.

Prof. Robertson described the introduction of manual training in elementary town schools in Canada through the generosity of Sir Wm. C. Macdonald, who provided enough money to bring

over 27 skilled manual-training instructors from England, and others from elsewhere, and to pay their salaries and the expense of maintenance and equipment of the schools for a term of three years. Over 6,000 boys from the public schools and about 600 teachers will receive training for three years, free of all expense to the public. He had observed that even in young, vigorous Canada the elementary education was becoming too bookish, and hoped for improvement in the rural schools by the use of garden plots and in other ways, not to train gardeners, but to impart and nourish ideas, to cultivate the mental faculties, and to develop inclination and ability and the capacity for getting the best out of life by following the innate desire of the youth to do something. The subject is a vital one, deserving the best thought of educationists in every Province of Canada.

### Travelling Libraries.

Farmers in different parts of the country are taking a greater interest in good books and periodicals than ever before. In the last issue of the "Farmer's Advocate," particulars were given of the establishment of a Farmers' Institute library in the County of Bruce, Ont., and now information is asked for regarding the subject of travelling libraries for settlers in the new districts of the Province of Ontario, a plan being developed by the Department of Education under Hon. Mr. Harcourt. The idea is not to pauperize people by the Government making them a present of books, but rather to create a desire for the best literature by placing a small library temporarily within reach of settlers in New or Northern Ontario at points remote from centers of population where libraries already exist. Upon receiving a requisition signed by four or five responsible residents of a given locality, asking for a library, the Department of Education sends a box of fifty books, to be retained say for six months, and then to be returned to the Department in good condition. The box contains histories, biographies, books of travel and exploration, the works of our best known poets and novelists, with standard works on agriculture, horticulture, and science, treated in a popular way. Libraries have been sent to Michipicoten Harbor, French River, Gertrude Mine, Victoria Mines, and, we believe, also to Cache Bay, and three or four other requisitions are now being attended to. It is likely the Legislature will be asked for a larger grant at next session simply for the purpose of stimulating a desire to read good books in this way. In the end it is hoped that people will be encouraged to purchase and possess good books of their own, which is the better plan. In developing the travelling-library idea, the Minister was in correspondence with leading clergymen, heads of colleges, teachers, librarians, etc., receiving a ready and hearty response on all sides. We believe that very great care has been taken in the choice of the books for these libraries, as indeed the success and usefulness of the whole scheme depends upon the selection, so that when the library leaves a district, those who have read it will have learned what good books are, and will be encouraged to purchase similar ones for the benefit of themselves and their families. In this way a great amount of good will be done directly in the localities in question, and in some measure a check will be put upon the craving for the "literary" trash now flooding the country.