

The Farmer's Advocate

and Home Magazine

"Persevere and Succeed."

Established
1866.

Vol. XLII.

LONDON, ONTARIO, SEPTEMBER 26, 1907.

No. 783.

EDITORIAL.

THE REFORM OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL.

The correspondence published in this issue of "The Farmer's Advocate" discloses the growing strength of a widespread conviction on the subject of public-school education. It is not simply a provincial question; it is national. And while it specially concerns the agricultural community, it is related to all, and reformation will benefit all. Inept in character as related to the life and work of the people, such systems of education could not be other than mischievous in their results. We do not wonder that men like George Rice, given to the use of vigorous and expressive terms, should grow indignant when he comes to think and write about it. Our readers will not stay to quarrel with Mr. Rice over his vocabulary; but in comparing the present classes with those of corresponding name a quarter of a century ago, we are disposed to think the difference is rather with the school as a whole. The rural public school, especially during the long winter term, was in those days, with its big fourth and fifth classes of young men and women, quite an institution in the neighborhood. As Mr. Rice points out, the curriculum and plan of the school now is to hurry the immature pupils through to the High School. The inability of advanced pupils to apply their knowledge in practical affairs is painful. We recall a "very smart" fourth-book lad, who, when his father sold a load of hay at \$10 per ton, was asked how much that was per hundred, and covered pages of his scribbler in vain to solve a problem which a "sense of things" would have told the parent who never got beyond his A B Abs. Beyond any question, the public-school influence drives the country youth directly in large numbers to the town. It fails to give them any appreciation of the advantages of rural life and nature or fit them to be more successful in rural pursuits. Is not this a serious problem for the farmer who so largely foots the bills? The Ontario provincial report of education tells us that nearly 58 per cent. of the whole population of the country is educated in the rural public school and only about 5 per cent. reach the High School at all, or of rural pupils only a minute fraction. The vast majority will continue to depend on the public school for their education. The time is therefore long past due for a vigorous policy of improvement in the work and status of this branch of the school system, making it more than a feeder of high schools run to suit the University.

R. B. Cooley, of Hastings County, Ont., handles the subject well. The point is not that we are too highly educated, but that much of our schooling is defective and unbalanced, hence tends in the wrong direction. It is not that we need less education, but a better kind of education, infused with a different spirit. Education of the right sort does not necessarily make a man discontented with his station in life, but whether on the farm or in the shop or warehouse or in the laboratory of the professor should heighten his appreciation of honest work and its problems and give him increased power.

Prof. F. C. Sears, now of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, writing with an extended knowledge of Maritime educational affairs as of those in Canada generally, tells us that the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which prides itself on an educational supremacy, has come to realize the need for a change in the rural education of the State. To that end several hundred of their public-school teachers were this season assembled at a summer school of agriculture in order to begin a cure at the roots of the evil.

This is well so far as it goes, but the reform must be more radical and touch not only the curricula of the schools, but as has several times been indicated in these pages and as Prof. Sears himself concedes, must touch the normal training of the teachers as well as the inspectorial oversight.

THE BREEDER'S CHANCES OF SUCCESS.

Present-day writers on the possibility of originating new breeds of live stock, or effecting well-defined improvements in already established breeds, almost invariably make it a point to endeavor to discourage the attempt, claiming that such an undertaking is a work of a lifetime, and that only men of extraordinary genius, few and far between, need hope to succeed in the effort. Were the men who in the past originated and improved existing breeds, wiser, more intelligent, or endowed with greater genius than those of the present, with all the advantages of improved educational facilities and scientific discoveries, together with the experience of their forefathers, as written in the history of their achievements in the line of live-stock improvement? It is hardly likely that such is or was the fact, and yet it is frequently remarked by older stockmen of the present that little, if any, improvement has been made in the character of some of the breeds in the last half century. This is certainly a mistaken idea in reference to most of the breeds, especially of sheep and swine, and to some of the varieties of cattle and horses, proving that the pessimistic view taken by many writers in regard to the possibilities of live-stock improvement is unwarranted and misleading. The remarkable improvement accomplished in the last twenty years or less in the remodelling of the conformation and character of swine in Canada, in bringing them into conformity with the requirements for the production of the largest quantity and the choicest quality of bacon to meet the demand of present-day markets, would appear to effectually contradict the idea that all the skill in this direction existed in the men of earlier generations. The improvement effected in the uniform quality of flesh and fleece of most of the British breeds of sheep in the last quarter of a century is scarcely less striking. The decided improvement in the propensity to early maturity, and depth and evenness of flesh in the beef breeds, of heavy milking capacity in the dairy breeds of cattle, and of clean, flat bone of superior texture in many breeds of horses, effected in a limited number of years, all goes to prove wisdom and skill in this line did not with the fathers, but has rather been intensified in the sons. The fixing and limiting of color markings in the Berkshire, among British breeds of pigs, and in the Poland-China and Hampshire breeds, evolved and improved in the United States within the memory of men yet living, and the striking improvement effected by American breeders in the conformation of the Hereford breed of cattle, furnishes ample evidence of the practicability of making headway, instead of merely marking time, in breeding.

The question, then, arises, How have these improvements and this advancement been accomplished? Has it not been simply by selection and intelligent and persistent mating of members of the varieties conforming most nearly to the ideal in the mind of the breeder, and the rejection of those failing to come up to the standard adopted? This has certainly been the secret in so far as the special meat-producing varieties of cattle, sheep and hogs and heavy horses are concerned, while in dairy cattle and fast horses it is essentially a question of records determined by scales and timepieces.

Men despair in the face of atavism or reversion, forgetting the wonderful achievements under

the law of heredity in the creation of uniform breeds, and even in the perpetuation, generation after generation, of minor peculiarities, such as the absence of horns and specific color markings. It is, in general, safe to say that what men have done other men can do, and more, too. Why, then, should it be considered impracticable to evolve from the live-stock material lying around us yet other improved varieties of special and dual-purpose animals? Why not dual-purpose cattle? The field is full of problems to be solved, of material on which to work, and of opportunities for experimentation, and the application of intelligent effort. And it is a time to encourage ambitious optimism, rather than to indulge in discouraging diatribes in regard to the breeder's chances of success in this line.

A SCHOOL INSPECTOR'S QUALIFICATIONS.

We notice that Mr. James H. Smith, M. A., has received the warden's appointment to the office of public-school inspector for West Kent, Ont., made vacant by the lamented death of Inspector Park. The attention that Mr. Smith has given to agriculture and agricultural education, as evidenced by his addresses at Farmers' Institutes, and, still more, his extensive experience in all grades of school work, should go far to qualify him to be an excellent inspector.

Mr. Smith's well-known interest in agricultural education seems so exceptional that we are moved to inquire whether it could not be, to some considerable extent, required of all candidates for the office of county school inspector, and to raise the question whether the present tendency to magnify the merely scholastic preparation is not shutting out the men who are likely to have that kind of interest, or preventing its development. Considering the enormous scope that the office gives its holder to effect the educational weal or woe of his district, and noting that last year's School Act deprives the councils of the power to remove a school inspector, it behooves councillors to be extremely careful in selecting their appointees.

Graduating, as Mr. Smith has done, from the County Model School and the Normal School, studying the courses for third, second and first-class certificates, and proceeding therefrom to his inspector's certificate; teaching every class, from A B C to the highest; knowing what it is to work a farm and be a taxpayer, should give him the right kind of training, experience and sympathy to make a useful inspector. Contrast that with the fitness that comes from protracted life in university halls and experience mostly in teaching classics or other specialties in towns and cities. Does the latter give an inspector skill and sympathy in handling classes of little children, and viewing affairs from the farmer's standpoint? Asking the question answers it.

When Dr. Ryerson established the office, his professed intention was to make it a prize for the conspicuously successful public-school teacher. The holder of the highest university degree was, then ineligible to be an inspector until he proved his all-round fitness, to the extent of taking a first-class grade A public-school teacher's certificate. When Mr. Smith qualified, in addition to the last-named certificate, he had to prove five years' successful experience, three of which, at least, had to be in public-school work. The present regulation reads: "The holder of a degree in pedagogy who has had four years' experience as a teacher, of which two shall have been in a public school, shall be entitled to a certificate as an inspector of public schools." Note that the experience required is decreased, and that success is not mentioned. The shortened time may have been years of failure. The emphasis is changing