

Agriculture as Education.

Summary of an address by JOHN DEARNESS, M. A., Principal of the Normal School, London, Ont.

IN the Report of the Minister of Education (for Ontario) recently published it is stated that "there always has been and is still a feeling among the farmers themselves in opposition to the introduction of agriculture" into the public schools. For the statement—one that is often made elsewhere—it is worth while inquiring into the reasons. Permit me to say that I was raised on the farm, have lived with farmers a good part of my life, and believe that I can see the situation from the farmer's view point. What he disparages is that his neighbor's daughter, possibly a city girl, hardly out of her 'teens, should set herself up as an authority on his life-long trade or pretend to teach children about the mistakes their father is making in farming. On the other hand if she makes no claim to know the right culture of various crops, the methods of improving herds, and selecting and mixing the suitable fertilizers, but confines her activities to impaling insects, making drawings or collections of seeds, mounting various museum specimens, and cultivating a few plots of flowers and vegetables in the name of a school garden, he thinks his children's time may be more profitably employed in what he calls the essentials. I do not know of a single instance where the subject of agriculture was properly introduced at the first trial of it that it met with any objection from a farmer.

A Liberalizing Value

The subject of agriculture can be taught so as to have a liberalizing value like language and science, a socializing value like civics and history, and a vocational value. Prematurely forcing the vocational phases of the subject is the chief shortcoming of our present day efforts. The experience, and opportunities for experience, of children living on the farm—and this as well as the rural-home view point should be intimately known by every rural teacher—can and should be used to deepen the children's sympathies, multiply their interests, and develop their powers of investigation. The gardens at school and homes and the near-by farm-yards are the almost sufficient laboratories for the realization of these aims.

The use of the time of children below the high school entrance standard in filling note-books with vocational information in paragraphs about breeds of live-stock, formulae for insecticides, rules for mixing fertilizers, etc., is comparable to the nearly obsolete practice of memorizing lists of counties, rivers and capes in the geography lesson. The average child under fourteen would derive much more benefit from studying in the school-yard under intelligent direction the adaptations of the hoof, mouth, and other organs of a cow, even though she be a scrub, than by looking at pictures and learning comparisons of Hol-