

THE FARMERS ADVOCATE AND HOME MAGAZINE

THE LEADING AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL
IN THE DOMINION.

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be encouraged to choose farming as a life work. The born mechanic will become a mechanic and the child with a natural predilection for law or medicine or pedagogy may still become a lawyer, a doctor or a teacher. We must exterminate root and branch the idea that farming needs no brains, and permeate the school instead with the idea that it is not the degree but the nature of a man's ability that should determine his life work. The thing to do is to relate rural education more closely and sympathetically to rural life by means of school gardening and nature study and by recasting the text books so as to introduce agricultural examples—and plenty of them—into the arithmetic, articles pertaining to rural life in the readers, more of agriculture into history and geography and drawing and so all through.

We stoutly maintain that so far from subordinating education to economic ends these changes will improve it in the fundamental respects of building character and developing brain power. To conclude, let us repeat a paragraph from a former editorial which was quoted at the time with hearty approval by an American exchange. We can phrase the point no better today.

Our school-teaching has been too abstract for maximum efficiency from a pedagogical standpoint. There is nothing like actualities, and especially living things, to interest a child. Let the juvenile mind study, for instance, the germinating seed, and, as the embryo plant unfolds, the child's mind will unfold with it in the most natural way. Thus shall we educate our youth along lines that will be continued into old age, conducing not only to educational efficiency, but to the training of an alert, informed, masterful people, who will raise the plane of agriculture, the plane of industry, and the plane of character and citizenship.

Wages the Last Charge.

Pursuing the chain of thought suggested by the editorial of September 25th, entitled, "Putting Land Out of Reach," one arrives at an explanation—a partial explanation at least—of the age-long labor problem, which exists alike on good and poor farms; in prosperous and unprosperous communities; on thousand-dollar fruit land and on eighty-dollar soil devoted to general farming. Always the problem is to secure enough help at wages which will leave a profit over cost of production. When the introduction of some new and more remunerative lines of farming makes the business more profitable for a time wages go up a little, help is attracted to the vicinity and the labor problem may be less acute for a time, but finally it resolves itself into the same old stubborn difficulty. Why is this?

Is it not largely because the minute profits advance land values go up also? The increased earning power of an acre is capitalized in the form of enhanced prices for farms, and this entails the necessity of meeting heavier interest or rental charges. The necessity bears most sternly on renters and proprietors working with borrowed capital, but does not exempt owners who are out of debt, for these, too, desire, if possible, to make interest on the nominal values of their holdings. Now, this interest or rental charge is fixed when one buys or rents a farm. It is inexorable; it must be met before profit can be claimed. It cannot be reduced, but, on the other hand, is increased every time additional facilities are purchased to lighten labor, or for any other purpose. The same holds true of taxes and insurance. They are fixed charges and must be met.

Labor cost, on the other hand, is more elastic. One can cut it down for a time by doing more work himself, or by getting more out of his men. It is open to the manager to try each time he engages a man, to get him cheaper, or at least to try to keep this item of expenditure from rising too high. Note that we say it is open to him to try. We do not say he can succeed. When help gets too scarce he either has to pay more or do without. The point we are trying to make is that labor is the one factor in the cost of production that is to a degree elastic. It is the only one not wholly fixed and established by forces outside the manager's annual control. Hence that is where the squeeze comes. The hard-fought proprietor, seeking to preserve a little reward for his own efforts, tries to keep down this factor of cost by hiring cheaply, and because he does so is often called "close" or "mean." We do not for a moment deny that some farmers go at the problem the wrong way. Instead of attempting to make labor accomplish more by labor-saving methods, they make the problem doubly hard for themselves by following out-of-date practices. Grant this, but the fact remains that there is an eventual limit to progress on that line, and when that limit is approached by the generality of farmers the pinch will again be felt, to a considerable degree, at all events, though perhaps not so acutely as at present. Is there not something wrong with an economic system which perpetually arrays labor and capital in this order with the pinch in the cost of production always on labor? How can interest charges be kept down?

Mr. Kent's Questions.

By Peter McArthur.

I am not sure that I am very grateful to Howard Kent for stirring me up with his list of "Whys." If there is one question above another about which I am absolutely befogged and at sea it is the question of education. I do not mind in the least getting into an argument with bankers and politicians. They are bluffing most of the time, and I can bluff back at them; but before a little child I am more helpless than the child himself. Nothing that I have learned or observed helps me a particle towards solving the problems of childhood. About all I feel reasonably sure of is that our educational system is wrong from top to bottom, but as I have nothing to offer in its place I have always avoided the subject. When it comes to the children, about all I feel capable of doing is to love them and kiss their bumps when they get hurt.

As Mr. Kent and the Editor of "The Farmer's Advocate" have already dealt with the list of questions, perhaps they will excuse me if I go off on a different tack. On the question of education

I have no settled opinions. I am merely groping for something that I am sure is the supreme good, but as yet I have found no hint of how it is to be attained. In my experience of life I have met men who had practically no school education, and yet they had all that I would wish a system of education to give to me or to my children. I have also met men who have had every advantage that can be derived from schools and colleges, and I found them of no more interest than a lot of trained seals. They could perform all kinds of mental gymnastics, and yet they were absolutely out of touch with the work and joys and sorrows of this big beautiful world in which it is our privilege to live. Education should enable us to understand, to do and to enjoy. And this understanding and doing and enjoying should not be confined to a petty round of duties that will enable us to slink through the world with as little effort as possible. The truly educated man exclaims with Terence, "Nothing that is human is alien to me." He is interested in everything, and at the same time so well-poised that nothing can debase or enslave him. There is too much talk about the purpose of education being to fit a man for his particular niche in the scheme of things. No man knows the scheme of things, and even if he did there is no niche big enough to hold a fully-developed man. There is a noble rebellion against the popular conception of a good citizen in Hamlet's outburst:

"What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unused."

In that passage Shakespeare outlined the highest purpose of education. It is to so develop a man that he can make use of his wonderful capabilities, and a man so developed is worthy of his bewildering eulogy:

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals."

At this point I wish to quote with all reverence that noblest of all conceptions of the child: "For of such is the kingdom of Heaven." I like to think that enfranchised spirits will have an opportunity to grow as the children grow before we begin to tamper with them and to impose on them our ideas of what they should do and be. Did you ever stop to think how much a child learns in its first burst of mental growth? It is no unusual thing for a child to learn two languages besides getting an understanding of the objects and actions by which it is surrounded before it is five years of age. If this development could go on unchecked the dullest child could learn more than the profoundest professor of them all before it reached maturity. Coleridge seemed to have hit the secret of this spontaneous education when he said, "A child learns because of the necessity it feels." Is there no way by which this feeling of necessity can be made to endure? Under our present system, instead of letting the child develop under the pressure of the necessity it feels, we imprison it in a schoolroom and try to shape it according to necessity that Dr. Pyne feels or—to get down to the man who is said to be at the bottom of our system—that John Seath feels. The natural development is instantly arrested, and the child is forced to pass through Moloch fires of competitive examinations. It is all wrong, hideously wrong.

Now let us stop for a moment and grope for that elusive thing Education. What is it? It certainly does not mean the accumulation of knowledge. The most learned man in the world does not know as much or know it as accurately as the Century Encyclopedia at my elbow. Knowledge seems to be a commodity that can be stored away in books where any intelligent man can get it when he needs it. Education seems to be a growth which enables a man to use knowledge. But how are we to make men grow? Few geniuses have been able to transmit their intellectual growth, and yet it has always seemed to me that geniuses are men who have been stimulated to great growth by some impulse of which we have no adequate knowledge. To state the case figuratively, perhaps human beings are like germs of growth enclosed in shells like a nut. Some fall in such conditions that they burst their shells and expand in rare atmosphere that their fellows never know. They cannot tell of what they have learned to know and feel because, as Shelley complains in his introduction to "Epipsychidion," their message "must ever remain incomprehensible from a defect of a common organ of perception of the ideas of which it treats." This growth is as likely to come to a day-laborer as to the greatest philosopher, and even though he may be unable to tell how or why, he ever after looks on life with a wisdom that has never been taught in the