

and a half, and then grounded upon the floor,—and a miscellaneous collection of unplained boards, carelessly nailed down, generally loose and rattling under the tread, and worn or burnt through in many places. Above were beams with the bark still on, hewn slightly on the upper side, on which a few “culls” were thrown, through the intervals of which and the interstices of the roof of the blue heavens could be seen at many points. A large, square hole through the garret-floor, without protection against the stove-pipe, and a like one in the roof, formed the substitute for the chimney.

The upper sashes were all gone from the windows, and their places were generally supplied by old boards tacked on. From the other sashes the panes were mostly missing. There were only thirty lights where eighty-four should have been. The rear window, from the unequal settling of that end of the house, had assumed a singular rhomboidal shape.

The furniture corresponded to its place. An entire long desk ran along one side, and half of such a one stood on the other. They were made of rough boards leaned against the walls at a difficult angle, and whittled, burned, ink-stained, and otherwise inscribed in a manner thoroughly hopeless of description. Probably some dozens of obscene figures and words could have been counted upon them. There was one long bench that rejoiced in the luxury of a back, and five of varying lengths that were bereaved of this convenience. Some of the boys had ingeniously improvised resting places for their spines; the girls, for the most part, tortured theirs against the sharp edges of the desks. It is needless to add that both desks and seats were a world too high.

The blackboard—for blackboard there was—consisted of three thin pieces of board fastened upon two bits of scantling, and covered with common black paint by some artist of the Middle Ages. This unique arrangement was ignominiously slanted up against the wall, and had evidently survived its usefulness long before my wondering eyes beheld it. A huge, battered, old stove, with an immense greenwood poker, completed the appointments of this institution of learning. Taken for all in all, I shall not look upon its like again. Among the few remaining log school houses in the country, this was entitled to the first premium as the ancient hovel par excellence. I place among my lost opportunities the failure to photograph it for the benefit of your readers and of future antiquaries.

During my round of visits two years ago, I found a teacher nominally on duty there, who also corresponded to his place, and deserves a shelf in the cabinet of educational antiquities. He was a genuine relic of the old days of pedagogy,—a boorish-looking and boorish-mannered man of about sixty years, foreign born, with an education which gave no occasion to his fellow-citizens to wonder how one small head could carry all he knew. There he sat upon one of the long benches aforesaid, with spectacles on his nose, and long, ragged switch in hand, his hair unkempt and awry, his clothes coarse, dirty, patched, his great clouted shoes projecting at the ends of lank limbs far out upon the floor,—the ideal keeper of a “hedge school.” He was evidently waiting, like Micawber, for something to turn up. The few children present, unanimously deserting the desks and huddling about the stove, gazed wondered-eyed and open-mouthed at the unwonted phenomenon of a visitor. In time, however, one volunteered to go and read. “What! you comin’?” was the salutation which met her. “Well, go on!” And she went on, pretty much at her own sweet will, until tired of the performance, when she “excused” herself.

Another season of patient waiting by the teacher was rewarded by the coming of another who had taken it into her head to read; and, a like exercise having been engaged in several times without much variety, I suggested that I should be pleased to hear some of his classes in other branches recite. “Waal, we don’t study much else but readin’ hear. The cold drives ’em away from the winders, and they can’t write. I makes figgers for ’em sometimes on the board, and a few of ’em has a little jogriffy or somethin’. But, as a gen’ral thing, we don’t have much but readin’. They reads round ’bout six times a day.” The time drawing near for the close of school for the day, I mentioned the spelling classes, and stated that I should like to hear them before I went. “There’s none of ’em spells, scarcely,” was the reply. “P’raps some of ’em can spell little words like cat, and dog, and hog, but they mostly reads.” As I still insisted on hearing a spelling class, he formed one for the occasion. “All you that wants to spell now come round here.” A few active volunteers then began a process of drumming up, punching up, and pulling up that presently resulted in an irregular semicircular formation of a good sized squad upon the floor near the teacher, who had not changed position during the whole scene. The spelling began, continued, stopped. That is all I am able to write of it. My pen utterly refuses to attempt its description. By the closing of this remarkable exercise the children suspected that it was time for school to “let out,” and away they went, pell-mell, hurry-scurry, standing not upon the order of their going.

This is a hasty story of things as they were. They will be so no longer. “The old school-house is altered some.” The people there as generally elsewhere, it would seem, throughout the Commonwealth, are awakening to their highest and best interests. A neat and spacious building has been substituted for the rattle-trap I have tried to describe. Into it a good teacher and a good school went last winter, and a new era for that district began. The old things of education are passing away. Let us thank God, and take courage. —Michigan Teacher.

III. Papers on Agriculture in Schools.

1. AGRICULTURE IN COMMON SCHOOLS.

An intelligent farmer, Mr. Robson, of Ilderton, Township of London, has drawn our attention to what he considers an important omission in common school education, especially in the rural districts. He requests us to give publicity to the following extract from Jas. J. W. Johnston's Lectures on the general relations which science bears to practical agriculture:

“I believe many persons look forward to the introduction of agricultural instruction into common schools, and I think it very important that this should not be lost sight of. In the lower grade of schools, I think it most important, and it should commend itself to those having the affairs of the State in charge. The mass of your countrymen get their instruction in these schools. You reach a greater number by introducing this study into these schools, and you reach them at the least possible expense of money and time. You only ask the schoolmaster to give a little time to teaching one certain book, selecting for its bearing on the principles only of agriculture. To facilitate this instruction, I drew up my little catechism. It has been introduced extensively into the schools of Great Britain, and translated into almost every European language. But this obstacle has been found to exist, not only at home, but in other countries, and that is, the want of qualification or inclination on the part of the schoolmaster, to teach. In Scotland, our schoolmasters are well educated men, but they are fixed and stationary, pursuing the vocation at one place generally all their lives, unless, as is rarely the case, some of the more skilful ones are transferred to places of greater emolument. These men find no difficulty in introducing this catechism. It has also been introduced into the schools in England, but there the grade of schoolmasters is lower. But we have there national schools for the education of teachers, the effect of which is, that a race of men are now coming out, who are capable of teaching this branch of knowledge. The same difficulty exists in Belgium and France, where their schoolmasters are not sufficiently instructed themselves to teach it. Of course this obstacle is only to be overcome by additional instruction to the schoolmasters, and it is a reproach to them, that they have so little application or capacity, that they cannot learn a catechism which a boy seven years old can perfectly understand. I examined a class of about a dozen boys, the eldest of whom was fourteen, and the youngest seven years of age; the eldest got the first prize, the youngest the second. It cannot, therefore, be difficult for a schoolmaster to learn to teach these simple principles.

“There is one obstacle, which, in this State, appears to me to be one of some difficulty—an obstacle to the introduction of this kind of study into the schools, and that arises from the unsettled condition of your teachers. You have not schoolmasters who permanently remain in one district; the trustees engage a teacher for a limited time, and then both parties are at liberty to quit their engagement. In England, they are fixed residents in the parish to which they belong. The difficulty here is, therefore, one of some moment. It precludes a unity of system, a concentration of effort in carrying it out, and it prevents the schoolmaster from taking that pride in the progress of his pupils, which he would have if he knew that a school was to be under his care for years, and he responsible for its management. This may stand in your way in introducing this study into your common schools, but it is not insurmountable, and you would do well to inquire how far it is practical to surmount it.”—London Prototype.

2. WHY I WANT THE BOYS TO LEARN FARMING.

BY HORACE GREELEY.

Every pursuit or calling that ministers to the sustenance, comfort or enlightenment of mankind is honorable and laudable. That is a narrow and essentially false conception which regards the farmer as more a benefactor than a beneficiary, and stigmatizes as drones and cormorants, all who do not directly contribute to the production and increase of material wealth. The upright, able lawyer, the studious, skilful physician, the pious, loving clergyman, are working men, as