

The Country School Once More

Professor Joseph Schafer, Ph. D., Director of Extension Work and Professor of History in the University of Oregon at Eugene, in a special article to the Farm Magazine, tells farmers why the old-time one-room school should become a union two, three or four room school in a consolidated district. Taxes need not be increased by this operation, while school efficiency is. The school law of Oregon permits such consolidations. Dr. Schafer's article is of vital interest to farmers with families still to be educated. A second and concluding article will be run in the next issue of the Farm Magazine.—Editor.

THE REASON WHY we are having such a determined, unabating agitation of the rural school question becomes clear only when we take a large view of it.

A recent bulletin of the Bureau of Education presents these significant educational facts: (1) That 40 per cent of the children of school age in the United States are being taught in city and town school; (2) that 60 per cent are being taught in rural schools, so-called, and 36 per cent of all children are taught in country schools having one room and one teacher.

Our problem is found in the last statement—that more than one-third of all American children are still being "educated" in the one-room, one-teacher school. This is so because of the limitations upon this type of school as an institution, and not because, within its proper scope, it has failed to justify itself. No one familiar with American pioneer history can fail to reverence the "district school" because of what it has meant to our people in the past. It was well adapted to care for the needs of a people engaged almost exclusively in a simple, non-scientific and almost primitive agriculture—a people who came only indirectly in touch with those phases of business life which were complex or with correspondingly intricate social or political affairs.

It was easy to establish, for whenever a few families moved into some new valley or pushed out into a new area of the plains, they could have their school for at least a few months, thus keeping open the priceless oppor-

tunity of learning to the boys and girls of the frontier households. Moreover this "district school" has been the scene of activity of thousands of men and women who are remembered by many more thousands as capable and devoted teachers, whose lives have been woven into the moral and intellectual woof of American society.

One Room an Anachronism.

We all should honor the district school of the past, but so far as it still remains an institution of one room and one teacher it has become an anachronism in American life and must be changed to something different before the country school education of today can be made adequate to the social needs of children living in the country today.

There is hardly need to argue the point. Everybody admits that farming both as a business and as a life is vastly different from pioneer conditions. The farmer, because land is high priced and margins of profit narrow, must be a man trained to close business habits. Because science can aid in making his farm more productive or in preventing losses, he must be trained at least to apply scientific principles in his business.

Because the farmer is today cosmopolitan in his business and social relations, he must have the training necessary to enable him to understand social and economic facts in all their varying forms as local, state, national and international. Because he is a citizen dealing directly with the most vital and far-reaching problems—problems, moreover, which grow more and more complex with the progressive intensification of American life—the farmer as a prop of the commonwealth and of society, requires for his equipment an education no whit less thorough or less broad than that which today comes as a matter of course to the man entering business life in the towns or cities. And similar statement will hold for the women on the farm.

Adequate Education.

Therefore, an education adequate to the needs of the present day farmer must differ from the old time district school education in range of subject

matter, in the degree of perfection to which training is carried, and in its vocational aim. All of this means, more and more specially trained teachers, more equipment, more years of school. It means some opportunity for variation in the training given to the two sexes respectively.

A school of two rooms and two teachers—a man who, among other subjects, can give boys the special training now required in agriculture and the mechanic arts, and a woman to teach girls the home-making arts—with equipment proper to its work, is the least that any country dwelling parent should be satisfied with. From this minimum, there should be as rapid an ascent as possible to a school of from four to five teachers, equipped to care for pupils through the high school years.

Of course, the chief obstacle in the way of getting such schools in places where they do not exist is the lack of money. Districts now are organized on the basis of furnishing support for a one-room, one-teacher school to be reached by the children from their homes, traveling on foot. Frequently the valuation of the district property is only high enough to secure at a reasonable rate of taxation the support required for one teacher; some districts are too poor to do this without aid from the country.

Consolidate Districts.

If the schools were to be developed to a two-room basis, or something still more pretentious, the financial support would have to be expanded correspondingly. This would involve, usually, the enlargement of the district by union with other adjoining districts or the formation of what is called a "consolidated district" for which the school law of Oregon provides already.

The people are accustomed to the "district school" of one room and one teacher; the bulk of the present generation "went to school" in some "little red school house"; somebody, or several persons in every district have property near the school house and they fear that consolidation would affect

property values; others have no children of school age and prefer to have things remain as they are; while some of those having children are opposed to a change which would increase the distance these must travel to reach the school. Jealousy among the constituent districts, the problem of transportation of pupils and a pervading fear of "new-fangledness" are other deterrents to the formation of new consolidated districts out of several contiguous districts.

But, if the new type of school is needed by our rural dwellers, then those various obstacles must be resolutely overcome, for the education of our children in such a way as to afford a reasonable guaranty of success for them as high-class citizens, men and women, is the first and most pressing duty of the present adult generation.

Wanted Badly.

A Louisville man tells of an incident at a Sunday school convention. In answer to the roll call of the states reports were verbally given by the various state chairmen. When Texas was called a big man stepped into the aisle and in stentorian tones exclaimed: "We represent the imperial State of Texas. The first white woman born in Texas is still living—she was born in Texas of over 3,000,000." Whereupon a voice from the gallery cried out in clarion tones: "Send that woman to Idaho—we need her."

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