

Agriculture for All Rural Schools

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As good a statement of the aim of education as I have ever heard is the following:—"The aim of education is to help the child to meet life successfully, and fully, and happily."

Two centuries ago an educated person was one whose mind was filled with Latin, Greek, philosophy, etc., all of which made him appear very wise and superior to the so-called uneducated, but none of which was of the slightest value as an aid to solving the great problem of life, that of making a living. But in more recent years educators as well as other people have been leaning more and more toward the idea that an education that lends no assistance in this all important problem is falling far short of fulfilling its greatest function.

Several years ago J. D. Eggleston of Virginia Polytechnic Institute said, "Ninety-seven out of every one hundred of our children go out into life unable to apply their so-called education to the immediate problem of making a living, a problem that immediately confronts that number. . . . The child should get at the school and through the school, everything he needs for his normal growth as a citizen. The value of an education is in its application."

Elliott R. Downing of the School of Education of the University of Ohio said, "The chief need in science instruction today is a more efficient organization of the course of study with a view to socialization and practical application."

Dean Emeritus Eugene Davenport of the Illinois College of Agriculture once made the following statement, "The true measure of success in teaching agriculture is found in the performance of those who actually go to the farm and live there and succeed. The living force in agricultural materials lies in two facts: first, that agriculture is a part of nature; and second, that by these agricultural materials we make use of the natural facts and forces for the definite end of sustaining life."

The old idea that a subject must have either a practical value or an entirely unconnected cultural value has for some time been giving way to the idea that it may have both. In an article published in the Illinois Teacher, Miss Etta Larson of the DeKalb Township High School said in defense of bookkeeping, that skill subjects are not necessarily "narrow in their scope, that work and culture are not incompatible." Former President Kinley of the University of Illinois brought out the same point very strongly in the Illinois Alumni News. He went farther and said that no subject can be taught, regardless of what it is or how practical it may be, that does not have a cultural value.

Many others have the same view. Certainly we can agree that no one is properly educated who does not profit by it both practically and culturally.

All this leads to the point that agriculture fulfils both of these aims as fully and completely as it is possible for any subject to do. The study of

the germination of a grain of corn or wheat is very practical. Yet no other study can stimulate greater interest in the wonders of nature and reverence for nature's God. As the poet puts it,

"Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod,
And waits to see it push away the clod,
He trusts in God."

In the State of Illinois 430,000 men and women do the farming. The sons and daughters of these men and women are to be the future farmers and their wives. If we take into consideration all the possibilities for higher education for these young people we must conclude that less than one in ten of them ever receives any other education than is offered in the rural schools. By this I mean not only the schools provided by communities of 2,500 or less, but a very large percent go no farther than the one room country schools. If ninety percent or more of our future farmers receive only such education as is provided by these schools, here is their only chance of receiving any scientific agricultural training whatever.

To point out the desirability of an agricultural education for those who are to operate our farms is not the object of this paper. That is taken for granted. But the object is to point out that such education should begin in the common schools, in the grades where most of the future farmers get their education. It is here that our educational system is most lacking. We still force these children to attend school for a certain period each year where they are crammed with fads and fancies which they know full well will never be of any value to them, either practical or cultural.

There are now in Illinois more than 28,000 young people, mainly of rural districts, who are members of 4-H clubs, and in the United States as a whole there are approximately a million. Why do they go into these clubs? No one forces them to do so. We have no law which says that a child must belong to a 4-H club. In fact I have known young people to join these clubs in spite of the opposition of their parents. Is it because of perversity? Not by any means. It is because of the fact that, with wisdom and judgment sometimes superior to that of their elders, they can see that here is something of vital interest, something that is going to be of use in making a living in the future.

The shameful thing about all this is that leaders of 4-H clubs get no pay for that valuable work, while we do pay the teachers for teaching things the children do not want to know, and in too many cases, things of no use to them now or in the future.

All such work as is done by 4-H clubs should be done in the schools where teachers are paid for their work. Nor should it wait for the high school, but beginning very early in the child's school experience, probably at the very start, his school work should be permeated and coordinated thoroughly with the scientific facts of agriculture, just as at present his life experience from the earliest is interwoven with the mechanical acts of farming.