

Agriculture in our Common Schools

Shall Agriculture be given a major place in our common-school curriculum or not? It is the opinion of many that, since Agriculture is our chief industry, and since farming will be the occupation of the greater part of our population—the subject should receive much attention in our schools.

Before it is permitted to further crowd our already over-crowded course of study it should be of very great importance; before it shares the time devoted to fundamental study itself. If our present course—made a little more classical—cannot supply the primary qualifications of this profession as it does for others, then we will gladly devote more space in the curriculum and time in the schoolroom to the introduction of a subject or subjects which will meet the requirements.

The qualifications of a good farmer are probity, knowledge of the business and diligence in prosecuting it. These qualifications are the fruits of a good education, in the fullest sense of the term. Let us consider how each of these three qualities are acquired. First probity is the result of normal education. Secondly the knowledge of farming is a professional training by itself—and this is better obtained in colleges specially devoted to that line of instruction. We have agricultural colleges which train men for farming, as the medical colleges educate men for physicians—why should we not have a medical course in our schools? It is just as logical to say that we cannot have good doctors without medical training in the common schools as to assert that we need agricultural training in our common schools in order to have good farmers.

The third deals with discipline. No better discipline of the youthful mind has yet been devised than that furnished by the classical course.

But some may ask—what is the practical value of latin, greek, or grammar to the farmer? The answer is obvious. Apart from the benefit which these school subjects are to him in common with other men, it is

certain that to read with intelligence the literature of his profession, which more and more abounds in scientific terminology, he must understand the structure of his language, and a study of the above mentioned subjects will unfold this to him. Hence the absolute necessity of the classics.

Take the schools of Scotland—a land which all the world looks upon as one of pre-eminence in Agriculture. To what is her pre-eminence due? Thornton ("Plea for Peasant Proprietors") gave as a reason—"the moral worth and intelligence of her peasantry, for which she is indebted to the elementary education in her schools, which is purely classical and has been afforded to her people for generations." In Scotland discipline is looked upon as one of the prime requisities of an education, and many Scottish farmers have their sons spend some time in the office of an attorney, estate agent, etc. not for the knowledge that they may gain alone, but especially for the wholesome discipline unconsciously acquired by diligent application and discreet subjection to superiors.

It is difficult to see how the subject of Agriculture can be handled in the schools with any degree of satisfaction. The country boy naturally has ideas of his own about farming and if the attempt to teach Agriculture be limited to practical, elementary work, he has little to learn. On the other hand if it be approached as a scientific study embracing both the theoretical and practical side of it, then the farmer's son deficient in classical learning, cannot intelligently follow scientific Agricultural treatises, and if he could, with conditions about our schools as they are, he would have no opportunity of seeing these theories put to the practical test.

The common school is not a place for specialisation. It can make neither finished scholars nor farmers, but it can enfuse into all the enduring requirements for any profession—honesty and discipline.

Exonerated.

"Its so good of you, Dad," said Harry Turner, "to be making all this sacrifice for me, but I will try and be worthy of it and some day you will be proud of me."

It was indeed a sacrifice for Dan Turner, now in the evening of life, when the burdens of his sixty years of honest toil seemed heaviest, to send his only son and child to college, for Providence had not blessed Dan with worldly goods. But in his humble sphere of farmer he had been able to set apart from his meagre gleanings a sufficient amount for the education of his son, with a small surplus for rainy days.

Harry, now in his twentieth year was yet an unspoiled child and more refined than his rustic environment, would lead us to expect, doubtless the mark of some touch of hereditary nobility. But with manhood comes new views and ambitions, and the parental eye was not slow to see the over-shadowing change, and the father hoped that his timely act and advice would help to preserve Harry in the safe path.

"Ah! my lad" said the old man, turning in his chair from the fire which crackled in the throat of the chimney and cast its ruddy glow over the whitened hair and chisled outlines of his hollowed features, "I am confident that with your brawn and brain you will lift yourself out of the humble position which my poverty has forced upon us ever since you were a little child so high. Our family were always honest folks and did not disdain hard work. But of late I have had a certain fear of your future. I am getting old now and I want to see you substantially fixed in life before I go. The time when everyone was content with a comfortable living has passed, and even peaceful, healthful Graveston is over run with idle pleasure-seeking city people, and I should never want to see you associated with that class. It is very easy, even for a boy out of college to loose himself, and you must always adhere

to noble principles if you are to make a success of life."

"But," intervened the son, a sudden wonder speaking in his alert eyes, "not all the wealthy city people are morally bad. I am sure I could make friends with them without being contaminated with any vice."

"Remember" said the father in a firm yet kindly tone, "Forewarned is forearmed" "so dismiss all such foolish notions from your mind. Not until you are fairly and squarely established in life shall I consent to your marrying, and then it must be within your class, and let this be final. I have already completed arrangements, and in a few days you will be at college where I feel confident you will fulfill my expectations;" and with these words the last faint hope of Harry Turner's future acquaintance with the loveliest girl in all Graveston died within his heart.

Tears shone in his eyes and the finely curved lips pouted childishly as he said in a half spirited voice, "You are always right Dad, and I will stand by your advice." 'It was wrong for me to delude myself with false hopes' he thought, 'I must see Kathleen tonight and explain it all. She is so good and noble she will understand,' and with this he rose and left the room.

An overwhelming sorrow took possession of him as he hurried down the moon flecked lane. He paused beside the old millstream and gazed abstractedly up at the glorious moon swinging in the starry sky, its silvery effulgence flooding the rippling water. The balmy air was filled with the odor of honeysuckle and wild roses wafted through the rustling foliage.

Suddenly a peal of laughter like that of silvery bells was borne to him on the night air, and turning he beheld Kathleen, radiant in her youth and exuberant spirits. "Harry!" she called, a smile still playing about her pretty mouth, "I couldn't help laughing, to see you standing there 'star gazing'; you are getting to be a sort of a dream boy. But really what's the matter?"

"Kathleen," he replied, with all tenderness and sincerity in his voice, "tonight we meet for the last time."

The girl's features paled and she grasped at the gnarled trunk of an old elm as if for support. "Then you have never cared, Harry" she said in a trembling voice.

A pang of remorse shot through his heart like a dagger as he saw the utter misery steal over her face. A cold gray deathliness seemed to enshroud him as he thought of life without the companionship of Kathleen, and he made haste to speak lest his courage fail; "No! No! it is not that" he said, "I am going to college in a few days and I have been talking matters over with Dad, and he thinks we had better part, but forgive me Kathleen, it was only tonight that I realized how far our paths lie apart. I could not honestly stand between you and a future of luxury and social position which your family have decided on."

"No matter who you are Harry" she said interrupting, there can be no change in my attitude towards you, but for your sake I am glad. I should never wish to be an obstacle in your way towards a future career. I wish you success and God-speed" and turning she walked quickly away,—down the long lane, through the majestic old elms, the moonlight and shadows dappling her as she went.

Harry watched gloomily until her figure disappeared among the trees, but that night as he walked back home his heart beat lighter than it had for many a moon, in contemplation of a bigger and newer life stretching out before him.

II

Harry was duly installed as a student in a private boarding college situated among the rugged New England hills. He made up his mind to forget his past experience in Graveston and devote himself diligently to studies and thus become interested in his new surroundings. The first day went well enough; everyone was very busily engaged in looking after their

baggage and getting settled, and Harry's presence in the place seemed hardly to be noticed. The novelty of his new life had a strange fascination for him and he strolled about the buildings and campus aimlessly. 'If first impressions count for anything he thought, 'I shall not fare badly in this old spot,' but how very much mistaken he was, remains to be seen in the dark days of trial that followed.

A few days later Harry made his way to the gymnasium and began to amuse himself with some of the athletic stunts with which he was familiar. A number of the boys were crowded around the object of central attraction who was clad in an ultra-fashionable suit and amusing his cronies with some humorous recital. Harry was desirous of becoming acquainted with the boys and thus getting on friendly terms with them, and although he felt strangely at variance in his own shabby attire still he knew that he would have to play his part as a man if he were ever to gain their respect and friendship. With this view he walked over and joined the crowd.

"I say fellahs," continued the central figure of attraction, totally ignoring the wistful look of Harry, "The joke is on us for he happens to be the son of a farmer. He should be labelled 'Lost' or 'Strayed' and shipped back to Graveston." A roar of laughter went up from the boys and Harry's heart sank like lead. He now recognized the speaker to be Jack Weston, belonging to a wealthy family that was summing at Graveston. 'It's of no use' he thought, "there is surely class distinction among this crowd, and that night he poured forth his feelings in a letter to his father.

"It is of no use Dad," he wrote "a fellow is looked upon with contempt by those in more fortunate circumstances, but for your sake I shall persevere in my studies, and make good the promise I gave you when I left home." He knew consolation would be slow to come from his father, whose conception of life was that nothing could dishearten one if he lived right : still he had always profited by his goodly advice and it gave

him a sort of satisfaction to confess his troubles to someone.

The old man indited a reply which sustained Harry's courage in the days that followed ; " Attend to your duty, be manly, straightforward and honest and God will protect you," he wrote.

There were occasions when Harry showed his companions many little kindnesses, in the hope that he would win their friendship by this plan, but they repaid him with abuse and insults, which led to a fight, and scenes of Tom Brown's schooldays were once again enacted on the college campus.

" You belong to a low-down set of tramps," said young Weston in a fit of anger," and I do not want to have anything to do with you or your clique."

Harry's blood ran hot in his veins. He could endure any attack on himself but to have the hallowed name of his beloved father implicated in the attack was too much for him, and patience ceased to be a virtue. The color suddenly shot to his cheeks and his dark eyes kindled with the fire of pent up indignation and feelings which he could no longer suppress. " Take back that insult !" he exclaimed. " I never make apologies to your kind," said Weston. " Then you shall have to fight me " concluded Harry.

In the scene that followed Harry's fist shot over Weston's shoulder and caught one of his pals, by name of Thornton, in the face. " I shall get you for that" yelled Thornton as he scrambled to his feet. " You cant get away with anything like that around here." " I did not mean to hit you Thornton " said Harry as he turned and went to his room.

That night when he was absent from his apartments Arthur Thornton, fired with the thought of having revenge for the blow he received, stole to Harry's room and placed his watch there. On the dresser lay a handkerchief with Harry's initials on it which he carried off in order to futher the proof that young Turner had committed the theft.

On the following day Thornton rose in the assembly hall and informed the President that he had been

robbed of his watch. An investigation hurriedly followed, with the result that Harry was indicted of the crime.

The sentence fell upon him like a thunderbolt from a clear summer sky. He saw no way of proving himself guiltless in the face of such evidence. Needless to say this was an infraction of the rules of the place and expulsion was the penalty. He was powerless to explain or offer any information that would help to clear the mystery as to the presence of Thornton's watch in his room. Twenty-four hours the President said was the time limit and then he must prove his innocence or leave the place.

He was heartbroken, and the eyes of the student body were focussed on him as he hurried to the campus at the noon recreation.

Thornton and Jack Weston were as usual walking together. "I've gotten square with that fellow for hitting me said Thornton, confidingly to his chum. "What do you mean?" asked Weston,

"I cannot imagine your being so thick as to not suspect that I placed the watch in Turner's room," said Thornton. Weston stared at his chum as if stupefied, and his lip curled in disgust and indignation; he said: "Such contemptible treachery Thornton I can never stand for. You must go to the President and tell him the truth."

"Well I wont go," snarled Thornton.

"Then in all sense of fair play and justice I am bound to take you there" said Weston, with the glow of latent manliness in his face, and he seized Thornton by the collar and dragged him. At that moment Harry Turner came upon the scene. "Shame on you Weston" he cried, "attacking a boy so much smaller than yourself. If you want to fight why I'm willing."

"Look out," yelled one of the boys, "here comes the President.

"Young men! I demand an explanation of this affair!" he exclaimed in a stern voice.

"I will explain sir," said Weston coolly. "Thornton placed his watch in Turner's room in order to get

square for a grudge he owed him. I ordered him to confess to you and he refused. I then tried to force him to your office. Turner not knowing the circumstances was about to take his part."

"Come to my office" said the President, and the three complied in silence. There the words of expulsion were pronounced on Arthur Thornton, and Harry was exonerated of the theft.

From that day dated the friendship of Jack Weston and Harry Turner, which was further strengthened in a most extraordinary way; Harry's father called unexpectedly and Jack was making an undue amount of fuss over the old man when the arrival of *his* father was also announced. When the aristocratic personage was ushered into the room Dan Turner sprang to his feet. "John," he exclaimed, "John Weston,"—"Yes! and you are Dan Turner." It was the meeting of long since forgotten boyhood friends and they clasped hands in kindly greeting. Each in turn went back over the span of years since they parted; Dan rejoicing in the success and wealth that the years had brought to his friend, while John Weston sympathized and thrilled with delight over the shadows and sunshine of Dan's humble life.

"It could'nt be otherwise," said John Weston as he rose to leave, "Our sons should be the best of friends," and Harry and Jack nodded approvingly.

When a few years later Harry graduated and went back home he had not an enemy in the college. Graveston was looking very peaceful and lovely in the purple shadows of the summer's evening when he arrived, and once more he strolled down the lane. As he neared the millstream the thick foliage parted and Jack accompanied by Kathaleen, came forward. "Allow me to introduce my sister—"Kathaleen—Harry."! Harry stood for a second, stupified, and then stepping forward took her hand, and as he gazed into her eyes he knew the truth forever.