

# The Function of the Rural School in Solving the Rural Problem

By Miss E. Scott

My subject implies that there is a rural problem and that it needs solving. But before we can attempt the solution of any problem we must have a clear understanding of what that problem is. So the first question we must ask ourselves is, "What is the rural problem?"

From most of the older agricultural districts of Canada and the United States comes the cry that there is a scarcity of both men and women to meet the requirements of farm life, while in our cities the population is increasing so rapidly that even before the present commercial crisis it is difficult for many to find employment. One has only to look around him, and even the most casual observer can see that our rural districts are not nearly so populous today as they were some years ago.

But perhaps few of us can realize the extent to which the rural population has decreased in proportion to the urban until we are brought face to face with facts, as illustrated by a comparison of the census returns of 1911 with those of 1901. During these ten years the proportion of rural population to the total has fallen in all the provinces of the Dominion.

Even in the prairie provinces, which are mainly devoted to agriculture, and where the population is increasing so rapidly, we find that the urban population is making greater proportionate gains than the rural, while in all the older provinces, except Quebec, the rural population has not only failed to increase proportionately to the urban, but has actually decreased numerically. Let us look at some of the counties where the loss has been the heaviest. Dufrin for instance, has lost 13.3 per cent, East Grey, 18.9 per cent, South Bruce, 19.3 per cent, South Grey, 20.4 per cent, and North Grey 21.9 per cent of their population, while the townships of Keppel and Sarawak have lost respectively 34.3 and 48 per cent of theirs. This depletion in population means also the closing of a great many farm homes as well as the weakening of a great many more. For instance, during the decade of the last census period Egremont closed 15.1 per cent of her farm homes, Glenelg 19.5 per cent, Keppel 27.1 per cent, and Sarawak no less than 45.5 per cent of hers.

But what is the effect of this rural depopulation? You may say that since cities have existed they have looked upon the country as the legitimate source from which to obtain their increase in population. They have always looked to the country for leaders. Whether it be in financial, or in social, educational, or in religious circles, we find that a great proportion of the leaders, some cases as many as nine out of ten, are country bred. Has this any detrimental effect on the rural district? That all depends on whether the city is just taking the surplus population of the farms or whether she is robbing the farm to enrich herself. If the former be the case, then the present exodus from the farm to the city must mean that less people are needed on the farm. But is this true? We know that the increase in the use of labor-saving machinery on the farm has made it possible to accomplish the same amount of work with less men than formerly. But if the men thus thrown out of employment go to the city, thereby enlarging it, the city, which always has been, and always will be, the chief market for, and the chief consumer of farm produce, must therefore increase her demand for this produce. If there is not an increased supply to meet this increased demand, it must be met by imported produce at a high price. Is this the case in Canada today? For our answer to this question let us go to trade statistics. In 1903 Canada exported to Great Britain thirty four million pounds of butter and in 1912 her export trade in butter not only ceased entirely during the last nine months of the year, but she imported butter from New Zealand to the value of over one and a half million dollars. The eggs imported from the United States during that same year, cost her two and a half million dollars. She also exported 6000 less cattle to Great Britain in 1912 than in 1911. Thus our country with her great natural resources for agriculture becomes an importer rather than an exporter of farm products, and the cost of living goes up both in the city and on the farm. You may well ask why has the farm failed to meet the increased demand? One reason is the scarcity of farm labor. She has poured forth into the city her wealth of men and women until she has impoverished herself. And who is it who goes? Is it not almost invariably the young. Now farming is certainly not an occupation for the aged and infirm. It takes the strongest and most vigorous to farm successfully. Yet in many rural districts the predominance of age over youth—one of the first signs of decadence, is very noticeable. And how can such districts be expected to meet the demand of the times. The increased demand for farm produce means an increased supply both in quantity and quality, and a continued increase to meet the ever increasing

conditions both for itself and for the country.

Having reviewed the rural problem from the industrial, the social, the educational, and the moral standpoint, we find that what the country needs today is to keep more native born young people on the farm, not all of them for all are not needed, and all are not naturally adapted for such life, but to keep a sufficient number of those best suited to farm life, to maintain a thriving and prosperous rural community, well balanced socially, mentally, and morally. The question which now confronts us is, "How are we to succeed in keeping the boys and girls on the farm? But before we can answer this we must first discover what causes them to leave it.

One reason for young people leaving the farm is the desire to make a fortune, quite a legitimate desire in itself, provided it does not dominate all other desires. But must leaving the farm necessarily follow as a means of accomplishing it? Could not this desire be turned to good purpose in developing a thrifty, progressive farmer? Then, on the other hand, if this desire does dominate all other desires, if the boy or girl becomes a blind struggle for the amassing of wealth, regardless of how he gets it and how many of his fellowmen he tramples underfoot in getting it, it is not a legitimate desire. There may be some excuse for such a character when his daily outlook is bounded by the four walls of a city office, but in the country surrounded by God's universe of earth and sky he is simply a blot on the book of nature. Let the city take care of him if it will and little it gains by the getting.

Some leave the farm because they have never learned to appreciate their rural surroundings. Nature to them is a closed book. They are like the man who said the poet must be mistaken when he said he saw sermons in stones, and books in running brooks; he must have meant that he saw sermons in books and stones in running brooks. Some people do not even see the stones. To be blind to the wealth of natural beauty that surrounds one in the country, seems almost a sacrilege. I think that we, as rural teachers, are missing our mark if we do not try to lead our pupils to observe to study and to appreciate the world of nature around them, for only those who have learned to love and to commune with nature know the depth of that joy which she has prepared for those who love her. Unless we ourselves have drunk deeply of nature's fountain we cannot hope to lead others to it. Love of nature can only be taught through love of Nature. The teacher must first be a Nature student herself.

The hard work and long hours, which farming operations necessarily entail, lead many of our young people to turn their steps toward the city, only to find that long hours in the air and sunshine are decidedly preferable to a shorter term in the hot, stuffy, ill ventilated rooms of some city workshop. The overcoming of the difficult and disagreeable in life is one of the stepping stones to strong, sturdy character. Some one has said that in character building, farm life, which from necessity has much that is hard, is Nature's equivalent for war. Are we then to let our boys and girls grow up weaklings who will always choose for themselves the easy and pleasant, and shun the difficult and disagreeable? Can we not teach them to look on the brighter side of farm life and to learn to overcome its difficulties. At school we have the children at one of the most impressionable periods of their lives when the foundation stones of character, whatever they may be, are being laid. Let us see to it therefore that we do our part in laying those foundations broad and deep for the brave and noble character, which will not fall a prey to discouragement, nor cower at the difficult task. In his little garden, it matters not whether it be a home plot or school garden, the child, on a small scale, meets with and overcomes many of the difficulties which are confronting the farmer on a larger scale. He has his failures too. But with help and guidance of the teacher he learns to look for the cause and his very failure becomes a means of teaching him to do better next time. The garden, too, gives the child the opportunity for making experiments in the best methods of cultivation, the varieties of seed best suited to the locality, and in the case of the girl, she will likely continue her experiments to methods of cooking, canning, and preserving her vegetables. The flower garden too is a source of pleasure and profit to all, when used as a means of developing in the children the taste for the beautiful. Thus, in the garden the child in overcoming his difficulties, and developing his aesthetic tastes is building character, and he is doing more than learning to study Nature in her many-sidedness, and to adapt himself to her various periods that he may make her his partner and companion on the farm.

Then, again, the school garden furnishes the teacher with great advantages for studying the pupils individually. The pupil is freer and more at ease in the garden than in the classroom. The garden work seems to break down the barrier that often exists between teacher and pupil, and to develop a companionship which greatly increases the teacher's power to influence the child. The garden also helps to solve the "dull child problem." I have in mind a boy whom I met recently, who had almost reached the limit of my resources for arousing in him an interest in his school work. When

we were arranging the garden plans for the season, he asked for a plot. I had very serious doubts as to the advisability of giving it to him. After considering the matter I said to myself that if it did not have a good effect, and if it did not, it would only be one more drop in the bucket of lost efforts. So he got his plot. At first it was somewhat indifferently worked and the frost damaged it considerably, but he kept at it. I noticed that the more attention I paid to his plot the better he cared for it, and as his interest in his other school work increased in his other school work. When harvest came, as far as the crop was concerned, it could scarcely be called a success but as far as the effect on the boy was concerned it paid well for the effort expended.

The lack of social intercourse and necessary recreation in the country compared with the gaudy allurements of pleasure which the city offers draws many of the youth from the farm. Can the rural school not provide a remedy for this? Can the school not become the social centre of the community where the people may gather to mingle with each other, and enjoy a social tea and a short program provided by the children and young people of the section. Then there is the annual picnic or the school fair. May not the school grounds too be used by the young people on summer evenings for football, baseball, and other games? And if there is no church in the section the school may also be used for Sabbath school purposes. But all these organizations and social functions require leadership, and more than that they require the training of new leaders to take the place of the older leaders who are continually dropping out of the work, and I know of nothing better for this purpose than the School Progress Club. The pupils elect their own officers, prepare their own program, of course with suggestions from the teacher as to appropriate subject matter. If they wish, they may invite some of their friends to their open meeting. At such meetings the president takes the chair and proceeds with the program, which consists largely of addresses and discussions usually agricultural or household topics interspersed with music and recitations. The addresses, let me say, are spoken not read, and the meeting is conducted as any public meeting would be. The School Progress Club if it is anything is certainly a means of developing leadership. It may be, we are developing leaders in agriculture, or in home making, perhaps it is leaders in the moral or social life of the community or it may be leaders who will take their place in our legislative halls to gain and to maintain the rights of the agriculturalist there. Let us see to it as teachers that their training in citizenship be such that they will always hold sacred the rights and privileges of the British subject; that they will be statesmen, not politicians, but men who, if the call should come, will be able to guide the footsteps of the nation in the paths of righteousness and truth.

I believe that more of our ambitious young people have been actually driven off the farm by the current idea that if you want to amount to anything in the world, you cannot do it on the farm. And who is to blame for the prevalence of this idea? I think that the educationists of this province cannot hold themselves entirely guiltless, whether it be the higher officials of the Department of Education, or the teachers of the rural schools. I think education should be a means to enable the child to do better and adapt himself to his environment. The present environment of the pupils of the rural school is rural, and in order to meet the needs of rural life this should continue to be the environment of the majority of those pupils throughout life. Previous to the last few years what did our educational system do towards enabling the child to adapt himself to this rural environment? Practically nothing. Farm subjects were excluded from the course of study with amazing persistency. True, there was one clause in the school regulations which provided of teaching of agriculture, but it was not put into practice, so was simply the dead letter of the act. The general trend of the course seemed to have for its purpose the drawing of the child from his rural environment and enabling him to adapt himself to urban conditions. Frequently too, the teacher in the rural school was urban in sympathy. She was not in touch with rural life and consequently her work was permeated with an urban atmosphere. The more pupils she could persuade to leave the farm and enter the so-called high professions the better she thought she was serving that school. Farmers were not slow to read the meaning of this and felt that the public school system was trying to tell them as plainly as could be that farming and education did not go together. Thus when the Department of Education saw the necessity for agricultural training it offered to the farmer the advantages of the Agricultural College, his reply, if not in words, in attitude at least, was, "No thank you, we intend to practice what you preached." So the work of the college was viewed with disfavor by many farmers because the reform was begun at the wrong end. Of recent years the Department of Education has become aroused to the error of its ways, and is endeavoring to show the public that agriculture and education do go hand in hand. But here it is meeting with opposition from some of the teachers who say that the course of study is too

crowded, that the preparation of pupils for the required examinations is taxing the capacity of the teacher in the ungraded school to the very limit now, why increase the burden? I ask you, "Is the required examination the goal in school work? Is it a means or is it an end in education? In twenty years from now which will be the more important; that you gave a pupil a better outlook on his life work, that you enabled him to make his life more useful to himself and to his fellow-men, that you led him to feast on the treasures of God's open book, the book of nature, or that you succeeded in getting him through a certain examination at a certain time? Are you sure that agriculture is an added burden? Can it not be so co-related with other subjects that it becomes a means to facilitate the teaching of them? For instance, to the child who has helped measure and lay out the school garden, a rod becomes a real rod not a mere table in a book. And frequently the child who finds it difficult to express himself connectedly in composition can give you a quite fluent account of how he cared for his garden. So, too, with other subjects but time does not permit me to go into further detail. Let me say that I think the success of the work depends largely on the teacher and her attitude to it. Unless she is rural minded and can see the importance of the problem, it will not be a success. She should be able to take as her motto,—

"I teach,  
The earth and soil,  
To them that toil;  
The hill and fen,  
To common men,  
That live just here.

The plants that grow,  
The winds that blow,  
The streams that run,  
In shade and sun,  
Throughout the year.

And then I lead,  
Through mould and mead,  
Through wood and sod,  
Out unto God,  
With love and cheer,  
I teach."

You may say the rural problem in Ontario at least, has not reached the climax I have here pictured. I sincerely hope that it has not. But we all know that there is little use calling a doctor and expecting him to cure a disease when the patient is dying. The best chances for effecting a cure lie in recognising the disease in its early stages. Of course prevention is better than cure, but I am afraid we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that disease has got a hold upon our rural life. So the sooner we set ourselves to the task of applying the remedies the easier the task will be, and the better will be our chances for accomplishing our end. "Now" is the time to answer the call. I think I may say, our country's call. It may not be possible for us to serve our country on the battlefield; we may not be called

to do so. But it may be that our country, yes and our God is calling us, the rural teachers of Ontario, to rise and grapple with this rural problem while yet we may. For God will not always suffer us to neglect His opportunities. The sin of omission may be just as great as the sin of commission. God is a God of mercy, but he is also a God of justice. "The sword of God is not in haste to smite; Nor yet doth linger." God has often times used the mailed hand of war as an instrument of punishment against the nations which trod underfoot their God given opportunities, and persistently neglected their duty.

Denmark had to be crushed by the oppressing arm of Germany and practically die, politically, before she saw her possibilities and rose to the highest place among the nations in scientific intensive agriculture. Must we, as citizens of our great Dominion, whose natural agricultural advantages are far superior to those of Denmark wait, until "The soil of her faith and freedom should echo a foe-man's tread." That depends, largely, I believe, on the rural people of Canada, and not least of all on the rural education.

"Let us then be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate,  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait."

THERE IS MORE CATARRH in this section of the country than all other diseases put together, and for years it was supposed to be incurable. Doctors prescribed local remedies, and by constantly failing to cure it with local treatment, pronounced it incurable. Catarrh is a local disease, greatly influenced by constitutional conditions and therefore requires constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio, is a constitutional remedy, is taken internally, and acts through the Blood on the Mucous Surfaces of the System. One Hundred Dollars reward is offered for any case that Hall's Catarrh Cure fails to cure. Send for circulars and testimonials.

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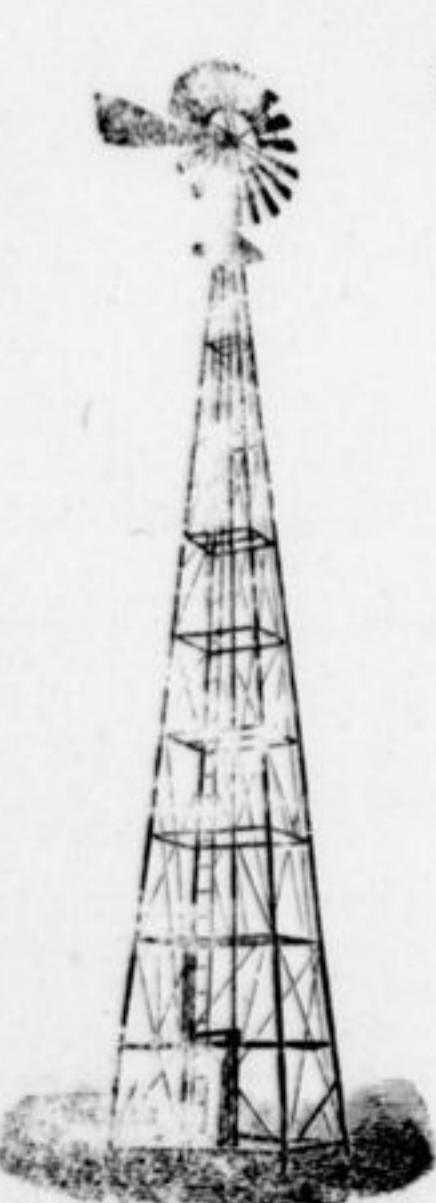
### A LONDON VIEW OF YUAN

It was no very great step for Yuan Shih-Kai to take from dictatorship to monarchy. He had already supreme control over the executive, was commander in chief of the army and navy, and could dissolve Parliament as he pleased. He bore no faint resemblance to Gilbert's hero, who was 'the bo'sun tight. And the midshipmite. And the crew of the captain's gig.' In addition to other things, he had swallowed everything. But one swallow doesn't make a king—only a dictator. London Evening Standard.

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