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Practical Agriculture For Our Public Schools

THE greatest need of Southern agriculture is more agricultural knowledge. The difference between 200 pounds of lint cotton and 500 pounds to the acre is knowledge. The difference between 15-cent butter and 30-cent butter is dairy knowledge. The difference between the three-cent steer and the six-cent steer and between the cow that produces 150 pounds of butter-fat in a year and the one that produces 300 pounds is livestock knowledge. The difference between the man who earns \$200 a year and the one who earns \$1,000 is the difference in their ability to convert knowledge into products needed by the race. The difference is not muscular but mental. The efficiency of the individual is measured by his knowledge and his ability to utilize that knowledge for increased production.

The writer on a visit to a town in North Carolina was told that the best farmer in the county was Mr. H. Mr. H. was a lawyer. On questioning another man as to who was the best farmer in the county he was told that the best farmer was Mr. F. Mr. F. was also a lawyer. On relating this difference of opinion to a third person without mentioning the names of anyone we were promptly told that the two men named as the best farmers in the county must be Mr. H. and Mr. F. Here was good evidence that these two lawyers must have been generally regarded as among the best farmers in that county. The next question of interest was: Why were these two lawyers good farmers? Some said they had better land, others that they had the capital necessary to do good farming and still others said that while they raised large crops these were not grown the most profitably. No one stated that these men were the best farmers because they did the best thinking and had the most farming knowledge and yet these were probably the true reasons. Certain it is that others who had as good land and larger capital did not obtain as great profits from their farming. These men had learned to study any problem which came up for solution, as they did a case in their successful legal practice, and in solving agricultural problems they sought and obtained the knowledge and experience of others, just as they consulted court decisions in solving legal problems. In short, they used greater knowledge, because they added to their own experience the facts obtained in the work and experience of others.

Our problem today is to increase the stock of agricultural knowledge possessed by the men who till the soil. Because 90 per cent of those who attend the common schools never get as far as the high schools, many insist that we must teach agriculture in the high grades of the rural grammar schools. Others as positively affirm that agriculture cannot be taught below the high schools. Many reasons are given to support both contentions.

Perhaps this difference of opinion is due to the usual cause of such differences—a lack of understanding of what the proposition of increasing agricultural knowledge among rural children means. In teaching children the multiplication table we teach them facts which are used more or less throughout all practical applications of mathematics to their future lives. Does anyone contend that we cannot teach children the multiplication table so as to make it effective in application to their future work? Perhaps if we sought to acquaint our children in the farm home and in the school-room with basic facts about their future work as well as we do to teach them basic facts in mathematics and grammar, we should find less trouble in teaching agriculture in the public schools.

Why is it that children do not know the general meaning of the

words "rations," "nitrogen," "protein," etc., as they do the meanings of the words, "mountain," "island," "noun" and "adjective?"

The reason is because words of the former group have no place in the conversation of the home, nor in our text-books; while words of the latter group are learned in the study of geography and grammar and are used in home conversation.

Any word or fact that will add to our understanding of agricultural practice could as well be learned in the teaching of arithmetic, geography, grammar, etc., as are our ideas of stocks, bonds, interest, etc., learned in the study of arithmetic. Why teach an understanding of percentage through problems involving the finding of the interest on \$2,000 for one year at six per cent, in preference to teaching the same understanding of percentage by problems involving the finding of the number of pounds of nitrogen in 2,000 pounds of cottonseed meal containing 6 1-2 per cent of nitrogen?

In the one case we teach, in addition to the mathematical processes involved, something of interest and in the other we might teach these same mathematical processes and in addition something of cottonseed meal and nitrogen. Which is of the greatest importance to rural children? Which will better equip the children to think on and solve the problems which arise in after life? Is not the purpose of education to train to better thinking, and how can good thinking be done on the problems arising in the life of the farmer if he does not acquire a knowledge of the facts and principles underlying those problems?

It is needless to inquire further into our problems or seek further for means to solve them so long as the average rural child has a school term of from only four to six months duration and our text-books deal with matters foreign to the life of the children. We must solve these two problems for they are at the foundation of all our future progress.

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