

A Visit to the Cooperstown High School.

Wishing to get information at first hand as to whether our present system of education tends toward rural life or away from it the writer approached the handsome brick school building on the outskirts of town. It was a spring-like day in midwinter. After passing the tall flag pole which showed unmistakable signs of a recent class "scrap," we entered a group of boys playing at marbles on the cement walk. Then entering the spacious ante-room between two massive pillars supporting beautiful architecture, we found within a busy "hive" from the first primary to the high school classes.

The rooms are spacious, all scientifically lighted, heated and ventilated. They were also kept in apple-pie order. Hung with large framed reproductions from the great masters and also very excellent specimens of the childrens' handiwork, they had, no doubt, the effect of appealing to, and developing, the child's love of the beautiful; but there certainly must have been an intelligent progressive school board behind it all, backed by a corps of up-to-date teachers.

Think of the advancement made in the art of teaching since you and I went to school! For instance in geography. Instead of hunting for weary hours for black dots and stars for unimportant towns and cities and black crooked lines for rivers, as we did in days long gone, the children had actually been making miniature continents, oceans, seas, mountains, lakes and rivers out of sand and water. They had also stuck on maps of various countries miniature sacks of flour, pieces of coal and other minerals, little bottles of wine and oils; also grains of oats, wheat, barley, etc. Little fluffy bits of cotton pointed to where that important product was grown and pictures of fat hogs were in their proper places.

All the text books in use have been kept up to date and they are free to all. There is also a circulating library containing a large number of choice volumes. We noticed one by Pres. Roosevelt, "The strenuous life." Preparations for the celebration of Lincoln centenary were in progress and the first primary pupils were drawing "Lincoln soldiers" in blue. Visiting the eighth grade a lesson in U. S. history was being recited and floating from another room came student voices singing their country's songs. In the 3rd and 4th grade a lesson in penmanship was being given. Here the pupils were drilled in the free-arm movement, just such as they would get at a modern business college. In the 5th and 6th grade the following dictation exercise was given out: "When Pres. Garfield was a boy a friend asked him what he meant to be when he grew up. 'I shall make a man first of all' he replied, 'if I succeed in nothing.'" In a class of physics conducted by the Supt., we had the pleasure of hearing a girl demonstrate by a model the workings of a steam engine. There were six girls and four boys present. This was certainly educating toward the rural life, if there were but ten pages on the subject and recited very generally by the girls. No chemical laboratory had yet been installed; but the physical laboratory, the superintendent informed us, is now quite complete; he, himself having made about twenty five dollars worth of apparatus. We found the teaching of drawing and music done by a special teacher; and

the excellence of the work accomplished was a great credit to the teacher, the pupils and the plan. The teachers were all very courteous and the students orderly—entering and leaving the building like ladies and gentlemen at a reception. Attendance and punctuality were also marked, being brought to a high standard of excellence by the force of public opinion; for each room, whose record is satisfactory, receives a half holiday each month. Although the heating and fresh air plant is said to have cost \$2000 we are convinced that the money was wisely expended; for a blast of warmed outside air being forced into every room, furnishes little short of perfect ventilation for the teachers and the 320 scholars enrolled. Provisions in case of fire have not been neglected. A cistern of water is close at hand, the doors of the building open outward, and a fire escape leads from the upper rooms to the top of a low building on the north. The pupils also have been drilled to vacate the building in less than a minute and a quarter. Concerning the criticisms sometimes made that "our public schools are Godless," we find that the Cooperstown school does not belong to that class; for each morning a petition is offered in the assembly room to the All Father, a hymn sung and the Lord's prayer repeated in concert. In the first primary room we found a New Testament primer on the first page of which we saw these words: "Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." We pause here to remark that if any primary teacher anywhere is found to be building on such a foundation,—starting the little feet in the right path, moulding the little lives after the "Great Pattern" and letting the light of the Christ life shine through her to the children entrusted to her care and keeping, then keep her by all means. She may have so consecrated her life to the little ones, that she has lost her personality and has become as a little child; honor her for it. She cannot be paid in money: but her salary can be steadily raised so that she need not worry about her material welfare for the future. Mothers, she needs your aid and kindest sympathies. Make her feel that her self sacrificing labors in behalf of your children are appreciated. Passing now to the main object for which the visit was made, we give below the result of a vote taken on the questions: "Do you expect to make farming your occupation?" to the boys, and "Is country life your choice?" to the girls. The questions were confined to those taking regular high school studies. As to the boys' question about forty-five per cent answered in the affirmative giving reasons; and to the girls question, forty-nine per cent answered "yes" also giving reasons. After having spent two full half days visiting this first class high school, we came away convinced "that the half had not been told," that the school was better in every way than we had anticipated. The superintendent and the principal were alive, alert and progressive. All of the the lady teachers were "uncrowned queens;" but whether of an autocratic tendency could best be judged by their pupils. But we are led to believe there is yet room for improvement when we consider that forty-five and forty-nine per cent of the students on the "upper round of the ladder" finishing without having had more instruction along the lines of their chosen vocations. Let the state high school board establish fewer constants and more electives; broaden and enrich the course of study, then, we believe, fewer will drop out after finishing only a portion of the studies required for graduation. Until such a change is made local school boards could establish shops for manual training in which the pent up energy of healthy young manhood could find a safe outlet. A shed could be built, idle threshing engines—steam and gasoline could be secured for the greater part of the year, and a trained, competent engineer hired for a reasonable rate to give stated practical lessons in farm engineering.

H. A. B.



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