

TEACHING AGRICULTURE IN COMMON SCHOOLS.

Dr. S. A. Knapp Presents His
Views Before Press Associa-
tion at Lafayette.

In his address before the Press Association at Lafayette, Dr. S. A. Knapp, of Lake Charles, field agent for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, said in part:

"There is a good deal of trouble in this world with our view point. After a man has been at a particular work for a certain length of time he begins to think he is either underpaid or over-worked and hence he slights his job or wants to strike. Or possibly he may think another man has an easier job and he would like to exchange work with him. Or he may think another fellow's job more honorable: and soon we have placed a kind of honor account with work.

"The man who sits in a banker's office, well clad, thinks he has a more honorable job than the mason who lays the foundation for a house. Or the woman who plays the piano and who is arrayed in fine linen, thinks she has a more honorable job than the woman, who with soiled garments, cooks the breakfast. There is nothing in this. If there is any difference in the honor it is in favor of the mason and the cook, for their employment is older and more necessary to the upbuilding of the world.

"But this honor trouble has disturbed a great many people. Somehow a kind of sneaking notion has crept into the minds of young men and boys that any sort of a town job is more honorable than work on a farm and as a result thousands of people leave the farm to take up menial employment in a town—as if a town made a man. This has continued until it has become almost a national calamity. This is not a new difficulty; it's old and we have been trying to improve this view point for a great many years.

"One of the first improvements attempted was the establishment of small factories in country villages to give employment to the surplus labor on the farm and to make a local market for the products of the land.

"Another step was the establishment of country schools, so as to widely diffuse knowledge. Possibly the schools were not as they should have been and can even now be greatly improved, but they were a gain. Some say they are too expensive. These people forget that the most expensive thing in the world is ignorance.

"Again we have been trying to improve the rural conditions by making better highways and establish rural free delivery routes, and in other ways, all of which are helpful.

"In the awakening of the public mind to better conditions in the country just now, another plan is very popular, and that is to introduce the teaching of agriculture in the common schools in all the rural districts. In a certain way I am in favor of this, but I do not accept it for as complete a remedy as some.

"Let us discuss it more at length. I think my view point is possibly a little different from some and I will try to make myself clear.

"What is the object of this teaching in the rural schools?

"The end sought is a higher life on the farm; less drudgery and more comfort, more attractive homes, more time to read and to think out the problems of the farm and a larger part in the national life; not for a few farmers, but for the great toiling masses in the country. The basis of this uplift is a greater earning capacity upon the part of the individual workers, for every step of progress requires money. The average earning capacity of each laborer on Southern farms should be increased five fold and can be. That increase may be distributed as follows:

"First, net gain in increased product per acre, due to better farming, one-fifth; second, net gain in the use of better teams and implements, two-fifths; third, net gain in devoting the idle lands of the farm to the breeding and raising of improved stock, one-fifth; fourth, net gain in using better business methods and greater economy in farm management, one-fifth. These four mainly cover the methods by which greater gain upon the farm can be secured. How many of these can be taught in the common schools? Certainly not the second, third, nor fourth. It will be noted that I assign the largest gain to the use of better teams and implements. There is just as much gain in being able to work

three acres in the time we now work one, as in fertilizing and tilling an acre till it will produce three fold.

"It is doubtful if many common school teachers could even define the most economical team for farm use, all things considered. It has been suggested that instruction could be given in economic rations, which would be of great value in animal husbandry. Let us consider this a moment. The formulas for making food rations for domestic animals of different ages and under different conditions, are mainly based upon the German experiments and their tests were all made upon stall fed animals. The teacher without scientific training would not know that they were of little value to the American farmer because here nearly every case is an exception. The age, weight, exercise, ability to digest and assimilate food, the climate, the weather and the hereditary tendencies have a bearing on the relative proportion of protein, carbo-hydrates and fats in the rations. Again, foods differ in composition: corn may have from 8 to 10 per cent of protein, depending upon the variety, maturing and storage. Alfalfa may have from 10 to 17 per cent of protein, depending upon when cut and cured. Further, the age of the grain and the flavor affect digestion, and cost of material must be considered. But where economic husbandry in the United States radically differs from the German, is in the use of the pasture, and feeding all classes of animals, whether for work or for fattening, in connection with the improved pasture where the protein is derived from the grass, and is a neglected element in the feed ration; corn and grass making the scientific ration.

"It is evident that judgment and experience and some science enter into the questions, and a teacher without scientific instruction would be totally at sea. A part of agriculture that can be taught in schools, and as I have always claimed should be taught, is how to increase the yield per acre. While from an economic standpoint only one-fifth of the gain is given to this, it must still be regarded as a broad and important subject. It involves the intricate problems of the soil, the composition, the mechanical conditions, vegetable matter, drainage, relative moisture, temperature, rainfall and its conservation, cover crops, soil renovation, use of commercial fertilizers, green manures, animal excreta and farm waste, the depth and the frequency the soil should be stirred, and the conditions it should not be stirred, etc. Then there is a broad field, the vegetable kingdom. A simple classification of plants should be given; how plants feed and how they grow and how they are propagated; what conditions hasten and what retard growth, influence of soil conditions, sun, air, leaf structure and environment of growth, composition, quality and flavor of product, whether in the stalk or fruit. This includes flora culture, gardening, horticulture, forestry, etc. I have enumerated more than the common schools can accomplish, even in an elementary way; yet there is more than could be profitably taught.

"My view point differs again in the method of imparting this knowledge to the pupils of the common schools. If a text book be used as a study, the teacher will be examined on the text book and the pupils will pass on their memory of the text book recollections. What we are seeking is practical reform and if the teaching be by object lessons (problems worked out in the soil and the living plant) the pupil will then never forget and never doubt the truth of the lessons learned. The strongest reason for the object lessons in agriculture is that they direct the pupils to a life of observation. The most important steps in the education of a child is to open his eyes to things. The highway of knowledge passes through the eyes. Persistent and accurate observations are the foundation of scientific knowledge. A great jurist once said to me, 'A lawyer with close observation and some knowledge of law is more successful in winning cases than a great law student without the observation.'

Teaching a child to observe will do more towards making a successful farmer than any amount of book lore memorized. I am, therefore, in favor of the school garden and the education derived from it. I am not so confident that the teaching of agriculture in the common schools, even according to the best methods, will accomplish all that some anticipate in the way of bettering conditions on the farm. The strongest influences that shape a life are the home influences. The carrying of pails of water in the winter's sleet and under the summer's

sun from the spring in the valley up the mountain side, to the home, bare and comfortless, will burn a picture into a child's brain that no school house teaching can efface. Nevertheless some gain can be made by teaching agriculture. It will aid some in determining the choice of a life. It will show the way to acquire facts bearing on rural life and open some doors of knowledge that otherwise might not stand ajar. It all depends upon the way it is taught. I am trying to make this point clear because I fear that this wakening of the public conscience to society's obligations to the farmer will end in simply voting a book into the hands of the children to memorize chapters for recitation to teachers unprepared to instruct. No blame is to be attached to the teachers. They must be given time and opportunity. Let it be understood that I heartily indorse the teaching of agriculture in the right way in the schools of the land, and am confident the project can be made a success under wise management, to the extent that it can be made a part of the common branches. I am in perfect accord with the plan of filling the arithmetic with farm problems, the readers with rural stories, the grammars with agricultural syntax and the unloading upon the spelling books and dictionaries all the vocabulary of bucolic lore. I have had a grudge against the dictionaries for some time and I am glad to learn that the work of getting even with them is to be undertaken. Or is this a beautiful dream? If real, is not the process a little indirect and slow, to fill the text books with agricultural atmosphere, to influence the children to persuade their parents to do better farming. In the education of young men I have tried this atmosphere plan many times, and have been defeated by the stronger home influence. Many farmers do not want their sons and daughters to remain on the farm. I prefer a direct educational appeal to the farmers for immediate results. However let us not discuss the relative merits of good work, but all join hands and each work in his own way. While some are placing problems in the arithmetic for the children to determine how large a crib will be required to hold a thousand bushels of corn, we will co-operate by teaching how to raise the corn to fill that crib; while some are filling the spelling books with big words, our part will be to fill the farmers with big horses and mules, better implements and purer seed, and while they are creating an agricultural atmosphere in the books and the schools, let us create an atmosphere of plenty, thrift, comfort, beauty and happiness around the homes.

"The children of the common people are hard sense, practical little men and women, and their life purposes are shaped mainly by home conditions, generally cold and hard, and they long for a life of more sunshine, love and pleasure. Let us get right at the difficulty and make home conditions easier and more profitable. It can be done and I am the more impressed with this view, because all similar reforms in other states and nations have been brought about by direct appeal to the farmers. This plan in no wise detracts from the great value of school education and its influence upon civilization.

"The State and United States should have an important part in this work. For instance when a community has improved its schools up to a certain grade this should be recognized by the State and a special appropriation made for such schools as a matter of encouragement. Just so when a township or a county has improved its highways to a certain excellence, they should receive State aid and when they have reached a still higher excellence they should become national highways and be maintained at the nation's expense. Under modern conditions excellent highways are just as important as good railroads and there should be a great national system of highways just as well as a national system of waterways.

"Operating upon such broad plans we can build up a country where rural conditions will be satisfactory and where we can maintain a population of high intelligence and character.

"It is necessary that the country be thus uplifted in order to balance the equation of modern civilization."

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