

teachers, high school instruction, modern school buildings and ample instructional materials. Every year such inequalities grow less tolerable to a people committed to the democratic principle of equalised educational opportunity.

An examination of the reforms undertaken in Scotland and the United States of America has been suggested. In addition the time is now ripe for a critical examination and coordination of the experimental work that has been carried out in the provinces of Canada. Although small, it is varied in character and each different method of attack upon identical problems yields experience from which it may be possible to formulate a thoroughgoing scheme of reform.

In Prince Edward Island there is a system of Provincial Grants by which the provincial government bears as high a proportion of educational costs as 69%. In Ontario two townships have experimented with a scheme of school consolida-

tion. In Manitoba, ten municipal units have been organised. In Saskatchewan the consolidation of rural school units has proceeded further than in other provinces and now the government is experimenting with a centralised Education Tax. In Alberta eleven new large Divisions have been organised and eleven more are to be established this year. In British Columbia two areas have been reorganised as experimental large units, with a greater centralisation of administration than in the case of the Alberta Divisions.

From a comparative survey of this work, against the background of American and Scottish experience, it may be possible to draw up a carefully planned scheme of provincial reorganisation that attacks all phases of the problem and develops a well balanced, democratically controlled administrative structure of education, within which progress is possible.

The Task of a Country Teacher

By C. H. SUTHERLAND

MUCH has been written concerning the importance of the rural teacher to our Nova Scotian communities, but his difficulties and problems have received very little publicity. It is the purpose of this article to discuss a few of those problems.

Attendance

The teacher's first task is to promote and sustain an active interest on the part of parents and other residents of the section. Their cooperation is essential in carrying on an effective educational programme. The teacher is entrusted with the educational direction of all children between the ages of five and sixteen, and of those over sixteen who wish to take advantage of the facilities

offered by the section. Clearly the minimum amount of schooling must be insisted upon if illiteracy and other conditions making for bad citizenship are to be removed. The regular attendance of all children of legal school age is essential to the progress of both the individual child and the school as a whole.

It is therefore clear that attendance is a major problem of the rural teacher. As many as twenty per cent of the children in a rural community may be offenders, thus creating a problem which is a constant worry to the teacher and which occupies an undue amount of his time. This situation may be the result of:

- Indifference on the part of the parents.
- Poverty in the home.
- Habitual truancy.
- Mental and physical deficiency.

There are some parents who evade their responsibilities to their children in the matter of education, and who develop an expert ability to evade the Attendance Law. To overcome such an attitude is indeed a difficult task, and it must be remembered that rural communities have no attendance officer such as exists in towns and cities to assume the obligations and cares of obtaining a full and constant attendance. Fortunately the teacher receives full support from the Attendance Branch of the Department of Education in his efforts to overcome irregular and non-attendance caused by the parents. Legal means are regrettable but absolutely necessary in dealing with those who refuse to cooperate, or who promise to send their children to school regularly and constantly break their promises. Unfortunately when such cases are carried to court there is sometimes considerable feeling aroused against the teacher on the part of the few sympathizers of the offenders. The children coming from such homes are usually doubly handicapped: their home training is poor, and they receive little or no encouragement in their school work. In a few cases parents have been known to encourage their children to become troublemakers in the school-room.

The teacher regards with sympathy the home in which non-attendance is due to lack of suitable clothing. Such poverty is by no means uncommon, and the teacher is often called upon for aid. It is sometimes possible to enlist the help of agencies interested in child welfare work, such as the Women's Institutes and the Parent-Teacher Associations, which do excellent work in spite of limited resources and exhausting demands.

Many cases of habitual truancy are fit subjects for a trained psychiatrist, and cannot be dealt with competently by an amateur. In less serious cases, however, the teacher is sometimes able to find the basic cause of maladjustment, and is then in a position to attempt corrective measures.

Few sections are free from mental cases of one sort or another. There is usually

at least one family in which the parents are definitely mentally deficient or nearly so. Often they have large families. When the children from such a home enter school they are likely to receive little benefit, since the teacher has neither the special training nor the time necessary for the instruction of subnormal children. The other children make fun of them, and because of their appearance, social habits (or lack of them) and general maladjustment, their addition to a group creates an unhealthy social environment for the normal children. Since there are few provisions for the care and special education of such unfortunate children, the teacher can do little but bar them from the school, provided the necessary authority can be obtained.

Health is no less a problem. Many of our rural schools are so unsuitable that they are a menace to the health of the children and nullify the advantages of a country environment. The average rural school is overcrowded, with poor ventilation and a primitive heating system. Harmful interior colouring and insufficient lighting affect the pupils' eyesight, while unadjustable seats and desks prevent them from taking advantage of what light there is. Outside the schoolhouse itself, one finds inadequate playground space, little or no play equipment, and outhouses which are both unsightly and unsanitary. The school section is responsible for such conditions and usually seeks to excuse itself on the grounds that it would be too expensive to make alterations. Yet surely it is a misdirected economy that saves a few cents per person by sacrificing a child's health.

There is a system of health inspection but not of treatment in our rural schools. The school nurse, who is usually able to visit each school only once a year, renders useful service by her inspection, detecting major and minor defects which she brings to the attention of both teacher and parents. Her responsibility stops there and the teacher can do little more than try to induce the parents to provide necessary medical care. If the parents continue negligent he must force action. The lack of medical and dental services

in so many of our rural communities is a serious one, particularly to children at an age when prompt attention to minor ailments would prevent serious consequences in later life. Recently a child whose eyesight seemed to be weakening rapidly was sent to a specialist by a few interested persons in the community. The specialist reported that it was two years too late to hope for a cure and that the best he could promise was a possible delay in the course of the disease. The child's parents were poor and had neglected to attend to what they considered an unimportant defect of eyesight. There is a genuine need for an efficient health service in our rural schools—a system which provides not only for inspection, but also for treatment.

A particularly odious duty arises when children from poor homes appear infested with vermin, which soon enlarge their travelling experience by spreading to other children. The teacher is forced to banish the offenders and persuade the parents to make conditions in the home sanitary. Should this occur frequently a regular system of inspection must be instituted, often to the disgust of children from better homes.

Library Needs

The lack of library facilities in our rural districts is a distinct drawback to the work of the teacher. The inculcation of reading habits and the development of an appreciation of literature are essential educational aims whose fulfilment gives the child an invaluable means of self-education. It is the only way to combat the influence of the cheap pulp magazines that are the favourite sources of reading among so many of our rural people. The Department of Education has been consistently encouraging the establishment and maintenance of rural school libraries, and has formed the nucleus of a library in practically every section. To add an abundance of suitable books to that nucleus is not an easy matter. An appeal to the Trustees for books is usually turned down as being a superfluous expenditure. A background of suitable reading material

is needed if the subjects on our school curriculum are to be taught effectively. Since familiarity with books will afford the child an opportunity of enlarging his experience, often so limited in rural districts, the teacher who wishes to avoid an arid educational process must be constantly on the alert to get as many worthwhile books as possible.

The Board of Trustees

It is natural and proper that the parents should have some control over the maintenance of the school. Yet the existing system, which allows the ratepayers of a section to exercise complete control over the financial and educational functions of the school, is far from satisfactory. The local board, consisting of three Trustees and a Secretary, varies greatly in efficiency from section to section but some of the common faults which impede the work of the teacher may be noted as follows:

The Board usually lacks a progressive educational policy.

Its members are rarely acquainted with the school law and often have but a half-hearted interest in their duties.

Its members are frequently unfriendly to each other, quarrel continually, and lack unanimity of action.

Its members are often fearful of rebuke by the ratepayers at the Annual Meeting and hesitate to co-operate with the teacher in effecting needed improvements, particularly if these involve expenditure of money.

The Secretary is often the object of of suspicion because he handles the ratepayers' money.

The system of tax collection is poor and the teacher's salary may remain unpaid for long periods of time.

The Board's interest is all too often centred on a low tax rate for the section rather than an efficient educational system.

No doubt there are rural school boards that have few or none of these faults, but they are rare. Any teacher welcomes working with a board that is earnestly

trying to solve the educational difficulties of the section. But when he finds that some of the officials resort to petty means to satisfy personal whims or greed, he can hardly be blamed for looking askance at the system of control which allows such pettiness. If education is to become an effective means of opposing the evils threatening our democratic system at this critical stage, then our educational set-up must be vastly improved. Money must be spent, and the inequalities resulting from the division of the province into small sectional

units must be removed by rearranging the burden of cost. Such a revision would free the teacher from the tyranny of short-sighted school boards and greatly increase his usefulness.

These are only a few of the major problems which face the average rural teacher, yet enough has been said to show that he has no easy task. He is handicapped on all sides by difficulties which are often unnecessary and which continually interfere with his primary function. He will need ability, tact, and enthusiasm if he is to succeed.

Women's Institutes in Nova Scotia

By HELEN J. MACDOUGALL

THIS year of 1938 sees the Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia celebrating the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of their foundation. It is fitting therefore, at this time, to refresh our memory as to the purpose for which such an organization was started and to note the achievements during that period of time.

In the reading room of McDonald Institute, Guelph, Ontario, hangs the portrait of a beautiful woman. Beneath it, a bronze tablet bears the following inscription: "In memory of Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, Founder of Women's Institutes in Canada."

When as a young woman, Mrs. Hoodless lost her first baby, she felt that with a little more knowledge and a greater sense of responsibility, this tragedy might have been avoided. Then and there she resolved she would do everything in her power to make it possible for girls and women to obtain the knowledge that would help them in their responsibilities in home-making and motherhood.

As a result of her untiring devotion to this ideal, home economics was introduced into the schools of Ontario, and in February 1897 the first Women's Institute in the world was organized at Stoney Creek, Ontario, with the motto "For Home and Country".

The Women's Institute was organized as a sister society to the Farmers' Institute, with the purpose of giving the same care, study and service to the home and family that the Farmers' Institute gave to the farm, stock and crops.

So in Canada was started this women's movement, now grown into one of the greatest world-wide organizations. It has spread throughout the whole of the Dominion of Canada, to Belgium, Scandinavia, and other Continental countries, to England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and India. The same idea was started in the United States, modelled on the Canadian idea, but adapted to local needs. There it flourishes as the Farm Bureau or Home Bureau in every state in the union.

As a sister Society to the Farmers Institute of Ontario, the Women's In-

EDITOR'S NOTE: Miss Helen J. Macdougall is Director of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture for Nova Scotia. Her fine work has, to a large extent, been responsible for the success of the Women's Institutes in the Province.