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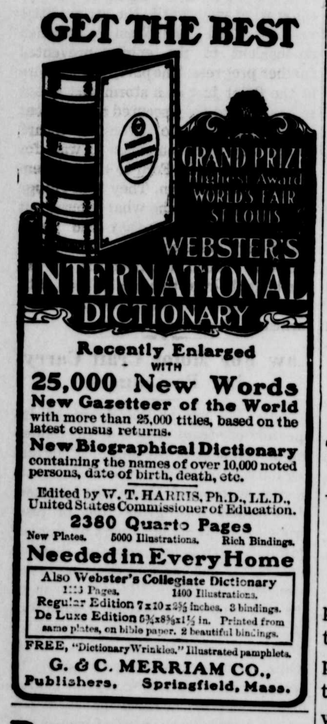

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NECISSITY FOR REVISION IN SCHOOL STUDIES.

By Milton Melvin, Superintendent of County Schools.

Superintendent of county schools, Milton Melvin, delivered the following very able address at the recent meeting of the State Teachers' Association in Ocean City, Md.:

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW TEACHERS:—To one who, since he was a mere boy, has tried to give his pupils all that was best in the public schools' curriculum, who has tried to use the most improved methods of instruction, it is upleasant to seem to be advocating that which might be construed as looking backward, and receding from our advanced position.

I am not wedded to the past nor to present methods. I believe that the present is far better than the past, and that the future holds for our schools far better than anything that has preceded. But an experience of more than 30 years as teacher in a country school and an experience of more than a year as superintendent of the schools of my county has revealed to me a condition of affairs that it is wise for us to acknowledge and face.

In speaking for a revision of the schedule I do not mean to say that it is not a well balanced cirriculum of studies. It is certainly not more than we would have the school children of Maryland learn, and it is not more than can be taught in schools where the children all attend full ten months and where teachers have not more than one or two grades each. But this is a happy condition of affairs with which I am not familiar.

In discusing the subject assigned me, I shall be compelled to view it from the plane of my own observation which has been limited to rural schools and to town and village schools where conditions effecting attendance prevail similar to those in rural districts.

In very few of these schools is the average atteadance greater than 75 per cent. of the enrollment. This with the confusion incident to absenteeism reduces the amount of work possible to a percentage even lower. While these conditions remain and while the average attendance remains so low it will be impossible for the pupils to complete a course suitable for those who attend the full year. We cannot entirely meet this by retaining them longer in a grade. At the age of about fourteen they will leave school whether they have completed the full course or not.

If the schedule of studies is not adapted to these schools, and conditions surrounding the schools cannot be adapted to the schedule, it follows that the schedule should be changed to meet the condition of the schools. That something is wrong seems to be evident. In my official visits I have found both teachers and pupils too much hurried to do their best work. The teacher is too much hurried to be sure that she has made a clear and correct impression: too much hurried to lead the children inductively up to the thought that she would have them reach; too busy to let the children do the work that should be done to reach the best results; too busy to be sure that the pupils have thoroughly mastered the work assigned them, because too much had been attempted. This lack of thoroughness in the elementary branches is almost fatal to proper work in the higher grades. This I have noticed not only in the rural schools but in the schools of the towns and villages, where conditions would seem to be more favorable.

During my last few years as teacher I became convinced that the addition of several studies to the course, and the broadening in the teaching of some of the studies, was not to the advantage of the pupils. Another effect apparent is the feeling of uncertainty—a lack of confidence on the part of pupils.

Before we can obtain the best results this must in some way be overcome. Our corps of teachers were never more competent, never more conscientious in the discharge of their duties. If their work does not come up to our expectations and their ideals, it is because they have undertaken too much, or too great a task has been set before them. This over crowding is the result of several causes. The course outlined by the State Board is too great for those who cannot attend the full year, and is too great for teachers who must give from twenty-four to twenty-eight lessons daily.

It really seems that we have lost sight of the fact that our pupils are children and that the capacity to learn remains about the same with each succeeding generation. Then, some of the text books selected, though admirable for a teacher who has but one or two grades, and who can have time to cull from such books lessons suitable to her ciass, and to outline the work to be done, to present that which is of primary importance and see that this is thoroughly learned leaving subjects of secondary importonce to be learned as time will permit, are most illy adapted to use of children themselves.

The fear that in the final examinations the pupils may be tested on something which she has not taught them, causes many teachers to attempt to teach everything in the book. This cannot be well done and would better not be attempted. A teacher is supposed to prepare every lesson before going before her class, and not only to develop the lesson of to-day, but to give a clear outline of the lesson of to-morrow. The man or woman who can condense the essentials of a half hour's reading into a five minutes statement and make it clear to a class, has a higher order of talent than is paid for in the salaries of public school teachers. In practice the teacher does not, because she has not the time, to condense and outline the lesson to be taught; consequently, the greater part learned by the child must be gathered from the text books. To meet these conditions, it seems to me there should be put into the hands of the pupils books that contain just what they are to learn, the fundamental principles, the essential facts upon which and around which a knowledge of the subject is to be gathered; a clear statement of just such principles and facts as are necessary for developing the child's mind, leaving matters of secondary importance, to be gained by supplementary reading and by business contact—leaving the child to grow into a larger and fuller knowledge of the subject.

I do not believe it wise to put into the hands of our pupils book that contain a large proportion of matter which they are not expected to learn, unless the teacher has the time to outline the work and to designate what are essentials and what are non-essentials; what is to be learned, and what not to be learned. Boys and girls cannot distinguish between essentials and nonessentials. When they can do this they have little use for a teacher.

If we require only the fundamentals in each branch studied, and encourage students to add to this by supplementary reading, I believe that we can make our pupils thorough and prepare them for better work in the High Schools and have them better prepared to take a business course or to learn office work. I might say here that a boy so taught becomes a very formidable competitor for free scholarships when such scholarships are given upon cempetitive examination, and he usually makes a good record for himself in college.

I believe that I would rather take a boy twelve years old who had learned nothing of the branches to be taught and attempt to educate him thoroughly, than to take a boy who has learned superficially and imperfectly, and who has been crammed through the first six grades. Business men have told me that they would rather have in their office to learn their business, boys who have learned the few fundamentals thoroughly and completely, than a boy who has a smattering of almost everything. I believe that the course of cramming, of imperfect learning, injures a child's capacity to do anything really well in after life. And I believe that the straits to which a child is put to pass examinations when he has not properly mastered the subjects upon which he has to be examined, gives a distinct lowering of the moral tone, makes the child less sincere, less truthful, and less trustworth.

It would seem proper to mention some branches, some books from which careful selection is to be made and from which other matters are to be eliminated. I would begin with that much-abused subject—Spelling, and would require only such words as the pupils use in their conversation, or meet in their text-book. I would reject all words whose use is unknown to the child. A child should learn new words as he learns to use them. I do not object to the use of the Spelling Book. It has a distinct use.

Instead of Physiology as now taught, or attempted I believe it would be better to teach only Hygiene; such rules of hygiene as children can understand and observe: and teach just enough Anatomy to make these rules well understood. Our schools have not the appliances necessary for teaching Anatomy properly. Moreover the subject is better suited to advanced grades. The most of it that they now get is just names. An eminent physician said that when he began his medical course his first task was to get rid of the misconceptions of Anatomy and Physiology received in the Grammar School.

Nature Study is important, and when taught naturally, to most minds is fascinating. But I believe that the natural way is not from plates and diagrams and text books.

Children who come in daily contact with vegetable and animal life need only the sympathetic interest of an intelligent teacher to make their play time, their walks to and from school, their work in their gardens yield better results than can be obtained by formal study of the subject in the school room, being at once a saving of time to the teacher and a gain in quantity and quality of information to the pupil.

I find it impossible to outline what I consider should be the scope of our instruction in Geography and History without exceeding the limits proper for this occasion. But I am convinced that children should not be required to attempt to gain more than a general knowledge of the Geography of the world at large, but they should have a more particular and detailed knowledge of their own country. They should be taught size, form, motions of the earth, the climatic zones where the

(Continued on Third Page.)

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In The Stud For 1906.

JOHN B., by Bedworth, Jr., Race Record 2.06½ Dam, Lillie B. by Alcantell, a son of the great Alcantara, 2.23, grand dam, Lady Messenger, by Crew's Messenger, 2.32, and great grand dam, Miller's Maid (a thoroughbred), better known as Belle, who was owned and reared by Dr. T. H. Whaland.

JOHN B. is 5 years old 28th of April, 1906. Is a beautiful dark bay, 15½ hands high, and weighs nearly 1000 lbs., is as handsome as a picture, and is one of the most sensible and best disposed horses living to-day, and has to his credit yearling colts as fine as there are in the State (none excepted.)

JOHN B. is a fair and square trotter, has never been to a bike or in the hands of a professional (to train), but was driven last season to a high-wheel St. Elmo Speeding Cart on Mr. John Bell's track, 8th in 17 seconds, a 2.16 gait, and that by an amateur.

Will take on a limited number of mares this season at $10.00 a season payable at end of season, or $15.00 to insure. Apply to

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He never wore hobbles, and none but quarter-boots.

Besides a large number of fine drivers and race horses with slower records BELTON is sire of the following: Calmo, 2.13¾; Little George, 2.18½; Johnny B., 2.19¼; Romola, 2.20¾; Polka Belton, 2.21¼; Daisy B., 2.25; Victor B., 2.25¼; Belton R., 2.27¼, etc. The trotters, Romola and Victor B. are now in Europe, and they have taken records better than 2.15, Romola being reported the two-mile champion of England.

BELTON'S daughters have produced: Marydel 2:12½; Little Belle, 2.13¼; Russell B., 2.19¼; Josh Raughley, 2.21¼; Water Lily, 2.27, James Dudley, 2.19¼, etc.

And all of BELTON'S get have been from only the ordidary run of mares.

BELTON will stand at the stable of Mr. Frank C. Johnson, Chestertown, FROM MARCH 15TH UNTIL ABOUT APRIL 15TH, and then at TOLCHESTER TRACK UNTIL JUNE 15th. It is intended to limit him to 25 mares.

TERMS:—$15.00 for the season. $25.00 to insure. Further particulars upon application to the owner.

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He is by Marvelous 2.23, sire of Wilkesbrino, 2.14¼; Winnie H., 2.15¼; Marveline, 2.18; Steed (3 yrs.) 2.22¼; Marlow, 2.22½; Elsie Mar, 2.23¼ Marvel Girl, 2.23¼; Marvel Branch 2.24¼; Marmalette, 2.25¼; Adversity, 2.27¼; Dam the great brood mare Myrtle King, Dam of three in the list, including Marveline, 2.18; Elsie Mar, 2.23¼; Marvel Branch, 2.24½. Marvel King is a handsome brown, stands 16.1 and weighs 1175 pounds. Bred by C. W. Baker, Aberdeen, Md. Individually he is a horse of grand finish and plenty of substance with a fine disposition. Marvel King, with four weeks training last year, worked miles better than 2.25.

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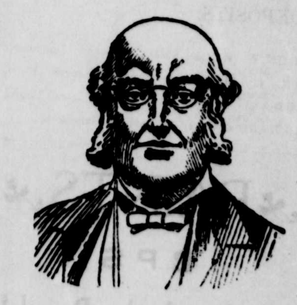

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