

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR.

BUREAU OF EDUCATION.

HOME GARDENING FOR TOWN CHILDREN.

There is need of suitable educative, purposeful, productive occupation for millions of school children in our cities, towns, manufacturing villages, and suburban districts who now have no proper employment out of school hours. In the cities, towns, manufacturing villages, and suburban communities of the United States there are approximately 13,000,000 children between the ages of 6 and 20. Of these, about 9,750,000 are enrolled in the public and private schools. The average daily attendance is approximately 6,500,000, two-thirds of the enrollment and one-half of the school population. The average length of school term in the cities is 180 days. The average attendance is 120 days.

Probably 5 per cent of these children are away from home during the summer vacation months with their parents at summer resorts or visiting in the country. Between 5 and 10 per cent are employed in some useful, healthful, productive occupation. Eighty-five per cent remain at home without proper employment for any large part of their time. Most of them have little opportunity for play. Some of them work a portion of the time at occupations at which they earn very little and which are not suited for children of their age. The dangers of idleness and unsuitable occupation are very great for all. A large majority belong to families the members of which must earn their living by their daily labor and whose earnings are so meager that anything which can be added by the children is much needed. Many of them are cold in winter, and must go hungry much of the time. More of them live in small, crowded rooms and in poorly furnished homes. More than two-thirds of them leave school at 14 years of age or earlier, to become breadwinners. Because of lack of proper contact with nature and the experience which comes from suitable, purposeful, productive occupations, most of them do not get from their years in school such education as they should.

Home gardening done by the children under the direction of the schools seems to offer what is needed. In all of the manufacturing villages, suburban communities, and smaller towns, and in the outskirts of the larger towns and cities, there is much valuable land in back yards, vacant lots, and elsewhere which might be used for this purpose. In every school in a community of this kind there should be at least one teacher who knows gardening both theoretically and practically. This teacher, who should, of course, be employed 12 months in the year, should teach the elementary sciences in the schools during school hours and should, out of school hours, direct the home gardening of the children between the ages of 6 or 7 and 14 or 15. If possible the teacher should have the assistance of an expert gardener, so that the work may be done in the most practical and profitable way. The teacher and the gardener should help the children find the plots of ground near their homes best suited for garden work, aid them by some cooperative method in having the lots properly plowed and prepared for cultivation, help them select seeds, and show them how to plant, cultivate, and harvest, so as to obtain the best results. The teacher should spend the afternoons and Saturdays of winter,

spring, and fall, when school is in session, and all of the vacation days of summer, if there are summer vacations, visiting the children in their homes, directing their work, and giving to each child such help as it most needs. Once a week or oftener, during the vacation months, the teachers should assemble the children in groups for a discussion of their work and of the principles and methods involved.

Vegetables, berries, and fruits grown should be used first as food for the children and their families; then the surplus should be marketed to the best advantage. Through the help of the teacher this can be done in a cooperative way. Ten or fifteen cents' worth of vegetables each day from the gardens of 200 children would amount to \$20 or \$30. In summer and fall, when the surplus is large and can not be marketed to advantage, the teacher should direct and help the children in canning and preserving for winter home use or for sale. The canning and tomato clubs of the Southern States have already shown what can be done in this way.

It is difficult to estimate all the results of this plan once it is in full operation throughout the country. For the children it will mean health, strength, joy in work, habits of industry, and understanding of the value of money as measured in terms of labor, and such knowledge of the phenomena and forces of nature as must be had for an understanding of most of their school lessons. They will also learn something at least of the fundamental principle of morality, that every man and woman must make his or her own living; must, by some kind of labor of head, hand, or heart, contribute to the common wealth as much as he or she takes from it; must pay in some kind of coin for what he or she gets.

The economic and sociological results are also worthy of consideration. Experiments already made show that with proper direction an average child of the ages contemplated can produce on an eighth of an acre of land from \$50 to \$100 worth of vegetables. A third of the children in the city schools of the United States might easily produce \$300,000,000 a year.

This plan in full operation would offer a valuable supplement to the child-labor laws. A boy 10 or 12 years old, with a small plat of land, working under careful direction, can produce more for the support of the family than could be purchased with the same boy's wages working in factory, shop, or mill. Children should not be ground in the mills, nor sweated in the factories and shops; their strength should not be sapped and their nerves racked by working in the heat and dust and noise of indoors; yet all children should learn to work. It is good for them, and they joy in it.

This plan in operation would do much to solve the problem of the idle negro. A large part of the negroes of the Southern States live on the outskirts of cities and small towns. Their cabin homes are frequently on large lots and surrounded with vacant lots covered with weeds and rubbish. During the vacation months the negro children roam idly on the streets, falling into mischief and vice. Under proper direction they might make, on back yards and vacant lots, enough to support themselves and more. Their parents might then put into savings banks a good part of their earnings. With the money thus accumulated they could buy or build their own homes and gain some degree of that independence necessary for good citizenship for men and women of any race. The children would be kept from vice and would gain habits of industry. Incidentally these negro quarters would be changed from places of ugliness to places of beauty.

Probably the most valuable result of this plan would be found in the fact that it would make it easy for most children to attend school three or four years longer than they now do, a thing more and more desirable, since education

for life and citizenship in our industrial, civic, and social democracy can not be obtained before the age of adolescence. In some way all children must have instruction and training after the years of childhood, or State and society must suffer for the failure. If children can contribute to their support while in school, they may remain in school much longer than if they must be carried as dead weights until they quit school to go to work.

The fact that a generation of men and women would be produced who would find their recreation, after the close of their labor day of eight hours, in profitable home gardening is not the least important reason for the introduction of this plan.

Compared with the results, the cost would be inconsiderable. No addition to the number of teachers would be required. It would only be necessary to require different preparation for one teacher in each school. Fifty thousand such teachers would be sufficient for all the city, town, and manufacturing village schools in the United States. To add \$500 to the salary of one teacher in each school, in order to retain his or her services throughout the entire 12 months, would require an additional expenditure of \$25,000,000, only one-twelfth of the present total cost of these schools and less than one-eighth of the total value of what might easily be produced by the healthful, joyous, educative labor of children who now spend much more than half of their waking hours in idleness, hurtful to them physically, mentally, and morally.