THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE
SCHOOL GARDENS OF LOS ANGELES: BY
MARY RICHARDS GRAY

LOS ANGELES blooms like the rose because seventy thousand schoolchildren are doing real gardening both at school and at home. To say that the city has the most beautiful school gardens in the world is to state the matter somewhat forcibly, when one thinks of those in Denmark, Holland, Prussia and France where elementary agriculture has been a compulsory study for years. Yet a semitropical climate performs wonders. Of two hundred schools one half has large gardens in full operation; all the others have them in varying stages of organization ranging from landscape features for the school grounds to fully metamorphosed vacant lots. As until now ground for gardens has not been deemed a necessary part of the school equipment, only the very newest, like the State Normal, provide the required space. However, vacant lots abound and owners are willing to have them pressed into this service. For

“A garden is a lovesome thing, Got wot!
Rose plot, fringed pool,
Fern’d grot—the veriest school of peace.”

Gardening took its place in the school curriculum three years ago when Mrs. Marie Aloysius Larkey was appointed special teacher of agriculture, going into the task single-handed. After a time she was given a trained assistant; but not until September, nineteen hundred and twelve, did the Board of Education see fit to establish a fully equipped department for this work. Now there is a superintendent, four assistant superintendents, and a few special teachers. In view of the fact that the teaching of the subject is likely to become obligatory throughout the State all teachers not certificated are preparing to become regularly qualified. Agriculture in Los Angeles ranks with reading and spelling.

Mrs. Larkey’s first efforts were spent on the East Seventh Street School, in one of the few squalid districts of the city in which the majority of people do not own their own homes and have no gardens. Adjoining the school she secured a vacant lot one hundred feet square given over to weeds and trash. Around it, within a radius of a few blocks, planing mills, factories, car barns, railway switchés and round houses hummed with business, and the gas works filled the air with noxious odors. Nothing about the lot in any way suggested the environment of a garden. That, however, did not matter. Other problems more serious than merely physical environment faced this
A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE EAST SEVENTH STREET SCHOOL IN LOS ANGELES: THIS IS ONE OF THE PRIZE GARDENS OF THE CITY AND THE ENERGY WITH WHICH THE CHILDREN ARE WORKING SEEMS TO MERIT EVERY POSSIBLE REWARD.
A GLIMPSE OF THE KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL GARDENERS WORKING EAGERLY FOR A PRIZE.

THIS IS ONE SECTION OF THE HORTICULTURAL GROUP OF THE GARDENA AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL IN LOS ANGELES, A SCHOOL DESIGNED TO DEVELOP THE CHARACTER OF BOYS AND GIRLS.
Boys at work in a "slat" house of one of the Los Angeles high schools.

Busy corner of a garden in the Gardena Agricultural High School.
A SCHOOL GARDEN IN THE RUSSIAN QUARTER OF LOS ANGELES PLANTED ALONG ONE SIDE OF A PLAYGROUND.

A GROUP OF BOYS BEGINNING THE ATTACK ON AN UGLY STRETCH OF CITY GROUND WHICH WILL FLOWER OUT INTO A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN.
SCHOOL GARDENS AND CHARACTER-BUILDING

capable woman—the actual task of battling with climatic conditions, untrained teachers, and pupils who did not know a spade from a hoe, a weed from a valuable plant.

LOS ANGELES is a land of little rain, semitropical and at the same time semiarid. The normal rainfall of about sixteen inches comes down usually in a few torrential storms during the winter when all vegetation grows luxuriantly; during the rest of the year not a drop of rain falls. There is little precipitation in the form of dew, and fog from the ocean twenty miles away cannot be depended upon. In many places the soil is adobe that bakes almost like brick, in other spots, heavy sand through which water drains as through a sieve. At all times more or less irrigation is required. At the Seventh Street School the seven hundred pupils representing many nationalities as well as colors were without any experience in gardening; likewise the teachers who had to learn the gentle art and teach it at the same time. All told the field of action was not one in which every prospect pleased and only man was vile.

For the Herculean task undertaken help came from many quarters—the city, the Board of Education, Women’s Clubs, individuals, the press. The city offered to cart away all trash, to pipe the lot and furnish water gratis; the Board gave supplies, and donations of seeds and plants poured in. In squads of one hundred Mrs. Larkey led her forces out into the field to clean up, accomplishing the task in a few days. The plowing and piping took a little longer. Then from each room she took the pupils in turn out with their teachers and assigned them to places for community work, even finding a good-sized corner for the kindergartners. About this time another specialist, Miss Merle Smith of the Lowthorne School of Landscape Gardening, Groton, Massachusetts, who had had experience in teaching gardening in college settlements joined Mrs. Larkey. Together the two pioneered helping teachers and pupils, repeating the Seventh Street experience over and over again in every part of the city. After about a year Miss Smith was regularly assigned to take charge of the gardening at Seventh Street, where both parents and pupils clamored for her instruction. Mothers who could not join in the work wheeled their baby carts up along the fences and took in knowledge in tabloid snatches while their infants slept and their older children hoed and weeded. Next, continuation classes that ran on until five o’clock daily were organized, but even these failed to satisfy the demand, consequently an unsightly lot seven hundred by two hundred feet wide was secured. The front half was cultivated, the back half left untouched. Through the middle a trench was dug and in it sunflowers were
planted that grew to rival Jack’s beanstalk, towering fully ten feet above the lovely garden and the dump heap—an object lesson in before and after applying work.

These gardens Miss Smith entered in a nation-wide contest conducted by one of the magazines and secured first prize—a framed certificate stating the terms of the award and a Nature Library published in sixteen volumes. The pupils attempted to grow only the most ordinary of small vegetables and hardy flowers. They were careful to arrange all beds symmetrically, to keep all lines straight and true, to choose for each plant the part of the garden best suited to its needs, to give to each individual plot as well as to the whole a beautiful massing of blossoms and foliage. Simple as were the gardens, one with a screen of towering sunflowers at the back and bank of moonflowers at the front, another with an attractive strip of lawn; their size, location and beauty attracted a great deal of attention. In the contests they won on neatness, style of arrangement, perfection of products and general excellence.

The curriculum for the grades calls merely for the beginning of this work. The Gardena Agricultural High School, the one high school of the city, specializing in Agriculture, continues with the advanced courses; though at present its work is largely elementary as it has been in full operation as a special school less than three years. The garden for this school is a farm of twenty acres completely outfitted with laboratories, slat houses, hot beds, flower beds, kitchen gardens and orchards affording the students training for all of the vocations that have to do with the raising of plants. Notwithstanding, here as in the grades, gardening is considered from the viewpoint of effective manual training, as an opportunity to inculcate a love of work and to build character rather than the mere acquisition of scientific facts. First, last and always the aim and object of gardening in these schools, whether in the grades or the high school, is character-building.

Coöperating with the Board of Education, the Women’s Clubs of Los Angeles having for their object the improvement of civic conditions have recently joined forces to aid the garden movement. Through their efforts one large seed house has published a pamphlet called “Hints for a Beautiful City,” and distributed it gratis. This circular gives simple directions for cleaning up yards and vacant lots, for planting and caring for gardens, etc. These clubs in different districts of the city are individually offering prizes for all kinds of contests. Everyone is finding something to do. Enthusiasm runs high. Los Angeles bids fair soon to be a fit abode for the celestial visitors from whom it takes its name!
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The first question invariably asked about the gardens concerns the disposition made of the produce and flowers, as if the production and possible financial gain were the chief aim and object of the work. In several schools the cooking department serves a luncheon for teachers and pupils. Some of the garden vegetables are used for these lunches; more, for the regular cooking lessons, when each girl is privileged to eat what she cooks. The rest are divided among the pupils and taken home. In individual gardens the young gardener disposes of his produce as he chooses. The flowers go to the children who take them home, to sick friends or hospitals. At the Gardena High School some boys have made a little money by selling their vegetables. Never under any circumstance is a thing wasted; nor is stress ever laid on financial gains from school gardens. With seventy thousand pupils home consumption solves the question.

As far as the teachers are concerned, they find this gardening the most delightful occupation the school affords. It helps to keep discipline, develops the children physically, creates a love for work and a desire to have more attractive homes. But of greater interest than all this is the attitude of the child toward the mysteries of Nature, the question of the explainable and the unexplainable.

Betines the teacher chances upon things neither unexplainable nor mysterious, just queer; as when she found a negro boy catching earth worms and putting them in a bottle.

"What are you doing, Buster?"
"Ah is ketchin’ angle wuhms fur gra’mammy."
“What for?”
“Dey cuahs ammonia.”
“Who said so?”
“Gra’mammy.”
“So?”
“Yes’rn. Ah knows. Dey gives out a brown juice and she jes’ rubs dat on huhsef an’ it cuahs her. Ah has saw huh do it. Ah knows,” and he rolled his big eyes in a convincing way.

However, when all is done and said it is the mystery element in gardening that holds children as well as grown-ups enthralled; the oft repeated experience of the kindergartner resting on her hoe gazing at a tropical growth of coxcomb and puzzling her brains as to how anything so marvelous grew from one seed. Los Angeles dreams a dream of a City Beautiful in which each child of her population shall have a garden in which to grow and develop like the wonderful flowers of the Southland. Slowly yet surely her dream is coming true!