

Twenty-Five Years Ago

MISS E. M. KNOX

THIS twenty-fifth birthday takes me back to old times, and to the hot August day, when, after wandering up and down the house, I finally took shelter in the furnace-room, the one only cool spot. I tried to gather together my first impressions and forecast the future. It all seemed as tangled and impossible to my inexperienced eye as the great, black furnace pipes, like snakes, coiling in all directions, but relieved by a splash of crimson nodding in through the window from a crab-apple tree outside. At that moment I saw only the school which had failed, apparently for no reason at all, and the hopelessness of that failure coiled in all directions around me, but relieved by the courage and good-will of the founders of the school, which, like a crimson splash of kindness, formed the one redeeming feature of the situation.

I was only a newcomer, yet I had heard plenty on the boat about the boom, plenty about land falling in on all sides for the taxes, and I had myself seen enough houses to let, even on fashionable Jarvis Street, to know something of the depression on every side. I could not help fearing that the Jeremiahs were not so far out who were prophesying that Havergal was a mere flash in the pan, which would unhesitatingly fizzle out of itself by Christmas. But, empty as the pockets of Toronto generally, and Havergal in particular, undoubtedly were, and might be, the one essential of the moment was to move forward, and I speedily roused myself, shook off my depression, and set to work to discover paperers and finishers. The old four-post beds in the larger rooms might stay, together with their corresponding equipment, but I neither would nor could teach a class at a table with another class circling round the black shelves with their faces turned to the wall. I neither could nor would endure the wax flowers, paper spills and white crosses of the drawing-room.

I set to work, with Professor Wrong's help, and, after telephoning in all directions (delayed, somewhat to my mortification, by enquiries as to my possible solvency or otherwise), secured workmen. A scene of confusion took the place of the former scene of stagnation.

It was quite a character study to meet the first girls, some desperately homesick, and but little consoled by the attentions of the French governess, who kept pointing out the carriages and the glories of Jarvis Street. Far more consoling were the blouses, many and rare, which they brought with them, and the starting of plans for the future. I soon discovered that the girls were

keen upon music, bicycling and adventure, but, alas! only here and there keen upon really hard work.

The real opening day came at last, and the painters and paperers having been, with difficulty, ejected, Professor Wrong read prayers to some thirty-five new girls of all ages and sizes, seated at the equally new desks in the renovated school-room.

There must be something magic about the number thirty-five in connection with Havergal, for years later Professor Wrong once again read prayers to some thirty-five new boys and girls in another set of new desks at the Hill. And a few years later again to another still smaller edition of thirty-five boys and girls in the new Preparatory on Bloor Street.



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Prayers ended, we went to work to settle the question of the school motto and school flower. Mr. Blake had suggested, "Opere Peracto Ludeamus," "Work exceedingly well done, we play." Something like the Scotch woman's farewell to her husband when starting for the front: "Now, there's your train, Jock. In ye get, and do yer duty." And there are worse mottoes than that.

The school flower had more poetry in it. It was the Marguerite, chosen because it grew so cheerily wherever its luck found it, and because it looked so steadily at the light that its heart was pierced with purest gold, its petals with purest white.

But time passed quickly, and it is hard to choose among the numberless first things, though I still feel a throb of gladness at the strong step taken against cheating by an elder girl, who, during a lull in an examination, when I had been called outside, having forgotten to order the pudding, forced a companion to burn her discredited papers in the stove.

The second year was still more exciting, owing to the arrival of our two first English mistresses, Miss Lange and Miss

Galletly, and to the rapid increase of our numbers, occasioning perpetual shifts, turning bedrooms into class-rooms and class-rooms into bedrooms, by day and by night, as fancy dictated. St. Peter's Schoolhouse afforded temporary relief until Christmas, and we were interested. Every Monday morning, it seems, an adventurous spirit climbed up and opened the ventilator, which had vexed the bald head of the Sunday School Superintendent of the day before.

Another growth by Christmas-time drove us from the schoolhouse into the old bicycle-house, the present Brooke House, from which weird-looking, old-fashioned bicycles and a practising horse were ejected, and the first "Bridge of Sighs," connecting the two houses, was built.

The next year saw the arrival of Miss Nainby and Miss Dalton, and the addition of a third house and a second "Bridge of Sighs." The fifth year saw the arrival of Miss Wood and Miss Pinney and the addition of still another house over the way. But meantime, the crowding and the inconvenience grew worse and worse, and poor Mr. Wyley Grier shifted his studio from basement to attic till he was justly weary.

The girls rejoiced in being broken up into small numbers in the four houses, and more especially in Liberty Flat, although the boards creaked and interfered a bit too much with that same liberty.

The small Juniors, then as now, were the most entertaining members of the household. They cared nothing for possible rats or inconveniences, and slept peacefully through the rattling of the stoves, which awakened us elders, to our intense annoyance, at four-thirty every morning. But it was not long after Miss Wood came before she, with her ready-hearted sympathy, began to share the small children's attentions. One bitter cold night two little, shivering maidens rapped at her door. "Oh, Miss Wood, dear, please let us in. I'm afraid of burglars, Jane's afraid of the dark, and we're both afraid of the devil."

The four houses lent themselves to wonderful games of hide-and-go-seek on a Saturday evening, but lent themselves equally to very weary feet in between, making way from the bottom of one house to the top of another, and our joy was untold when a small child one evening espied Mr. Blake tearing away a paling of the Rutherford fence. A few days later we had our first tea party under the apple-trees, blossoms floating down into the tea cups, where the Duty room and class-rooms now stand, and next year we went home, rejoicing in the beautiful new building to be opened in September.

But, alas! and alas! A sheet of flame went up out of the heart of that new building, and I returned almost immediately after reaching England, another hot August morning, and, with Dr. and Mrs. Cody, stood mournfully gazing at the empty shell, with long, blackened beams hanging here and there, and the old horse, who had worked the pulley of bricks, starting his

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