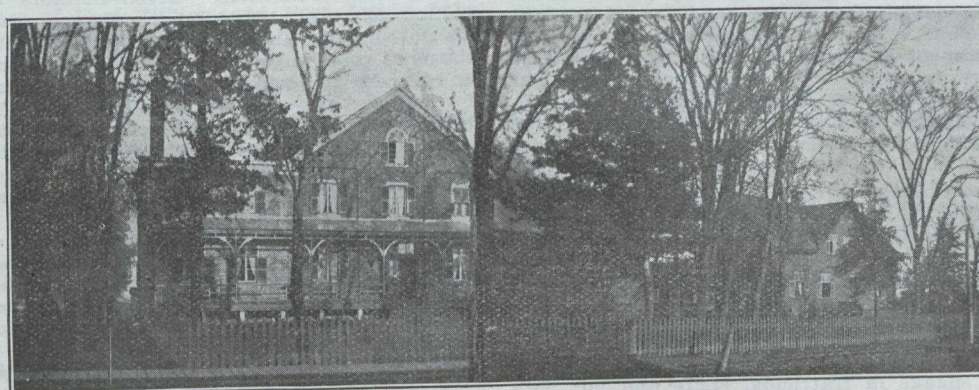


An Old Canadian Grammar School

By STELLA



It has been said that Canada educationally is too prosaic for her real intellectual development; that she misses the real aim for which education was primarily intended, the enlargement of the mind so as to understand better the fundamentals of life and its effect on the nationhood of the country. No doubt there is a great deal of truth in the statement, the principal reason being too much specialization and cramming of facts, without the why and wherefore of their meaning, or to put it another way, educational authorities are too prone to turn out inane products of a machine-made system, rather than the student of the older countries, whose love for his alma mater is not so much because of the system of teaching as of the personnel, the character and the environments. Cecil Rhodes in his will leaving the whole of his fortune to found scholarships at Oxford University, laid great stress on the character building of the environments of the old University. He, himself, though he made his fortune in the hard field of pioneer building, never forgot what he owed to the cultured surroundings of his youth and likewise there must be in Canada educational institutions which have left their mark on men and women who are today leaders of thought and the public life of the country.

This train of thought was brought to the mind of the writer when sojourning last summer in the little town of Berthier, P.Q. As a matter of fact we occupied one of the masters' houses of the old English Grammar School, so that we had many opportunities to study at first hand the life of one of the old grammar schools of Canada and to mark its possible influence on the lives of the boys, and one could not help but compare the old world environments of the place with the newness of some of the up-to-date schools visited in Canada. The very desks, carved all over with initials of the earlier boys, and no doubt of some of the present pupils, impressed one with their associations, and the whole atmosphere was such that must indelibly leave its impression on the minds of the boys who studied there. No greater temptation than the village tuck shop, and an occasional visit of a travelling circus to take the mind from the business in hand, which would seem to be the building up of clean cut Canadian manhood; and the retaining of that boyishness we all like which is the result of masters and boys playing together after school hours, rather than the imitating of that spirit which too often enters into Canadian sports, the spirit of winning even at the cost of sportsmanship.

The school was founded in 1849, though there are

indications that a day school existed since the early part of the century, but sixty-five years is a long record for a new country and though it has met with many vicissitudes since its foundation — one master recording that for three weeks the entire school lived in the attic owing to eight or nine inches of water on the lower floor—the academy has always maintained a good reputation for teaching and many prominent Canadians of today and the past, including the Hon. Mr. Rogers, the Federal Minister of Public Works received the rudiments of three “Rs” at Berthier. From the beginning the school has been fortunate in its masters, each one vying with his predecessors and colleagues for its honour and reputation, and it would be hard to find another school in Canada which has sent out so many professional men. And no wonder. Situated out of the world, and yet near it, where nature, summer or winter, is always at its best, with the old church reminding one of old English families who came over at the Conquest, and the new church (fifty years old) taking one still further back in mind to the old Anglican service as rendered at the time of the English Reformation, with the stately St. Lawrence on whose bosom 400 years ago sailed the doughty pioneers of New France, and surrounded with soil, every foot of which had been trodden by the Indians of Fenimore Cooper and Henty, and amongst a people whose language and habits are the same today as when they first came from Brittany, some three centuries ago and with a peaceful quietness only disturbed by the singing of the birds and the croaking of the bullfrogs, surely in this place there can be no disturbing factor to detract the mind, and everything must be conducive to bringing out the best in a young nationhood. It is. The joyousness of the boys themselves was a sufficient guarantee that their minds were attuned with nature. No false note was heard in their language, no selfishness found a place in the communal life, but a spirit of bright optimism and confidence seemed to permeate the whole atmosphere. How those boys loved to hear of the unknown world and its distant seas, and lands, and peoples, and how trusting they were in the goodness of mankind. Chivalry seemed to be second nature to them. And why? The school was small enough to allow almost individual teaching — at least to give the masters a chance to study each boy and bring out the best in him. And yet there was a sufficient number to keep the boys from priggishness. It was good to be amongst these boys. I saw in them the potentiality of Canada's manhood and I was not afraid for her future.