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LONDON OLD BOYS' REUNION

LONDON, ONT., CANADA

AUGUST 7 TO 12, 1905

"Extract from the Exile"
by F. W.

DEDICATED TO THE LONDON "OLD BOYS."

Revered and cherished friendships
Of the many vanished years,
Whose memories, like precious gems,
Their brilliant worth endears;
Unharm'd by time and distance,
Where'er we live and roam,
Our hearts still love our old-time friends
And scenes of hallowed home.



THE FALL of 1826, one Peier McGregor, a sturdy Highland Scotsman, made the first clearing in what is now the City of London, and erected a log shanty somewhere in the vicinity of King and Ridout Streets; and to him, therefore, belongs the title of being the oldest of London's Old Boys. Other settlers soon followed the example thus set, and in a very few years quite a respectable village had sprung up. In 1840 London was incorporated as a village, with a population of 2,000. It was not, however, until 1846 that the first brick building was erected (the place having been devastated by a great fire), and in that year three such substantial structures were put up. As a village London grew steadily, and in 1848 incorporation as a town was secured, with the late Simeon Morrill as its first mayor. The period of seven years that elapsed until it became a city was one of marked progress in every direction, and the year 1855, when final incorporation came, found London with a population of about 10,000. The embryo city had attracted considerable attention in the Old Country, and "New London" was the cry on the lips of a considerable majority of the emigrants landing at Quebec.

It is the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the city that is this year being celebrated. In this celebration, not only the residents of to-day, but those of former years, who through force of circumstances are scattered all over the continent of America, but still take a pride and interest in the home of their youth, are entering with an enthusiasm that ensures the success of the undertaking.

The origin of the "Old Boys" movement dates back to 1896, and is of interest at this time. In the summer of that year a trio of former Londoners, resident in Toronto, met by accident in that city, and, as a matter of course, the old town at once became a topic of conversation. And a fruitful topic it proved. The days at the old Central school, the games on the cricket square, the swimming in the numerous "holes" of the Thames, known only to the London boys of the days long gone by, caused a flow of eloquence—sometimes enthusiastic, occasionally touched with sadness, and always reminiscent—that not one of the three suspected the other of possessing.

Finally, the proposal was made, "What's the matter with running an excursion to the old town on Civic Holiday?" The idea struck home at once, other former Londoners in the Queen City were communicated with, and the result was the organization of the first London Old Boys' Association. A committee was sent to London to make preliminary arrangements, meeting hearty co-operation here, and the first Monday in August, 1897, London saw a home-coming such as had never before been witnessed by any city. The reunion was a tremendous success. Londoners in Detroit and Windsor had taken up the movement, organized and joined in the home-gathering hundreds strong. There were three days of jubilation, hand-shaking and rejoicing.

But the movement did not stop there; the reunion, possessing as it did so much of heart-interest, had attracted notice all over the continent, and the year following London Old Boys' Associations were organized at Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Toledo, Buffalo, and other places on both sides of the lines. In this organization those interested were greatly aided by the Nicholas Wilson golden jubilee testimonial in 1895, the response to the appeal on that occasion having been most hearty and having come from almost every city, town and village of the United States and Canada. That incident had brought former Londoners scattered all over the continent into close touch, so that when the movement started in Toronto was seen to bear such bountiful fruit, it was at once taken up elsewhere. The result is, that to-day wherever two or three former Londoners are located there will be found a London Old Boys' Association. In addition, there is an international and a home association.

The reunions were of annual occurrence until 1901, when it was decided to make them biennial. Each succeeding gathering has surpassed its predecessor not only as regards numbers, but for general enjoyment; and this year's, with the added importance of the city's golden jubilee, promises to be the best and biggest of all. It is significant that the "Old Boys" idea has been copied by many Canadian and United States cities and towns, and that organized home-gatherings are no longer confined to London.