

Young Stephen hated every minute of the growing-up process in the backwoods and wrote at length about these experiences in later life. Clearly unfit for the tasks imposed upon him, Peter sold part of the farm machinery and stock and hied himself to the Winnipeg of the 1880 boom days. There he hoped to make his fortune. He returned home broke, dispirited and addicted to the bottle. In no time he abandoned the family for good, settled in Nova Scotia under an assumed name and took to himself a common-law wife.

Meanwhile the sterling character of Agnes Leacock began to assert itself. Although conditions on the farm went from bad to worse, she saw to the proper education of her children -- lessons in the home, sessions at the "little red schoolhouse" and eventually, for three of the boys (including Stephen), at Upper Canada College. Small and intermittent legacies from the families in Britain made this possible.

His years at Upper Canada established Stephen's intrinsic worth. He demonstrated an aptitude for both the classics and modern languages. He carried off prize after prize and became head boy in his final year. All the time, however, he was supremely conscious of his responsibilities at home, since his elder brothers had headed West. It became necessary, therefore, to earn money, in pursuance of which he attended a training-school for teachers and eventually got a job as instructor in a secondary school. In the future he would record how he detested this period of his career.

Then his old school, Upper Canada College, came to the rescue and hired him as an assistant master of modern languages. He liked the work no better, but it provided the opportunity to study, simultaneously, for his B.A. degree at the University of Toronto. In addition, he continued his childhood practice of rising every morning at five, this time to study the subject of economics on his own hook. The evenings were devoted to writing diverting little essays which he sold to magazines and newspapers for princely sums of anything from \$2.00 to \$5.00 apiece.

Leacock had acquired enough academic know-how to suggest he might settle successfully on the staff of a university. At the same time, he realized that to do so he ought to have a doctorate. With a bank loan added to what little money he had saved, he headed for the then new University of Chicago. His goal was a Ph.D. in economics. He took with him a bride -- Beatrix Hamilton, daughter of a socially-prominent Toronto family.

By giving him a position as a term lecturer, McGill University in Montreal had made it possible for the 30-year-old teacher to complete his Chicago thesis. Accordingly, afterwards, Leacock joined McGill's Faculty of Arts as an assistant professor of history and economics. Shortly thereafter he was given a year's leave of absence to tour the Empire on behalf of the Cecil Rhodes Trust. On his return from speaking engagements in five countries, Leacock had not only been promoted to full professorship but had been given charge of the department of economics and political science.

Having exchanged the drudgery of teaching youngsters and coping with their coddling parents for the relaxed atmosphere of ivy-covered halls, Leacock became attached to the life. The small stipend didn't worry him. He had written a textbook called Elements of Political Science, which was quickly taken up by numerous colleges in the United States and ultimately accepted by educationists round the world. But writing of any kind, he felt, must take second place to his academic duties. Or so he thought.