

# Canadianizing the Foreign Born

*The place of the School Garden and School Fair in Education*

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Efficiency in public instruction as applied to rural schools presupposes the fulfilment of at least three important requirements. Each child should be given equal opportunity without regard to race or creed for a thorough grounding in fundamentals. Each child should be enabled to develop knowledge of fundamentals by practice, and opportunity should be afforded for practice which will develop thrift and similar virtues. Each child should become possessed of the consciousness that there is an exalted physical, intellectual and moral standard which he may attain.

It is necessary that the child be guided into an appreciation of the comparative values of fundamentals in order to assist him to a rational view of the superstructure of education. In other words, he needs a taste and a knowledge of each ingredient



EDMUND ZIRK

President of the Bergheim Bird, Gopher and Weed Club

that enters into the making of an imperial citizenship in order to determine his "best."

The child needs practice with his schooling that he may know intimately and love the thing which he is studying. As a childless woman may cleave unto and love the life that comes to her by adoption, so does the child heart grow to its playthings. The child may be able to describe the wonders of nature without seeing them, but cannot know nor love without the living touch. Likewise virtues grow with exercise. We are a notoriously prodigal race. We need the development of thrift in our schools more than that of any other virtue except chastity.

The ideal of an exalted citizenship should be placed and kept before the child so he may find content in his striving. The pursuit of the ideal is undisputedly the most satisfying passion of the human heart. Notwithstanding all the public condemnation of the rural schools, at the hands mostly of those who have never had anything to do with them, they have been and always will be the greatest uplift factor in the community. It is easy to compound a remedy, but disease is not easily banished. It is with the greatest facility that some so-called educationalists conceive schemes for the reform of schools, but it is not so easy to put these in operation.

We have the interesting admission of a voluminous writer on school reform that he advocated reconstruction thirty years ago, is doing it now, and expected he would be thirty years hence if he lived. So much for the inutilty of abstraction.

Now and again there comes out of the people a teacher who puts his work on a new plane with only the inspiration that comes from his own heart. Such a teacher is John D. Williams. Williams is now "somewhere in France." While he was engaged in the business of teaching he exhibited the same spirit of sacrifice and service that prompted him to offer himself on the altar of a most cruel war.

In the autumn term of 1911, Williams found himself in charge of a one-roomed school at Berg-

heim, Sask. Twenty-three children between the ages of five and twelve years confronted him on the first day, and he found that there was no common bond of language. With one or two exceptions the children were Russian-Germans, and all spoke the German.

With an intuition that is a part of the natural endowment of the ideal teacher, Williams seized upon the objects round about him as a means of arousing the interest and sympathy of the children. He borrowed a yoke of oxen, a plow and a set of harrows, broke up the ground and reduced it to a desirable condition for planting. The necessity of providing a proper seed bed, and what constituted a good seed bed, was impressed upon the minds of the boys and girls. In the spring the teacher and pupils proceeded with the planting. A stock of 1,400 trees had been procured from the nearest experimental station, and seeds were procured for the flower and vegetable garden. The expense of the latter was borne by the teacher, the trustees having declined the responsibility.

Plots for flowers were marked out, the teacher carefully explaining the geometrical designs employed and encouraging the children to do the marking themselves. It was found necessary to bring in good black loam from a bluff three hundred yards distant from the school in order to provide proper soil. This was done by borrowing a wheelbarrow, which the children gleefully pulled with the loads by means of a long rope, while the teacher held the handles. Plots for demonstrating and studying seed selection were marked out. Germination tests were made of cereals, and only seed of strong vitality sown. Head selections were made of the first year's crop, and sheaves and threshed grains showed in a competition for which prizes were donated by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Upwards of fifty dollars was secured in this way. With this amount and with the money procured by the sale of garden products the children reimbursed the teacher and provided an organ for the school. They also provided a better supply of seeds for the next year's operations.

#### A Nine-Year-Old President

For the second year wheat, oats, barley and flax were sown from selections from the crop of the first year. That the children fully understood the principles will be demonstrated by the following conversation. I visited the school and was being shown around the plots. Said Edmund Zirk, age nine: "Meester, you li'e to see my plot." "Certainly, Edmund." "Yo, see dat beeg row? That came from seed from a beeg, beeg head. They were all beeg kernels and they all grew. You see dat leetle row? That came from a leetle head and there were leetle kernels, and they didn't all grow."

The children kept records of their plots showing

The principles underlying growth were carefully explained to the children. The whole procedure was one of absorbing interest to all of them. As their knowledge increased their reverence for the things in nature deepened, and the school work, far from being a drag, was a constant delight.

All the work above described was carried on during recess periods and outside the regular school hours. From time to time during the day the children were refreshed by songs, accompanied by the teacher on their own organ. Much of the music was of a patriotic nature. Altogether the day's work combined an ideal method of producing from children of foreign extraction an educated Canadian citizenship. The method will bear the closest scrutiny of educators whatever the end sought. It can be employed in every school in the land with



ALL THIS IS MINE

results which will dispel the pessimism which beclouds the educational horizon.

#### The Development Not Appreciated

The Bergheim school garden did not complete the activities of the children of the district. As a growth from that undertaking the children have organized a Bird, Gopher and Weed Club, and have familiarized themselves with all the plants and animals of a beneficial or noxious nature that occur in the community. The community did not show a fair appreciation of Williams, however. The children became too progressive for their parents, and, on the pretext that he was using the children as beasts of burden, he was discharged; the children in the meantime continuing to hitch themselves to the wheelbarrow and bring in good soil to plant their seeds in.

In Saskatchewan last year there were 1,500 school gardens conducted with varying measures of success.

Whatever success or failure was achieved rested mostly with the teacher. Williams achieved his success under the worst conditions. He left the children with a better general knowledge of simple and important agricultural practices and of nature as it teaches agriculture, than any similar number of people, juvenile or adult, of any nationality which it has been my privilege to meet. He left them with a reverence for nature and their own powers, and with a deeply rooted love for the school and its work. It is hardly possible to overestimate the value of work of this kind.

It is essentially the place of the school garden to assist the child in acquiring an intelligent interest in living things, and in putting life and interest into what has too often been the dull, dead, drudgery of school routine by showing up the intimate relationship of the school work with the business of living. The logical development of the school garden is the school fair. Last year there were fifty school fairs in Saskatchewan. In 1914 there were eight. This year there will be at least three hundred. In the school garden the child

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HOW WILLIAMS MADE OVER THE SCHOOL GROUNDS

the kind of wheat, how treated, when treated (for sowing), when seeded, depth of seeding, description of plot, soil, etc., percentage of germination, appearance of first blade, of second blade, date of heading out, time of flowering, length of tallest plant, average height of straw, number of plants in row, longest head, average head, highest number of stools in plant, lowest number of stools in plant, date of harvest, number of days growing, rainfall and temperature. Every stage of growth was studied.