

A New Type of Rural School

*What a Young Man of Vision and Ideals did to Reform Rural School
Life in a Lonely Saskatchewan School*

Strange indeed! A real country school in the country! Most country schools that I had visited were counterfeit city schools. Here was the Quill City School, about which I had heard so much. There was something strange even in the name. As I drove up I looked about and I saw neither city nor town. There wasn't even the semblance of a village.

The school stood alone on a barely perceptible elevation, and but for the school stables, was perched in isolation on the prairie. How this distinctly rural school came by its name I do not know, but it stood near the shores of Quill Lake

with a family which cannot afford the accommodations that a young woman should have. Her meals are often unsuited to her frail constitution and her strenuous work. The society is not always refined, and if she does not stoop to all the undesirable refreshments and entertainment of the neighborhood she is generally looked upon as a snob. There is the long walk to school over poor roads in all sorts of weather. Then there is the janitor work and the problems of the big boys and girls.

I am not one of those who view with any measure of alarm the predominance of women in the teaching profession. It is not an unmixed evil. The

old masculine school master has been superseded by a superior teacher. Too often he was harsh and lacked genteel qualities. His habits were frequently not all that could be desired. With him new and improved methods and ideas were but a fad. The young girl teacher is more pliable in the hands of the masters of her profession. She absorbs more from her normal training. If she lacks this training she generally becomes inspired with the spirit of the better system at the institutes and thru the professional journals. As I sat and observed the teacher in the Quill City School, I saw the teacher of the future;

a university graduate, trained and experienced, with his heart in his work, and with sufficient self-confidence, tact, originality and ingenuity to cope with the rural school problem of the day.

The Hot Dinner

It was near noon. On the box stove in the rear of the school a kettle of potatoes and a teapot were steaming. Two girls had prepared the potatoes at recess. As the last morning class was reciting, two pupils, acting as servants, spread old newspapers over the desks and set the plates. By the way, this class was one in agriculture. About the room I noticed evidences of what had been done. There were boxes of soil showing various experiments in seed germination and surface cultivation. On the wall was a large collection of the common noxious weeds and grasses. As the girls were being trained in the fine art of house-keeping the boys were receiving instruction in farming.

Presently the water came to a boil and the servants made the tea. As the aroma of the beverage floated over the school room and summoned our appetites for dinner, I realized what I had missed in the rural school of my boyhood. The dry bread with the cold pork or molasses was, as a rule, unceremoniously grabbed as we used to rush out on the play ground. With a chunk of bread in one hand and a hat in the other the task of eating was quickly over. We were anxious to be outside, for if we stayed inside the floor and desks would be smeared with portions of our various viands as we tore about the room, with the result that teacher would scold.

But this was a novel idea to me. As the classes were dismissed the older boys went out to feed their teams, for parents send their children many miles to the Quill City School. The girls were busy making gravy. We stood and watched the process. "Ings," asked the teacher, "why does gravy thicken when you bring it to a boil?" The young lady didn't know, whereupon the teacher gave the girls an insight into the chemistry of cooking.

Their domestic science study not only provided food for the school and made for better cooks in future homes, but it also afforded an opportunity for study of innumerable related subjects. How much more important was this than a drill in cube root or proportion! The interesting fact was that these practical subjects could be taught in such a way as to stimulate interest in the required subjects of the school. I noted particularly that there was life and enthusiasm in all the school work, and the common subjects did not suffer but were improved by this extra practical work. As we sat down to dinner the two girls acted as waitresses. In addition to the hot dishes, each family had brought sandwiches and dessert. I was informed that on some days meat was prepared for the whole school.

I observed that the pupils knew proper table manners, and I was pleased to see that even the smaller pupils had been trained how to hold their knives and forks, how to ask for more dishes and how to respond to the solicitous inquiries of the two servants. As each pupil finished he arose with a polite "excuse me," took his dishes to the stove where water stood ready and there "did" his own dishes.

Physical and Mental Benefit

Upon inquiry I found that the hot mid-day meal at Quill City had resulted in much benefit to the pupils. One of the primary pupils had always been considered dull. He was thin and nervous when the teacher took the school. On the day of my visit the lad was robust and healthy. He had acquired a better memory, and according to the teacher, had gained in self-reliance. I was informed by others in the district of another instance which seemed to attract particular attention. It was that of a girl with a nervous disposition. She was sallow in complexion and had a frantic stare. She was slovenly about her dress and person. When she walked she would rush with an impetuous scrambling movement. She twitched and grinned as she stood up to recite, and her voice was scarcely audible. The teacher studied her closely. He found she had an insatiable craving for strong black tea, and that her meals and bedtime were irregular. It required both courage and tact to interfere with long established home habits, but by some means or other, the teacher has made an entirely different girl out of her. She is today a real little lady. In fact, all the girls had the bearing and spirit of ladies. The boys, too, were gentlemen to the bone. The teacher has a way of cultivating these traits among his pupils. As a first requirement of a gentleman or lady is clean teeth, the pupils were taught to use a toothbrush. The teacher impressed upon them the fact that nearly every infectious



A hot mid-day meal at Quill City School. Prepared and served by the pupils.

and was but another of the mystic associations of the inland seas. The district, which is about four miles west of Wadena on the Canadian Northern Railway in Saskatchewan, had been settled about ten years. Cosmopolitan is the word best suited to the rural population. Americanized Swedes, Norwegians and Scotch from Minnesota, English and Irish from the old lands, and Canadian of both Anglo and German extraction furnished the rough-hewn material ready for the teacher. They were a good class, readily susceptible to constructive training and there, in an out of the way nook on the prairie, was being developed a school which in the future will probably be recognized as a pioneer in the new education movement.

As I drove into the yard a school boy came out to take care of my horse. I hastened in, as the day was raw and I was chilled. In response to my rap at the door, a school girl came to usher me inside. She introduced herself and then in turn asked my name. As we stepped into the school room she turned to her school mates, who, by the way, sat attentive at their tasks. "School," spoke up the girl at my side, whereupon the pupils rose to their feet and faced the entrance. "This is Mr. Blank," she continued. "Good morning," came the response from the pupils in chorus. The teacher came up to the door and welcomed me, and the pupils resumed their work in their seats.

The Teacher

The teacher, Carl A. Anderson, was a young man who had drifted out West in search of health, and judging by the look of energy and enthusiasm in his manner, I take it he had found health in abundance. He was a graduate of the University of Minnesota and for some time superintendent of schools for McLeod County, Minnesota. I could not help comparing him with other teachers in schools which I had chanced to visit. I have found many efficient teachers, but they are only teachers. Most rural teachers are women, and too often young, immature women, lacking in forceful personality, experience or executive ability. The outcry of observers against the tendency of the school to produce effeminate men may or may not be justifiable. That association tends to influence character is self-evident. Even the horse takes on to a certain extent the temperament of his master. The shepherd, left in isolation with his flock of sheep, comes in time to blend as the one of them.

I cannot help admiring the pluck of these rural school teachers the young, and my sympathy is with them. Their first rural schools are often tragedies. The girl teacher has to leave her home and often go far in the backwoods to schools which are placed in the rejected class by the more experienced teacher. Often she has to make her home



Class is reading, Quill City School. The same teacher gave all the instruction.

disease enters thru the mouth, and deathly disease germs often lurk in the fifth of the teeth. Unless driven out by the toothbrush they may attack the body at the weakest spot when the system is run down.

The Home and Social Side

Inspector J. O'Brien, of the department of education, Regina, upon his annual visit, happened in at noon and shared the meal with the pupils. He stated what is perhaps the strongest argument for the hot noon-day meal. "The common meal," said he, "makes companions of the children and over-

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