

THE EFFECT OF CANADA AS A COUNTRY ON ITS OWN CHIEF SEAT OF LEARNING.



OURS is practically a new country. There are yet vast fertile plains and valleys awaiting the plow to be made rolling seas of golden grain; miles upon miles of what to the unobserving is nothing but barren desert wastes, but down below the surface of which are treasures which would make a Cortez abandon the rich mines of Mexico, or a Pizarro the El Dorados of a Peru; vast, almost interminable forests of pine and spruce, where never foot of man has trod, and whose death-like stillness nothing has broken, but the sighing of the wind and the cry of some denizens of those primeval habitations; seas, lakes and streams abounding in fish, waters in which no Isaak Walton has ever dropped the hook. Yes, ours is a young country, but it is one in which is wrapped up all the possibilities of a mighty commonwealth, and, as it is a young country, it has no "long-drawn aisle and fretted vault" in which lie the remains of generations that have passed to their account, no cathedrals mouldering into ruins, and attracting the reverence of a nation to its decaying magnificence, and no awe-inspiring evidences of former greatness in the shape of castles, fortifications and roads. We, the inhabitants, have not mouldering in the graves of our city cemeteries and country churchyards the remains of a long line of ancestors, whose lives were an honor to themselves and a glory to the state, and who were borne to their last resting place in a national mausoleum, amid a nation's tears, by a grateful and thoughtful people. There is nothing to bind us to the past; we live in the future. All our views are perspective, not retrospective. We see our ideals raised aloft on the pinnacle of the temple of fame, built by the effort of a united democratic people in a grand, glorious and peaceful country.

Past greatness, ancestry and mouldering magnificence make people think of the days gone by; their views accordingly are retrospective, and they aspire to re-live the lives of their almost deified ancestors. They have no desire to break away from a life that was at once glorious, beautiful and heroic. They become conservative, and honor the dead and dying achievements of the age that is gone, rather than the genius of the age that is come, which is to achieve greatness that will eclipse everything known to our forefathers. The inhabitants of a new country, if not naturally democratic, have democracy and reform principles forced upon them. They see nothing at all in the past, and nothing in the future but the realized possibilities bound up at present in the potential energy of their country. There is not one person that has a prior claim to his fellow, and they see their realized possibilities only in the equal and united effort of the patriotic pioneers of a Utopian civilisation. No, the soil is not adapted to the growth of, nor is the climate congenial to, those exotics from an old country—titled gentry, ancestral claims, exaggerated reverence for the past. All are by the nature of the case at the same level; aristocracy is in the dust, and democracy, not a rabid communism, is in the ascendant. Although there is greater unity, still future achievements are a stimulus to individual effort and genius, which are employed not so much for individual ends as for the common good. Such a country we live in.

What effect has this on educational matters in general, and on university life in particular? The latter part of the question is what interests us at present.

Even in this new democratic country wealth is not distributed evenly, but by a happy coincidence a great institution devoted to higher education is right at our very doors; and not only that, but the fees are merely nominal, and the cost of living very little greater for the student, if he wishes to practice economy, than in the smaller towns or country places where his home may be. In this land of ours, from the very nature of it, a comparative equality

reigns in almost every department. We have no enormously wealthy fathers of a future aristocracy of wealth, and no influential advocates of that relic of barbarism and middle age darkness,—an aristocracy of birth; and more than that, from what we have said already, the really poor man's son, and there are not so very many of those, has access to our institutions of learning, where he can, by dint of energy and genius, soon fill up any little inequality there may exist between him and his neighbor. In such a country what should characterise university life? Education is too great a boon to struggling humanity to be treated with indifference by those whose lives are one long desire to raise the level of man morally and materially. So, as soon as the avenues to the temple of learning are thrown open, it is not long before they are thronged by seekers after knowledge. Poor they may be in this world's goods, and struggling with adverse fate in more than one way, but up there beautiful vistas, where the very air you breathe is suggestive of liberty, and the sunlight glinting through the trees bespeaks intellectual emancipation, they see glistening in the effulgence of the noon-day sun of intellectual freedom, the marble walls of his future Alma Mater. What a glorious prospect! one that makes the heart of every patriot leap with joy, especially when he knows that that pathway is open to the son of the laborer, as well as to those who are nursed in the lap of luxury.

When one arrives at this intellectual palace he will find crowding its lecture-rooms and laboratories eager students drinking deeply of the Castalian fount. Some, no doubt, of these students may not have rooms beautifully furnished, and may not take their meals at the fashionable restaurants, but nevertheless their rooms will on the whole be comfortable, and their food, if not displaying any very great variety, will be substantial, so that they are enabled to come there with a sound mind in a sound body, ready to take advantage of their opportunities. However, I am sorry to say that there are some there who do not go to worship at the shrine of Minerva, but at that of Venus and Bacchus. Yes, they go there, and, guilty of a most sacrilegious plagiarism, steal the fire from the altar of Athene to make brighter the already consuming fire on the altars of Aphrodite and Dionysus. But as it is only those who are blessed, or rather cursed, with a plentiful supply of filthy lucre that can do this, we find this class of students, in this country of ours, forms a very small minority.

Let us take a look at the students, and try to find out in what divisions we might classify them. First we have those who may be found spending all their spare moments in secluded nooks, poring over some dusty "volume of forgotten lore," or delving down deep into the mysteries of philosophy and science—quiet, taciturn, uncommunicative fellows, intellectual hermits, delighting in the cloister, bashful, modest, diffident beings, beneath whose mysterious and perhaps uninviting exterior may or may not burn the pure fire of intellectual advancement. These mortals, so hard to understand, whose holy of holies—into which no one is allowed to enter but they themselves—seems so vast and awful in its sanctity, but whose holy place, the reception-room of intimate friends, is so cramped and confined, and the outer "court of the Gentiles," the reception-room of comparative strangers, seems a misnomer, may be the future philosophers, scientists and philanthropists. But some may be narrow-minded, critical, cynical, morose and fault-finding, although intellectually fairly well endowed.

To the second class belong those who have learned that universal principle of true progress and evolution, the assimilating of the good from everything, and the combining of it into one grand whole which is able to withstand the adverse attacks of the present and pave the way for a still more nearly perfect whole in the future. Those who have the studiousness of the cloister philosopher, the practical turn of mind of the man of the world, and the proper complement of the love of pleasure which leavens the whole lump. We find such a one in the lecture-room wrapt in attention and oblivious to all outside influences, listening to the disquisitions of the professor and grasping the subtle truths