

Comment by the Editor

OLD SCHOOLHOUSES

Everybody remembers the old school. In some respects it is more vivid than home. Home is a haven that a person returns to; but school is the wide world full of adventure. At home are only one's own folks who never do anything different; while at school there are strangers with peculiar ways and surprising traits. Home is restful; school is thrilling.

It is not astonishing that the memories of school should remain through the years. School is the most exciting part of childhood. There is the source of varied experience. At school we lost diffidence and gained confidence, recited our unforgettable lessons without comprehension, solved problems of conduct as well as arithmetic, played games, quarreled and made peace, traded our property for more desirable possessions, and all the while sharpened our wits.

Perhaps the spirit of the mechanical age has changed all that. People are so fascinated by size and speed and efficiency that there is no time to be human. Education is a big business. Schools have to be made bigger and better by consolidation. Pupils are so busy finding their places on a skewed curve by means of self-testing drills and standardized examinations that

fun is banished and relaxation is as bad as idleness. They learn everything in half the time. But what becomes of childhood, that halcyon period of pleasure and unconcern?

Somewhere in the memory of folks who learned to read and write before education became a matter of physical plant and scientific method, there is a vision of an old schoolhouse. It was not a pretentious edifice. Probably it had only one room. The floor was made of boards that creaked; and the desks were double, with built-in inkwells. Selecting a seat-mate was an adventure in itself.

But above all there was a distinctive smell about the old schoolhouse. It was a pleasant odor that signified all kinds of children, old books, slates, chalk, sweeping compound, and wet mops. The modern schoolhouse, with its odor of lumber and pie and gingham, smells more like a factory than an educational institution. It is unnatural.

The old schoolhouses, so intimately associated with the life of the neighborhood, are being abandoned, torn down, or transformed into granaries. Yet many of those that remain have not outlived their community usefulness. Like the Sheldall School, these could be converted into local museums and preserved as memorials of old times. The Sheldall schoolhouse has been restored to its original location. A rail fence encloses the school yard. Pictures of the early patrons

and teachers adorn the walls, and pioneer relics are being collected for preservation there.

I wonder if the museum smells like a schoolhouse.

J. E. B.