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XV—*The Diversions of a Professor  
of History*

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*XV—The Diversions of a Professor  
of History*

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**I**N my earlier days of college teaching, I was for a time, under the sharp spur of necessity, a professor of history. I expected at that period that my researches in this capacity would add much to our knowledge of the known globe. They did not. But they at least enabled me to survive the financial strain of the long vacation by writing historical poetry for the press.

The little verses which here follow were written day by day and appeared here and there in the forgotten corners of odd newspapers. They occasioned about as much interest or illumination as a fire-fly at midday.

It will be noted that I used up only the month of August. Any professor of history in the same need as I was may have all the other eleven months.

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*College Days*

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TO-DAY IN HISTORY

AUGUST 4, 1778

*(Victory of Gwalior)*

O, the neglected education  
Of this poor young Canadian nation,  
To think that you never heard before  
Of the wonderful victory of Gwalior !  
How the British suffered with heat and thirst  
And they curst  
Their worst  
Till they nearly burst  
And then in the end came out victorious.  
O ! wasn't the whole thing Gwaliorious.

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• AUGUST 2, 1704

(*Battle of Blenheim*)

This was the very occasion when  
Great Marlborough gained the battle of Blen.

The rest of the noble word won't rhyme,  
Say it in silence or call it "heim."

On the very same spot

• In other years

• Old Caspar shed his senile tears

• And the reason was

If you ask me why

Because his father was "forced to fly!"

O, poor old Caspar, you really ought

To have lived in the age of the aeronaut.

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*College. Days*

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AUGUST 5, 1809

*(Birth of Alfred Tennyson)*

On this very day  
At early morn  
Lord Alfred Tennyson chanced to be born.,  
Had it not been so, I really hate  
To think of the poor elocutionist's fate.  
He couldn't have been  
The sad May Queen,  
He couldn't have brayed  
The Light Brigade  
To a ten cent audience (half afraid,  
When he hitches  
His breeches  
With soldier-like twitches  
To shew how the Russians were killed in the ditches).  
He never could shake  
With emotion and make  
The price of a meal with his 'Break, Break, Break'  
Alas, poor bloke,  
He'd be broke, broke, broke.

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*The Diversions of a Professor of History*

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• AUGUST 8, 1843

*(The Annexation of Natal)*

When we in touch with heathens come,  
We send them first a case of rum,  
Next, to rebuke their native sin;  
We send a missionary in :  
Then when the hungry Hottentot  
• Has boiled his pastor in a pot,  
• We teach him Christian, dumb contrition,  
• By means of dum-dum ammunition,  
    The situation grows perplexed,  
    The wicked country is annexed :  
But, O ! the change when o'er the wild,  
Our sweet Humanity has smiled !  
The savage shaves his shaggy locks,  
Wears breeches and Balbriggan socks,  
Learns Euclid, classifies the fossils,  
Draws pictures of the Twelve Apostles,—  
And now his pastor at the most,  
He is content to simply roast :  
    Forgetful of the art of war,  
    He smokes a twenty cent cigar,  
    He drinks not rum, his present care is  
    For whisky and Apollinaris.

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Content for this his land to change;  
He fattens up and dies of mange.  
Lo! on the ashes of his Kraal,  
A Protestant Ca-the-der-al!

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AUGUST 9, 1902

*(King Edward VII crowned)*

Again the changing year shall bring  
The Coronation of a King,  
While yet the reign seemed but begun,  
The sceptre passes to the son.

O! little, little round of life,

• Where each must walk the selfsame way,

O, little fever fret and strife

• That passes into yesterday

When each at last, with struggling breath,

Clasps in the dark the hand of Death.

O! Sorrow of our Common Lot,

Go, mark it well, and Envy not.



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*College Days*

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AUGUST 10, 1866

*(The Straits Settlements founded)*

Tell me now, will you please relate,  
Why do they call these Settlements straight ?  
Does it mean to say  
That the gay  
Malay  
Is too moral  
To quarrel  
In any way ?  
Does he never fight  
On a Saturday night,  
When he's drunk in his junk  
And his heart is light ?

Have they got no music, no whisky, no ladies ?  
Well—it may be straight, but it's gloomy as Hades

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AUGUST 12, 1905

*(Anglo-Japanese Alliance)*

Valiant, noble Japanece,  
Listen to Britannia's plea,  
Since the battle of Yalu  
I've been yearning all for you ;  
Since the fight at Meter Hill  
Other suitors make me ill ;  
Tell me not of German beaux  
Addle-headed, adipose,  
Double-barrelled Dutchman plain,  
Sullen, sombre sons of Spain,  
Flaxen Swede, Roumanian red,  
Fickle Frenchmen, underfed,  
Nay, I care for none of these,  
Take me, O, my Japanese,  
Yamagata, you of Yeddo,  
Fold me, hold me to your heart,  
Togo, take me to Tokio,  
Tell me not that we must part ;  
In your home at Nagasaki  
Cuddle me against your Khaki,  
Since the Russians couldn't tan you,  
Rule, I pray you, Rule Britannia !

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*College Days*

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AUGUST 14, 1763

*(Admiral Albemarle took Havana)*

On a critical day,  
In those awful wars,  
The fleet, they say,  
Ran out of cigars ;  
It sounds like a nightmare, a dream, a bogie,  
They hadn't even a Pittsburg stogie,  
Nor a single plug,  
Of the noble drug,  
And from vessel to vessel the signal flew  
" Our Sailors are dying for want of a chew."

From boyhood up those sailors had been  
Preserved and pickled in nicotine,  
By conscientious smoking and drinking  
They had kept themselves from the horror of thinking.

Then Admiral Albemarle looked to leeward  
And summoned in haste his bedroom steward,  
And said, " My hearty, just cast your eyes on  
The sou'-sou'-west, and skin the horizon,  
That cloud of smoke and that fort and banner ?"  
The sailor answered, " That place is Havana."

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Within a second or even a fraction  
The Admiral summoned the ships to action,  
The signal was read by every tar,  
"You hit a Spaniard and get a cigar."

Now need I say to readers that smoke  
How the furious burst of Artillery broke,  
How they shot at Havana, bombarded and shook it  
And so as a matter of course they took it.  
The terms of surrender were brief but witty,  
"We'll take the cigars, you can keep the city."

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*College Days*

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AUGUST 14, 1535

*(Jacques Cartier discovered the St. Lawrence)*

This is the day  
When Cartier  
Came sailing up to the Saguenay.  
He found the St. Lawrence  
Without a chart.  
O, wasn't Cart.  
Exceedingly smart !

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AUGUST 15, 1870

*(Manitoba becomes a Province)*

Now everybody, drunk or sober,  
Sing loud the praise of Manitoba ;  
Throw back your head, inflate your chest,  
And sing the glories of the West ;  
Sing, without slackening or stop,  
The jubilation of the crop ;  
Sing of the bending ear of wheat,  
That stands at least some fourteen feet ;  
And soft its tasselled head inclines,  
To flirt with the potato vines ;  
Sing of the prairie covered over  
With cabbage trees and shrubs of clover ;  
While English settlers lose their way  
In forests of gigantic hay.

How wonderful be it confessed,  
The passing of the bygone West ;  
The painted Indian rides no more,  
He stands—at a tobacco store,  
His cruel face proclaims afar  
The terror of the cheap cigar ;  
Behold his once downtrodden squaw,  
Protected by Provincial Law ;

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"Their tee-pee has become—Oh, gee,  
A station on the G.T.P.,  
And on the scenes of Ancient War,  
Thy rails I.C.O. C.P.R.

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AUGUST 16, 1713

*(New Brunswick founded)*

I need not sing your praises, every word  
Of mine, New Brunswick, would appear absurd  
Beside the melody that freely pours  
From out these polysyllables of yours.

Where Chedabudcto roars and bold Buctouche

Rivals the ripples of the Restigouche ;

Or where beneath its ancient British flag

Aroostook faces Mettawamkeag.

Oh, fairy-land of meadow, vale and brook

Kennebekasis, Chiputneticook,

Shick-Shock and Shediac, Point Escuminac,

Miramachi and Peticodiac.

This is no place to try poetic wit,

I guess at least I know enough to quit.



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*College Days*

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AUGUST 17, 1896

*(Gold discovered in the Yukon)*

This is the day  
In a climate cold  
They found that wretched thing called Gold ;  
That miserable, hateful stuff,  
How can I curse at it enough,  
That foul, deceitful, meretricious,  
Abominable, avaricious,  
That execrable, bought and sold  
Commodity that men call gold.  
How can I find the words to state it,  
The deep contempt with which I hate it ;  
I charge you, nay, I here command it,  
Give it me not, I could not stand it :  
You hear me shout, you mark me holler ?  
Don't dare to offer me a dollar.  
The mere idea of taking it  
Gives me an epileptic fit.

What use is Gold ?

Alas, poor dross,  
That brings but sorrow, pain and loss,  
What after all the use of riches ?  
'Twill buy fine clothes and velvet breeches,  
Stone houses, pictures, motor cars,

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Roast quail on toast and large cigars.

But oh, my friends; will this compare  
With a fresh draught of mountain air?  
Will wretched viands such as these  
Compare with simple bread and cheese?

Nay let me to my bosom press  
The gastronomic watercress,  
And hug within my diaphragm  
The spoon of thimbleberry jam,  
And while the wicked wine I spurn,  
Quaff deep the wholesome mountain burn,  
The simple life, the harmless drink  
Is good enough,—I do not think.

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AUGUST 18, 1577

*(Birth of Rubens)*

Think it not idle affectation  
If I express my admiration  
Of frescoes, canvases and plasters,  
In short, the work of Ancient Masters.

You take a man like Botticelli,  
Or the Italian Vermicelli,  
Rubens and Titian, Angelo,  
Anheuser Busch, Sapolio,  
John P. Velasquez and Murillo,  
Fra Lippo Lipp, Buffalo Billo,  
Pilsener Lager and Giotto ;

Admire them ! Why you've simply got to !  
What if you do not understand  
Just the idea they had in hand,  
What if they do not quite convey  
The meaning that they should portray ?  
What if you don't exactly find  
A purpose in them, never mind,  
Beneath the coat of gathered dust  
Take the great geniuses on trust.

If you should see in public places  
Fat cherubs whose expansive faces

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Wear a strong anti-temperance air  
The work is Rubens, you may swear ;  
Fat ladies in inclined position  
You always may ascribe to Titian,  
While simple love-scenes in a grotto  
Portray the master hand of Giotto.  
But if you doubt, do not enquire,  
Fall into ecstasies, admire,  
Stare at the picture, deeply peer  
And murmur, "What an atmosphere" ;  
And if your praises never tire  
No one will know you are a liar.

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*College Days*

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AUGUST 19, 1897

*(Introduction of the Horseless Cab)*

Farewell, a long farewell, Old Friend,  
'Tis the beginning of the end.  
So there you stand, poor patient brute,  
Dressed in your little leather suit ;  
Your harness, buckles, straps and bows  
An outline parody of clothes.  
Speechless, confined, without volition,  
It seems to me that your position  
'Is with a subtle meaning rife,—  
A queer analogy with life.  
A depth of meaning underlies  
Those blinkers that restrain your eyes ;  
I see a melancholy omen  
In straps that cramp your poor abdomen,  
I could supply, would it avail,  
Sad speculations on your tail  
So docked that, swishing at the fleas,  
Its arc is only nine degrees ;  
But more than all, I seem to trace  
Analogies in your long face,  
So utterly devoid of humour,  
Long ears that hearken every rumour,

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A sweeping snout, protruding teeth,  
And chinless underlip beneath ;  
So joyless and so serious  
Well may your features weary us.  
For musing thus, I think perhaps  
Your life is ours, the little straps,  
The shafts that hold us to the track,  
The burden ever on the back,—  
Enough. The theme is old, of course,  
I am an ass, you are a horse.

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AUGUST 20, 1896

(Fridtjof Nansen's Ship "The Fram" returns safely  
to Skjerve)

What a glorious day  
For old Norway,  
When *The Fram* came sailing into the Bay  
To the dear old fjord,  
With its crew on bjord  
All safely restjord  
By the hand of the Ljord ;  
And they shouted " Whoe  
Is this Skjerve ? "  
And they rent the ajer with a loud Hulljoe ;  
While the crowd on skiis  
As thick as biis  
Slid down  
To the town  
On their hands and kniis.  
And oh ! what cries  
When they recognize  
A man with a pair of sealskin pants on  
And thjere, I decljare, is Fridtjof Nansen.

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AUGUST 22, 1903

*(Expedition on the "Neptune" under Commander Low  
to Hudson Straits)*

While we welter  
In the swelter  
Of the pestilential Heat  
Drinking Sodas  
In Pagodas  
At the Corner of the Street

It seems to me  
That it would be  
My highest aspiration  
To Sail away  
On a Holiday  
Of Arctic Exploration.

Let me lie in my pyjamas on the ice of Baffin's Bay,  
In the thinnest of chemises, where the Polar breezes play,  
Underneath a frozen awning let me lie at ease a span,  
While beneath the bright Aurora roars the ventilation fan.

Can you wonder now that Nansen, and that Peary, and  
that Low,  
Should wander forth,  
And struggle North,  
As far as they can go?



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When the hero  
Under Zero  
Lives on frozen lager beer  
And a demi-can  
Of Pemmican,  
You need not shed a tear.  
He seeks a higher latitude,  
I quite admit the feat ;  
The reason is a platitude,  
He's crazy with the heat.

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AUGUST 26, 1346

*(Great Slaughter of the French by the English at Crecy)*

How strange, it seems to me that even then  
Man raised his hand against his fellow-men,  
Fretful and eager, still his mind he bent  
New Engines of destruction to invent.

Poor little Creature, through his whole life story  
Waving his little flag and shouting Glory.  
Vexing his puny strength and panting breath  
Merely to hasten ever-certain Death.

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*College Days*

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AUGUST 27, 1870

*(Invention of the Gramophone)*

I freely admit that the gay gramophone  
Possesses attractions entirely its own,  
I frankly concede that the wonders of science  
Are seen at their best in that very appliance ;  
And yet notwithstanding, I deeply deplore  
The gramophone owned by the Joneses next door.  
I rise in the morning, the first thing I hear  
Is " Sleep on, my Darling, for Mother is near,"  
I sit down to breakfast and hear with surprise  
A loud invitation to " Drink with Mine Eyes."  
I come from my office, the gramophone's strain  
Informs me that Johnnie has marched home again.  
I sit down to read, but the minute I do so  
The Joneses arouse a carouse with Caruso,  
Their strains all the veins of my cerebrum clog,  
My slumbers their numbers monotonous dog,  
Will ~~nothing~~ but homicide end or prevent it,  
Oh, Edison, why did you ever invent it ?