
III—Laus Varsitatis

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A SONG IN PRAISE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
(Varsity War Supplement)
(1916)

Note.—It would be false modesty to conceal the fact that this poem was submitted for the Chancellor's Gold Medal. It didn't get it.

No one I think can blame me if I want to
Exalt in verse the University of Toronto.
I always do, I hope I always will
Speak in the highest terms of Old McGill;
That institution, I admit with tears,
Has paid my salary for sixteen years.
But what is money to a man like me?
Toronto honoured me with her degree.

Oh, Seat of Learning, at whose Norman Gate
My feeble steps learned to matriculate,
Oh, ancient corridors and classrooms dim,
That youth that once you sheltered, I am him.
Ghosts of departed decades, wake and see,
That boy in the short trousers, I am he,

College Days

And after thirty years I bring along
This unsolicited return of song.

Roll back the years, O Time, and let me see
The College that was Varsity to me ;
Show me again those super-sylvan spots
Now turned to choice suburban building lots.
Spread wide the trees and stretch the park afar,
Unvexed as yet by the electric car,
Till once again my listening ear shall seize
The Taddle murmuring among the trees
And Fancy see in that far yesterday
The Bloor Street farmers hauling in their hay.

Thus at fond memory's call as through a haze
I see the men and things of other days.
Dim shades appear within the corridor
And noiseless footsteps fall upon the floor.

Lo ! noble Wilson—dared we call him Dan ?
Musing, the while, on Prehistoric Man,
Draw nearer still, O Venerable Shade,
Read me that lecture on the Third Crusade,
Let thy grave voice its even tenor keep,
Read it again. This time I will not sleep.

Profound in thought, melodious in tongue
I seem to see thee still, Oh Paxton Young ;

Laus Varsitatis

How gladly I would ask thee, if I could,
One or two points I never understood.
You said one day that all our judgments were
Synthetically a priori, sir,—
I never doubted it, I never will.
I thought so then and I believe it still,
Yet whisper low into my ear intent
What did you say that a priori meant ?

But see these shadowy forms, so strange yet like,
That head!—'tis Chapman—and that brow—'tis Pike.
That coloured chalk, that moving hand, that bright
Description of the Neurilemma—Wright !
That voice within the room—pause here and listen—
Mittel Hoch Deutsch—it is, it's Vandersmissen.

Oh Noble Group ! what learning ! There were some
Possessed a depth one hardly dared to plumb,
Others a width of superficialities that
Makes the professor of to-day look flat.
And all are gone, departed, vanished, nil—
Called to the States or summoned further still,
Some have resigned, or been dismissed, or died ;
Others, while still alive, Carnegified,
And in their stead their soft successors play,
In flannelled idleness at Go-Home Bay.

All gone ? Not so, some still are on the ground ;
Fraser is with us still, and Squair is round,

College Days

Still Hutton's Attic wit / the classroom pleases
And Baker keeps at least as young as Keys is.
Others there are—*f'en passe et des meilleurs*—
Who still recall to us the days that were.

For those were days of Peace. We heeded not.
Men talked of Empire and we called it rot ;
Indeed the Empire had no further reach
Than to round out an after-dinner speech,
Or make material from which John A.
Addressed us on our Convocation Day.
There was not in the class of '91
A single student who could fire a gun,
Our longest route march only took us—well,
About as far as the Cær Howell Hotel,
Our sole protection from aggression lay
In one small company—its number K.

Oh, little company, I see thee still
Upon the campus at thine evening drill ;
Forming in fours, with only three in line,
A target for such feeble wit as mine.
All honour to the few who led the way,
Barker and Coleman, Edgar and McCrae,
Geary, Ruttan and Andy Eliot, who
Is now dispensing justice at the Soo ;
And Ryckert—let me pause and think of him,
Is it conceivable he once was slim !

Laus Varsitatis

And, yes, perhaps the most important one,
Friend of my youth, good Howard Ferguson,
The kindest man that ever failed to pass
In First Year Trigonometry, alas !—
This man of place and power, has he forgot
His boyhood friend? Oh, surely, he has not ;
When next some well-paid sinecure you see,
Oh, Howard, pass it, pass it on to me.

A noble band, those veterans of K.,
Born out of time, living before their day,
Paying their own expense, their belts, their boots,
And calling ever vainly for recruits.
Oh K., thou wert O.K., but not to be
And sank as sinks a raindrop in the sea ;
Yet from thine ashes—if a raindrop can
Be said to have such things—there then began
A mighty movement, and one well may say,
You put the K in Canada to-day.

For see, the past has gone ! It fades apace
And the loud angry Present takes its place,
Lurid and red, and shaken with alarms,
The thunder that proclaims a world in arms.
What sounds are these, O Varsity, that fall
Loud on thy corridors, the bugle call,
The muster roll, the answering cry, the drum,
As from thy quiet halls thy students come ?

College Days

Oh ancient corridor ! so it falls the light
Upon their hurrying faces, brave and bright ;
Children they seemed but yesterday, and then
As in a moment they are turned to men.
Hush low the echoes of thy stone-flagged floor,
Footsteps are passing now that come no more.

And they are gone ! The summer sunshine falls
Through the closed windows of thy silent halls,
The winter drags its round, the weary spring
And the slow summer still no tidings bring
Of their return. Yet still, O Gateway Grey,
Silent but hopeful thou dost wait the day—

And it shall come. Then shall the bonfires burn
To tell the message of their glad return.
Ho, porter, wide the gate, beat loud the drum,
Up with the Union Jack, they come, they come !
Majors and Generals and some V.C.'s—
Had ever college such a class as these ?

Let the wine flow—excuse me, I forgot—
I should say, in Ontario, let it not,
But let at least the pop be strongly made
And more than lemons in the lemonade.
Let the loud harp and let the mandolin,
In fact, let any kind of music in—
And while the wildest music madly whirls,
Why, then—if I may say it—bring the girls.

Laus Varsitatis

And under circumstances such as these
Come, give them all gratuitous degrees.

And there are those who come not. But for them
We sing no dirge, we chant no requiem.

• What though afar beneath a distant sky,
Broken and spent, shall their torn bodies lie,
And the soft flowers of France bloom once again
Upon the liberated soil above the slain
Who freed it, and her rivers lave

As with their tears the unforgotten grave,

• Whilst thou, Oh Land of murmuring lake and pine,

• Shall call in vain these vanished sons of thine,—
They are not dead. They shall not die while still
Affection live and Memory fulfil

Its task of gratitude. Nor theirs alone

The sculptured monument, the graven stone ;

The Commonwealth of Freedom that shall rise

World wide shall tell their noble sacrifice.