
.V—The Faculty of Arts

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*(Verses written for Dean Moyses's Dinner to the Professors
of the Faculty of Arts, McGill University, October 29,
1909.)*

Dear Mr. Dean, I think it much completer,
To voice to-night my sentiments in metre,
This little thing—I ask your blessing on it—
Is what we technically call a sonnet.
Sonno, I sing, and Nitto, I do not,
A derivation made upon the spot.

Here let me interject to save confusion,
There has not been the very least collusion,
I had not given any intimation
That I intended such an innovation,
And if you find my verses poor and mean,
Worthy professors, do not blame the Dean.
For years I have dissembled, now you know it,
My friends! behold in me an unknown poet
Careless of notoriety, of fame unthinking,
But singing like a skylark after drinking.
So tasting this good cheer from soup to Stilton,
I can't remain a mute inglorious Milton.

College Days

Let every man pursue his different way
And seek his life work where he finds his pay.
I leave to Walker gas, to Caldwell Kant,
Adams the rock ; Penhallow keeps the plant,
Let the bacilli stay where they belong.
But leave to me the humble joy of song.

A sonnet did I say ? Nay I confess
This is an epic neither more nor less,
Arts and the Men, I sing, for I am yearning
To sound the praise of Academic learning.

How start the theme with teeming fancies fraught,
How measure into feet the crowding thought,
How mark the rhythm and divide the time
And bid the stubborn syllables to rhyme,—
In other words, how can I jam it, sir,
In Petersonian Pentameter ?

First, let me voice a wish I must avow,
The Board of Governors might see us now.
That we might have to make the tale complete,
An Angus and a Greenshields, and a Fleet.
Oh, sirs, this spectacle would make them feel
That poor professors like a solid meal,
That learning, since it is no hollow sham,
Looks best with a distended diaphragm.
Well may they boast among their employees
A group of smiling faces such as these !

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Yet 'tis a theme on which I must not touch,
In fairness be it said we owe them much,
And let us hope the future has in store
That one and all shall shortly owe them more.
Yes, let me voice this humble, earnest plea,
Participated by this company—
When next the stream of benefaction starts,
Pray, pour it on the Faculty of Arts!
Oh, Edward, William, Robert, James and John
Delay no longer, kindly turn it on!

For this the Faculty of Arts is known,
Of other studies the foundation stone,
It forms the base, however deeply hid,
Of higher education's pyramid.

Let medicine discourse in cultured tone
Of pickled corpse and desiccated bone,
Yet let it answer, if it dares to speak,
Who taught it how to name the bones in Greek?
Or let the scientist pursue his toil,
Grease his machines with lubricating oil,
Fling far the bridge and excavate the mine,
And bid the incandescent light to shine.
Yet let him answer—will he dare to tell,
Who tries to teach the engineer to spell?

Or let the law, if proof be needed yet,
To our great Faculty deny its debt,

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The Latin it must use to mystify
Is raw material that we supply.
The logic that Dean Walton takes his tricks on
Is manufactured by Professor Hickson.

But I have said enough, I think, to show
The debt of gratitude all others owe
To this our Faculty. Now let me come
To details lying rather nearer home,
And let me speak about the various parts
That constitute this Faculty of Arts.
This done, with your permission I will then
Say something of our most distinguished men,
And with all gentleness I will assign
To each a brief Thanksgiving Valentine.

Here first the Classics holds its honoured place,
The centre stone of the aforesaid base,
In education's whirling stream and jam,
It lies embedded like a coffer dam.
So deeply down do its foundations lie,
Its worth is hidden from the common eye.
The vulgar think the Classics are a sham,
O noble edifice, O Greek, O dam!
Yet judge its worth when you can find them beaten,
Messrs. Macnaughton, Peterson and Eaton.
See where Macnaughton with imperious tread
Rudely disturbs the archæologic dead,

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Watch him receive in his extended hat
The venal offering of the plutocrat.
Watch this, my friends, and will you dare to say
The study of the Classics does not pay?

Or see, a Peterson with spade and hoe
In ducal vaults exhumes a Cicero!
Carries it gently to the outer air,
Removes the dust with Caledonian care,
And straightway to the Classics is annexed
A new and highly controversial text.
A noble feat! and yet alas! I own,
Like Dr. Cook, he did it all alone;
When next in search of Cicero you go,
Take, Mr. Principal, an Eskimo.

Lo! Mathematics hidden from the view,
Behind its symbols though it may be true,
The upper part of it so wrapped in darkness,
That no one sees it but Professor Harkness.
The very Queen of Sciences they say!
It is, for the professor, anyway.
In lectures he is not obliged to talk,
Needs but a blackboard and a bit of chalk,
A set of problems given as a test,
Then down he sits,—the students do the rest.
Forgive me if I fall into ecstasies,
Would I were taught to teach the Mathematics!

College Days

Charming as is the mathematic mystery,
It will not stand comparison with history ;
Imagine what a splendid *tour de force*
To trace the Norman Conquest to its source,
Think of a man who still quite young was skilled
To analyse the Mediæval Guild !
To follow it and trace its root-age down
Deep buried in the Anglo-Saxon town !
Yet such is Colby ! Oh, what joy complete
To terrorize the man upon the street,
To hush his crude attempts at conversation
By quoting pages of the Reformation ;
And that his cup of misery be filled,
To crush him with the Mediæval Guild.
Oh, Charles, with all thy knowledge, is it right
That thou art not beside the board to-night ?
That thou shouldst set thy brain to overplan
The simple, unsuspecting business man !
See ! at the bidding of the gentle sage
The Caligraph creeps noiseless o'er the page,
The clatter of the busy key is dumb,
Destroyed by Colby's patent Liquid Gum.
Oh, second Gutenberg, God speed the ship
That bears you on your European trip,
Let bulky Germans drink your health in hock,
And frantic Frenchmen clamour for the stock ;
And, Noiseless Charles, when you have had your fill
Of business life, come back to fond McGill.

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Surely no nobler theme the poet chants
Then the soft science of the blooming plants.
How sweet it were in some sequestered spot
To classify the wild forget-me-not ;
To twine about the overheated brow
The coolness of the rhododendron bough ;
To lie recumbent on a mossy heap
And draw a salary while fast asleep.
Dr. Penhallow, it would need a Herrick
To sing your work and that of Carrie Derick.
Nor shall my halting Muse in vain essay
Such sweet co-operation to portray.

Would that your time allowed you once or twice
To drink to Barnes, discoverer of ice !
All unsuspected in the river bed
The tiny frazil reared its dainty head.
No one had known for centuries untold
Why the Canadian climate was so cold ;
Why winter should be vigorous and rude
In such a truly Southern latitude.
Barnes after years of thought and anxious teasing,
Decided that there must be something freezing.
He stopped his lectures, bundled up his pack,
Braved untold hardships at the Frontenac,
And there within a stone's throw of Quebec,
Found ice that no one ventured to suspect.
Let ice and snowdrift sing their requiem,
Our Howard Barnes is going to settle them.

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A fairer prospect opens to thé eye !
A Canada beneath a sultry sky !
Already the prophetic eye of hope
Sees grape vines circle the Laurentian slope.
Palms and pomegranates with the breezes play
And luscious figs droop over Hudson Bay.

Last, but of all departments valued most,
Is that illuminated by our host ;
English, the very word inspires the thought
With memories of a noble nation fraught.
English, the tongue of Tennyson, of Gray,
Of Milton, Bunyan, Goldsmith, Pope and Gay ;
Of still more widely circulated names,
Of Henty, E. P. Rowe and G. P. James,
The tongue of Bobbie Burris and Walter Scott—
You interrupt me ?—strictly it was not.
But let me tell you, sirs, who dares to fight it ?
Let Saxons speak it but let Scotsmen write it !
English, to add to this enumeration
The tongue to-day of every place and nation,
For cultured Chinaman, for mild Hindoo,
For travelling Russian nothing else will do.
The tongue of every race and every clan,
Just think how needful to a gentleman !
Varied as are the forms of English speech,
Our Dean has got his solid grip on each ;
Here sit a man who positively knows
The whole life history of our nation's prose,

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Who can, and will, at your request rehearse
One thousand lines of Anglo-Saxon verse.
To him, we feel it in his every look,
Chaucer and Gower are an open book ;
He finds the verse of Cædmon light and breezy,
And Beowulf, if anything, too easy,—
Nay, bless my soul, the man can even read
The writings of the Venerable Bede.

Yet not for this, or not for this alone
We love to claim him as our very own ;
Rich in the scholar's gift in every part,
Yet more we prize the richness of his heart.
The cheerful humour nothing can dismay,
Unruffled by the cares of day to day.
The industry that does not flag or shirk,
That stints not trouble, measures not its work.
The kindness never failing and the hand
Outstretched to help, the brain to understand
With ready sympathy another's cares
And lighten thus the burden that it shares.
Oh, sirs, if this in English may be sought,
Would that such English were more widely taught.
Let him recite us Cædmon if he will
Or sing us Beowulf, we will be still ;
Nay, let him quote us, if he feel the need,
Whole chapters from the Venerable Bede ;
Still shall we cry the pauses in between
God's blessing on our well-beloved Dean.