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College Reminiscences

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Weird Ocean, with mysterious spell,
    Inspired the pilgrim leaves thy shrine;
Voice-haunted, like thy native shell,
    Whose music is a part of thine.

I seem to hear thy hollow roar,
    As when, in yearning boyhood's day,
I stood upon the lonely shore,
    And listened to thy solemn lay;

Like some sweet, melancholy strain,
    That wakened chords of sympathy,
The lingering echo swells again
    Within the cell of memory.

Loitering upon the shell-paved strand,
    The encroaching surf my feet would lave;
While gazing dreamily, I scanned
    The flow and ebb of many a wave.

They come interminably on,
    Like time's full tide, in billows vast;
How like the unconscious present gone,
    Engulfed in the oblivious past.

Thus came the thronging joys of youth,
    As prodigally thrust aside,
Till lapsing soon betrayed the truth—
    Their source was not an ocean tide.

O give me back my boyhood's dreams,
    The gushing heart, the fancy free,
And, manhood, all thine empty schemes,
    And anxious wealth, are dross to me.

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MESSRS. EDITORS.—When, on a recent occasion, one of your gentlemanly corps observed to the writer that another article was expected from him for the July number, the hint was received with a few misgivings. He had occupied some room, and spoiled some very handsome paper in several of the earlier issues; and for a moment, he construed the suggestion into a
playful attempt to twit him for the abundance of his previous scribblings. But the earnest solemnity of the subsequent conversation completely disarmed suspicion; and we parted with the mutual understanding, that, after one more infliction upon your "fifty thousand subscribers and over a million of readers," I was to "give way," as they have it in country debating societies, "to a more abler individual."

I have just signed, sealed, and (hope to have) delivered a letter to an old classmate, and while writing it, many scenes of "Auld Lang Syne" came up to my recollection. Do not wax facetious, gentlemen, at my antiquity. Time is an exceedingly relative entity. With the peaceful rusties of a retired valley—with men whose peregrinations never transcend the line sketched on the sky by their mountains—not less than forty years make a generation. But with us, one-tenth of that period is sufficient to replace the forms we once knew and cherished with strangers. The old graduates returning for the second degrees can tell you all about this matter. To them the college buildings and the town seem much as when they left: "but all else how changed!" * * * I belong, then, to a former generation, and with your leave, offer a reminiscence or two, which, at this distance of time, untinged by party hue or excitement, may aspire to the dignity of history. Out of consideration for the feelings of surviving friends, however, I must restrict myself in the use of names, and present only the initials.

I. C——— was the descendant of an excellent clergyman, but a notable example of a remark not precisely original with me, that moral goodness is not always hereditary. Possessing talents which might have placed him in the first section at least, he never pretended to prepare an exercise until within about five minutes of the bell, and then he would exclaim, like Queen Elizabeth on her death-bed, "millions for an inch of time!" The excuse usually offered for this procrastination was—that, having heard of students who began well and ended badly, he had too much regard for his pious parents to pain them by any sudden reverse in his career; he therefore preferred consistency to cruelty, and gave himself credit for the preference. In this way he gained opportunity for planning schemes of fun and deviltry, and more than once has he applied to me for any surplus wisdom I might be able to lend him for the completion of his pranks. Thus, after hanging a vessel of water over a neighbor's door, he would ask—"Think that's about high enough to cool his ambition?"—or, after slipping the rope from half the pins on the bedstead—"Wonder how far he'll get down before he turns to rise?" were questions he would ask with the innocent and self-satisfied air of a man devotedly engaged in promoting the public good.

One dark but very still night, near eleven o'clock, I met him in deep distress. He asked me to his room, and I followed. When I arrived—there was "a scene more easily," &c. His bed lay in a heap on the floor, the cord was strewed round in all kinds of curves, and his wood box had emptied its contents in glorious confusion. "You see," he began, "the old steward's
down here sound asleep, and I question whether he feels the slightest gratitude for the blessing of refreshing slumber. Now, I want to teach him its value. I've been trying to let down one of those confounded sticks from the east window, and touch up the steps; but my wood's so fine and straight that it slips through the noose and does no execution. Perhaps you have a stick large at both ends and small in the middle: if you have, the thing can be done yet." Search was made, and he soon found a piece exactly suitable. But a few minutes elapsed until "there was a sound of deviltry by night;" every dog within five miles of town set up his long, gloomy howl; and for two precious hours the steward found neither "sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids." As soon as he made his appearance near the steps, the billet would ascend as gracefully as if all the simple powers in mechanics had a hand in raising it; and no sooner had he tucked himself easily in bed, and began to feel a little warmth, (it was a stinging night,) than the old torment would commence anew. At last luck favored him. He only pretended to have retired; watched his chance; took a firm hold of the hated block, and almost drew the wicked offender out of the window. C. left in disgust, and returned to sleep on the floor—coolly remarking, "I fear my system of instruction is not likely to cultivate the principle of gratitude."

But labors thus self-sacrificing could not fail of their reward. "The powers that were, in those days, could not refrain from expressing to the young gentleman himself their respect for his rising abilities. They even wrote home encouraging accounts of his precocity; and at last were obliged to intimate to his friends that this place did not furnish him a theatre sufficiently grand and commodious for the exercise of his powers. The suggestion was acted on; and the last time I heard from C. he was "teaching school and studying medicine"—the almost invariable destiny of every student who outstrips his class two or three years.

II. F. hardly ever made a good recitation. He greatly regretted the "unsatisfactory" character of his performances—though, at that time, the long word did not flourish in the reports with the consequence it has now. Those were the days in which a successful effort was soon to bring with it a 20. Ah me! what a fall, first from 20 to 9, and then to satisfactory!

"What a fall was there, my countrymen!
Then you and I, and all of us fell down!"

When shall we have, again, the powerful eloquence of the pure Arabic?

But to return to F. After an attempt at reciting, he always discovered that his successor in the chair had received the very subject upon which he could have dilated gloriously; while it always happened he was called up on the only part he didn't know. "Don't you think," he inquired, one day, of a classmate, "it would be a good plan to prepare best the parts I don't know? Then I can recite as well as other people!"

III. Sitting, one evening, with my chum, we dashed off into a sublime
fit of moralizing upon the results of collegiate education about thus:

"The public institutions of this country are, every year, graduating hundreds of young men. But what becomes of all this talent so fitted for honor and usefulness in life? Commencement everywhere shows a grand parade of very fine scholarship; but, unfortunately, much of it seems destined, like Sterne's flower, to

\[\text{'Waste its fragrance on the desert air,'}\]

or to be so chilled by the world's blasts as to produce no valuable fruit. True, many study professions, and become highly useful members of society; but how few contribute, in any degree, to the science or literature of our country? Nay, are not these departments very much indebted to the efforts of self-educated men?

"If we analyze the causes of these results, they will, probably, all be found combined in one—the multiplicity of studies pursued in college, without the selection of any controlling subject. The usual course includes Mathematics, Philosophy (Natural, Mental, and Moral), Natural Sciences, Languages and Religion—and about equal attention is claimed for each. In this way, the mind becomes confused by the ever-recurring routine. It does not dwell long enough on one subject to acquire for it such a predilection as to lead to farther investigation subsequently. And when the course is at last concluded, and the graduate, with all his blushing honors, arrives at home, his books lie in glorious repose on some back shelf, unless, perchance, they serve the purposes of some younger brother, who pants to become as learned as the first born.

"And yet, the present system is, perhaps, the best that could be adopted. Imperfection attaches to every human scheme, and all we can do is so to direct our minds as to secure the advantages, and avoid the evils of the influences bearing upon us. I would, therefore, suggest that every student, while in college, ascertain that department of learning in which he would be most likely to excel, and let his reading, writing, and reflection be conducted with reference to that department. Under this plan, other studies will answer the purpose of a pleasant recreation, after long and exclusive application to one. Besides, it will give tone and character to the individual himself. Of course, a hobby, always on the trot, becomes disagreeable: but a man loses nothing from its being known that his mind acts best in a particular direction. But, especially, can such a course render all inquiries subservient to a man's advantage. No thought stands isolated from all others. Each is connected with others; and receives illustration from all."