

THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

Vol. VII.

University of Toronto, Nov. 27, 1886.

No. 6.

SONNET.

Like as a bird whose wings are not yet grown,
From out the nest makes effort to arise,
And spread its wings to fly and breast the skies,
And drink the deep ethereal blue unknown
To those of meaneer power who halt and moan
Upon the level earth the vain emprise,
But ah! too weak as yet! It fruitless tries
To wing the unsupporting air alone.

Thus with the fledgling of the muses nest,
He feels the immortal harmony of song
Throb in his heart; and strives, with deep unrest,
To scale the rhythmic heights, and borne along,
To grasp the prize that highest powers attest.
Not yet! It needs sore trial and effort strong.

ORMSBY.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

III. UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

By the Act of 1853 the teaching part of the University, under its new name of University College, was put on an entirely new and enlarged footing; but no local habitation was provided for it. It is not generally known to the present generation that before that date the Canadian Parliament had cast covetous eyes on the University park, and appropriated the site which the local Legislature have at last laid hands on. In the defence of the University before the Quebec Parliamentary Committee in 1860, the following statement by Dr. Wilson recalls the fact that University College began its work in 1853 as a temporary lodger, or "literary tramp," in the old parliament buildings which are about to be superseded by the new erection on the site of King's College. After disclaiming responsibility for the preliminary steps, which he nevertheless defended as not only justifiable, but indispensable, he thus proceeds:—

"In defence of the necessity of the building, I will only say that during seven years in which I have been a professor of University College, I have witnessed five removals. Since the Act of 1853 was passed we have been turned out of the old King's College building, and established in the Parliament buildings on Front-street. Parliament returning to Toronto, we were sent back to the old building; Government requiring that, we were thrust into a little brick edifice originally built for a medical school (*i. e.*, Moss Hall!); and before we at length moved into our present buildings, we had been compelled to waste thousands of dollars on removals, fittings, and temporary makeshifts, as distasteful to us as they were wasteful and extravagant. Surely it was wiser to put up adequate and permanent buildings than fritter away the endowment in a system like that, which destroyed all faith in the perpetuity of the institution, and impeded everything but the mere daily scramble to accomplish such work as could be got through, in the absence of nearly every needful provision of a well-appointed College."

When our readers realize that there was actually a time, within the terms of President Wilson and Professor Chapman, when the whole work, both of the present College and the School of Science, was carried on within the walls of Moss Hall, they will form some idea of the growth of the College from its first small beginnings. But not only was it needful to provide adequate College buildings. It was no less wise than needful to invest the surplus funds in this useful and substantial fashion;

for so long as a surplus lay in the bursar's hands, the grand aim of the denominational colleges was to have a slice of it. The most extravagant notions, moreover, prevailed as to its amount. It was fancied to include wealth enough to equip half-a-dozen universities.

Fortunately at this critical stage in the history of the University of Toronto the Governor-General was Sir Edmund Head*, an old Oxford professor; a man of eminent scholarly attainments; and sincerely bent on furthering the plan for a national university. He took the liveliest interest in the new buildings; and under his countenance matters were pushed on so effectually that the contracts had been signed, and the work was far advanced, before the public were aware that it was even under consideration. The friends of the National University clearly perceived that without permanent buildings there was no guarantee for its endurance. The work accordingly was pushed on energetically. The site in those days lay altogether out of observation. The Yonge Street avenue went no farther than Sleepy Hollow. All beyond, where College Street, St. George street, and the populous district to the west, now stand, was in bush; a mere trackless wilderness. So masons, bricklayers, and carpenters plied their busy tools unheeded; till, to the mortification of some who had set their hearts on a division of the endowment, the surplus was safely invested in a new building, and a well furnished museum and library. We have referred to the grand ceremonial at the laying of the foundation stone of King's College in 1842. The corner stone of the present magnificent building was quietly laid on the morning of the 4th of October, 1856, by three members of the committee, with no other ceremonial than the cordial wishes for the success of the undertaking in which Mr. Langton, Dr. Croft, and Dr. Wilson so heartily united. But the hour of triumph was only delayed. On the same date, exactly two years later, His Excellency, Sir Edmund Head, the steadfast friend of the institution through all its early difficulties, placed the top stone on the summit of the turret at the north-east angle of the great tower, after depositing benetah it a glass cylinder containing various documents connected with the history of the institution; and over this a brass plate thus inscribed:—

HOC LAPIDE *

OMNIUM IN ÆDIBUS ACADEMICIS
SUMMO TURRI IMPOSITO
OPUS ABHINC BIENNIUM SE AUSPICE INCHOATUM
CORONAVIT
EDMUNDUS WALKER HEAD BARONETTUS A. M. OXON.
E SECRET. REGIN. CONSIL.,
VICE REGIA RERUM SUMMAM
PER PROVINC. BRITANN. IN AMERICA SEPTENTR.
ADMINISTRANS
IDEMQUE UNIV. ET UNIV. COLL. APUD TORONTONENSES
VISITATOR
IV NON OCTOBR.
A. D. MDCCCLVIII.
ET
VICT. REG. XXII.
HON. ROBERTO R. BURNS REV JOHANNES McCAUL, LL.D.
UNIV. CANC. UNIV. COLL. PRES.
JOHANNES LANGTON, A.M.
UNIV. V. CANC.

* By the Act of 1853 the senate was appointed by the Governor-General. Lord Elgin should have been named in our last number as Governor-General of that date. He was succeeded by Sir Edmund Head, who was the active promoter of the newly organized university.