

## THE SPIRIT OF THE WAR: AT HARROW.

WHEN Harrow broke up for the summer holiday of 1914—three days earlier than had been intended, owing to a plague of mumps—there was no sign which could be read as prelude to a storm. Foreign ministers and ambassadors we know now were exchanging anxious notes, but this was below the surface. Had the term run to its natural end, the school would have read the news of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, on its various train-journeys—or would have skipped it to search for something more comprehensible to the boy mind. A week or so later we were at war. By the time the school bell rang again, the great retreat had run almost all its course and the German armies were pressing on Paris: and the school which had dispersed in what was seemingly profound peace gathered again in the throb and restless anxiety of the worst period of the war.

That took away one opportunity of seeing the impression made. Almost everyone had been away from the Hill: individually every boy had looked on at the outbreak, and watched the stir of preparation: on his return each had had stories to tell of what he had seen, and tales—often, it must be said, wild ones—of what he had heard in his own neighbourhood. Yet, as a school and a corporate whole, Harrow did not experience, any more than any other English school, the sensation of 'going to war'; it came back to life under war conditions so acute, so swiftly changing, and so menacing that years seemed to have passed instead of eight weeks, and one wondered, as the train brought one back, whether Harrow could be the same. And on walking up the hill it was almost a shock to find no obvious change in the familiar surroundings.

For indeed busybodies had buzzed in our ears of many things 'A whole division of troops was quartered in Harrow—were encamped on the football field, and had cut down hundreds of trees; the houses would all be requisitioned for Red Cross hospitals; trenches were being dug and the hill fortified as part of the defences of London; troops were using all the school buildings; the school would probably not reassemble—could not possibly reassemble.' Such things flew wildly about till the Head Master wrote to *The*

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*Times* to say that the school would assemble on the proper day; at which discharge the whole tribe of ducks flopped down dead, and the sky was cleared.

Post-mortem examination among these wild-fowl revealed some curious enterprises and perversions. There was the (self-appointed) organiser of hospitals who had been promised a variety of things ending up with '50 beds and one single sheet': there was the hasty clearing out of speech-room for troops (who never used it), and the provision of a hundred buckets to serve as washstands there (the buckets are now standing about houses filled with anti-Zeppelin sand, and one hopes they may never see fight in this capacity either); the fortifications never existed; and the 'hundreds of trees' turned out to be a most ingenious effort of misconstruction. Troops were using the footer field—that was true. It was true also that the philathletic field (on the other side of the hill) was being enlarged to give more space for cricket, and to do this it was necessary to remove the so-called 'Fifty' trees—trees planted by members of past elevens who have made a score of fifty or more in a school match to commemorate the exploit. Rumour supplied the rest. No. 1: 'I hear they have moved the "Fifty" trees; yes, and there are a lot of soldiers on the football field.' No. 2: 'Troops are in Harrow, and they've cut down fifty trees.' No. 3: 'The troops have cut down fifty trees—over fifty trees—nearly a hundred trees—hundreds of trees.' Still, among these imaginings, there was the fact that there had been a Division at Harrow, and its fortunes brought home the grim realities of war. It was the Fourth Division: it left Harrow suddenly on Saturday August 22, and its next appearance was recorded in Sir John French's first famous despatch, thus:

'The 4th Division commenced its detrainment at Le Cateau on Sunday the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a brigade of artillery with divisional staff were available for service. I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai-Le Cateau road. In this position the Division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the Second and First Corps to the new position.'

At Harrow on Saturday: on Tuesday and on Wednesday—the most critical day of all,' as Sir John French called it—in the thick of the fighting: so swiftly does modern war move.

To this, then, the school returned—to take up again its familiar

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round, and to consider how it stood. Outwardly, the change was not great. There was no rush into the corps, for the sufficient reason that before the outbreak of war 470 out of 500 boys were already in the corps: the remainder naturally came in, and the recruits for the time presented a strange mixture of the very new with the gleanings of the old. Of course the work of the corps increased and prospered with a new keenness. A good many places were indeed vacant; boys who normally would have had another year in front of them were now with the Colours; one familiar military figure had gone, since Captain Begouen de Meaux had been recalled to command the 8th Chasseurs; the gymnasium was deserted, its naval superintendent, Lieutenant Cotee, and his staff of instructors, having all been requisitioned by the Navy; other masters, hitherto civilian, were now seen in khaki. There came a reminder of how short the country was of equipment when all our rifles were taken from us and we were left with a few carbines, later reinforced with wooden dummies—we still have them—and when ammunition even for the miniature range began to run dry. We went through the usual round of early excitements—maps gaily beflagged, charts of ships with the losses recorded on either side, bulletins posted upon novel notice-boards, homeless Belgians bewildered with school-boy French, and taken in, provided, and cared for with amazing efficiency; comforts for the troops, literature for the Fleet, collections and subscriptions, information and instruction—some of it pointed and seasonable, and some less conspicuously so—of such volume that few had much time to consider what they did think, since most of their time was taken up with listening to what they were told they ought to think. None of these things indeed were peculiar to boys at school: every newspaper is prepared to provide its readers with ready-made opinions. But what was private and personal was the ever-increasing weekly casualty list; each Sunday the words, 'The following old Harrovians have laid down their lives for their country, . . .' came like the toll of a bell. To some there would come back memories of old times, of games played and matches won, 'days in the distance enchanted'; but to most boys in the school these dead comrades were but names, heard in this solemn fashion for the first time—and the last. For life at school is short, and generations pass quickly—as they do outside, just now.

A further sense of the Great Comradeship, which spreads over the schoolfellows of every school that is worth the name, is stirred

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by the records of what its old members have done and are doing. When the war broke out Harrovians could reflect that a good many sides of the nation's life, whether peaceful or warlike, were under Harrovian care. A Harrow man was Archbishop of Canterbury, another First Lord of the Admiralty, another Secretary of State for India, another Viceroy of India, another Governor of the Bank of England; and the peerage granted to Lord Cunliffe shows how valuable were his services there at the time of financial strain—and yet another, and this one the president of the Harrow Association, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, Commander of the Second Army Corps in the British Expeditionary Force. In July, Sir Horace had presided at the Triennial Dinner of the Association, and he had devoted his speech to urging on us the necessity of enlarging and strengthening our Army and to pressing on his old schoolfellows the privilege of serving either in the Regular forces or the Territorials. Neither he nor his audience realised then how close at hand was the day. But neither President nor his schoolfellows failed when the day came, as two facts out of many will show. The first is the opinion of Sir John French in his first despatch:

'I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could not have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operations.'

And the second is the fact that the number of Old Harrovians known to be serving or to have served with the Colours is 2087: there are doubtless many others we have not been able to trace, but let it stand at that. Remembering that there are only about 6000 living old Harrovians, of whom somewhere about a half are over military age and debarred from beginning service now; and recalling the number who are in civil Government employ, the proportion who have come forward to serve, the list of the high posts they have held, the distinctions they have won in the shape of V.C.s, D.S.O.s, D.C.M.s, Legion of Honour, and promotions for Field Service, may well make Harrow proud of her sons, alive and dead. For over a hundred and fifty have already won the highest honour of all: they have died for their country.

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When one comes to the school itself, one may say briefly that it is going on steadily, cheerfully, and confidently making ready for the time when school is to end and service is to begin. There is scarcely a boy who has left since the war began who has not gone into His Majesty's forces in some shape or other—excepting those unhappy ones whom the doctor will not pass. Some of these have managed to bamboozle Medics—but probably Medics was a sportsman too. The rest wait—somewhat impatiently—the approach of eighteen. They look forward till the time comes to put their unofficial motto into action, to 'follow up.' Meantime they have willingly given of their money much, and of their free time much: two afternoons a week extra have been devoted to corps work without any remission of school, and it is hard work.

Say what you may, the routine of drill and long route marches on hot dusty roads do become wearisome: failures mean fault-finding, and that is not pleasant either: firing imaginary blank cartridge out of a wooden rifle is apt to seem a child's play: on the other hand trench-digging in Harrow clay is not. It would be absurd to pretend that every one always enjoys these things. The point is that though they are not enjoyable and often not enjoyed they are done methodically and cheerfully. And after all it is a high sense of duty which carries boys or men faithfully through long dull training without weapons.

Perhaps to one who has seen it from inside, the most striking and satisfactory feature of all is the way in which the younger ones have filled the places which the elders left unexpectedly vacant. More than most people realise, Harrow is a collection of federal states: it is made up of a number of groups—the houses—each under the supreme authority of the school, yet in its own concerns autonomous, and living under the rule of its leading boys—its 'Sixth-Formers.' When the war came there was a sudden departure of leaders: not only leaders *in esse*, but leaders *in posse*, the boys each housemaster marks down in his mind 'for next year.' Authority and responsibility, the business of head of house, and captaining house elevens had to be passed down—in many cases to boys who when they went home in July never dreamed they would be in high place in September. Yet this sudden brief authority—well used and what was a far higher test of the mass, well respected. It is not altogether easy to put a new and untried boy into unexpected office, much less easy for him to rise to the place; and hardest

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of all for those, recently his bear-fighting and irresponsible equals to remember he is no longer what he was, and that, as Bacon says, 'When he sits in place he is another man.' But that this capacity of rising to the occasion both in rulers and ruled, this spirit of continuing to govern itself in spite of difficulties by what E. E. B. once called 'glorified convention,' has been conspicuously shown, no one who has seen the working of Harrow in the past year will question. And for this we may add the words with which each Founders' Day we end our commemoration of *all* Benefactors to the school—'Let us give thanks.'

Of the dead this is no place to speak. Some have shone by exceptional deeds—such as Rhodes-Moorhouse and Walford. Of some there have come back pathetic and touching memories—as of Verner of the Shropshire Light Infantry, killed all alone in an advanced trench whence he had sent away his men as it was too dangerous for them, while he himself remained to give warning of any attack. His men begged for pennies from his money as a souvenir because 'he was the bravest man we ever saw, and we would have followed him anywhere.' Some treasured here as ideals of what boys should be—such as Arthur Lang and Geoffrey Hopley. Two more missing and it is feared dead, both of them adopted sons of the school and loyal servants of it, Ronald Lagden who, as he said, 'went out to play Rugby football with bayonets,' and Charles Werner of whom his commanding officer wrote: 'I have not seen his equal for untiring keenness'—but when one begins such a chronicle it is not possible to select with justice. Of some we know the story; of others we have no more than the record of a death in action—

'Here on the marshland, past the battered bridge,  
One of a hundred grades untimely sown,  
Here, with his comrades of the hard-won ridge,  
He rests unknown.'

but of all, wherever and in whatever form Death came to them, we are sure that they died well.

GEORGE TOWNSEND WARNER.

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