FORTY YEARS BACK

According to Bernard Shaw the only good teacher, apart from torture, is fine art. And looking back on our years at school, 1914-1919, it seems to me that our education consisted largely in being allowed (but not compelled) to come into touch with things of beauty in the realm of art, and with right values in the realm of ideas.

I myself arrived in September 1914 a day late. There must have been an error in the instructions sent to me with my Minor Scholarship. So in a bewildering maze of corridors and strange faces, I was kindly taken in tow by one Hugh Morris, and with him, unheralded and unannounced, I took a seat in Form la classroom. within a few moments I became conscious (burningly concious) of Miss Boyd's gaze upon me. It was an unforgettable experience, and I was drawn in an almost hypnotic state to her desk, to give an account of myself. However, things turned out very happily, and Form la proved to be my proper destination. In fact I believe it was reckoned to be one of the most remarkable collections of new entrants the school ever saw! I must confess here that Miss Boyd and Miss Bennett so over-awed me during that first term that had I ever heard of Miss Beale and Miss Buss, (whose story only came my way many years later) the four ladies would have been evermore inextricably confused in my mind. Yet as Miss Boyd moved up with us each year from the first to the fourth forms, we had the greatest affection for her, and were much grieved by her departure for Longton. I still possess a small gift from her, a tin whistle which she gave me one day while spring cleaning her desk, and upon which I played an Irish Jig (or a Scottish Reel) in the 5th form-room on November 11th, 1918, as the sirens announced the signing of the Armistice.

We were, of course, almost destitute of masters. Mr. Clegg, Mr. Attenborough, Mr. Riley, Mr. T. Alliott, and Mr. Mansfield (for a short time), were with us at the beginning. But very soon Sam and ....

Tommy (if the familiarity may be forgiven) were soon left alone of the male staff. Miss Taylor, Miss Evans, Miss Drake, and Miss Turner (together with Miss Boyd and Miss Bennett aforesaid) were wonderful teachers, and I am sure that our generation of scholars owed a great deal to their skill and understanding.

But if the first impact of war robbed us of our masters, its second effect was no doubt the arrival of Belgian refugees. And with them came that remarkable lady, Mlle. Rosa Vaerwyck, later known as Mme. Pauwaert. Under her guidance the art-room became a favourite place in the school, and as she moved so quietly and gently from one pupil to another she not only told us what to do, but showed us how it should be done. One of the first things we did together was a large poster of Santa Claus in all his scarlet splendour, appealing for help for the refugees : one of our first works to be " hung "-this time in Long Eaton market place! Her later contributions included the beautiful murals in the Milton Room and Tudor Room, now alas! obliterated.

Into the Modern Language department came Mlle. Verachtert. Had she foreseen the treatment she was to suffer, she might well have declined the appointment. Plagued unmercifully by a heartless middle school, and haunted by the school's cat, she was a very courageous young lady. And though her interminable tables of pluperfect subjunctives made little impression on our dull wits, she did help us to speak French as it ought to be spoken. Her classes were always exciting, and coupled with Miss Evans' patient study of Weekley's *Groundwork* and Daudet's *Lettres de Mon Moulin,* did more than anything else to prepare for us a way to Honours in French.

I have vivid memories of Miss Silk's geography lessons, especially the advanced course for the chosen few (A. B. Henderson and myself) in the quiet seclusion of the old dining-room. And, of course, Miss Dedicoat's lessons in Latin! I wonder if she recalls a cartoon of King Canute, his hairy legs dipped in the disobedient ocean, as we passed it surreptitiously around the 5th Form table ? We had some fun with those drawings: Miss Turner and Godwin returning from a botanical foraging expedition, and one of the whole Staff immobilised with " flu " during the great epidemic, and so on. Perhaps we wasted a lot of valuable time with these frivolities, and I personally earned a stern rebuke from time to time.

But the mention of Miss Turner and Botany brings back to mind a whole atmosphere of those happy days : the smell of autumn fruits (dehiscent and indehiscent) piled up on the table ; and of peas and beans that sprouted (and grew beards) in damp sawdust. And the wonderful walks we had to Dale Abbey, where we found a bed of *I Lathrea* behind the hermit's cave, and to the ox-bow lake by the Trent

at Sawley. We never dreamed in those days of school journeys as we have them today, but I am sure we all enjoyed a day out with a vasculum just as keenly as the pupils of the 1950's and 60's enjoy their visits to Rome and Norway. There was a day too when the whole school went skating--a whole day off without the Authority's permission ! And I heard afterwards that we met H.M.I, on his way to school from Trent station. But no one cared much about H.M.I's We were a pioneer school, and had initiative.

Apart from Botany I believe we did very little science. There was only one small lab. anyway, for chemistry and physics together. No school today could hold its own without making proper provision for these subjects, and no doubt the humanities have had to make room for them. Nor was there, forty years ago, the sense of urgency there is today. There was certainly much less noise! There was no road-traffic to speak of: no bus services, no heavy lorries, and very few cars. Even the Headmaster came to school on his bicycle. Nor was there the restlessness that mars our present age. Even the members of the staff seemed content to stay. In fact (as I write this chapter) Mr. Crompton, who joined us at the end of the war (1919, not 1945) is still with us. It was as though we all belonged to the place, pupils and staff working and even learning together, and enjoying the fellowship.

In 1914 we possessed no sports field or tennis courts. The piece of ground which lay between us and the fire station was rough and boggy. There we used to play " duck-stone ", until the U Boat menace threatened the country with starvation, and we had to begin digging. I remember particularly one occasion, as we were setting potatoes. Mr. Alliott sent me into school to find a suitable stick to mark the end of a row. Failing to discover just the thing we wanted, my eye fell upon a nice piece of smooth wood that lay handily on a bench. Quickly I sawed it in two, and with a bright smile carried the two bits out to Tommy. His wrath descended upon me in a flood of exasperation, and he sent me (in so many words) to a place far, far away . For my nice stick had been a carefully measured, planed, and polished length of oak destined for a pantograph on which he himself was engaged at the time. I was never much good at woodwork.

However, the potatoes grew. School meals were first introduced in 1916, and with them came another great character in the school's history- Mrs. Frost. Her kitchen was to us just as holy ground as the Head's study (and probably pleasanter when recollected in tranquility). Though it was in theory out of bounds, an occasional visit was always worth the risk. Food rationing was a very serious business and there were times when the rice pudding served in the dining ...

room bore a disquieting resemblance to the paste we used for colour-printing in the art-room. But we accepted it, unquestioning, for Mrs. Frost's baked potatoes made up for all deficiencies. What a hushed thrill came over the dining-room as Mr. Clegg announced : " The School Vine has been cut ", and -we proceeded to pass the bowIs of grapes along the table. For the past thirty years I have used at my own family table the same form of Grace before Meat which he used then :

> " Grant, O Lord, that we may partake of these gifts
> with thankful hearts, and help us to have in mind
> the needs of others."

Another wartime feature was the Cadet Corps, if such it could be called, for I cannot remember any great enthusiasm for it, and many " cadets " were repeatedly in hot water for missing parade. What we then knew as " drill " was a very different affair from our modern Physical Education ; and while we marched back and forth across the school yard at the command of Serg. Tubbs (borrowed from Trent College) the Regular Army was at bayonet practice in West Park, jabbing at stuffed sacks that hung from goal-posts just beyond the Cut. I remember the announcement, one morning at Assembly, of the death of L. Keeley at the Front ; and again the news that Mr. Robson had been awarded the M.C. No doubt the Zeppelin raid in January 1916 shook us a little ; and one quiet evening as I cycled along the lanes near Sandiacre, I witnessed the great explosion at Chilwell. But all the same, looking back after the 1939-45 war, it seems to me that the first World War affected us, at the time, very remotely. There was consternation at the news of Kitchener's death at sea, but I cannot remember having any "pep -talks ", or, in school, studying any maps of the various theatres of war. And as I have already described, we celebrated the Armistice in our own particular Manner, and took the afternoon off for a mixed Hockey match.

Those hockey matches were very popular, and the girls (Barbara Clegg, Marjorie Wood, Margery D., K.D., and the rest) generally gave the boys a rough time. As for school games generally, there were the usual matches, but my athletics were no better than my carpentry, and I admired and envied the skill and prowess of the players. I still possess a photograph of the soccer team (1917-18) including A. S. Humpherys, H. Godwin, Lakin Taylor, W. Skinner, and E. Hilling all looking rather cold and miserable as they posed on the steps at the boys' main entrance. At one time there was much enthusiasm for boxing, and of course we held the annual school sports on the town's Recreation Ground. The provision of tennis courts brought a new interest in life. There was the customary English reverence for cricket, and for sports gear of all kinds. There ...

still comes floating down, on the wind of memory, the horrible smell of the senior boys' cloakroom : a mixture of leather, old plimsolls, linseed oil, brilliantine, and perspiration.

Another photograph which many Old Scholars may still retain is the group of the whole school and staff, taken in 1918. Compared with similar groups today, it is probably rather small. There must have been about two hundred and fifty of us. But it must be admitted that in those early years it was possible for a master or mistress to know, not only by name, but personally, every pupil in the school. And as I scan the faces, row by row, it is astonishing how many names I can remember. We came from " Derwent, Trent, and Soar . . ." to quote the old school song ; Long Eaton itself, Sawley, Breaston, Draycott, Borrowash, Spondon, Ockbrook, Risley, Castle Donington, Kegworth, Thrumpton, Toton, Stapleford, Sandiacre, Shardlow, all compact little villages, which today are almost merged in a maze of Subtopia.

But the photograph I have always valued most is one of Mr. Clegg, a smaller print of the one which now hangs in the assembly hall, and taken (I believe) by Mr. Attenborough. For while it is hard to say where the hub of our school life lay, in the Hall, or in the art room, or out of doors, it was undoubtedly in the person of the Headmaster that the school found its strength and inspiration. Whether we were singing "The Nightingale ", " Who is Sylvia ? ", " Van Tromp " to his accompaniment, or dabbling in Phonetics in one of his English classes, or helping him to restore the colours on the Chaucer Room mural, or examining one of his exhibits (a Japanese print, or a page of illuminated manuscript) in a display cabinet in the Hall, or coming into school on Saturday for a lesson with him in pastel drawing, or just sharing with him a bottle of Barsac at Rye Hill Close, there was always the same communication of enthusiasm which is the essence of teaching.

" A school which has always specialised in art ", he wrote in the testimonial he gave me on leaving school. It seems to me an act of desecration to have obliterated the mural paintings in the old French Room, the Chaucer Room, the Tudor Room, and the Milton Room, on the last two of which we watched Mme. Pauwaert working. Every classroom, and every corner of the Hall and corridors, had its own good reproduction of a good painting, and we became familiar with them almost without knowing it. Even the Hall today has lost its old perspective, and the panelling has been painted a ghastly white, like a seaside cafeteria! It is difficult to say exactly why these changes jar, but something of beauty and repose seems to have been lost. Miss Evans, writing to me recently about this present chapter, asks me to convey " something of the spirit of the school as it was in your .....

day-there was something for everybody, not only academically but in a real educative way ; unobtrusively we tried to give you a standard of values not to be obtained elsewhere."

I think " unobtrusively " is the operative word. There was something quiet, something one might describe as " of good taste " about it all, as though St. Paul's words had been taken for our text : " That ye may approve things that are excellent."

A part of each term's syllabus in English, at least in the lower school, was the learning by heart of two hundred and fifty lines of verse and the reading of four Classics in prose. Books like Stalkey and Co. were very popular, though I believe now that Henry Esmond and Tristram Shandy were rather heavy going for twelve-year-olds. In fact we did pass through a stage of revolt, preferring the Magnet and Gem, half concealed under the desk-lid, to any classic in prose or verse, and I personally remember more vividly the boys of Greyfriars than any character from Thackeray. Nevertheless, we could not fail to be influenced, in the long run, by creative work that was intrinsically good, and encouraged to go and do likewise, if the spirit moved us to do so. Versifying for the school magazine (original or translation from the French), wood-engraving, book-binding, embroidery and design, lettering and illuminating, whatever we had a mind to do, there was an opportunity to have a go.

In a more narrowly academic sense I think we were going through an experimental stage. It was in our fourth year (or fifth ?) that the school abandoned the Oxford Senior Local examination for the School Certificate (now known as G.C.E.), and we must have been among the first pupils to attempt exemption from Matric. by doing well in the School Certificate exam. There was hardly any recognisable Sixth Form, for very few parents in those days had the foresight or the good sense to allow their children to stay at school for an extra year. I believe Harry Godwin was one of the first ; his progress at Cambridge has been followed with keen interest by all his old associates at school, and his recent elevation to the Chair of Botany is a fitting climax to a career that began with our two small microscopes in the old school dining-room, where Miss Turner initiated us into the mysteries of Protococcus, and the fascinating sinuosities of Spirogyra. I still read Amy Johnson with pleasure, and take my Watts School Flora in my pocket when I set out for a walk over the hills, though no doubt these two books have been superseded long ago in school. Perhaps they have a sentimental, rather than a scientific, value for me.

Another book on my shelf that takes me back to school is a copy of " William Drummond of Hawthornden : His Cypress Grove ", published by the Hawthornden Press in 1919, and edited with .....

introduction and notes by Samuel Clegg. One thousand copies of this edition were printed, and mine is Number 284. Yet another is an Oxford edition of Shelley, awarded to me (though I believe I paid for it) with an intermediate scholarship in 1918. And finally (though I cannot remember how it came into my possession) I have a copy of the little, grey, paperbacked hymn-book we used at morning prayers, with the tunes pencilled in in tonic sol-fa :

" Now as we part and go our several ways . . . ."

Our ways certainly diverged, but it was some years before we really parted. With the end of the war, and the influx of a new team of masters, a new chapter began in school ; while the Old Students' Association, and its annual reunion in January (with Mrs. Frost's continued help) held us together, and forged closer links with those who for the past five years had been our juniors. " Carnival at Midnight," and " Carriages at 2 a.m." ran the legend. And those were real carriages, with horses!

It must have been about this time that Mr. Clegg invited Mr. F. Mountney's string quartet to play for us at an evening conversazione. The Hall was decorated in cherry and almond blossom, and the company was seated at small tables arranged here and there about the room. Mr. Anderson and R. Earp had played the piano for us on various occasions, but this was my first taste of chamber music. In the intervening years I have attended innumerable concerts, and listened to the world's greatest pianists and violinists ; but this was what one might call the " rite of initiation ", and I shall never forget the echoing strings, or the lovely setting. Here again, then, was another instance of what I mean by the communication of enthusiasm ; so that in after-life, whether in music, poetry, or painting, nothing but the best is good enough.

But the formation of the Old Students' Association brings us into the nineteen-twenties, outside my terms of reference. What I was asked to do, and what I have tried to do (though inadequately)
has been to express in a few words the love we had, and still have, for the old school, and to evoke something of the spirit of the time, and the spirit of the place, in the days of World War No. 1.

J. DAWSON HOOLEY (1914-1919)