

Melle Spence

Some Young
Immortals

COLLEGE



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The young men of this group are the subject of Miss Spence's inspiring article.

Some Young Immortals



I HAVE just come upon a group picture of some sixteen boys in cadet uniform—winners of a prize in a military tournament in the spring of 1914, shortly before the War. They are arranged in two rows, those in front kneeling, with rifles in position; those in the rear standing. Before them, on a little pedestal, is the Trophy which they won. Behind them are three of the Masters of the Secondary School to which they belonged.

The picture, I remember, was brought to me some time during the progress of the War, with the suggestion that I should use it as the basis of a little "write-up", as all these lads—with one possible exception—had joined the Colours and gone overseas. All these boys I knew personally; of some, it is true, my knowledge was limited to the class-room, while others I knew both in and out of school. But the suggested "write-up" remained in abeyance, chiefly because I felt that it would be all out of proportion, seeing that in some cases my information

was so scanty, and in others so complete. I put the picture away in a drawer, and there it lay.

Now the War is a thing of the past, and nobody wants to hear any more about it. Perhaps that is why, from a spirit of contrariety, I am now moved to write of these boys. This post-bellum indifference is unworthy of us; we who sang such lusty war Processionals should chant our Recessionals with as deep a fervour—"lest we forget, lest we forget". As I look into the young faces in the picture (their ages ranged from fifteen to eighteen), and remember what they did and how they suffered in the Great War, and especially when I note that seven out of the sixteen gave up their lives, I feel that such lads and such deeds should not be lightly forgotten; that all sorts of reminders by voice and pen and act should be forthcoming. And so, even thus late in the day, I want to speak of these young soldiers, one by one, as I knew them; and in particular of those who are now only a memory—a memory that should be kept forever green. I shall take them one by one, from left to right, beginning with the back row.

Willard, the first boy ("Bill" the other boys preferred to call him), joined the Air Force immediately on receipt of the news that his brother

Harry was missing. Harry was last heard from just before the Battle of Vimy Ridge in the spring of 1917. He had often written of his "little fighting scout" which travelled ninety miles an hour. "My little 'bus only carries one", he wrote in one letter. "I have to fly her and work my machine-gun at the same time, and it needs all the hands you have got in a scrap. She is designed for fighting only, so that my duties consist in sitting a couple of miles up in the air over the lines, ready to swoop down on Mr. Hun if he tries to come over. It is awfully lonely up there and mighty cold, and one is not sorry to get down again after a couple of hours."

In that "little fighting 'bus" Harry crossed the lines on reconnaissance work before the Spring Push of 1917, and nothing was ever heard of him afterwards; only a little packet, long months later, was sent home to his mother—a little packet that told its own sad tale.

Meantime Willard had gone over, too. How often during the War was one reminded of the story of the two immortal Gracchi—the younger not daunted, but rather impelled, by the death of his elder brother, to follow that brother's example and share that brother's fate! And just a year after Harry's tragic death the same mess-

age—"Missing"—came of Willard. He was last seen surrounded by hostile aircraft—the rest of the story can be easily guessed! As yet no other word has come; and not even a little tell-tale packet of personal belongings. But the mother of these two brave lads—and she has no other sons—still "carries on" with the calm courage that has ever marked the mothers of soldier-sons and that goes far to explain the heroism which has been the birthright of these sons.

Of Russell, the second boy in the picture, I can say little. I remember him as a particularly happy, carefree lad in the matriculation class, one to whom both work and play had a proper relish, and who, when the War came, "joined up" without hesitation. I can see him now, on the day he visited the school to say good-bye, standing in the hall, surrounded by his classmates, laughing and joking, perhaps to hide the sadness of farewell. His military career was tragically short. Following hard upon a letter in which he said his battery (he was a bombardier) was located where the shells were wildly flying, came the despatch, "Killed in Action". And so he gave his glad young life away in the grim old war. That is a beautiful fancy—and why may it not be a beautiful

fact?—in Katharine Tynan's "New Heaven", where she says that

"Paradise now is the soldiers' land,
Their own country its shining sod;
Comrades all in a merry band;
And the young Knights' laughter pleaseth
God."

Of Heber, the third boy, I have a different tale to tell. For Heber has come home, unscarred by battle but decorated for bravery, having won the Croix de Guerre, with Silver Star. Heber will always be remembered in the annals of the school for his athletic "stunts" in the sports—he established marvellous new records for hundred-yard dashes and running broad jumps. Nevertheless, he was pronounced medically unfit for military service, and it was only by a daring piece of strategy and a tactical "coup" (which I am under bonds not to reveal) that he succeeded in getting overseas. "But he will never get to France", confidently said those who knew him well.

"You'll see!" said those who knew him better.

And soon came the word that Heber was in France, and in a combatant unit, too—infantry, at that. When one thinks of the way in which some boys (and more men) evaded military service, and the way in which others achieved military service, one is lost

in wonder at the contrasts which life affords; and one doubts the conclusion of the modern novelists who say that humanity presents not black and white but only a neutral drab or gray. A study of the military situation under the voluntary system, and even under conscription, is rather a refutation of this theory of life and character. Perhaps Sir Walter and the other old-timers were right, after all.

Leonard, the next boy, near-sighted and spectacled even in childhood, and of rather delicate physique, is another example of the "Will-to-Do" which scorns obstacles. But a letter from Shorncliffe speaks with disgust of his slim chances of getting to France, and of the tedium of his work as an instructor in bayonet-fighting and physical training. He seemed almost envious of the militant and muscular English women omnibus conductors, and described the summary way in which they pushed mere men off the steps when the 'bus was full enough. It was with considerable surprise that I received a little later a letter from France—Leonard had "arrived" somehow or other. He was with the Canadian Cavalry Brigade under General Seeley, and was afterwards transferred to the Artillery. He, too, has come home, safe and sound; he and boys like him will help to build up

the New Canada of the greater days to be.

And now we come to Howard and George. For, really, I cannot speak of these boys separately, they were so inseparable as schoolboys. Rather, I should take the trio, for on the other side of George in the picture stands Douglas, another close friend. George and Douglas came from the same little town at the mouth of the Credit River, and, like other Lake Shore boys, brought with them to the school a certain individuality and virility—like a breath of fresh country air invading the confines of the city. Howard was a Torontonionian, but a lover of lake and stream and woodland; not a real city boy at heart. In the summer of 1915 George and Douglas were in camp at Niagara together, sharing the same tent. Douglas got overseas first, in September, 1915, being one of five officers sent over with five drafts (Douglas was seventeen at the time). Meantime Howard joined the Colours, and he and George were in the same unit, George having been promoted to Captain's rank, Howard serving under him as Lieutenant. It was not till the spring of 1916 that they crossed the sea. In England their battalion was broken up, and presently they found themselves in France with another unit, George having reverted to

lieutenant's rank to go with his "pal". The first Battle of the Somme was their initiation into actual warfare. Then came the long, hard winter in the trenches, followed by the Spring Push of 1917.

"What did you think of the first phase of 'The Big Push'?" asks George in a letter dated April 18. "It was the most wonderful sight I ever hope to see. Our chaps advanced behind their artillery barrage just as we did when practising for it miles behind the lines. We commenced the attack at 5.30 a.m. and at 12 noon all our objectives were gained and we had successfully 'pulled off' the biggest infantry advance yet made in the war.

"Poor old Howard acquired a dirty crack on the head shortly after we left our own parapet. I didn't see him get hit and have not heard from him since; but, knowing that he is safely wounded and probably in 'Blighty' by now, I am quite content. He was first reported to me as being killed, which news naturally was not the best thing for one after an attack. But cheer up, all is well now, and if our Corps is ever relieved, I shall see him when in England on leave. You see I still hope for it."

But poor George was destined never to see England or his friend again.

Howard, after a hard fight for life and a long convalescence, came home to Canada at last, and was welcomed almost as one risen from the dead. But it was not the laughing, inexperienced boy who returned; in his place came a mature and thoughtful man. Life could not be the same to him after the loss of his best friend; in fact, life can never again be the same to any of us who knew and loved George well—and to know him was to love him well.

As he stands in the picture between Howard and Douglas, I cannot help comparing him with the boy—or rather the man—who appears in a later picture I have of him. What a change those few years made! Yet it is the boy of the group picture that comes back to me now, as I think of the days before the War. Well I remember the first year of my acquaintance with him. I had announced, as was my wont, that any pupils who were unable to prepare the work assigned each day for the class had only to see me before nine o'clock in the morning and state their case; otherwise they were liable to be detained half an hour after school. Even as I spoke the words, I fancied I detected a curious look in the eyes of a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked, English-looking lad sitting towards the back of

the room; and I was not surprised when the next morning, at precisely two minutes to nine, he burst breathlessly into my class-room and explained (he had a quick, staccato way of speaking that rather amused me at first) that he was "most awfully sorry" that he hadn't his work prepared for the day; but he had had trouble with the car going home (he used to motor in from the Credit every morning and "park" his car in the school grounds), and it had taken him a good part of the evening repairing it. Gravely I accepted the explanation, with a word of caution as to the use of double superlatives and the importance of precision of diction. In the course of a day or two I examined the car standing on the campus, and came to the conclusion that it might well serve as the peg to hang many an excuse upon—it was a much-used and much-abused Ford, with, however, long life in its old frame yet.

But I was scarcely prepared for what followed. Morning after morning (not every morning, but so frequently that I missed him when he did not come), a roguish boy would rush into my room at precisely two minutes to nine, and, after a hurried "Good Morning!" (he never forgot that), would explain in a breathless staccato:

"I'm most awfully sorry, but I hadn't time to polish off Alexander the Great last night. The car——"

I never could cure him of his tendency to the double superlative, and his fondness for raey figures of speech; and so, with occasional changes of metaphor and variations as to the personality of Alexander, the familiar tale was repeated. Of course it was most unpedagogical of me to accept the excuse day after day, but it was really very pleasant to have those morning calls from that happy-faced boy. Besides, I had no fear about that boy's really neglecting his work or failing at examinations; he was not the boy to shirk any duty, he was too much the gentleman to be inattentive in class, and he was quick and clever in every way. He was only trying a little experiment on me and was wondering how long it could be kept up. Sometimes, indeed, as if he thought it not quite fair that he should always get off scot-free and other boys be detained, he would fail to turn up in the morning and would make some shocking mistake in the course of the lesson; then he would come to my room at the close of the day and give Alexander a most beautiful polish under my personal supervision.

At last, one morning, after I had

listened once-more to the oft-told tale of the car and its vicissitudes, I remarked:

"This has been a most interesting serial, George, but don't you think that everything has happened to that car that ought to happen to any self-respecting vehicle? Suppose we begin on a new story to-morrow."

George smiled (and George's smile was a tonic that helped one through a weary day), and withdrew without comment.

I should have been sadly disappointed if my boy had not come next morning; but I knew that he would come—knew that he would accept my challenge. And surely enough, at precisely two minutes to nine, he dashed breathlessly into my classroom.

"I'm most awfully sorry, but I hadn't time to polish off Alexander the Great last night. They're getting up a church entertainment at the Credit, and I had to be at a rehearsal." And before I could recover breath, he was gone.

Who wouldn't love a boy like that?

He was absolutely irresistible, and everybody loved him. He was so sunny, so full of fun ("never was known to have a grouch", the other boys said), and such a wonderful athlete! Never had we such a Cadet

Corps as when he was Captain, never such a Rugby Team as when he led it to victory. I can see him now, making one of his beautiful runs down the field; and, again, at the close of a glorious game, borne high upon the shoulders of the other boys after the manner of the old chieftains raised upon the shields of their followers. And—most marvellous of all—he remained quite unspoiled by his popularity, and unspoiled by his military life.

And this splendid young life is over—oh, the pity of it all!

"It seems only the other day", they told me once at the manse, "that George used to come tapping at the door to ask, 'Please may Wallie come out and play?' His home was a mile or two up the river, and he often came down to the village, riding his little Shetland pony or driving behind it in a little cart. And in his home at "Thornwood" they have a picture of a chubby little boy mounted on that Shetland pony. And, in a moment, as it were, the chubby little boy shot into manhood and was off to the War.

My last picture of George is as he stood on the landing outside my little flat. It was the night before he left for overseas, and he and Howard had come in to say good-bye. As they went downstairs, George turned

at the landing to call back something, and I can see him clearly, as he stood there for a moment, flushed and smiling, then ran lightly down the steps. Those lines which Wilfrid Gibson wrote of Rupert Brooke often come to me when I recall this last picture of George:

"He's gone!
I do not understand;
But as he turned to go,
And waved his hand,
In his young eyes a sudden glory shone,
And I was dazzled by a sunset-glow,
And he was gone!"

George was wounded at Vimy, and, as a brother-officer wrote, could easily have gone to "Blighty"; but that was not George's way. He had to carry on. He only went to the Transport lines for a few days' rest.

To continue the story in the words of the brother-officer:

"We began to prepare for the third of May show. George was told that he would not be in it, but, although his previous wound was not yet healed, he accompanied us up to the trenches on the first of May. He was too fond of work, and nobody with any authority tried to make him stay back. . . . Well, night came on, and about twelve o'clock the battalion moved up to within five hundred yards of the German lines, and com-

menced to dig in. It was moonlight and Fritz saw us, and between twelve and 3.45 a.m. he laid his barrage on top of us twice. 'Twas a wonder we survived that, but our men had made the most of their time and were pretty well dug in, so we came off very well. Then Zero hour came—the hour. A few minutes before that time I went over to George and shook hands with him. We wished each other luck, etc., and I returned to my men. That was the last I saw of George. He was on the right flank, the position of honour, by the way. I was on the left. I will not attempt to describe that show otherwise than to say, I wonder how any one lived.

"I have made many friends, but I have never met one whom I liked and admired as much as George. He was absolutely the best in every way, physically as well as morally. I don't believe he *ever* did a wrong thing."

In this 3rd of May "show"—the Battle of Fresnoy—George was severely wounded. Two days later, his twenty-first birthday, he was brought into hospital, and it was soon found that a leg had to be amputated. He might have survived this, but it was discovered that the wound received at Vimy a month before—in the apex of the lung—had not healed. He was, moreover, weak from loss of blood and

exhausted by the prolonged strain. What is popularly known as "galloping consumption" set in, and, after six weeks of suffering, he died.

"To what purpose was this waste?" was the text upon which one of Toronto's most eloquent preachers delivered a war sermon just about that time. To what purpose, indeed? If only some definite, satisfactory answer were forthcoming to the sad question? Perhaps there is, behind the sacrifice of so much of our splendid young manhood, some infinite purpose, some sublime good, that we know not of; perhaps "the red, sweet wine of youth" has not been poured out in vain so prodigally. But to our finite understandings the only consolation is the thought that these lads who died before their time shall at any rate not grow old,

"Or tired on any dawning morrow,
Nor ever change, or feel the clutches
Of wither'd Time on his old crutches,
Nor fear the wild gray osprey, Sorrow!"

As I said before, Douglas went overseas some six months before George and Howard. Cheery letters came from him during the fall and early winter describing life at the training-camps, impressions of old London, and visits to relatives up in the heart of the Highlands. By this time the British Government had be-

come seized of the importance of machine-guns, and early in February, 1916, came a letter from Douglas, announcing his arrival in France as an officer in the 4th Brigade Machine Gun Company. His earlier letters speak of the Colt gun, his later of the Vickers, which superseded the Colt. After a tour or two at the front Douglas was sent to take a special course of instruction on the Vickers at a machine-gun school near Boulogne. "It is a great thing, the machine-gun", he writes. "There is something fascinating about pressing the thumb-piece and hearing it rattling off five hundred shots a minute." Later on, when he returned to the Front, he spoke of the activity of the German machine-guns, but added cheerily: "We retaliate, and in five nights my section fired over 1400 rounds. They never scrimp us for ammunition now."

Writing in the late summer of 1916, he speaks hopefully of the chances of peace. "If the war continues, two or three more tours will bring us to winter again. I don't much want to see another winter here. I saw enough of last winter to suit me."

How often the hope deferred that maketh the heart sick must have been the experience of the gallant, uncomplaining lads, as they passed through

campaign after campaign, now gaining a little ground, now losing it again! What an endless see-saw it must have seemed to them!

Shortly before Christmas, 1916, Douglas came home on furlough. He had been wounded at Courcelette, and, indeed, officially reported missing. The latter cable had been fortunately followed closely by one from Douglas himself: "Report missing all rot!" But he appeared pale and worn, when I saw him a day or two after he reached home, and there was a look in his eyes that I did not like—the look of one who had seen unutterable things. It was not fear—the heart of the Douglas could know no fear—but a sort of horror, the horror of being brought face to face with the unspeakable awfulness of modern war. In a few months, however, he went back to it all, though the going back must have tried even his fortitude sorely. Then, at Fresnoy, he was again wounded, this time very severely, losing an eye and being otherwise injured.

"At any rate Duggie will be out of it now", was the consoling thought that came to all of us, and glad we were to see the scarred young veteran when he got back in the late summer of 1917. He had been decorated by the King, and his Majesty had in-

quired very specially about his injuries and most of all about the loss of his eye. Douglas was quite cheerful over that loss, only remarking that he wouldn't go back to College now, he would go straight into business.

A year later—it seemed the cruelest thing, the meanest irony of fate—he was struck down by influenza and pneumonia. His reserve power had been used up in the war and he had not the strength to combat the double disease.

“If it were not for his nights, he might pull through”, said the physician. But in the delirium of pneumonia he was back in France and Flanders, fighting all his battles over again. It was too much, and in October of 1918, just as the War was being fought to a finish overseas, the battle of life ended for Douglas, and Death, the victor, claimed his own.

Death, the victor? No, one really cannot believe it in the case of a boy like Douglas. Some one has said that it is the poverty of our lives that makes faith in immortality difficult. That is very true, but, contrariwise, the richness and promise of some lives makes faith in immortality easy. And so, to any one who knew and loved Douglas—and the sunny warmth of his disposition and the frank manliness of his character endeared him to

many—he, being dead, yet liveth. And I like to think that when I, too, shall go over Life's parapet and steal across the silent No Man's Land of death to the Great Objective that lies beyond, there will be waiting at least one loyal lad to greet me with outstretched hand and cheery word of welcome, for he is of the stuff that does not alter or forget in this world or the next.

Of Bruce, the last boy in the back row of the picture, I can say very little. He was only a short time in one of my classes, and he left school about the time the war broke out. He went overseas with the Buffs, but was with Col. Harbottle and his famous "Six Bits" battalion during those last Hundred Days of the war. He came out unwounded, indeed, but utterly exhausted. For bravery on the field he received the Military Cross, and he is now back in Canada, not yet quite restored to normal health and strength, but in a fair way, I thought when I saw him last, to make a complete recovery. Wonderful, indeed, is the recuperative power of youth.

Glancing at the kneeling boys in the front row of the picture, one notices that the first boy on the left is looking straight in the direction towards which his rifle is pointing; the other boys seem to be looking straight

at the camera. Of Alan, this first boy, I have written elsewhere in some detail,* so I will say little of him here. A son of the manse, he was one of three brothers who went to the War and one of two who fell. He crossed the ocean early in 1916, and saw some of the fighting at the Somme in the summer and autumn of that year. In the spring of 1917 he was home on sick leave for three months, but returned to France in the summer. Though he escaped the fighting at Vimy and Lens, he went through the horror of Passchendaele, and the greater horror of the campaign of 1918—that final phase of the War. My last letters from him speak with pride of the advance, with sadness of the price paid in human life. One by one his pals fell about him, until at last, after Bourlon Wood, he was the only original officer left of his battalion at the Front. Then, as I have heard from two comrades to whom he spoke quite freely, he had a premonition that his own fate was near at hand. And on September 30, in the great Battle of Cambrai, in which he, a lad of only twenty, was acting Second-in-Command of his battalion, he was killed. In his death I seemed to feel not only his loss (great

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as that was, for he was a lad after my own heart), but, in a sort of cumulative way, all the losses that had come before to our little circle—it was a culmination of sorrow and tragedy.

The next two boys, Basil and Raymond, were brothers as well as comrades-in-arms. They were American lads, hailing from Boston. But their forbears came from Nova Scotia—old Aeadie—and it was as much, I fancy, the call of La Belle France as of Mother England that they heard and promptly answered. Raymond was twenty, Basil eighteen, when they joined the Colours. Raymond was a brilliant lad at school, and he used to contribute much to the interest and not a little to the gaiety of our history classes, rising often to a point of order, very respectfully but insistently, when controversial topics, like the American Revolutionary War or the War of 1812, were under discussion—he was never, I know, quite satisfied with our version of the Saratoga incident. But the War came, and lo! our Yankee boy was British of the British. He and Basil joined the “American Legion”, and they chafed at the long delay here and in England. At last they reached France, having been transferred to a Canadian unit. “I am an old soldier now”, Raymond writes. “I have been

in France nearly three weeks." That was in May, 1917. In June he was killed; he was leading his platoon into action for the third time at La Coulette when he fell. On Dominion Day our Yankee lad was laid to rest at Villers-au-Bois.

The official news of his death was late in coming, but a cryptic message from Basil brought the tidings to his people. Basil was not permitted to send word in plain English, but the meaning of his cable, "Be brave—he was brave to the end", was only too clear.

Just about that time I happened to be reading John Buchan's description of the death of another Raymond—Raymond Asquith—and I could not help applying his words to this dear Raymond of ours: "He loved his youth, and his youth has become eternal. Debonnair and brilliant and brave, he is now a part of that immortal England which knows not age or weariness or defeat."

Basil (better known as "Buster" by the boys) "carried on" as best he could without his elder brother. Wounded at Passchendaele, he came home at Christmas on leave. He might have stayed; in fact, he was assigned to "light duty" here indefinitely; but he refused the "bomb-proof job". "If it had been Ray", he said when spoken

to on the subject, "he would have gone back, and I must go. Besides, as I figure it out, every man under thirty-five who is physically fit, ought to be over there." I could not help thinking what a pity it was that such proficiency in moral arithmetic, such a clear figuring of it out, was not more general. And I recall a day in the early spring of 1918, when I stood with a few others on the platform of a suburban railway-station and caught a last smile and wave of the hand from the brave lad as he stood in the rear vestibule of the receding train which was bearing him back to the War. Going out the first time, as all the boys said, was just a great adventure; but going back again was a very different story. What it must have been to this boy who went the first time with the support and companionship of his older brother, and went back alone, one can only vaguely imagine.

"Stay in England if you are offered a Depot job", some of us urged him. "Don't try to get back to France. Think of your Mother—and of Raymond."

"Yes, I'll stay in England for Mother's sake", he answered, "unless I am needed in France."

But of course he was needed in France, as we might have known

would be the case. There was dire need of the boys of the good old bulldog breed just then in that lonely salient where the sons of Canada were "standing to" for so long, while the tide of battle surged around them. So we were not surprised when word soon came that Basil had rejoined his battalion in France—it was then just a year after Raymond's death. He had figured out the problem of duty to a clear and heroic solution, and stepped once again on French soil in the hour of deadliest peril. The Germans had made their last and most wonderful drive, reconquering in a week (was it not?) the ground that our armies had gained in a long summer's campaign.

Then came the miracle—the right-about—the advance. Then the Canadian Corps, used as a spearhead (how familiar became that metaphor!) won imperishable fame. What is it that Ludendorff himself confesses about that black day—the eighth of August—and succeeding days? But, alas! in that last phase—those Hundred Days—we lost as many men as during all the war down to this time. The one little Secondary School of which I write lost eighty-six boys (of some five hundred who went to the war), and nearly half of these eighty-six were killed during those last three

months. And the same, I fancy, is true of every little unit, and of the whole Canadian Corps. The price of victory was high, indeed!

On one of those days of fiercest fighting Basil was badly wounded. For hours he lay out in the open, unable to move, expecting each minute that another machine-gun bullet would come his way and complete the work of the one that had laid him low. A sergeant crawling to his help was killed. Rescue was impossible until nightfall. Then he was brought in, more dead than alive; and, by sheer force of will-power, I believe, he finally recovered. "You have no business to be alive, you know", said his physician. "By all the rules you ought to have died."

But instead of the sturdy boy who had merited the name of "Buster", there came back to Canada a pale and badly-shaken and much older-grown man. A few months, however, and he began to be himself again; even his gaiety returned, mingled, as I imagine it always will be henceforth, with a gravity born of tragic experiences and fateful days.

Of the next boy, Morton, I dare not say much. When he won a Military Medal and the inevitable press-item appeared, Morton served notice upon two or three of us who, he sus-

pected, might have been responsible, threatening to cut us off with field postcards if we ever gave out any information whatsoever about him. So, though I have some good stories of his exploits as a runner, and one particularly raucous story of an early morning surprise party across No Man's Land to the German lines (it was here, I think, that he won a Bar to that Medal), and another story telling of the attack on Regina Trench in October of 1916 (a story of uncut wires and consequent tragedy—a story of twenty-four hours that seemed twenty-four years—Morton making, as runner, innumerable trips between the line and headquarters, never stopping going one way or the other—he was the only runner left at the last) I must leave the story untold. I have often thought, anyway, apropos of Hawthorne's "Twice-Told Tales", that a series of "Half-Told Tales" also might be interesting. Just a suggestion or two—let the reader do the rest.

Morton came through a thousand adventures and escapes, and he lives—but *not* to tell the tale. He is reticence itself, and what information I have, though authentic, is not from him. It is amazing how all the boys, indeed, while communicative enough regarding the heroic deeds of others, preserve a sphinx-like silence about

their own. I trust, however, that Morton and the others will forgive me for setting down what I have done. I have really left a great deal unsaid.

Jack, the next boy in the picture, left school in the summer of 1915, and I somehow lost sight of him. He had always been a reserved and diffident lad, and, when he donned his uniform, he did not go calling upon all his friends in consequence. He just slipped away quietly, and my first intimation that he was overseas was almost immediately followed by the news of his death. He had not quite finished his training in England—he was in the Air Force—when one of those accidents that were unfortunately so common and so often fatal in that branch of the service terminated his military career. One can be thankful, at any rate, that he did not see active service. Though he would have been, I am sure, one of the bravest of the brave, yet the horrors of actual fighting would have been worse to a lad of his quiet and sensitive disposition than to boys of a more assertive and bellicose nature. Worthy of as much honour are those who died without entering the fray as are those who fell in the thick of battle. As Helen Gray Cone says, in her little poem,

"On the Death of an Untried Soldier",

"He died in armour, died with lance at rest,
The trumpet had not sounded for the
charge;

Yet shall his guerdon of golden fame be
large,
For he was ready, he had met the test.

"No sacrifice is more complete and clean
Than that in the locked soul secret and
still;

Take for a visible deed the perfect will;
Crown with sad pride the accomplishment
unseen.

"Hang his bright arms undinted on the wall,
In all brave colours whereto his dreams
aspired;

Blazon his blank shield as his heart
desired,
And write above : "The readiness is all!"

Of Guy, the next boy, I know nothing. He came to us from the West somewhere, and remained only a short time at the school. What became of him I cannot tell. He may have gone to the War, but no word of him in any way reached me.

Alan, the next boy (another Alan), was a despatch-rider at Valcartier camp, at the age of fifteen. When the first Canadian Contingent went overseas, Alan came back to school. But he was quite unsettled, and after Christmas he did not return; and, except for his extreme youth, I was not surprised to hear that he was at Exhibition Camp. In the fall of 1915

he was in England, and soon word came that he was leaving for France. But trench life was too much for him, and pneumonia—of which he had had an attack before leaving Canada—set in. Back in "Blighty", he was restless and unhappy, and presently managed to get to France again. Soon, however, he was wounded, and an amputated leg ended his fighting days. Another tedious experience of hospital life in England was in store for him; but at last he got safely back to Canada, and is, I understand, managing to achieve success and happiness in life despite his serious handicap.

The last boy, Claude, I recently heard of as bound for South America on some business venture. He had only just returned from overseas, when he started off again. I heard little from or about him while he was at the front, but I know that he won a Military Medal and was counted "a first-class fighting man".

And now, as I look back at the picture, I am seized, as, indeed, I often am (and who is not?), with a strange feeling of the unreality of the happenings of the past five years. Surely—the fancy comes again and again—it has been all a dream! Surely there never was—there never could have been—such a war as that of 1914-

1919! Why, it is not so long since I read a book—it was much talked of at the time—proving that war was impossible under modern conditions. And, besides, it did not seem thinkable that the world, having emerged from the Dark Ages some centuries since, should enter still darker ages. Surely, mankind has been acquiring a little common sense—coming to realize not merely the wickedness and the barbarism, but the crass stupidity of war! Surely humanity has grown somewhat in grace and culture and kindness and sanity through the ages! Twenty-three centuries have passed since Plato taught a serene idealism in the olive groves of Academus; nineteen centuries since a Greater than Plato stood upon an olive-crowned hill and put forth a strange new religion all compounded of Sweetness and Light. Surely the poor, dull world has learned a little of the lesson—has caught something of that divinely gracious spirit? Surely war has become an unthinkable absurdity, an impossible anachronism! Yes, I surely have been dreaming—a prolonged and ghastly dream. I must have been reading late last night—reading old Gibbon, too—reading of the wild work of Goth and Hun and Vandal in those dark days when the wonderful civilization of Greece and Rome came tumb-

ling down in tragic ruin! And in my dream I have mixed and magnified and multiplied all the horrors of that far-off time! But soon I shall be wakened from my dream by the little alarm-clock standing there on the table at my bedside; and I shall hurry over to the old school, trying hard to shake off the memory of the hideous nightmare; and presently a warm shaft of sunshine will penetrate the gloom of my classroom and my spirit, when, at precisely two minutes to nine, a roguish boy will rush in upon me to wish me a merry Good Morning and to explain in his breathless staccato:

"I'm most awfully sorry, but I hadn't time to polish off Alexander the Great last night. The car——"

Oh, little Alarm-clock, why don't you ring out? 'Tis surely time to waken now!

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