

Firm Earth my Comrade, Seas my deep delight,
The Sky my memory of soaring Wings.
The Day my counsellor, my guardian Night,
My Life the echo where far Music clings.

" F I R M E A R T H M Y C O M R A D E "

Some wanderings of a
Grounded Airman

by

H.H.J.

DEDICATION

To all those good friends who were my companions in this personal story, especially to those who have now travelled on to our Journey's End; where, at the appointed hour, I shall rejoin them in that happy completion.

H.H.J.

December 1950.

Foreword

Having written these notes, I now ask myself why? and it occurs to me that some day, some other person happening by chance to read them, may ask the same question.

Certainly these reminiscences were not written with any idea of formal presentation. This account is essentially personal, intimate, a cursive jotting down of thoughts, some letters and some diary extracts, and not a planned document. Now that I have retired, in years earlier than one might ordinarily have expected to do so, I find, - beyond such activities as I still, thank Goodness! am able to achieve for myself, - unexpectedly free time to pause also and think upon the past. I find that past years, lived perforce so much for the moment, with unforeseen chances, changes, and results, are somewhat confused and difficult to set in perspective.

As a boy and youth I was supposed to be, - and in fact was, - much at the disadvantage of indifferent health. Family doctors and Harley Street specialists emphasized for me that tiresome word "caution". It seemed that the outcome of my University career, when in a bleak December of Michaelmas term of 1912 I went up to Christ Church, Oxford, - could at its most enterprising only lead to some placid and well-protected way of life. When the 1914 war broke out, and I wanted to "join up", my doctor prophesied my demise within 6 months if I did so, and the Military Medical Board also turned me down. I desperately sought the intervention of my Dean ("Tommy Strong" of Christ Church, later Bishop of Oxford), with the military authorities and he, with some qualms of conscience, I think, poor man, interceded for me. The decision went forth, that if I would go through a month of intensive physical training, my acceptability would be re-considered. I did this, was accepted, and received my Commission in September 1914^{at} Churn Camp. My "Journals" of the war period, and of later Service, show, sufficiently to be of amusement to me, that original predictions based on medical grounds and general probabilities of a sheltered career, were not exactly accurate! Then came other medical edicts for my dissolution; but these present notes of mine from 1929-1951 again show a, to me, entertaining inaccuracy in those predictions! Have these unexpected extensions of life and activity been worth while? and would I like to experience them again? To the first I can answer yes! and to the second no! I have found it interesting however, and somewhat spiritually relieving to re-live again in these pages the years now definitely gone; to set right the sequence of events, and to get some perspective of this curious journey of life as it moves nearer to its closing stages, now perhaps, not so far ahead. One cannot of course live through a half century and more, most of it amidst war and drastic change, without the shadow of particular and sombre tragedy. That too I have known; but of such one does not write; and even one's thoughts spontaneously contract as remembrance tends that way. To such thoughts the way is barred, as against some destructive power, which shall not take control. Such things are of the

past, and there all wisdom bids them stay; treasuring only the knowledge that the beauty of living does yet survive them, and that the pain of their experience is only important now in so far as it may be used sometimes for the protection of those not yet experienced. I am not of course so complacent as to imagine that misadventure is no longer possible for me! but when once distresses have been overcome, it is improbable that later mischance will ever have the same sharp poignancy.

No one is likely to find these notes of mine of any great interest, except possibly a few good friends or perhaps after many years, if they survive. The story is merely the random account of an ordinary person, and of some of the surprises, the unexpected ways, and the unlocked for content which he has met with. As I sit writing here in my Cairo pied-à-terre, the setting in which I have lived since my return alone from Australia in July 1948, I have around me in my rooms an assembly of trophies, mementoes, photos, reminiscent of my wanderings; and a few personal treasures of family pictures, furniture, and silver, to remind me of a manner of living now wholly past. I cannot, indeed, pretend that I never feel the sadness of disillusion, the loneliness of loss. In the main however I rejoice that I still can share the warmth of good-fellowship, and the interests of people active in mind and body; and that young people as well as those less young, still extend to me the privilege of their confidence and friendship. That anyhow I think I may record to date as an achievement not without encouragement in life's onward way.

H. H. J.

Cairo, July 1951.