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As We Were

(We thank Mr. S. H. Perry-Warnes of Saxthorpe for these interesting reminiscences of the School in the days of the late Mr. George Hare.—Ed.)

“Times change and we change with them.” It may, therefore, interest the present-day Pastonian to peep at the Paston School of just over a generation ago.

The boys, coming from far and near, were composed of the sons of the fairly well-to-do, and also of the scholarship boys. The latter outshone the others in almost every way. The boarders were mostly of the duller type, less able to absorb the knowledge presented to them, but, for the most part, robust and vigorous like their fathers who sent them. Discipline was rigid and severe; games played were rough and energetic; but politeness and good manners were cultivated to the utmost.

Those were the days of corporal punishment, meted out often very severely. The playground at that time presented rowdy and

boisterous scenes. All games played were of the rough and tumble kind. There was much picking up of sides for this or that game, disputes and compromises, rowdyism and yet good boyish fun that made up happy recreation.

Towering above this noisy collection of boys and joining in the games and general good cheer, as if the years had been cheated of time and he yet a schoolboy himself, was the tall Scot, Charles Edward Grey, arch-disciplinarian, under whom the boys were to sit in class when play was over, never to move an eyelid or deviate one fraction from the lesson in hand. Good natured, humorous, of a dynamic personality, this great man was to us the perfect schoolmaster.

Who is this coming up the playground, boys stopping their games to let him pass? It is Sergeant Hendry, time-served soldier and Gymnastic Instructor from the Royal Norfolk Regiment. See how he takes his squad in the gymnasium. There we find him, in shorts and singlet, in build and deportment a superman. His hair is close-cropped and he carries a broad, open countenance. Tufts of hair grow on his cheeks and his massive chest expands to seemingly impossible dimensions. The great calves of his legs are in keeping with his general development. His caustic wit and sarcasm know no bounds. He first gives a perfect demonstration of the exercise in hand and then we march or double, go up the rope, perform on the parallel bars or vault the horse, always with his brown, hairy arms to save us from harm. He is our hero, out and out. At "Stand Easy time" he marches up and down as if his limbs were mounted on rubber and recounts to us his soldierly experiences the which add zest to our games as soon as we are let loose again.

Sunday afternoon walks were a great delight to boarders and although regulations said that not more than three boys might walk out together that did not prevent a meeting-place being arranged; and many were the mass-meetings of boys arriving in two's and three's for sky-larking. How vividly I remember six of us meeting in Westwick Park and going to the lake. With the crass audacity of youth we unmoored the boat and set out for a pleasant afternoon's rowing! Time flew away like the birds overhead and suddenly we realised we were in danger of being late back at school. Bible reading took place from 4.30 to 5 o'clock every Sunday afternoon and to be late for this was a heinous offence liable to have serious consequences! We made for the boat-house. Unmooring the craft had been easy; to get it safely tied up again was anything but easy and took us a long time. By spurts of running and walking we got back to school ten minutes late! Timid and well covered with mud we slouched to our places. To our dismay nothing was said. This could only

mean that a report of our escapade had preceded our arrival. What gigantic proportions are assumed in schooldays by events that in after-life would merely cause a laugh. For us the pleasant events of a happy afternoon were turned to heavy remorse. How gladly we took our punishment next morning when we were lined up for "execution." What a relief from dreadful anticipation!

During the summer term cricket became the centre of all interest. Practice took place every evening and after that we went into "prep." The "prep-room" always had its air of being the "Holy of Holies." On one sunny, summer evening the door had been left open because of the heat. All was silent when in trotted an inquisitive dog. At first he went from boy to boy, sniffing here and there and being friendly in a general way. A murmur arose which gradually developed into an uproar. The master on duty was a kindly, gentle soul and though he tried his utmost to control the situation his efforts were without avail. His lips moved, but no sound was heard from them. Here was an opportunity for boys to let off steam. Soon chairs were turned over, desks moved about with a grating noise, boys pushed each other over, whistled and shouted, and added what they could to the general confusion. The dog became frantic with fear, rushed helter-skelter here and there and finally backed into a corner where he sat on his haunches growling, barking and showing his teeth. Amidst this riot the Headmaster entered, but even his great prestige failed to produce order. The Head Boy was sent for. Captains of Schools are chosen for their integrity and ability; no task must be too much for them. Strange though it may seem, his entry produced a greater effect than did that of the Headmaster. He advanced towards the animal, took a grab at his collar and with superhuman strength, it seemed to us, dragged him yelping, snapping and howling down the drive to Grammar School Road.

As I look back over the years it seems to me that the foundations of the success of the Paston School were in some measure laid by three outstanding men whose characters made such a lasting impression upon the minds of my contemporaries and myself—Mr. George Hare, Mr. Grey and Sergeant Hendry. I hope I have succeeded in producing an impression of the atmosphere of and conditions in the school when I was a boarder. In the words of the School Song—as we sang it—"Good luck to the Paston School."

S. H. Perry-Warnes.