

SOME REMINISCENCES OF EARLY SALISBURY

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Taken from *Ye Sarum Booke*, 1927

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My work at Salisbury began in the fall of 1906. The school at that time had about thirty boys, even that number being an extraordinary increase from the year before. The central building was then as it is now, but then it housed the whole school. The two wings were about a quarter of their present size. At that time the gymnasium was not yet built. The present chapel was then used as the gymnasium, and the room now used as the physics laboratory served as the chapel. Neither of the cottages were built. The football field was still an inconspicuous hillock. One feels, of course, that with the greater equipment and larger numbers there have come many advantages that did not exist twenty years ago. Yet the early days were not without their compensations.

In those days we had no bells—except a small bell in the study hall, which marked the change of periods. We had a boy who was a splendid bugler. He sounded reveille, mess, chapel, and taps. The bells were installed in 1907, “owing to the many excuses of the boys when late at meals, that they did not hear the first bugle,” as *Ye Sarum Booke* reports it. *Ye Sarum Booke* remarks further, optimistically, that “the decrease in tardy-marks is apparent.”

A pleasant custom, possible only with a very small school was Mountain Day. My first Mountain Day is still a distinct memory. It was, as always, not announced until the morning of the day itself. Shortly after breakfast five “three seaters” appeared—it was in the days when the automobile was still an expensive luxury. The whole school embarked thereon and were carried (except on the hills, where the virile walked) up over the Riga Ridge to Bash Bish Falls. Bash Bish is a picturesque, precipitous place, and the boys thoroughly enjoyed exploring wild ravines and leaning out over the sheer cliffs. The masters, however, vowed that we would never go

there again; when one has only thirty boys, one can not risk the possibility of having to collect the mangled fragments of two or three of them at the base of a cliff.

Subsequent Mountain-Day trips were most often walks. More than once we started from the School on a Sunday afternoon and hiked through Sage’s Ravine, up along a trail through the woods to the Alander House near Mt. Everett. The Alander House was a small inn usually empty by the middle of October, and it was all ours for the night. The next morning after breakfast, small groups would go to the top of Everett. A convenient rendez-vous would be named, whither everyone would repair for lunch after the morning’s explorations. A huge pot of coffee would be made over a huge bonfire, and everyone would make a ravenous meal of sandwiches, cake, and fruit, sent in wagons from the school. We would walk back to school in the afternoon. Obviously, it was an extremely enjoyable outing. In fact, the last one was a bit too enjoyable. The boys were on a jaunt that came but once a year; the masters were not prowling around on a hunt for trouble. The rooms in the Alander House were each provided with a bowl and pitcher of water, and they each had a transom. The temptation to creep up the hall, to dash a little water through the transom, and then to run, was, to some, irresistible. The temptation to get his revenge was, to the dripping target, equally irresistible. Then gangs and raids and rescues and pillow-fights and overturned beds. Strangely, the proprietor, the next year, was not particularly anxious to have us return. And the school had now become too large for his accommodations.

The last Mountain Day, in 1920, was a motor-trip to West Point. Two boys from West Point who were here at that time proved most interesting guides in showing us all the sights. In the afternoon we saw the Boston College football team beaten by the cadets. The greatest treat of the day, the most enjoyable because it was wholly unexpected, was a brief glimpse of King Albert of Belgium. We had noticed on our arrival a huge hydroplane out in midstream and soon learned that the

King had flown up that very morning from New York City, to make a brief call at the Academy, and was due to start on his return at about the time we got there. We lingered near the ferry-house for a few minutes, and presently he was driven down the hill in a large car, from which he went into a launch, then boarded his hydroplane, and in a short time slowly rose into the air only a few feet away from us. Every one thought that this was one of the most beautiful sights that he had ever seen—the wonderful scenic setting, the georgeous autumn day, and the powerful, graceful plane.

Perhaps that day was intended to be a fitting end and climax of the long series of Mountain Days. Such trips had become difficult to arrange for the larger school which we were growing to be. Besides the football trips to the Yale Bowl were beginning in a measure to take their place.

In the earlier days, our athletic teams were not so likely to be victorious as they have been more recently. For a time we did not feel strong enough even to try to play rugby football. We played association instead, and were able to arrange for outside games with a few schools, among them being Westminster. We usually won these games of association football because of our greater interest and better coaching. For a great many years we tried to have hockey games with outside schools. It was, however, frequently impossible to adhere to a schedule on account of the vagaries of the weather. Games were often played under most adverse conditions—one with an inch or two of water on the ice, and another at Berkshire in a high wind with the thermometer below zero. This Berkshire game was planned as a part of the entertainment at a week-end dance. The girls as our guests sleighed to Berkshire and watched the game and *said* they enjoyed it. *Ye Sarum Booke* contains this adequate description of the hockey of another year: "This hockey season consisted of only two games played and one day's practice. The games were both lost. In saying that there was only one day's practice, we mean practicing the game itself. There was a great deal of practice in putting up the sides of the rink, taking them down

again, and building rafts to search for sunken goals. Whenever the rink was together, there would be a thaw, and certainly the captain and manager had lots of practice in rink building." Another report has a strangely familiar sound: "Owing to the large amount of snow which fell in the early part of the season, a great deal of time was spent in cleaning the rink."

During the war the school organized itself as a military company and had military drill. Wooden guns were obtained to be carried in the maneuvers of the drill. At first, in the spring, of 1917, Mr. Gordon, master in mathematics at that time, was the captain. He had been in the Plattsburg summer camp. The other officers were boys who had had some similar military training. The masters, except Captain Gordon, volunteered as privates. At the suggestion of the boys, the drills were held between six and seven in the morning, so as not to interfere with the baseball. The next year Mr. Gordon left the school to enter the service. The junior officers, with Emerson Quaile as captain, very successfully conducted the drills by themselves. In the fall of 1918, Captain Corcoran, an officer of the English army who had been retired on account of wounds, took charge of the military training. There was no longer any football. Everyone was kept busy with boxing, target-practice (with a few real rifles which had now been secured) and trench-digging. In fact, every one was so busy, and everything military had become so much of a grind that a lively, personal pleasure was felt by all when the armistice was signed and it was possible to restore the more normal school routine.

One Salisbury festivity that was disturbed not even by the war was the school play. Not once has there been, I think, a year in which some play was not given. In the earlier years it was usually presented in the spring—very often during the Anniversary Day festivities. We did not then have any suitable auditorium. So at first the plays were given in the little theatre in the Scoville Library, or in Roberts Hall in Lakeville.

The public was invited and admission was charged. An

interesting novelty occasionally was a ballet. There was usually, for those wishing it, a class in dancing during the winter term. A teacher would come once or twice a week and the classes were held for an hour or two in the afternoon. The best dancers were selected for the ballet and were given special instruction. The Lakeville Journal reports, in reference to one of these ballets, that "when the six pretty girls, dressed in red satin bodices, regulation ballet suits, red stockings and ballet slippers, came on the stage and 'tripped the light fantastic' through many graceful figures that required a great deal of skill and quickness of foot, they were applauded again and again and were encored twice. There were also a few comic songs by one of the boys with the ballet as chorus." In 1909 and 1910, standard, three-act plays were presented. These proved to require more time and work for their preparation than could be afforded, especially in the busy spring term. So for two or three years thereafter there was a reaction in favor of rather informal vaudeville, gotten up almost entirely by the boys themselves and done without excessive preparation—yet enjoyed as much, perhaps, as the more pretentious efforts. There were such offerings as (so-called) comic dialogues and fancy dancing. A short sketch written by one of the boys with the title of "Boozletop, the Cannibal King" made a great hit. Since the present study hall was built, the plays have always been given there.

Room 2 was used, originally, as the study hall. Before 1908 the school was lighted by acetylene gas; electricity had not become available. The dormitories in those days were divided into single alcoves, with the partitions between them rising some eight or nine feet. All the gas jets were in the hall and the alcoves were not well enough lighted for studying. Therefore everyone "studied in" all the time. As the school grew, this tiny study hall became very crowded. There were for a time more than forty-five desks packed into it. That was indeed the golden age for note-passers and whisperers, and the crucible of magisterial skill! When the electric lights were put in and the alcoves were made into rooms, "studying out"

became possible, and the crowded condition was relieved. And in 1913, with a prodigious amount of pounding and sawing which went on while recitations were being held in rooms close by, the present study hall was made ready. Compared with the old room it looked so light and spacious that no supervision seemed necessary. It was dedicated by a talk about "Work" by Dr. Luther, President of Trinity College. His remarks were not only full of wise counsel, but also witty. He declared that he could easily give lots of advice about "Work"; he had, when a boy, received lots which he had never used. I often suspected that some of his listeners did not pay much heed to his wise counsel, but that they did observe and follow this practice of his boyhood.

Salisbury winters have not always been the mild tame affairs that they have been in recent years. We have had, on occasion storms that *were* storms. I remember one very interesting blizzard. It snowed and snowed and blew and finally began to rain. There was a hard freeze. The result was that everything was buried in a deep snow and covered with an icy crust hard enough to walk on, but almost too slippery to stand on. There is only an ounce of exaggeration in the claim that one could start from the Front Mound and coast at any speed, in any direction, for any distance, over any fence or other obstacle. Another historic storm arrived two or three days before the Christmas holidays. The roads were blocked. "Will the school be kept over?" Everyone was in despair, especially the few who were privileged to go early. The privileged few arose before daybreak; with their bags they skied to sleighs near Barack Matiff. The rest got shovels—recitations were of no consequence then—and went after the drifts. It was a happy moment when they were met by the road-men, breaking a way with heavy sleds. All left on time, though they were carried to the station, crowded into rough farm-sleds with carpets of straw. The winter of 1920 was our severest, when one blizzard followed close after another. That was the year when the school was without any mail from Wednesday noon until Sunday night, and when six en-

gines one after another, were derailed on the Central New England, while trying to clear the tracks of snow.

The winters have been extremely mild. One winter the lakes were still without any ice in early February. The winter of 1913 was conspicuously free of snow. There was wonderful skating on the lakes all the winter term. So ice-boats were the craze. Several were built. They were mostly modest affairs, with old skates fastened to light timbers, and fitted with small sails. But they were very fast and easily handled. Two boys from the Middle West thought that they alone knew how to make them properly. They made the frames of heavy beams (no flimsy two-by-fours for them!) which they themselves had laboriously dragged across the fields. The sail, boom, and mast matched the frame. The whole school was on hand to witness the launching—quite luckily, for it required a large part of the school to effect a launching. And then the heavy structure would not move with any wind short of a gale. The trouble apparently was that it was mounted on skates, like the light boats, and these were not heavy and broad enough to carry the weight. “Doc” and his friend, the builders were never allowed to forget their fiasco.

One of the most difficult problems that Salisbury ever had to solve was the acquisition of an adequate water supply. Water is not so plentiful on the top of a hill as it is in the valleys below. The boys who now enjoy their hot showers have little idea of the anxiety and labor required to provide those showers. The earliest source of supply was the spring in the woods. Then, a year or two later, a deep well was sunk from which the water was pumped by a wind-mill and a gasoline engine. The supply from this artesian well was at first copious and ample. Then, suddenly, when we were beginning to need it all, the flow became much smaller. Perhaps there was a leak through which it wasted away. About the same time there came several years of drought which reached its climax in the fall of 1908, when there was practically no rain at all from early August, until December. Our situation was desperate indeed. The

deep well gave a certain amount of water each day but not nearly enough; the well in the woods gave none at all. Every one had to be extremely frugal in its use. Shower baths were forbidden altogether. Tub baths were indulged in sparingly—both as regards to their depth and frequency. One could bathe without stint in the lake alone. In fact bathing parties were quite the thing, on the many warm, sunny days of that anxious autumn. The bit of comfort was that all submitted with ready will to these necessary restrictions and deprivations.

It was felt that, though such a drought was not likely to recur, provision should be made to meet it, if it did ever occur. So the well a few rods east of the tennis courts was dug. A huge cistern was excavated in front of the school to hold the roof-water as a reserve for another such crisis. The drought had one favorable feature—it allowed these works to be completed without delay or interruption. Then the rains came and in late December, during the vacation, they came in torrents. The sides and bottom of the new cistern were made of a thin layer of cement laid against the dirt. Its top rested on girders that extended into the dirt on either side. It was expected that the pressure of the water inside would balance that of the dirt from the outside and thus support the top. This expectation was not realized. The structure collapsed in the strain of this first big rain. On our return in January we saw an irregular, ragged hole. Next spring the cistern had to be entirely rebuilt. It was enlarged to a capacity of more than a hundred thousand gallons and made heavy and solid enough to withstand a second deluge. A few years later pipes were laid to the spring near Pete Shaw’s house. This spring has ever since provided an unfailing supply, always in excess of our needs. And the system was completed by the erection of the reservoir in 1923.

Such are a few of the many changes and improvements and interesting events that have occurred in the growth of a school of thirty boys into one of one hundred. Will 1947 see the number tripled again? If that does happen, the reminiscences of that day will describe changes that will seem as novel and

radical as any I have seen and will look back on the school of 1927 as no less interesting in its oddities than the school of 1907 may now appear to us.

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