

# **A DAY AT DULWICH**

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**A. H. GILKES**

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BY

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## A DAY AT DULWICH

### INTRODUCTION.

DULWICH is dear to thousands of men and boys. Thousands talk of it, write of it, and hear of it with pleasure; and perhaps every view in which it is regarded arouses in them a certain amount of interest because of the contrast which it presents with their own.

Dulwich is, as most people know, a great school, in which there are day-boys and boarders—generally five or six times as many day-boys as boarders: its Statutes thus order the proportion; for boarders hang more closely together than day-boys, and where they preponderate in numbers, since there is always a tendency in regulations of all kinds to accommodate themselves to the interest of the stronger body, the interests of the day-boys are often a little disregarded. The existence of day-boys and boarders side by

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side, the former numerically far stronger than the latter, is of great value to the school. The presence of boarders is valuable as strengthening that independent tone, and that temper of generosity and public spirit which should prevail at a school; and the presence and strength of the day-boys is valuable as tempering the independence of the tone. At a boarding school there is always a danger that boys will form their own code of laws and rules of life without any reference to the opinions of their elders; and obviously boys are not able to do this with profit to themselves.

Dulwich has grown to its present position through curious stages. About three hundred years ago, Edward Alleyn the actor acquired a large estate in the south of what is now London over the border, and provided on it a College—for a warden, fellows, a chaplain, alms-men and alms-women, and twelve poor scholars. For this institution he asked for a charter. But there was a delay of nine years on the part of the Lord Chancellor—Lord Chancellor Bacon—in granting this charter; no one knows exactly why; but in days when individuals have great power



and there is not much publicity in the conduct of business, many abuses occur. During these nine years Alleyn's views altered. He wished his school to be like Winchester and Eton, and he applied to these schools for information as to school arrangements. The charter however was granted at last in the terms of his original application, apparently much to his annoyance, and the school gradually settled itself to follow the charter. This was its authorised guide of life until in the middle of last century Parliament arranged a new scheme for it.

At this time there was need, as there had been often before, for some interference in the affairs of Dulwich College, or rather of Alleyn's College of God's Gift. The Warden and Fellows were of little use in the world; they succumbed often, as many people succumb, to the temptations which beset wealth and idleness; they were apt to be self-indulgent, conceited, and quarrelsome, narrow in their views and mean in their proceedings; a poor set of people, well clad and well fed, with a varnish of politeness, but often somewhat rotten at heart. As to the school, the fewer boys there were, the more

comfortable were these misguided men ; and naturally therefore there were very few boys—poor scholars—poor in wealth, but poorer in a truer sense, because of the incompetence of their masters. Much to the good of every one, the Commissioners interfered with this unsatisfactory position ; and now began a long wrangle, in which many men, whose hearts were kind enough, lost their tempers, and considered each other, very unjustly, both knaves and fools. One set of men took their stand upon the terms of the charter, and demanded the establishment of a school for poor scholars ; the other upon the second intention of Alleyn, and demanded a school like Eton and Winchester. Eventually the dispute was settled by the establishment of what was really needful ; the great revenues of the estate were applied partly to the establishment of schools in poor neighbourhoods in London, in parishes with which Alleyn was closely connected, partly of a school for poorer boys in Dulwich, and partly of Dulwich College itself. There were never wanting, during the long unholy wrangle that took place concerning the matter, men connected with the College who desired only

a school for poorer boys, whose education they wished to be directed simply to the earning of their daily wages ; and the presence of this desire in some of the College authorities prolonged the wrangle, and did much to starve the College, by lessening the grants made to it. But Dulwich at last emerged as a great public school, for circumstances continually and steadily proved their desire to be foolish, though as was natural, they refused to abandon it, and never could really bring themselves to see that they had been all along mistaken. These sad times are nearly past, and there is little to remind the present generation of them, excepting a bitter memory or two, or a misconception or two, the records of antiquarians, and the shape of the College buildings.

The days that are spent in Dulwich College now are those spent under those circumstances which are best for boys, the circumstances of public school life, and of the best kind. No doubt these days have many blemishes in them. Education generally has received so much attention lately that it is not likely to have escaped without harm from its friends. Man has power to make excellent arrange-