

**RUPERT BROOKE: A
MEMOIR,
PP. 12-197**

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Rupert Brooke: A Memoir, pp. 12-197 by Edward Marsh

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EDWARD MARSH

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RUPERT BROOKE

A MEMOIR



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1914

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year at Cambridge, reading out a paper on Modern Poetry which he had written at the end of his last term at Rugby for the School Society called "Eposos, and afraid that the alarming undergraduates might think it sentimental, he excused himself by explaining the circumstances in which he wrote it. "I had been happier at Rugby," he said, "than I can find words to say. As I looked back at five years, I seemed to see almost every hour golden and radiant, and always increasing in beauty as I grew more conscious; and I could not (and cannot) hope for or even quite imagine such happiness elsewhere. And then I found the last days of all this slipping by me, and with them the faces and places and life I loved, and I without power to stay them. I became for the first time conscious of transience, and parting, and a great many other things."

This happiness was compounded from many sources: friendship, games (he played for the School in both the XI and the XV), and books. He was a balanced combination of the athletic and the intellectual types of schoolboy—"always with a ball in his hand and a book in his pocket" is a vivid little description. "Rupert" (writes a contemporary in the VIth who was at another house, and afterwards became an Assistant Mas-

ter¹), "first of all people at school gave me an inkling of what a full life really meant. I was an awful Philistine, and still am, I fear; but he, with no appearance of superiority or attempt at preaching, as keen as any of us on all the immensely important events in school life, and always ready for a rag, impressed us as no one else could with the fact that these things were not all—not even the most important. And the best thing about him was that he was not out to impress us—it was just being himself."

His great school-friend Hugh Russell-Smith, since killed in action, wrote in the Rugby paper, the 'Meteor,' when he died:—

"For the first two or three years, I think, few of us realised that someone out of the ordinary had come among us. He was rather shy and quiet, though he at once proved himself a good athlete, and he lived much the same life as anyone else. Gradually, however, we began to notice little things about him. Instead of coming 'down town' with us, he used to go off to the Temple Library to read the reviews of books in the 'Morning Post' and 'Chronicle.' He read Walter Pater, and authors we knew very little about. He read a good deal of poetry, and he

¹ Hubert Podmore, who, before he was killed in action, gave Mrs. Brooke leave to publish this extract from his letter to her.

let us find him in raptures over Swinburne. He began to wear his hair rather longer than other people. Still, he played games enthusiastically, and helped us to become Cock House in football and in cricket. Gradually most of us in the House came under his spell. We accepted his literary interests. He was so straightforward and unaffected and natural about them, and he took our chaff so well, that we couldn't have helped doing so. Perhaps they amused most of us, but one or two—and those the most unlikely—were occasionally found clumsily trying to see what there really was in such things. But it was his personal charm that attracted us most, his very simple and lovable nature. Few could resist it. When in his last year he became head of the House, almost everyone came under the sway of his personality. It seems to me now, as it seemed then, that there really was a spirit in School Field which made it rather different from any other House. It was due, I believe, partly to Rupert, partly to his father. The situation might have been difficult for both. The way in which things actually turned out shows one of the most delightful sides of Rupert. He was in all things more than loyal to his father, but he never made it awkward for the rest of us. His sense of fun saw him through, and it helped us

a good deal to know that he would not misinterpret all the little pleasantries that boys make at the expense of their Housemaster. The result was a sort of union between the Housemaster and the House, which made very much for good.

"Outside the House, his worth was realised to the full by some—by the Upper Bench, and by a few of the Masters who knew and loved him. He rose to a high place in the VIth, won two prizes for his poems, played cricket and football for the School, and became a Cadet Officer in the Corps. But I think he was never a school hero. It was chiefly his House that knew his loveliness. And when he was at Cambridge, I think he always loved the House lunches, which we used to have nearly every week. The last letter I had from him was one in which he was talking of members of the House who had fallen in the war.

"Rupert had an extraordinary vitality at school, which showed itself in a glorious enthusiasm and an almost boisterous sense of fun—qualities that are only too rare in combination. Of his enthusiasm it is hard to speak; we knew less about it, although we felt it. We knew much more of his glorious fooling—in his letters, in his inimitable and always kind burlesques of mas-