

COMMEMORATION, JUNE 18TH, 1938.

PROLOGUE, written and recited by S. J. H. DURNFORD.

'I am the Prologue.' The formula sounds trite,
But informality would not be right
Before my elders, so anew I say
(And it means welcome, though it be not gay)
'I am the Prologue.' I suppose I'm here
As Alfred's next best thing—he can't appear
To-day, I'm sorry—as Aldhelm's acolyte,
Steve Harding's secret'ry! in fact I might
Be Arthur Scott—and I might not!
Yet I am warden of this sacred spot
With them, imagine that with me they're here,
Like income-tax demands, each year! Don't fear
Us, for these are all most jovial ghosts
I bring you, who've been genial hosts
For centuries within this sheltered place;
If we are 'possessed,' 'tis but with joy, no face
Quainter than Arthur's haunts these cloisters,
No schoolboy ghoulish gloats, poltergeist night-roisters
In our Big Schoolroom (though if he did, the seating
Of a new one might be equal to our greeting!)
Of time inviolate, of boundless space unawed,
We are inheritors; stand we and applaud
The ages, and with legend rest content?
No! We will rather exorcise the merriment
Of a thousand shades, call a thousand years
Into the balance so upset by 'present fears
And horrible imaginings.' Let them spin the Axis,
We can spin cricket balls! let all Taxes
Be raised 5 per cent., groaning fathers, please,
Be thankful they've not increased Tommy's fees!
I know alas how deeply you must feel—
The Premiership has lost its sex-appeal,
And Foreign office too! But though your Eden
Prefers his apple to one Nevilled, even
This rift in true-blue paradises we're resolved
Shall be forgot, of care you'll be absolved!
Rejoice in being parents, not a son,
And be thrice thankful if you've only one!
But seriously—the hum-drum cash-nexus
Binds you to us, care of our solar-plexus,

And hints on Bertie's asthma to the Matron
 Which lead to us being permanently patron
 Of pink pills, implore our gratitude,
 And so the Prologue's pun and platitude
 Will stun the brainbox of his harassed father,
 Whose sober British acumen would rather
 Be insulted straight than by a subtle prod
 He can't quite understand—it may be good,
 But far more likely infinitely rude!
 Repaying mother with some Classic quips
 For all her 'keeping warm in winter' tips!
 And if he's overbold, think of old Alfred's pains
 To write a comic prologue when the Danes
 Upset his parents' apple-cart—his Saxon mirth
 Was doubtless a lot broader in its Gurth!
 Mark—there's no guaranteeing he'll be staid
 If there's no guaranteeing he'll be paid!
 So let his impudence and Shakespeare's 'Belch'
 And swarms of simple children welch
 Your jaded hearts to well-earned relaxation,
 And let us cry 'All hail Commemoration'!
 A new 'all hail,' one of a deep significance
 For all, in these short shifting years when chance
 May bring the card-house crashing on our ears.
 So let us echo it again, 'All hail!' The years
 Salute you, brave parents of brave sons
 Children of Mars, yet heedless of her guns!

All hail! my Lord ¹, with you we celebrate
 The past and future, from the modern state
 Of your new rising glorious house, we bear
 You welcome to the oldest Bishop's chair!
 The Church's latest David! (Yet the Holy City
 Partook of holidays to mark his victory!)
 And welcome too, Headmaster, from your scholar ²
 Whose Kennedy we hope caused you to holler
 At him as he does us, we hope you'll find
 Life in his Public School not too unkind!
 What more to say? Lord of the Ring and Cope,
 From town of Football Pools, Grand Nationals and Soap,
 From Lancashire, returned to grace-ful fields,
 Prologue, the place of honour to you yields!

NOTES: (not intended as insults to intelligence, but as aids to understanding).

1 The Rt. Rev. A. A. David, D.D., Bishop of Liverpool, formerly Headmaster of Clifton College and Rugby School, author of "Life and the Public Schools."

NOTE.—The new Liverpool Cathedral is now under construction.

2 The Headmaster, educated at Clifton College.

Hail, Sir ³, you are a unique combination
Of Devon spirit and the thrifty Scottish nation,
Perhaps one tempered by the other, your 'munitions'
May be of the largesse kind, and our ambitions
Be fulfilled—for Latin triumphs are not gained
Without a Roman holiday—we've strained
Our eyes and trousers for your yearly profit
Now may our labours reap the interest of it!

And hail Sir ⁴ now, thou Chairman 'Snowwhite'
Of our seventeen 'Dwarfs' that so delight
To 'dig, dig, dig' on paper all the day,
And then with much 'Heigh-hoing' ride away
Like gods, from working for us mortals
To more ambrosial refreshment from our portals.
We hoped you'd flourish 'in the pink,' 'tis our despair
You have forgot Diana and her foxy lair
Here in our Courts (though I suppose J.P.s
Must rest from Blood Sports in their hours of ease!)
You have a reputation on a holiday,
Unparalleled, though Fate cried 'Gone Away!'
Last year, we answer 'Tally Ho!'
No Cornucopia so justly famed as you!

Ladies and Gentlemen, and, if any, lords—
I've quipped enough, I'll turn my inky swords
Like Brutus on myself and haltingly expound
A tale of progress that will swift confound
Repressionists, expressionists and pessimists
And all Non-Aryans who let little cysts
Of minds fester to every press reporter
Of 'Bringing up a happy but still human daughter!'
So then my speech is fashioned into three
(Much as you've probably forgot, Gaul used to be)
And my last province is to say 'Behold
The page is empty, and 'my aunt's quill'
Droops o'er 'the gardener's inkpot,' while we fulfil
Our yearly duty, into collars visored,
Laced into waistcoats and our hair Short-scissored
Glowing with ointment, for no time avails
That is not spent in welcome.' And though
The weather's been quixotic in its show,
And harps, that once in Sherborne's halls did ring
For Neptune's ⁵ horn-pipe and old ⁵ Hymen's rollicking,

3 John Murray, Esq., born in Aberdeen, Principal of the University College of S.W. England, Exeter, Minister of Munitions (1915-18): A Governor.

4 Colonel F. J. B. Wingfield Digby, Chairman of the Board of Governors, Master of the Blackmore Vale.

5 The Big Schoolroom was the scene last year of the Wedding Reception of the Headmaster's daughter.

Are silent ; though Terpischore that led the dance
With Bacchus on this stately floor will prance
No more, there still are gods to worship here
— Look how we pagans spend two half-days clear
In bail—worship, and officers of Mars
Kill sacred beasts as off'rings with their cars !
The intellect quite modernly we train—
—‘ Whistle while you work ’ is our refrain ;
At body-culture, too, we’ve not been slack,
And can give points to Miss Prunella Stack,
Or any public figure. And though our Reception
Can’t hope to equal in profuse deception
A Fascist soirée, yet we’ve a ‘ dictator,’
Equal in speeches, tricks to any imitator
Of the laurel crown, and he’ll outlast the lot
—There can be only one like Arthur Scott !
But all things have their day and all their night,
And he, his ghosts, and Prologue from your sight
Must vanish ; forget—but when they’re gone,
Let their old welcome stand invisibly alone
Beside you each returning, restless year,
And may he be a lucky ‘ croupier’
That cries, ‘ Messieurs, Mesdames, faites vos jeux !’
Or in plain plum-duff Saxon ‘ On the Play !’
For though his welcome’s an unworthy ring,
Yet Prologue knows full well ‘ The PLAY’s the thing !’