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EVENING

## OXFORD IN KHAKI.

### FILLED WITH THE ECHOES OF WAR.

"Oxford is no longer academic; it is martial," someone remarked the other day. Robert Browning bids us rejoice that we are hurled

"From change to change unceasingly,  
Our souls' wings never furled."

Matthew Arnold asks mournfully:

"For what wears out the life of mortal men?  
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls."

Whether we accept Professor Bergson's philosophy and follow Browning's bracing advice, or agree languidly with Arnold when he goes on to say:

"'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,  
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls  
And numb the elastic powers,"

we must admit that Oxford has been hurled from a "haunt of ancient peace" to a town filled with the rumours and echoes of war.

Seven years ago, three years ago, one year ago, we had to dip into the papers of "John Inglesant," or shake a few historic bones, to make ourselves realise that the "smooth lawns and grassy plots" of the college gardens had ever been made less smooth and grassy by a force rougher than the careless heels of undergraduates, or the too impetuous feet of sightseers.

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We are not only reminded of War by the sparse number of undergraduates, and by their appearance in uniforms instead of ordinary morning dress or flannels; by the colleges and gardens and other public places given up to the sick, wounded, and convalescent soldiers; by nurses hurrying hither and thither, and motorcars and carriages laden with soldiers being taken to hospital, or indulged with an "airing"; not only by committee meetings, and sales and entertainments "for the benefit of refugees or purposes of the war," not only by all the outward and visible signs of the predominance of martial energy, but by the pervading spirit of excitement, expectancy, preparation, exultant sorrow, general unrest.

The air, atmospheric and psychological, is steeped in excitement, all the more potent because it is held in check lest it should undo tradition. The subtle influence is felt not only in streets and colleges, in the parks used as a parade ground, at public meetings, in hall and debating society, but it is round and about us in shops and libraries, and is exhaled from the tea-pot in drawing-rooms. We may not be always talking war, but we eat, we drink, we breathe it, and it invades our dreams.

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The young see the needs of the old world and her trouble; but they also glimpse the fair freshness of the new civilisation. They hear the cry for help from the tortured lips of the old civilisation, and they fly to her on the wings of Chivalry. They hear also the feeble sounds of the infant civilisation, and they are on fire with excitement and expectation. Their courage mounts with the demands made upon it. They are eager to be in the thick of the struggle. They do not see in the racked frames of existent things a dying world; they foresee a resurrection of all that is worth survival of the Past, living on in a young, strenuous, glorious Future.

Oxford represents and typifies this Spirit of Youth—Oxford, the Shrine of Tradition; Oxford, the Cradle of Beginnings.

Always hospitable, a softer feature has made courtesy even gentler than its wont towards the stranger within the gates. The stranger—in the person of Belgians, for instance, and sick and wounded soldiers—has suffered many things. He must be treated with tenderness as well as punctiliousness. He enters largely into Oxford life.

There is no lack of provision for those who are hungry for lectures here in this changed Oxford, but there is the flavour of war in all.

The war note is heard in sermons too, sometimes as key-note, sometimes as sub-dominant, often as dominant. Khaki is in evidence everywhere, in fact, and in short. At a recent giving of degrees an undergraduate demurred that the "rag" as he, of course, called the undergraduate's gown, was worn over uniform. "The King's service obliterate the University," said he. "Surely," was the reply. "the University must assert itself at a purely academic function. The University is honouring the King's servants." "Absurd," was his last scornful word.

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Though it is a subdued and altered Oxford in the khaki garb, it is not a gloomy Oxford, and earnestness takes the place filled by insouciance before the war. Those of us who survive this world-wide war will say, as Mr. John Inglesant said, speaking of the Civil War:—

"What a different world it was before the war! What strange, old-world emotions, and thoughts, and stories vanished like phantoms when the war trumpets sounded, and great houses and proud names and dominions crumbled into dust."  
 J. R.