

Thoughts and recollections

by

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The last edition of 'The Johnian' gave us the heartening news that St John's College, that had perforce to close down due to the escalation of the war and the exodus of the people, had been restarted. It was a much welcome news that ended an eight-month period of anxiety and concern as to the fate of our beloved schools. We have yet to receive a more detailed account of the state of the Institution as of now, not knowing whether it has suffered damage or loss and whether all or only a percentage of the staff and students had rejoined the school. It is our fervent hope that our College had not suffered great damage and loss. Whatever it may be, on a return to the familiar surroundings the staff and students would face the challenge of restoration and reversion of normalcy. We salute them that are now engaged in this difficult task, beset as they are with scarcities of every sort necessary for the rebuilding work. Our hearts go out to them and wish them well and pray that what they rebuild may not be destroyed in the next round of warfare. May God forbid it.

It is probable that some things belonging to the school might have got lost during this period when the school remained unprotected but my fervent hope is that the only existing collection of all the Annual College Magazines, the series beginning with the first volume published in the year 1906 has survived. This collection was preserved in the College Library and is indeed a remarkable repository of the history of not only our College itself but also of the world outside for it carried, in addition to what pertained to the school, a general purview of all the important events, educational, social and political. I came to appreciate this collection of the College Magazines when in my effort to contribute an article on the extra-curricular activities in the College over the years, I resorted to the material published in these volumes and I had the opportunity to go through every one of them. In this process I came across little known snippets of history. Who would know but for this collection that when Twynham Museum was built, (now it is used as the College Administration Block), there was placed within the foundation a time capsule, (probably a box containing items of historical interest) that would throw light on the life of the community and its history. One hopes that if and when this building gives way to another this item would be recovered intact. Or who would know that a group of families who traditionally worked in brassware and lived in Nallur decided to migrate south and settled down in a place near Panadura and called their village settlement Nalluruwa. As they were Christians it is recorded that the Nallur Parish Priest journeyed once a month or so to minister to them. In like manner there are many items and material to be found in this collection of magazines that are truly invaluable and therefore deserve special consideration towards preserving this irreplaceable collection for all time.

When our Alma Mater restarts its life after a lapse of time it is good time to ponder on the uniqueness of our school and ensure that the future generation of staff and students are made aware of it. Time and again students in our time were told that St John's had jealously preserved its high traditions. These traditions are like the unwritten conventions of the British Constitution, never written down, rarely spoken about but always acted upon. St John's has always maintained a high standard of discipline, in and out of the classroom and outside the school and school hours. As students we were an example of orderliness wherever we happened to be. We were called upon to show the true spirit of sportsmanship. The school provided a great variety of opportunities for the student to participate in activities such as sports and games, debating societies, drama, music, scouting, social service etc. In all these activities one would find the imprint of the school traditions of giving one's best, not only for one's own sake, but for the good name of the school.

To me who had experienced life at St John's both as a student and then as a teacher, it would appear that the uniqueness of St John's and the quality of life it endows to those who study and work therein is that all are involved in the pursuit of excellence in every field of activity, academic and non-academic and strive hard, not only for personal success, but to embellish the name of St John's. Anything that we organised as a school, whether it be the Annual Prize Giving or staging of a drama, or the variety of inter school competitions and events, the uppermost determining factor was the high standards and traditions set up by the school over the years and everyone, student and teachers gave their utmost towards that end. On such occasions, one could feel the oneness of the school community and makes up the stuff that fond memories are made of. Our strong attachment to our school arises from this fellowship. So it is our hope that these traditions which spring from one common factor, the pursuit of excellence - will pervade the activities of our much loved school in the years to come and in its fulfilment there will always be heard the full throated refrain "St John's uprears her crest on high".