

THE ADDRESS AS GIVEN BY THE REV. C.T.H. DAMS AT
THE MEMORIAL SERVICE HELD ON 30th SEPTEMBER
TO COMMEMORATE MR. KENNETH LAURENCE DAMES 1897-1967.

Kenneth Laurence Dames was your headmaster and friend, Old Harlovians. He was the friend of you all who have come from Harlow and beyond today to honour his memory. He was also my elder brother.

Does it seem strange that so close a relative should give the address at this memorial service? It seemed so to me, and I had resolved to take my silent place in the congregation to represent his family. But I was persuaded by one close to him, and by representations from your Association to speak about him this afternoon.

He was a man completely dedicated to his work, and a born schoolmaster. Perhaps he was a born headmaster - at any rate I cannot, as I look back on his life, picture him as anything less than a headmaster. He did not rule through love of power. Power for its own sake had no attraction for him. He knew - none better - the often crushing burden of responsibility which those who wield power must inevitably shoulder. He ruled not by the love of power but by the power of love. He cared deeply for all Harlovians and for each as an individual. If my own experience is a true guide, none who came to him for help or advice went away empty. They might not always get what they expected or what they wanted, but they would certainly get what they needed, so far as he could assess their needs.

When I came to stay with him, as I did from time to time, he would say, "I can't entertain you much during term because the job has to go on." That was typical of him. His work always came first - and not only during term. While he was headmaster the college had its share, perhaps more than its share, of problems, difficulties and even tragedies. He shirked none; he evaded none; and he never spared himself.

It has been said that at one moment in its history he saved the College from premature extinction. If this is true, I am indeed proud and thankful, as I am sure you all are. There can be little doubt that he sacrificed his health, and ultimately his life, for the school of which he was so justly proud.

Though this church, in which the school worshipped every day, stands to remind us of Harlow College, of the College buildings not a brick or stone remains. But the College itself lives on in you, and that is his best memorial. Do not forget. Try to live out in your lives what he taught you through what he said, still more through what he did, and most of all by what he was, what he tried all his life to be, and what you saw him to be.

Two of the hymns at this service were chosen for special reasons. "Love divine, all loves excelling" was sung at his wedding 43 years ago this very month. That wedding service proved the prelude to an ideally happy marriage. Throughout their years together his wife gave herself and her own very different gifts to the service of the school as unsparingly as he. Though their marriage was childless, you were their vast family. My brother was not a demonstrative man; he did not wear his heart on his sleeve. It was often difficult even for those closest to him to guess what he felt. But of his deep concern and affection for that huge family there can be no shadow of doubt.

He loved music - not surprising in a former chorister of Magdalen College, Oxford. He delighted in sharing his large and varied collection of disc- and tape-recordings with his boys, for whom he gave regular record recitals - many of you will remember them - sometimes in the assembly hall and sometimes in his own house. He liked his music full-blooded and loud - a preference I shared with him. We must have been a sore trial to others living under the same roof!

By a strange turn of events (or was it so very strange?) I was told of his death while listening to a performance of Beethoven's Exoica Symphony - the only symphony by any composer, so far as I can discover, which contains a funeral march. He must have died just before the performance began.

The hymn we have just sung - "Praise, my soul, the king of heaven" - was the College hymn, included in the last service of every term and sung heartily as you looked forward with jubilation to the freedom of the holiday. However excellent, however happy a school may be, what schoolboy is not glad to escape from it when the term ends? I can assure you that your headmaster was! Will you add an extra note of thanksgiving to-day for his freedom - freedom from the weakness and pain of his last years, which he bore with characteristic courage

and patience, lit up by the almost boyish sense of humor which never deserted him even in the darkest hours? When he entered, for the third or fourth time, King Edward VII Hospital for Officers, founded by Sister Agnes, he said to me, "If they have any sort of 'Old Boys' Association' in this place - some kind of 'Old Agnesians Association' - I think I shall join it, and if there is a tie I shall wear it".

Who dare deny that he could hear us as we sang, or doubt that the sound gladdened his heart?

Many centuries back St. Francis of Assisi wrote this:

"O thou most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise him, Alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod;
O praise him, Alleluia!"

To Kenneth Laurence Dames death's summons was kind and gentle indeed. One instant he was here, in the world of time, replacing the receiver of his telephone after completing a call - the next, in the eternal world where time is not, and men of every age speak to one another, not through any man-made contrivance, but face to face. How short a journey and how momentous!

Few men can have been less "churchy" though his environment was clerical; but his was a profoundly Christian character. Humbug and hypocritical piety he abhorred, and made no secret of his dislike; genuine goodness he saluted and revered, wherever and in whomsoever he found it. May he rest in peace, and may God, from whom all goodness comes, bless and keep you all. Amen.