



HENRY AUGUSTUS COIT

1898-1905

To have fought and died for the Right before our country sounded the call to arms; to have given all before anything was asked, is the proud record left by some St. Paul's boys. And it was symbolic of the School's diversity of fellowship and typical of a common ideal, that, in the early days of the European war, some of our alumni of British, French and American birth decided at once to fight against Germany, a sentiment which soon was to put America overwhelmingly on the side of the Allies.

Henry Augustus Coit was the first grandchild of the first rector of St. Paul's, for whom he was named, and the only child of Joseph Howland Coit (1875-1881:

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master, 1883-1907) and Adeline Balch Coit. He was born at St. Paul's School May 26th, 1888. Having spent his childhood and school days at St. Paul's, Henry was known to a great many alumni, and those who remember him as a child will recall his remarkable beauty, his curly hair and his happy disposition. Years later, when he had grown to be over six feet, he retained these delicately chiseled features which, added to a graceful poise, made him a marked figure in any company of young men. He must have been a strikingly handsome soldier. That he was a brave and fearless one was only natural, for he possessed the requisites—quickness, perceptiveness, loyalty and that daring recklessness which he had so often displayed in his football and hockey matches.

While not a robust youngster, he grew into a strong athletic youth, and in his sixth form year he was awarded the Gordon Medal as the "best all-round athlete," excelling especially in football, rowing and hockey.

Henry Coit entered Harvard in 1906, having traveled abroad for a year after leaving the School. He remained in college only two years. During the first year he rowed on the victorious Freshman crew. In 1920 Harvard conferred upon him the posthumous degree of A.B., as upon all those who left college before graduation and were killed in the World War.

Between 1908 and 1915, when he joined the British army in Canada, Coit held positions in the Long Island Railroad Company, the Good Roads Machinery Company and, latterly, was on a ranch in the State of Washington.

The military career of Henry Coit is brief, lasting less than seven months, and may be summarized as follows:

December 15th, 1915, enlisted at Montreal as private of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry—the only American in his company.

March 15th 1916 sailed for England on the *Olympic* and a convoy of British warships, with his company and some five thousand other Canadian troops and nurses.

April 10 to June 1 in training at Shorncliffe, East and West Sandling.

June 5 to July 3 served in the trenches at the front.

July 2 he was struck by a motor lorry and "dangerously wounded." On July 5th he was taken to the Third Canadian Clearing Station at Remey, having sustained compound fractures of both knees. Here, after intense suffering, his right leg was amputated on August 4th, the earliest time at which the surgeons believed him strong enough to stand the operation. On August 7th his left leg was also amputated, and at nine o'clock that night he died. His body was buried in the British military cemetery on the Poperinghe Boeschepe Road.

Many of the letters from the Chaplain, the nurses and others who ministered to Henry during the last weeks of his life have been put together and printed in a small volume. In the earlier letters, those written during his periods of training, there is an earnestness and manly tone throughout, showing that he was content with his lot as a private; that he did not want a commission by any "pull," but hoped to win it by his work. Henry had a keen sense of humor, and these letters show his wit, even when describing the daily drudgery of cleaning camp. In his letters from England he shows his impatience of the restraint that was keeping him from France, but his cheerfulness never failed him, and even during his terrible suffering his attendants testify to this cheerfulness and unselfishness, which won the hearts of many of his fellow-sufferers.

We are too apt to think that the bravery of a soldier must be displayed on the field of battle. This display was denied Henry Coit—the bravery of actual combat with the

enemy—but the following extracts from letters will show his uncomplaining bravery in a harder fight with suffering and death. The "Sister in Charge" wrote:

"I want to tell you that among the wonderful, brave men that came to us here your son stands almost preëminent, and everyone that comes in contact with him says the same thing. He ever had a ready smile and answer, and even at the worst moments never lost his courage or courtesy, for a second. . . . So often, when he was having a hard time, I have said to him I was sorry, or it is too bad, or some such thing, and he would answer with his winning smile, 'Never mind, Sister, it is all in the same old game!'

"Never once did I hear him utter a complaint or regret.

"I asked him once how it happened he was out fighting with us, coming from U. S. A. 'Our fight, too,' was his answer."

The nurse who had charge of him wrote:

"Your dear son was my patient almost from the first. . . . He was one of the bravest boys I have ever known. No matter how much he was suffering, he always had a cheerful word and bright smile for everybody."

These and many more extracts from letters from staff officers connected with the Clearing Station show that Henry was a brave soldier in his fight.

His lovable disposition, winning ways and his irresistible humor won for him a host of friends. His Sixth Form have erected in the School chapel a most beautiful bronze memorial to him—the last work of the sculptor, Bela Pratt. The tablet bears a striking likeness of the young soldier. On September 21, 1916 there gathered in the Church of the Transfiguration, New York, a large number of old St. Paul's boys for a memorial service, and besides his many friends, there were present many of the older alumni to do honor to the name.

ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

Generous to a degree and a great sportsman, we can imagine his feelings in regard to outraged Belgium in the early days of the war, and though his campaigning was brief, we know that he did his duty well, and that he freely gave his life for a grand cause—noble example for the boys of to-day and worthy of the great name he bore and of the great School he represented.