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978-1-107-63607-1 - The Tunnellers of Holzminden (with a Side-Issue):

Second Edition

H. G. Durnford

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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The track of the Holzminden Tunnel after being dug up.

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THE TUNNELLERS
OF
HOLZMINDEN
(WITH A SIDE-ISSUE)

BY
H. G. DURNFORD, M.C., M.A.
FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

SECOND EDITION

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TO
MY WIFE

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PREFACE

ALMOST exactly two years ago, as I write these lines, the famous Holzminden Tunnel became history. Even then, when the sordid camp was still lending (and seemed likely to lend *in perpetuum*) its grey colour to every aspect of life, when sense of proportion was practically dormant and racial animosity intensified to the highest pitch, it was impossible to overlook the peculiar dramatic proprieties of the event. Some day, it was felt, this story might be fittingly told.

And in the retrospect the feeling remains unaltered. The harsh angles have softened: the tumult and the shouting have died away to the remoter cells of memory: Captain Niemeyer (of the Reserve) has departed—God knows where! His imperial master is dragging out an unhappy old age in exile. The British protagonists and walkers-on in the 9-months struggle have scattered to the ends of the Empire on their lawful occasions. Once in a blue moon perhaps they think of it and rub their eyes. The details are already vague. The whole of their prison existence seems absurdly far away.

But it is in the hope that they will care to follow with not uncritical interest the following plain unvarnished account of the Tunnel episode that I, a mere looker-on, have sorted out the threads and fitted the jumble together. If any think this an impertinence, may I plead that an ordinary stage hand may see more of the workings of a nine months run than the star performers? To them at any rate, protagonists, walkers- and lookers-on in the event, and their friends and relations I would address myself particularly. Through them alone can I hope to interest the British public in this simple tale of a strategically unimportant but highly successful side-show, in Germany, in the dog days of 1918.

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PREFACE

I am indebted to one friend in particular for assistance in the true description of the actual Tunnel. He prefers to remain anonymous. Many others of my ex-fellow-prisoners have helped me in various ways. The design which is reproduced on the cover was drawn by Lieutenant Lockhead while in captivity at Stralsund and was intended to serve as a Christmas card; I am indebted to him for the loan of the block. To Messrs Blackwood I am obliged for permission to reprint the personal experiences contained in the final chapter.

H. G. DURNFORD

KING'S COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE.

24th July 1920.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

I AM deeply gratified by my publishers' suggestion that this book should be reprinted. The plainness of the story must be its justification. It is subjective and carries no moral. It barely touches the battlefields, recounts no actual horrors and does not emphasise the spirit of good-bye to "all that." If it stresses the indignities of captivity as a legitimate setting for the main episode, it is free from animus against the German nation as a whole.

The text is but little altered. I have added a page or so to the concluding chapter as I have been sometimes asked as to what happened after I had crossed the Danish frontier.

I will no longer accord Walter Butler, who supplied me with all the particulars as to the actual Tunnel and in fact wrote most of Chapter VI, the anonymity which he at one time insisted on.

H. G. D.

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