

Captain Basil Hodgson-Smith, Theosophy and the Battles of Salamis (480BC) and Cambrai (1917AD)

When a very young 2nd Lieutenant Alan Thomas first arrived at the transport lines of the 6th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment that were situated among the ruins of Montauban on 7 October 1916, he was directed to his new company commander, Captain Basil Hodgson-Smith. He found him in a shell hole. ‘At my approach’, Thomas later wrote, ‘a swarthy, saturnine face peered up at me out of the shell-hole. The body to which the head was attached wore no clothes and was being sluiced by its owner with water out of a green canvas bucket. It was the thinnest, most skeleton-like body I had ever seen. “Captain Hodgson-Smith?” I said, saluting this lean and hairy form. Captain Hodgson-Smith grinned at me—as a skeleton should. “Good morning”, he said. “This is the first bath I’ve had for a month. I’ll be out in a minute”’.¹

Thomas was to get to know Hodgson-Smith very well in the following months. He found him to be very caring of the men in his company and genuinely anxious to be ‘in the centre of serious activity’. He had, however, some strange traits. He slept with his eyes open and he had a positive mania for keeping records, normally in triplicate. This compelling need to make lists obviously had roots deep in Hodgson-Smith’s psyche and it did not make him very popular with his platoon officers. Nor, despite his care and attention to his men’s interests, was he much liked in the ranks. He lacked, thought Thomas, ‘that quality of leadership which many less conscientious officers possessed’.² But it was his company commander’s attitude towards death that Thomas found most intriguing.

It was an attitude, so far as one could tell, of utter indifference—not the indifference of a superman ready to sacrifice his life for a cause; but rather the natural indifference of a man who isn’t interested. Life to Hodge [Hodgson-Smith’s nickname in the battalion] was a job and so long as it lasted you got on with it. The thing to avoid was to outlast your usefulness and to live so long that you became an encumbrance to others. A short life on the whole was preferable. ... I never knew a man who showed so little interest in life apart from its routine, so little zest for living.³

Thomas’ recollection of his company commander’s attitude to life and death was perceptive, but any explanation for Hodge’s disposition foundered on the absence of relevant information on his life before he joined the 6th Battalion. If Thomas had known of Hodgson-Smith’s extraordinary life as a boy and young man he might have better understood, for his company commander had been told, at the age of nine, that not only had his father fought at the Battle of Marathon in 490BC, but that also he, as a girl, had hidden in the bowels of a trireme during the Battle of Salamis a decade later. Hodgson-Smith had been brought up a Theosophist and a believer in reincarnation. He was not, however, likely to have disclosed in the mess of the 6th

¹ Alan Thomas, *A Life Apart* (London 1968), p.51.

² *Ibid*, pp.51-52, 65.

³ *Ibid*, p.53.

Battalion or in the trenches in France and Flanders his five previous lives stretching back to Egypt more than 6,000 years before.

Pre-War

Walter Basil Hodgson-Smith was born in the spa town of Harrogate, Yorkshire, on 8 March 1887.⁴ His father, Alfred, had at one time commanded a small ship but in the 1901 Census he described himself as a stationer and fancy goods dealer.⁵ He and his wife were also passionate Theosophists. Like Spiritualism and other esoteric movements of that era, Theosophy flourished mainly amongst people who despised Victorian materialism and who sought to discover and understand the essential essence of nature, the world and themselves through the study of psychic phenomena. It also appealed to the politically radical mind and, in England, Mrs Annie Besant, freethinker, Fabian socialist and promoter of contraception dominated the Theosophy Society in the years before and after the Great War.

Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934) was Besant's main collaborator in the promotion of theosophy within the British Empire. A former Anglican clergyman, Leadbeater developed an esoteric philosophy based mainly on his clairvoyant capabilities, that is, on his ability 'to see things that are hidden from ordinary eyes, but which are fundamental to the real significance of what appears on the surface of life'.⁶ Among his ideas, which included reincarnation, was the eschatological belief that the time was right for the arrival of the Messiah, or World Leader who, Leadbeater thought, would first materialize as a young boy. This is one reason why he sought the company of young males.⁷ Basil Hodgson-Smith first came into contact with Leadbeater in 1896 when he was nine years old. According to Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa, one of Leadbeater's protégés and subsequently President of the Theosophy Society, Hodgson-Smith 'had high possibilities of Discipleship' owing to his connection in a previous life with the Master, Koot Hoomi.⁸

In order to test Basil's capabilities ('the boy's finer vehicles'), in May 1896 Leadbeater organised an overnight session to allow the Master to have 'a thorough examination' of his 'etheric double'. This involved the boy spending a night in Leadbeater's bedroom and the arrival of Mahatma Koot Hoomi's astral body from Tibet. The examination was apparently successful and when Basil awoke he said 'I have seen the Master, what a beautiful face, but only a few minutes afterwards the memory began to fade and he seemed a little shaky and uncertain'. He thus began his

⁴ *The Times*, 18 June 1929.

⁵ 1901 Census.

⁶ 'Leadbeater, Charles Webster', *Theosophedia*, http://theosophy.ph/encyclo/index.php?title=Leadbeater,_Charles_Webster (accessed 20 October 2015).

⁷ Leadbeater played a major role in the Lotus Circle, a Theosophy Society youth group for boys founded in 1895. Joseph E. Ross, *Krotona, Theosophy and Krishnamurti: Archival Documents of the Theosophical Society's Esoteric Centre, Krotona, in Ojai, California* (Ojai 2011), p.195. Hodgson-Smith was a member.

⁸ C. W. Leadbeater, *The Soul's Growth Through Reincarnation: The Lives of Ursa, Vega and Eudox*, ed. C. Jinarajadasa (Madras 1948), p.78. In Leadbeater's epistemology, Masters were at the top of the Great Chain of Being, men who had evolved further than other human beings and had no need of the physical body. Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden 2004), p.382.

life as an ‘Invisible Helper’, living at the Theosophical Society’s headquarters in London.⁹

After this psychic event Leadbeater, using his clairvoyant powers, examined Basil’s previous lives, with Alfred Hodgson-Smith taking notes. In this process Basil was given the “star name” Vega. Leadbeater focused on only five of the many previous lives of Vega. Two were in Egypt, between 4017 and 3960 BC and 2695 and 2645 BC, one on the Dardanelles coast (1520-1483 BC), one in Athens (490-420 BC) and one in Spain (1504-1527 AD). On three occasions Vega was female, including the life described in Athens. Here Vega’s name was Euphrosyne, whose father and uncle—the latter being Leadbeater in another manifestation—fought at the Battle of Marathon. At the age of ten, under the plan of Themistocles to abandon Athens in a last-ditch attempt to thwart the Persian invasion under Xerxes, her family were forced to leave their home and seek protection on a ship.¹⁰ This was part of the Athenian fleet that at the Battle of Salamis destroyed Xerxes’ hopes of conquering Greece. Thus, although he/she did not actually fight in the battle, Basil’s *alter ego* was present at one of the great turning points in history.

In Vega’s latest incarnation, as Basil Hodgson-Smith of Harrogate, life was less tumultuous, at least before 1914. Basil never attended school, preparatory or public, but was tutored by Leadbeater. In 1900, with Basil as his thirteen-year old secretary, competent in shorthand and typing and described by one Theosophist as Leadbeater’s ‘boy-companion of the time’, Leadbeater toured the United States.¹¹ In the following year they again travelled to the United States and then visited Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Java and India. They returned to England in May 1906, to find a damaging scandal brewing. Leadbeater had been accused of the sexual abuse of young boys in the United States. Annie Besant had in her possession letters from parents who accused Leadbeater of interfering inappropriately with their sons. The Theosophy Society undertook an internal investigation and, once Leadbeater admitted that he had taught masturbation to a small number of boys for therapeutic and occult reasons, he resigned from the society and went abroad.¹² Hodgson-Smith’s role in the investigation is unknown, but one historian has suggested that he wrote a letter in June 1906 in defence of Leadbeater in which he said that ‘I can quite understand how numbers of trifling things can be regarded as evidence of conduct of this sort where people are suspicious of it’.¹³ This can, perhaps, be placed in the context of Leadbeater’s opposition to alcohol, eating meat and even wearing a hat.

Leadbeater was reinstated in 1908, causing a schism in the Theosophy Society, but he never returned to Britain, spending the years up to the war in India. Whether Hodgson-Smith saw Leadbeater again after 1906 is unknown. He remained, however, within the influence of Annie Besant in London. He prepared himself for university (a difficult task considering his lack of formal education) and in 1909 went up to

⁹ Leadbeater, *Soul’s Growth*, pp.78-80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.93-97

¹¹ Gregory John Tillett, *Charles Webster Leadbeater: A Biographical Study* (on-line edition 2008), p.204, <http://www.leadbeater.org>.

¹² ‘Leadbeater, Charles Webster’, *Theosophedia*.

¹³ Quoted in Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (e-Book version), pp.140-42, 320-23. Dixon’s book has the best analysis of the Leadbeater scandal.

Worcester College, Oxford, graduating with a Pass Degree in 1913.¹⁴ While at university he served with the Officer Training Corps. His links with the Theosophy Society remained strong during his university years, for between November 1912 and April 1913 he acted as a bodyguard in a lodge in Ashdown Forest, Sussex, to Jiddu Krishnamurti and his brother. These were young men whom Leadbeater and Besant had chosen in India for a special education, with the expectation that Jiddu might be the World Leader. Their father, after giving permission for his sons to be taken to England for a university education, had changed his mind after hearing of Leadbeater's unsavoury reputation and Besant, in desperation, had effectively kidnapped them and hid them in England while the courts sorted out the problem.¹⁵

Wartime

Hodgson-Smith, now aged twenty-seven, was working in the library of the English National Society when war broke out. He was about to have published an article on 'Environment' in *The American Theosophist*.¹⁶ He swiftly sought a commission in the army, with the blessing of his Theosophical brethren. One, Jinarajadasa, wrote (very perceptively) to him on 25 September 1914:

I am glad you are in things. I expect it will be endurance and doggedness that will win. You have both and should be able to lead well your men. England has an uphill task, and grim determination, with no cackling and gloating over little victories, is what is needed. Do your job "unto the Lord", like Arjuna, thoroughly, but in a thorough business-like way as best you know how, and you will have done the only thing there was to do.¹⁷

Hodgson-Smith was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant on 22 August and, after a brief period of training, was posted to D Company in the 6th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment. He arrived at their training camp at Purfleet on 28 September.¹⁸ The 6th Battalion was part of K1, Lord Kitchener's first volunteer Service Army of 100,000 men. It was one of twelve infantry battalions in the 37th Brigade, 12th (Eastern) Division. He was to remain with the battalion for the whole of his military career.

The 6th Battalion went to France on 1 June 1915. It was introduced to trench warfare in the Ploegsteert sector, a relatively quiet part of the line south of Ypres. Casualties were comparatively slight in the first months, but on 13 August 1915 Hodgson-Smith's luck ran out.¹⁹ The day began in the trenches at Despierre Farm with an inspection by Brigadier-General Fowler, GOC 37th Brigade. Shortly afterwards the enemy fired 30 to 40 "whizz-bangs" into the area and, at about 6.30pm, another three.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 18 June 1929. This sympathetic obituary did not mention Hodgson-Smith's links to Theosophy, merely stating that he spent his youth travelling widely.

¹⁵ Mary Lutyens, *J. Krishnamurti: A Life* (New Delhi 2005), p.66.

¹⁶ *The American Theosophist* (Vol.16, no.1, Oct-Dec 1914).

¹⁷ Leadbeater, *Soul's Growth*, p.85. Arjuna is a reference to the *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of God) that is special to Theosophists and Hindus alike. It comprises a conversation between Krishna (the Higher Self) and Arjuna (the individual human soul) that takes place, appropriately, on a battlefield.

¹⁸ *London Gazette*, 21 August 1914, p.6596; War Diary, 6th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, TNA, PRO WO 95/1861, 28 September 1914.

¹⁹ Captain C.T. Atkinson, *The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment 1914-1919* (London 1924), p.114.

The Battalion laconically records two casualties, both wounded. Hodgson-Smith was one of them.²⁰ It appears from his obituary, however, that Hodgson-Smith was wounded before the inspection.

Wiring in front at night, even though certain balloon-like balls of barbed wire were prepared beforehand and had merely to be pegged in position, was slow work. [Hodgson-Smith] volunteered to peg these at dawn in a half light, when the enemy were as a rule comparatively inactive before starting the daily dose of intensive rifle and machine-gun fire. In three mornings he pegged down as much wire as it would have taken a large fatigue party many nights to fix blundering in the dark. On the fourth morning, when the rapid task was nearly complete, a German bullet pierced his left leg and broke the shin. The wound was serious ...²¹

Hodgson-Smith was repatriated to England and was treated in the Bathurst House Hospital in Belgrave Square, London.²² This was a small facility for officers, with twenty-nine beds. It was there a year later that the life of the future Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was saved.²³ Hodgson-Smith was released as a convalescent in the middle of September 1915 and was given two months' leave, which he spent in London. In January 1916, while still unfit for General Service overseas, he was appointed as an Assistant with the Junior Officers' Company of 1st Reserve Brigade in Ripon, Yorkshire, close to the family home.²⁴

Hodgson-Smith was to remain in England for more than a year, returning to the battalion on 26 August 1916, only six weeks before Thomas found him washing in a shell-hole. In the intervening period the battalion had fought two major battles, at Loos and on the Somme, and he would have found the composition of the officer cadre very different from when he had left. Seven of the originals had been killed and a further six wounded and still absent. This partly explains why he had risen to the rank of Captain and company commander by October 1916.²⁵

During the following twelve months the 6th Battalion was involved in several bouts of severe fighting, some successful, some not. During the Battle of Arras on 9 April 1917 they advanced four miles towards the village of Monchy-le-Preux on Observation Ridge, but came under extreme pressure during German counter-attacks and barely managed to hold their ground. Losses were slight in April, but in another attack on 3 May the battalion was decimated and a number of officers in a small party which managed to reach their objective were cut off and made prisoners of war.²⁶

²⁰ War Diary, 6th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, 13 August 1915.

²¹ *The Times*, 18 June 1929.

²² Service Record, Walter Basil Hodgson-Smith, TNA PRO WO 339/11439.

²³ Harold Macmillan, *Winds of Change 1914-1939* (London 1966), p.95.

²⁴ Service Record, Walter Basil Hodgson-Smith, TNA PRO WO 339/11439.

²⁵ He was promoted Temporary Captain on 4 July 1916. *London Gazette*, 29 November 1916, p.11683.

²⁶ Atkinson, *Queen's Own*, pp.245-50, 252-55; Sir Arthur B Scott, *The History of the 12th (Eastern) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918* (London 1923), pp.112, 118-19. Curiously, fifteen of the sixteen officers of the 6th Battalion who became prisoners of war were captured in 1917. *List of British Officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August, 1914, and November, 1918* (London 1919), p.83.

The shattered 12th Division avoided the main battles of the Passchendaele campaign later in the year, but was involved in the Battle of Cambrai. As at Arras, a very successful period was followed by disaster and, for the second time in the year, the 6th Battalion was almost completely destroyed. On 30 November the Germans made a powerful attack on the sorely depleted battalion that was defending too long a part of the line at Lateau Wood. Hodgson-Smith was at the time Acting 2IC (Brevet Major) and was at the battalion's Headquarters when the front line began to be pushed back. He led a hastily organised HQ company in support, but was badly wounded twice, once in the hand and once by a bullet through a lung. The British line eventually stabilised, but Hodgson-Smith was taken prisoner.²⁷ He was officially reported wounded and missing.²⁸ We are fortunate to have Hodgson-Smith's own account of his capture, written following his return to England in 1918.

About 8am on the morning of 30th November 1917 I was in the dugout of Battalion Headquarters, 6th Royal West Kent Regiment situated on the outskirts of Latteau (sic) Wood near Cambrai. At the time I was acting as 2nd in command having held both the rank and position for four months earlier in the year. A heavy barrage descended on us and Lt-Col W.R.A. Dawson, DSO, and Captain W.G. Dove, MC, and myself went upstairs to see what was happening. Hostile aeroplanes were flying very low and firing on us with their machine guns. Runners were despatched over the top (there were no communication trenches whatsoever) to get communication with the companies and we spent our time ineffectively sniping at the aeroplanes. About 300 yards to the left we perceived troops of the division on our left giving way and pouring back, and the Colonel told me to take all available men of Battalion Headquarters – signallers, runners, servants etc., and occupy a small piece of sunken road or ditch about 70 yards in advance of the dugout. My orders were to hold on there and if any men should retire to impound them on my defensive line. None of our men, however, did give way and on that day the Battalion was practically wiped out. My small party held on and we had good targets for rifle fire, for in hot pursuit of the division on our left came on swarms of Germans. There was a good deal of shelling and all the time the enemy aircraft were flying very low indeed and firing into us with their machine guns. I had seized a rifle and was taking aim when I got a bullet in my right hand. Groups of Germans appeared in front and also on the right as well, having worked around the wood. The position was pretty desperate but I walked up and down encouraging the men to keep on firing till I got a bullet through my left lung, which knocked me out. Later I was roused by two of my men who had been made prisoners and they bound me up. The Germans were all around us and shouting and threatening us to move backwards. Being too weak to resist further my men supported me and took me to the German dressing station.²⁹

²⁷ Atkinson, *Queen's Own*, pp.316-25.

²⁸ War Diary, 6th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment, 2 December 1917.

²⁹ Service Record, Walter Basil Hodgson-Smith, TNA PRO WO 339/11439.

He survived this ordeal and in January 1918 he sent a letter to Mrs Forrester of Maida Vale informing her that he was a prisoner at Limburg. He was transferred to Karlsruhe in February and in April to Heidelberg.³⁰ At the end of the month he was interned in Holland and on 16 August, under the prisoner exchange scheme, he sailed to England and was taken to hospital. In December a Medical Board declared him permanently unfit to serve in any military capacity and he was given leave.³¹ In March 1919 Hodgson-Smith relinquished his commission on account of ill-health 'caused by war wounds' (he had two fingers missing from one hand).³²

Post-War

The lady with whom Hodgson-Smith corresponded while a prisoner of war was Ethel Dorothy Forrester, the widow of an official in the Indian Civil Service and the daughter of Sir John Stevens, Judge of the High Court of Calcutta. They had been courting since 1915.³³ On his return from Holland he stayed with Dorothy as she nursed him back to health. They married on 3 January 1919 in St Mark's Parish Church in St. John's Wood. She was eight years his senior.³⁴

Hodgson-Smith returned to his former occupation, becoming Librarian and Secretary to the New University Club in St James' St, London. This was an exclusive club, founded in 1863, limited to 1100 members who paid 30 guineas to join.³⁵ It is likely that he obtained this position through the influence of another 6th Battalion officer, Captain RPP Rowe, who had been Secretary of the club before the war.³⁶

Hodgson-Smith appears not to have cut his connections with the Theosophy Society, for he compiled and annotated the work that Annie Besant had produced between 1891 and 1911. Entitled *Twenty Years' Work*, it was serialized in *The Theosophist* in 1928 and 1929. His old friend Jinarajadasa also kept in contact. He later commented on his post-war state of mind and noted that 'a strange subtle change' had come over Hodgson-Smith after the war.

The sufferings which he had undergone as a prisoner seemed to have drained the vitality out of him. When I saw him after the war, he was as affectionate as ever, the same old Basil with intuitive sensing of a service to be rendered. But he was tired, less physically (though his mutilated hand still bothered him) and more "inside". It was as if the Ego cared no longer to grapple with the struggles which Karma entailed. A sadness enveloped him, and he merely "carried on" with life.³⁷

³⁰ Prisoners of the First World War, Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, <http://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/246824/3/2/>.

³¹ Service Record, Walter Basil Hodgson-Smith, TNA PRO WO 339/11439.

³² *London Gazette*, 15 March 1919, p.3574; *The Times*, 18 June 1929.

³³ I am grateful to Jonathan Saunders for this information.

³⁴ London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921, London Metropolitan Archives, accessed through Ancestry.com

³⁵ Henry Benjamin Wheatley and Peter Cunningham, *London Past and Present: Its Historical Associations and Traditions*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge 2011), p.421.

³⁶ For Rowe, see my 'The Turnover of Officers during the Raising of a Kitchener Battalion: The 6th Battalion Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, August 1914-May 1915' on this website.

³⁷ Leadbeater, *Soul's Growth*, p.86.

This analysis is remarkably similar to Thomas', which suggests that it was the effects of the war itself, rather than just his incarceration that altered Hodgson-Smith's character. His courtship and his love of London's stage and West End, as noted by Thomas, suggests that Hodgson-Smith had an active social life before the war took its toll.³⁸ On the other hand, the war's impact was working on a mind that had been greatly influenced at a young age by Leadbeater's philosophy. One commentator in *The International Theosophical Yearbook*, following Leadbeater's death in 1934 in Perth, Western Australia, claimed that he was 'the Great Seer whose books have robbed death of its terrors'.³⁹ It is no exaggeration to say that the war caused many soldiers from all walks of life to use fatalism as a coping mechanism, but it is possible that Leadbeater's residual influence was a foundational cause of Hodgson-Smith's 'natural indifference' to death that Thomas had noticed in 1916.⁴⁰ Leadbeater certainly influenced another of Hodgson-Smith's unusual character traits, his pedantry, for, like his young secretary whom he trained, he had a strong predilection 'for profuse details and complex classificatory schemes'.⁴¹ This was especially the case when Leadbeater was in a clairvoyant state, for the lives he uncovered were full of small details and relationships were always complex and multi-layered. Hodgson-Smith himself kept 'the large mass of his travel letters and diaries ... Every letter is in its place, all carefully arranged and each group labelled by month and year to save trouble for the biographer'. He even kept a war diary 'of his tasks and operations'.⁴²

Hodgson-Smith's personal war diary would have come in handy in the 1920s when he helped to keep the old camaraderie of the 6th Battalion alive. He organised an annual dinner at the New University Club for surviving officers of the battalion and was involved in writing parts of the history of the regiment during the war that related to the 6th Battalion.⁴³ He also helped the parents of James Saumarez Mann—who survived the Western Front but was killed working as a Political Officer in Mesopotamia in 1920—with details of the 6th Battalion's activities in France when they were preparing a memoir of their son for publication.⁴⁴ Hodgson-Smith is not counted as a war casualty, but his multiple wounds certainly affected his health in the 1920s. A decade after the Armistice he developed serious problems with his sinuses and although he had three operations he died in March 1929 at the age of forty-two.⁴⁵ Theosophists would have seen this event as just another stage in a continuing evolution.

³⁸ Thomas, *A Life Apart*, p.54.

³⁹ Quoted in Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, pp.133-35 (e-book pagination).

⁴⁰ For the fatalism of the British soldier see, for example, Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge 2008), pp.87-89; David Taylor, *Memory, Narrative and the Great War: Rifleman Patrick MacGill and the Construction of Wartime Experience* (Liverpool 2013), pp.115-19; Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier. Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London 2005), pp.101-113 (iBook pagination).

⁴¹ Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, p.65.

⁴² Leadbeater, *Soul's Growth*, p.86. It is not known if these documents still exist.

⁴³ *The Times*, 18 June 1929; Jonathan Saunders in <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=75061&hl=%26quot%3Bhodgson-smith%26quot%3B#entry685115>. The annual officers' dinner is not to be confused with the annual reunion of the battalion, which only began in 1933. *The Queen's Own Gazette*, Vol. 51, No. 733 (December 1933), p.328.

⁴⁴ J.S. Mann to Hodgson-Smith, 21 August 1921, manuscript letter attached to my copy of J.S. Mann (ed), *An Administrator in the Making: James Saumarez Mann, 1893-1920* (London 1921).

⁴⁵ Leadbeater, *Soul's Growth*, p.82.

Conclusion

The British officer class of the Great War have often been the victims of stereotyping: the bungling, butchering General Staff; the brainless, field sport-loving, arrogant pre-war officer corps; and the over-enthusiastic volunteer Sir Lancelots from the public schools and universities of 1914-1915. Once the British officers are studied as individual personalities, however, the reality starts to become rather different and more interesting. Most, especially those who were in their mid-twenties or older when the war began, had unique hinterlands that are obscured by the biased generalisations of later social and literary commentators. Basil Hodgson-Smith is a case in point. We have the benefit of Alan Thomas' thoughts on his company commander, but even his sharp literary eye did not come close to what really made Hodgson-Smith tick. On the surface Hodgson-Smith was conscientious, hardworking and taciturn, if slightly idiosyncratic. Beneath that closed conventional exterior, however, a very different world pulsed.