

All Quiet on the Western Front?

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Based on 'Dear Friends, Liebe Freunde, International Friendship and the First World War', published in 2010, which focused on the WWI experiences of six young people. Found in a junkshop, the journal 'Six Nomads in Normandy' isn't 'a letter from the lost generation'. Written in 1912, it's a glimpse of the 20th century as it might have been. Determined to speak and understand French, they form real friendships, overcome prejudice. Their account of backpacking adventures in France revealed links with Germany too. In the last chapter, one of the girls proposed a toast: 'To friendship, long life and happy, happy days'

On the eve of WWI? But the 1911 dog-days crisis over Morocco had passed. Diplomacy had succeeded. Europe was at peace, there'd be no Armageddon. For these young people and all their generation, 1912 could be their 1963, the year after the Cuba crisis didn't lead to nuclear war.

The 'Nomads' didn't give their names. Identifying all six became possible when editors agreed to publish articles and photographs. Recognising family members, their descendants offered key information and shared private records, linking one friendship group to forgotten British, French and German history. The 'Nomads' were members of the Co-operative Holidays Association. Founded by Arthur Leonard and Dr J B.Paton, in response to social problems still all too familiar, the CHA rejected all barriers of gender, faith, income or politics. Inspired by Chautauqua, the movement offered outdoor adventure and education to young working people. In 1900, supported by Patrick Geddes, the CHA offered its first university based studyholidays. Donations from members funded holidays for the poor and disabled.

All Quiet on the Western Front? includes the original story, now extensively revised and rewritten. Five new chapters examine the early twentieth century dialogue between Britain and her European neighbours. As Europe's leaders prepared for war, universities, schools and industry focused on peace. In the new century, anything was possible. Rapid advances in science and technology were creating a world of instant communication, swift travel and barely credible scientific developments.

Anticipating the multilingual community of Europe and aware of mounting political tensions, linguists recognised the value of experiencing every aspect of another culture. Academics from every university in Britain taught at CHA holiday centres. Some of the scientists were already Fellows of the Royal Society. Fred Marquis would become Lord Woolton. Dr Alex Hill was the Master of Downing College and for two years Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge. Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley was a co-founder of the National Trust. Some CHA staff had overcome early disadvantage, including Peter Macnair, F.R.S.E., F.G.S.. Once a twelve year old draper's assistant, Macnair became curator of Kelvingrove Museum and examiner in geology at Aberdeen.

Generations of British workers had paid a hideous price for Britain's status as the 'first industrial nation'. In Manchester's slums, over 90% of Boer War volunteers had to be rejected. Travelling to Germany in 1906, Beveridge observed the successful delivery of health and social care. Britain's welfare state would have to wait, as both countries poured money into the 'Dreadnought race'. Militarism in Britain and Germany threatened the whole of Europe. On both sides of the North Sea, the popular press promoted xenophobia, serialising thrillers like 'The Invasion of 1910'. Responding to the volatile international situation, many CHA members chose holidays in Germany. Inspired by the CHA, language teachers in Frankfurt formed their own association, the Ferienheimgesellschaft. Invading Cologne, Frankfurt, Heidelberg and Berlin, CHA photos are captioned 'The Invaders'. The FHG responded by 'invading' London, Oxford, Stratford,

Liverpool, the Lake District, Scotland and Wales.



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