

CANADIAN OMAR *in the* TRENCHES

By V E R N E D e W I T T R O W E L L

WHEN the Great War broke out George Dottridge was in London, Ontario, then the centre of a semi-Bohemian, semi-Philistine little group of indifferently successful young newspapermen and ambitious but unarrived writers who discussed Nietzsche, Bergson, Shaw, Sudermann, Strindberg, Futurism and "vers libre" in the city room of one of the local newspapers daily when the "jig" was up at 3 p.m., and nightly, in a certain little Chinese restaurant at 12.30 a.m., where they made war on chop sueys, drank cafe noir and smoked innumerable cigarettes. On Sundays they organized, attended and promoted "radical" clubs, New Thought and Culturist societies.

All of this doesn't intimately concern Dottridge. He had worked on a newspaper in Brantford, Ont., but in London he was draughtsman with a local lithographing firm. Occasionally, however, he drew cartoons for the "London Advertiser," and in his spare time he organized and promoted amateur theatricals, painted most of the scenery himself, in addition to coaching the actors, and "moused" among the poets and the art albums in the public library. This introduction is simply to pay passing tribute to two other young London poets more closely coupled up with the group, who, like Dottridge, heard the call of their country, went overseas and received wounds of honour in the great conflict. These two others were Eric Ross Goulding, a young Oxford graduate, who divided his time between working on a farm at Hyde Park (Ontario) and writing poems for the London Advertiser; and Andrew Rae Macdonald, holder of a Ph.D. degree for a thesis on some of the intricacies or intimate phases of Hungarian literature, who had formerly worked on the Toronto papers, and was by birth a Maritimer and a kinsman of Bliss Carman and other versatile and noted Nova Scotians. Macdonald, the most avowed Bohemian of the group, obligingly accepted the presidency of the Culturist Society, an organization aiming at the propagation of "Culturism," a new philosophy proclaiming "art for art's sake" and based on Nietzsche's "Will to Power," Vol. II, with stray ideas from Bliss Carman, du Maupassant and Elbert Hubbard. When Macdonald went south to edit the "Duncan (Oklahoma) Eagle," manage a chicken farm and promote a Holiness revival campaign, the Culturist society disbanded.

Later Macdonald returned to Canada, enlisted, went overseas, and to France, was wounded and invalided to England. He is probably back on the firing line again, for when Pte. W. Nelson Minhinnick, C.A.M.C., one of the newspaper members of the little group and now serving in a hospital at Uxbridge, visited him in a neighbouring hospital a few months ago, he was nearly recovered from his wounds. Goulding was more severely wounded and is still convalescing in an English hospital.

Dottridge was born at Blackheath, Kent, England, a trifle over thirty years ago. His father was the late J. W. Dottridge, a leading cheese and produce importer of the British Isles. His brothers are still conducting their father's business in England. George came to Canada eight years ago, worked for several seasons as a pilot on the Great Lakes on the "Keewatin" and "Assiniboia" boats, and eventually drifted to London.

Here is where our story really begins. Dottridge joined the 33rd Battalion and went overseas with an early draft. Pastimes among the soldiers in the trenches are many and varied. Now they are driving the Germans home to Berlin, but when Dottridge was over there, reading and letter-writing, smoking, card-playing, carving knick-knacks and souvenirs to send to the folks at home, all served to beguile the long hours during which no shots were fired across No Man's Land, but when the soldier had to maintain a policy of "watchful waiting" none the less. In addition to filling several portfolios with cartoons and sketches from life in the trenches, Dottridge did something no other soldier attempted. He wrote a complete parody on "The Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam, with the result that his "Omar from the Trenches" has already run through two editions in England and Canada for the benefit of

the Red Cross and like patriotic projects. Recently he was invalided home to London and is now hard at work compressing into poems, songs, sketches and stories his experiences at the front, although not yet fully recovered from the havoc wrought by a stray bullet that played hide-and-seek in his chest and shoulder, while he was collecting some shovels dropped in hurried flight by a working party in a sudden and unexpected bombardment.

It is not every poet who is capable of clever parody. Contrary to general opinion, it is much easier to write good, original verse of reasonable strength than to get by with really first-class parody, and that is just wherein lies Dottridge's unique attainment. His revision of the work of the famous old Persian poet begins:

Stand to! for morning in the trench of night
Has flung his Starshell, putting stars to flight,
And lo! the Sergeant with the rum is come,
Stand down and post day-sentries now, all right.

Dreaming when Starshells fluttered thro' the sky,
I heard a voice outside the Dugout cry:
"Awake, my little one, it's two o'clock."
Sadly I crooned "The Sentinel am I."

Winter, indeed, has gone with all her snows,
And last week's fifteen francs—where, no one knows,
But still our rum its warmth and pleasure yields,
And still the "Stokes" its frequent mortar throws.

Come, gentle sergeant, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears;
To-morrow in old "Blighty" I may be,
And I'll come back—in nineteen thousand years.

With me along some strip of herbage sown
With cabbages and carrots all my own,
Where Gas Alerts and Grenades are not known,
And pity Kaiser Wilhelm on his throne!



MISS CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER, a British Columbia woman who is making a reputation for herself in the world of letters. She was born in the Cariboo gold fields, where her father was a Hudson's Bay Company factor. She no doubt inherited some of her literary talent, for Charles Reade was a relative of her father, while connected with her mother's family was Margaret Lindsay, who wrote "Tales of Scottish Life and Character," and Lady Ann Lindsay, author of "Auld Robin Gray." Miss Skinner has long been a writer of short stories and articles for American and English magazines, and has lately written several plays, one of which was produced a short time ago with great success in New York. Her literary reputation, however, she owes to her poetry, chiefly songs and character sketches suggested by the Indian lore of the Pacific Coast. These are written in free verse and are inspired by the author's early life among the primitive people and deep forests and mountains of the West. In 1913 Miss Skinner won half the London Bookman's twenty-one guinea prize in the lyric contest with her "Song of Cradle Making," and the following year with a group of "Songs of Coast Dwellers" she captured in the United States a \$100 prize offered for the best group of poems published during the year. She is at present living in New York.



A SPRING THERE WAS.

(But Not in 1917.)

There with a newspaper beneath the bough,
A little beer, a smoke or two—and Thou
Beside me, rambling about politics,
Ah! Canada were Paradise now!

And much as War has played the infidel
And robbed me of my peaceful notions—well,
I often wonder what the soldiers gain,
One-half so precious as the lives they sell!

Alas, that men should be shot down in rows,
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close,
A holocaust to please an imbecile,
Who yet may be an Emperor, who knows?

But, blood-red War is dimming and shall wane,
The Sun of Peace is rising once again;
How oft hereafter rising shall he look
For any hint of War—and look in vain.

And when Thyself with shining feet shall tread
Among the soldier victims thy bent head
Shall promise for their death an Endless Peace;
Forgive us if we hate—we have our Dead.

BOOKS YOU WILL READ

By WAYFARER

AND STILL THEY COME!

MESSRS. GRAFTON AND CO., of London, England, announce the publication of the fourth volume of "Books of the Great War," a very useful bibliography of literature dealing with the present conflict, and is said to be as large as any two of its predecessors put together. That would mean that already the total output of war books reaches the appalling number of 5,000 copies—and still they come! It was Sherman who declared that "War is hell," but not even he had any conception how hellish the scribes can make it for a poor reviewer.

On my desk stand three of the latest clamouring silently but insistently for notice, and they will not be denied.

From Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., comes the first of these, CANADA IN FLANDERS—the official records of the doings of our boys over-seas. Sir Max Aitken, Baronet, wrote the first volume of these records.

And he wrote them up so skilfully

That he went to the Lords from the H. o'C., and as Lord Beaverbrook, is responsible for the second volume. This volume carries the history of our forces at the front from Sept., 1915, to July, 1916, covering such important engagements as St. Eloi and Sanctuary Wood and coming down to but not including the Battle of the Somme. As an intimate story of the fighting the book is bound to be of great value to the future historian and is at the same time of intense interest to the average reader.

In TO VERDUN FROM THE SOMME (S. B. Gundy, 75 cents), Mr. Harry E. Brittain, an English journalist not unknown in Canada, describes his impressions and depicts the various phases of war-work

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