

The Poetry of The War

The difficulty of keeping abreast of the literature of his time, of which the wisest of kings complained, was a mere trifle by comparison with the task the printed page imposes on present day readers. To be widely and accurately informed on even one subject of general interest is impossible, when there are but twenty-four hours in a day, and sleeping, eating, and earning a living occupy all but a few of them. The literature of the Great War is a conclusive example of this. Messrs. Lange and Perry's annotated list, published less than six months after the outbreak, showed hundreds of books on the struggle, and in addition, over fifty entries under "Poetry, Songs and Plays," seventy volumes of "Sermons, Hymns and Prayers," twenty of "Humour," and more than a score of histories. When, to this beginning, is added the ever increasing and on-rushing volumes inundating us every month, and the scores of thousands of magazine articles, one realizes the futility of any effort to keep step with a literature that in forty months is in a position to mock any attempt at successful assimilation.

This is true, not only of the literature of the war as a whole, but also of its poetry. A Munich professor, replying to the charge of enemies, such as Maeterlinck and Vaerhaven, that his is a nation of barbarians, in disproof of the accusation triumphantly asserted that in the first five months of the cataclysm Germany had written 3,000,000 poems! Schumann, in his book "Germany and the World War," says 6,000,000 poems were produced in the first year of the war! Whether or not that be true, the output makes the hardiest of readers blench. More than three hundred volumes of verses have been written, with some phase of the war as the entire subject. A dozen anthologies have already been issued, and more are in preparation. "The Poets' Corner" of every newspaper contains fugitive verse on the war, and some of it worthy of permanent preservation. War verse dominates in the magazines. The human aspirations and passions, the emotional analyses and manifestations that, with the visible and natural world, constitute the basic poetic material, today are seen through, and colored by, the red mists that enwrap all civilization.