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War Poems

by

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Lyman C Smith.

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The Kaiser Abdicates

YE made me what I am. From childhood's prime
Ye fenced me round with cringing, fawning
guards

Who clicked their heels, or bent the servile knee,
And made my foolish whims supremest law.
Ye fed my mind and heart with tales of blood
And ravage done in weaker neighbor lands,
And praised their doers as the kings of men.
From earliest years ye fed my thoughts on war,
And warped my judgment with ideals false.
The men ye called the great were ever clad
In glittering steel, with crested helms of gold;
And from their brazen belts hung swords that
flashed

Like glories in my young admiring eyes.
Ye dressed my infant limbs in uniform
Of brilliant hues, and girded to my side
A burnished blade with jeweled hilt and sheath—
My very playthings, implements of war.
While yet a child, ye gave me high command;
My breast with clasps and medals ye adorned—
Titles and honors that I never earned.

The Kaiser Abdicates

YOUR fawning priests, that claim to comprehend

The laws of God and show His will to men,
Instilled this poison in my willing ears:—
By birth, God's special act, had I been called
To lead His people to a higher plane,
And make them undisputed lords of earth:
That, being thus ordained by Right Divine,
Vicegerent of Almighty God was I,
And who my will opposed, resisted God;
That in my dream of conquering the world,
It mattered not how many foemen fell
A sacrifice upon my Moloch shrine;
The life-blood welling from a million hearts
Counted for nothing with one drop of mine.
The devastation, and all horrors wrought
When I rode forth to conquer other lands,
Were retribution due to foes of God,
And merited the highest meed of praise.
And when, thus taught by holy men who held
In keeping all the oracles of God,
I too presumed to don the priestly robe
And from the altar mouth my wanton boasts,
Ye stood elated at my vaunts profane,
And flattered me as if I were a god.

The Kaiser Abdicates

FROM childhood's early hour, where'er I went,
Ye made my life one long parade of flags
And trumpets, tossing crests and jingling steel.
While on my prancing steed I proudly passed
Ye cheered, and cannons roared their loud ap-
plause.

Ah, verily, ye all are fools and blind,
And love a god to worship, though of clay;
But I have proved the vainest fool of all—
A gaudy puppet for your foolish praise.

THEY taught me I was of superior mould
With godlike ichor coursing in my veins,
Not to be soiled by marriage bonds with hinds
Like you, who were but pawns wherewith I played
Ambition's game, and all should count it gain
And highest duty, at my beck to die
In thousands, to exalt my fame or feed
My pride. What were ten thousand lives like
yours,
If I won glory for myself or mine?

YE made me what I am. Too well I learned
And acted on the stage my strutting part.
Where was the man among you all that told
Me I was mortal too, the fool of pride
And self-conceit? Who taught me that a king
Should guard, e'en as a shepherd guards his flock,
Whose every life is precious in his sight?

The Kaiser Abdicates

AT last, the bubble of my pride has burst,
The sweet has turned to bitter on my lips,
No more a god, a weeping, crouching wretch,
I kneel and whimper fruitless prayers to Him
Whose sacred name my lips so oft profaned,
Asserting His approval of my deeds.

INOW resign. Ah, whither shall I flee?
The hosts bereaved will shrill their curses loud,
The helpless blind, reproach with sightless eyes,
The millions maimed, outstretch their handleless
arms;

Earth has no place to hide my guilty head.
And in the world to be, the pallid ghosts—
Sweet baby faces, famine-blackened lips,
Deflowered maids, and mutilated forms
Bestrewing pathways of my brutal hosts—
In myriads, will point their taunting hands
And shriek their hollow curses on my soul,
Can Lethe's billows all these horrors hide,
Or drained Nepenthe bring forgetfulness?
In all the aeons of the world to be
O, what can lift this burden from my soul?
I would that all were Nothingness and Night
Where mem'ry of the Past would never come.

The Kaiser

O FALLEN Kaiser, fleeting years are few
Since men implored a blessing on thy name,
Believing thee a monarch wise and true
That made the people's good the single aim:
Thy patient Germans too were often praised
As toilers at each industry and art
That all the race to higher levels raised,
And fed the hunger of the human heart.

BUT now, earth heaped with torn and shattered
slain,
The lurking death in sky and open sea,
Lust, devastation, and satanic crime,
Have left on "German" a polluting stain;
And thou, in all the years to come, shalt be
The vilest blot that soils the scroll of Time.

Why Were Ye Silent?

GREY watchdogs of the sea, your task is done.
Through glooms of night and winter tempest
wild,

O'er pathless waters, tireless have ye coursed
To hunt the lurking demons of the deep,
Or dare from safe retreat leviathans.
Ye guarded well our little island home;
No foeman's foot her borders hath profaned;
Ye kept secure dominion of the waves
That torn and trampled nations might be free,
And Right and Justice never fail from earth.

THROUGH morning mists of dim November
dawn,

Your two long lines of grim and ghostly forms,
Extending to the far horizon's verge,
Silent and ready, waited for the word
That, on a sign of treachery, would bring
Thunder and lightning from a thousand throats
Of steel, upon the monsters of the deep,
Huge, cowed, submissive, moving to their doom.
Your crowded decks were silent. Not a sound.
No mock. No cheers of triumph. Why should men
That bravely fought, yet kept their souls unstained,
Stoop to a triumph over captured fiends

Why Were Ye Silent?

That heartless murdered helpless wounded men,
Sisters of Mercy, matrons, bright-eyed maids,
And sweet-lipped babes; or leered and laughed to
see

Them vainly battling with engulfing waves—
Yea, boasted of their deeds nor were ashamed?
Men do not cheer when they have trapped a wolf
Whose fangs are red and dripping still with blood.