

# John McCrae

B.A., M.D., M.R.C.P. (Lond.), Lieut.-Col., C.A.M.C.

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LIEUTENANT-COLONEL JOHN McCRAE

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JOHN McCRAE, B.A., M.D., M.R.C.P. (LONDON),  
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL, C. A. M. C.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from falling hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders Fields.

(LONDON "PUNCH," 1915.)

JOHN McCRAE, physician, soldier and poet, died in France from pneumonia, complicated by meningitis, on January 28, 1918. He was born in Guelph, Ontario, in 1872, the son of Colonel and Mrs. David McCrae, who survive him. His primary education was received in the Guelph schools, and later he entered the University of Toronto, graduating in arts in 1894 and in medicine in 1898, being the gold medallist of his year. He was an intern in the Toronto General Hospital, the Garrett Hospital at Mt. Airy, Md., and the Johns Hopkins Hospital, and then accepted a Fellowship in Pathology at McGill University under Professor J. G. Adami, to whom he became most intimately attached. In 1904 he received the conjoint degrees of M.R.C.S. and L.R.C.P., and later took the M.R.C.P. (London). He had lived in Montreal since 1900, and his work in medicine was chiefly identified with the Medical School of McGill University and the Royal Victoria Hospital. For several years he served as pathologist at the Montreal General Hospital, primarily under the guidance of Wyatt Johnston, and after his

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death was in charge of the department. For a number of years he was professor of pathology at the University of Vermont. In 1905 he was elected associate physician to the Royal Victoria Hospital and physician to the Alexandria Hospital (for infectious diseases) in Montreal. He continued his association with the department of pathology, and until his death held the dual position of lecturer in pathology and lecturer in medicine at the Medical School, McGill University.

John McCrae was a born teacher. He loved the simple exposition of the pathology of disease and avoided at all times beclouding the subject with the abstruse and intricate. His demonstrations were impressive and sharp was his criticism, each point being made with a snap which reminded one that he was a student of Carlyle. If contrast was required in teaching it was used even to the grotesque. To the student it was a new departure from the uninspiring lecture, and he revelled in it. I have repeatedly met students who had sat under him and they never stinted their praise of his teaching. His simple methods demanded a firm rule and his class-room reflected a stern but congenial relation of master and student. The ward teaching was his particular delight, and when didactic lectures fell to his lot he converted them as nearly as possible into practical demonstrations by bringing as much pathological material to the lecture room as was possible. The students loved him for the interest he always displayed in their difficulties and because he showed the human side in medicine. They learned from him the unselfish duty of the physician to human distress in all walks of life. They loved him, too, because he never feared to step from the dignity of the teacher to the level of the student.

In 1899-1900 he served with the artillery in South Africa, saw much active service and was in many engagements. Although serving as an artillery officer, he often acted as a medical officer when need required. His military activities brought him the Queen's Medal, with three clasps, and later he was appointed commanding officer of his battery. McCrae had much of the soldier in his make-up. His carriage, his approach and his appearance before an audience marked him of soldierly character. His method of dealing with others was always with that straightforward, square front which we are pleased to recognize as the attribute of a true soldier. He lent no patience to trivial quarrels, and often he would appear as the peacemaker, particularly amid the factions of a junior

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faculty who everywhere are Quixotic in their grievances. On the other hand, he would have nothing with the peace-at-any-price party when a quarrel founded upon rights and principles was at stake. He was a man of few words but of decided action. Of his South African experiences he rarely spoke, but we have a number of poems, which though telling us little of the actual warfare, spoke volumes of the thoughts of the man. In 1910 he was invited to accompany Earl Grey, then Governor-General of Canada, on his trip through western Canada, across Hudson Bay and return by way of Labrador. The members of this party never failed to refer to the interest and pleasure which John McCrae infused into the trip. Earl Grey said that "they had travelled 3000 miles and McCrae had a story for each mile."

At the outbreak of war in 1914 McCrae had just arrived in London. He cabled to Canada offering his services and was appointed surgeon to the First Brigade of Canadian Artillery. He was with the guns along the Ypres sector for a continuous period of fourteen months, and was in the thick of the engagements where the Canadian forces made an undying name for their valor. His brigade was behind the area where the first gas attack was delivered and his description of their moving up to hold the front line was most graphic. They were under intense fire for seventeen days, and on one occasion a shell came through his dressing station, but he escaped injury. When in the service of his country he was a man of few words, and few there are who have an appreciation of what he endured. His health was undermined by the strain of constant duty and the conditions under which the men were living in the early period of the war. He did not realize this: in fact, he was reproving himself for the lack of greater sacrifices which he deemed it his duty to make. It was only through the strong appeal of his friends that he consented to accept the post of internist at a base hospital (McGill Unit).

In his medical duties he was equally severe with himself. He sacrificed his all for the comfort and welfare of the men under his charge; he was keenly desirous that all the invalided should have the last ounce of care provided, to restore them to health as early as possible. He served for over two years as chief in medicine in the McGill Unit. Just before his death he had been appointed consultant to one of the British Army areas, the first officer of the overseas forces to be so honored. News of this came on the day on

which he was stricken with pneumonia. The attack at first seemed mild, but meningitis developed on the third day and death came two days later.

In medicine John McCrea will be known to us for his admirable teaching, and a number of researches of which his investigations on the relation of extensive superficial burns to duodenal ulcers, acute mycotic aneurysm of the aorta, necroses of the liver and a clinical study of scarlet fever are among the most important. He was co-editor with Professor Adami in the writing of a *Text-book of Pathology*. He edited the department of Pathology and Bacteriology in this JOURNAL for a number of years. However, he is much more widely known to a general audience for his literary essays and poems. During the present war the poems given herewith are among his best. "In Flanders Fields" has received favorable criticism everywhere, and has been republished the world over.

John McCrae leaves a host of friends to mourn his untimely end. All will sorely miss him and his genial presence. Those who knew him will carry forward his torch, not forgetful of the living spirit of the man and a character as true as steel. His last poem, "The Anxious Dead," may almost be regarded as an answer to "In Flanders Fields."

#### THE ANXIOUS DEAD.

O guns, fall silent till the dead men hear  
 Above their heads the legions pressing on  
 (These fought their fight in time of bitter fear  
 And died not knowing how the day had gone).

O, flashing muzzles, pause, and let them see  
 The coming dawn that streaks the day afar:  
 Then let your mighty chorus witness be  
 To them, and Caesar, that we still make war.

Tell them, O guns, that we have heard their call,  
 That we have sworn, and will not turn aside,  
 That we will onward, till we win or fall,  
 That we will keep the faith for which they died.

Bid them be patient, and some day, anon,  
 They shall feel earth enwrapt in silence deep.  
 Shall greet, in wonderment, the quiet dawn,  
 And in content may turn them to their sleep.

(LONDON "SPECTATOR," 1917.)

OSKAR KLOTZ.