



Poems

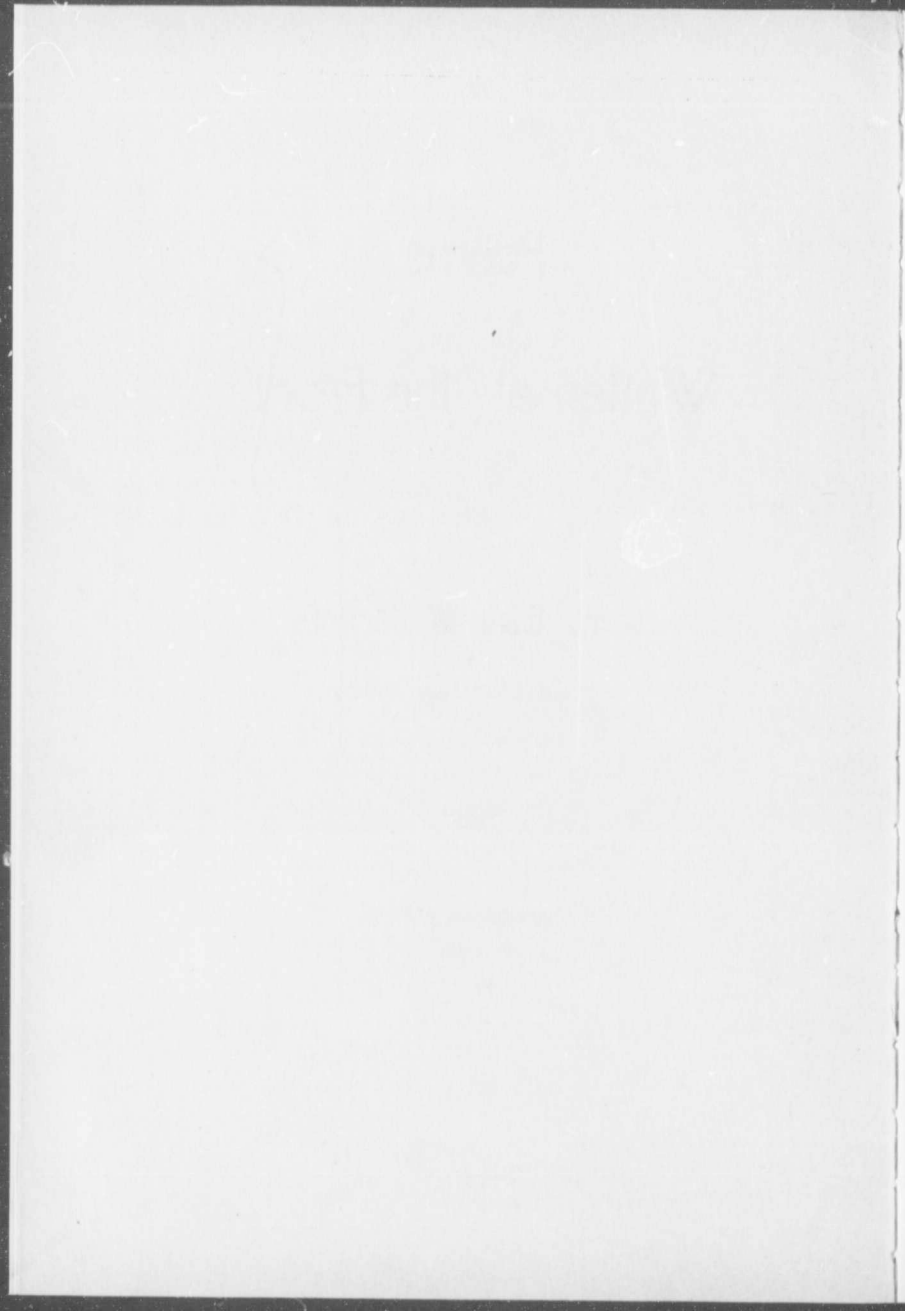
Written at "The Front"

By

Comd. Edgar W. McInnis



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Poems

(2)

Written at "the Front"

by

(1)

Bomb. Edgar W. McInnis

11th Canadian Siege Battery



(3)

Charlottetown, P. E. I.

A. Irwin

1918 (5)

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By Edgar W. McInnis



THE LOVE OF THE SONS

WHEN the singing bullet finds its mark
In a gallant British breast,
When the yellow cloud of poison gas
Bears death on its wavering crest,
When the blue-grey hordes in a steel-tipped line
Sweep on like a living flood,
When the deadly bayonets slash and rip,
And the trenches run with blood,
And we bear it all for thy sake alone,
England! Mother! Our love is shown.

When the big guns speed o'er an angry sea,
In the teeth of sleet and spray,
Their message of death to the tossing foe
Scarce a storm-swept league away,
When the life-blood creeps o'er the glistening decks
In sullen spurts and red,
When glazing eyes stare sightless up
At the heavens overhead,
And the black shark slinks to the riven side,
England! Mother? Our love is tried.

So we come, Mother England, thy loyal sons,
Ready to do our share,
For behold, we have writ in the blood of our best
The proof of the love we bear;
We have staggered blindly through choking gas,
Reeling with ev'ry breath—
Shrill, whistling shrapnel, screaming shell,
Agony, sudden death,
All for thee we can face unmoved—
England! Mother! Our love is proved.

ROUGE CROIX

BEFORE the wayside shrine we fall
While yet the hours are terror-free,
A while to pray, a while recall
The blood-red Cross of Calvary—

O Christ! In hours of sharp alarm—
In dark defeat or triumph's thrill—
Grant us to feel Thy strengthening arm,
To know that Thou art with us still;

Alike within the quiet room,
In that dim hush that bides the dark,
Or 'mid the raging shock of doom,
Be Thou our Light and Guiding Mark

From craven fear that bids us flee,
From vengeful hate that seeks its vent,
From pride that holds aloof from Thee
And rebel guilt impenitent,

From our unnumbered ancient sins,
From all our petty, sordid dross,
Cleanse us, O Christ, ere battle dims
The vision of Thy Crimson Cross.

So let our humble hearts atone,
As in Thy presence now we bend,
That in Thy strength, and Thine alone
We may endure unto the end.

54 C. C. S., Merville,
August 17th, 1917.

THE SENTINEL

FROM sullen dusk to pallid dawn,
With eyes that may not close,
I watch the crimson sky grow wan
And flush again to rose;
The blood-red of the sunset gate
Fades into ghastlier light—
The throbbing, pulsing fires of hate
That sear the robe of night

O'er shattered wall and sunken road
The quivering flames are hurled;
The glory of the gods bestowed
Upon our 'wilderred world—
The secrets of the void profound,
The mysteries of life,
Melted, and fused, and poured around
In pools of anguished strife.

Oh, lights that reel 'twixt earth and sky
In stabbing, searching pain!
Their scarlet spears shall leap and die
And flicker high again
Until the last dim fire has glowed—
For they can only be
The lights that mark the winding road
Whose end is victory.

THE GUN

A SHARP command from the misty dark,
And we brace ourselves for the big gun's bark,
For the echoing bang that splits the night,
And the sudden flash of the blinding light
That etches clear, for a moment's space
The tense, hard lines on each straining face,
Then the darkness folds like a robe again,
And the squeaking scotches groan and strain,
And we hark once more, as the orders come,
To the quivering "plunk" as the shell drives home,
To the leathery squeal as the wheel-brakes jam,
To the thudding clang of the breech-block's slam,
Then our palms fly up to our mud-stained cheeks,
And we close our ears as the big gun speaks.

O, the enemy search for her night and day,
And they blow up an odd estaminet
Or a couple of churches, just for fun,
But they never come nigh to the crouching gun,
For she sits secure by the battered wall,
And she bides her time while the stray shells fall,
Yes, she waits and waits till the last one rips,
With a sneering laugh on her cruel lips,
Then she wakes to life with a shattering roar,
And we feed her the shells, and she calls for more,
And she hurls them North and East and South
Like bitter oaths from her blackened mouth—
Oh, well do the enemy know their path,
And they fear our gun when she roars her wrath.

So she works for us, and we work for her,
And together we swing from ridge to spur,
And our trail lies plain to the shuddering skies
In the sanguine stream of our sacrifice;
For we stride the length of the lonely land,
And we scatter death with an open hand
To the foe as they crouch in their dugouts deep—
Be they wide awake, be they fast asleep,
Still we search them out and we mark them well
And we leave their fate to the screaming shell
That our big gun speeds on its hellish way—
Till over the town the dawn breaks grey,
And the darkness drives from the far hill-crest;
Then we leave the gun for a well-earned rest.



THE ADVENTURERS

NOT in the rush of a broken cause—not in a shameful war—
Not in the mad, hot haste of fear shall we go forth
once more,
Not with despondent and senile steps will we turn from
the beaten track—
We will arise in the pride of might, as we did in the years
long back.
Years long back, when our riotous blood nor quiet nor
peace could brook,
We who were born to the Lonesome Trail the paths of
our sires forsook,
Spurning the ancient, trusted things for the things of
doubtful worth,
Playing the game of life and death at the ends of the
careless earth.
Oft have we drunken and dived with Death—laughed in
his face with the best—
Little we recked of his ghastly grin as we matched him
jest for jest—
Oft would we gladly have hailed him friend ; oft have we
pledged his health—
Now we would meet him in open fray, lest he come in the
night by stealth.
Over the ridged, ribbed comb of the world our vagabond
road runs red—
We who were born to the Lonesome Trail, we may not
die in bed—
Better to fall in the last grim fight on the crimson, corpse-
ringed hill,
So that old England may know with pride that her sons
are English still !

THE SISTERS

WHEN the world with horrid wrath was throbbing,
When the earth and sky were awful red,
When the night-wind through the trees was sobbing--
Sobbing for the still unburied dead,

When we lay with bodies shattered, broken—
Death had been a sweet release from pain—
With the words of anguish yet unspoken,
Watching with dull eyes the spreading stain,

Then they came, with cooling, soothing fingers,
With the tranquil smile that speaks of peace,
Quieting the frame where torment lingers,
As they bade the raging fever cease.

By their acts of mercy all unnumbered,
By their tenderness and constant care
By the hours they toiled while others slumbered,
When we would have yielded to despair,

By the battles fought at death's dark portal,
When they gave themselves our lives to bind,
They have won a crown that is immortal—
Deep abiding love of all mankind.

Wherefore we, their debtors past all measure,
Though our faltering words be weak and crude,
Bear them, for the memories we treasure,
Boundless and undying gratitude.

OVER THE LINE

ONLY a shadowy, slender thread
Running to God knows where,
Caught on the cross-arm overhead,
Shining like silver there,
Stretching as far as the eye can see,
Tiny and taut and fine—
Oh, but the things that come to me
Over the line :

Word of the foe in a wild retreat ;
Victory won and lost ;
Triumph, close-snatched from a black defeat—
Tales of the red, sad cost—
Stories of grim, gaunt men at bay,
Speeding with wings divine,
Tell all the world how they fought that day—
Over the line.

Only a slender thread, it sings
Ever its cheery song,
Thrilling and throbbing with wondrous things,
Passing the word along,
Spreading the news on a swifter wing
Bringing the longed for sign—
Victory lives in the words that ring
Over the line.

OUR DUG-OUT

WHEN the lines are in a muddle—as they very often
are—
When the break's a mile away from you, or may be
twice as far,
When you have to sort the trouble out, and fix it on the
run,
It's fine to know that you can go, when everything is done,
To a cosy little dug-out (and the subject of this ode)
Just a comfy little bivvy on the—Road,
A sheltered, sandbagged doorway with the flap flung open
wide,
And a pal to grin a greeting when you step inside.

When the weather's simply damnable—cold sleet and
driving rain—
When the poles snap off like matches and the lines are
down again,
And you rip your freezing fingers as you work the stub-
born wire,
It's great to get back home again, and dry off by the fire.

In a cheery little dug-out (and you know the kind I mean)
With a red-hot stove a-roaring, and a floor that's none too
clean,
A pipe that's filled and waiting and a book that will not
wait,
And a cup of steaming coffee if you come back late.

It may look a little crowded, and the roof's a trifle low,
 But it's water-tight—or nearly—and it wasn't built for
 show,
 And when Woolly Bears are crumping and the shrapnel
 sprays around,
 You feel a whole lot safer if you're underneath the ground
 In a rat-proof, rain-proof dug-out (and it's splinter-proof
 as well)
 Where we got the stuff to build it is a thing I mustn't tell,
 But we've made it strong and solid, and we're cosy, rain
 or shine,
 In our happy little dug-out on the firing line.

TO A "V. A. D."

MINE is a stubborn pen,
 Mine an untutored tongue;
 I must depart again,
 Leaving our thanks unsung.

But be you well assured,
 Deep in our hearts we know
 All that you have endured,
 All that you must forgo—

So, though our lips be dumb,
 Yet may you learn some day,
 In the long time when the world comes home
 All that our hearts would say.

MY PRINCESS

HER little wooden shoes go patter-patter pat
On the cobbles of the sunny old French street,
As she toddles down the hill with a rat-a-tat-a-tat,
And there's music in the clatter of her feet—
Oh, her hair is molten sunshine, with the shadows flitting
through,
And her big, round eyes are twinkling, shining stars,
And her laughter is the sweetest that the old world ever
knew
Since the fairies flitted through the rainbow bars.
So I count myself her subject, and I stand to serve her
needs,
And I come to lay my homage at her feet,
But she laughs and clatters by me, and she never looks
nor heeds—
And when she laughs she looks so wondrous sweet!
And I'm sad when she is sorrowful, and glad when she
is gay,
And every day I love her more and more,
But she tramples on the heart of me, and laughing goes
her way,
My little Princess—aged just four.
Oh, her kingdom lies before her, for my heart is all her
own,
And the little tyrant rules by smile and frown,
With a rag doll for her sceptre, and a wooden stool her
throne,
And her royal robe a tattered gingham gown.
And she only asks a sugarplum as tribute to her sway,
Or a kiss, perhaps, to drive away the blues,
But I know the great big universe keeps rolling on its way
To the clatter of her little wooden shoes.

SWEETHEART OF DREAMS

IN daytime I search for her vainly,
Unfinding, yet feeling, so near,
Her presence, so hauntingly, plainly,
Elusively dainty and dear ;
But midnight is kinder than morning,
And Luna oft lends me her beams,
To find, 'twixt the dark and the dawning,
My wonderful sweetheart of dreams.

Then over the star-studded spaces,
Dream-carried and drifting we rise,
The joy-light of youth on our faces,
The laughter of love in our eyes,
To rove where the meteors quiver—
To roam where the world-shadows fall.
Where life is the Joy of the Giver,
And Love is the Master of All.

Dear heart ! could we wander forever—
We two on the edge of the Sphere,
Just drifting and dreaming, with never
The dawn of awakening to fear !
But cruel sun-shadows enfold you :
You melt from my arms and are gone ;
For only in dreams may I hold you—
I lose you at last in the dawn.

INTROSPECT

THERE is a cavern where the still sea lingers,
Lapping and slipping through the quiet hall,
And whispers, in the soft-descending darkness
Echo from wall to wall ;

There in the glory of the golden twilight,
Sweet-scented winds from far-off, filmy lands
Come lightly to caress the dreamy waters,
And gently kiss the sands ;

And there I know, when this dread dream is over,
I shall return—to rest ; and resting, find
The old accustomed things—the hopes and visions
So lately left behind—

Then when the daylight dies in saffron splendor,
And all these tortured, fevered days are past,
Into the glad, warm West I knew aforetime
I shall return at last.

QUARANTINE CAMP

SNEAKING along in the darkness,
Dodging the bally M. P's,
Wondering how I can slip past the guard
Into my den of disease,
What in the world am I up to?
Where in the deuce have I been?
Plainly and clearly—I have been merely
Breaking from quarantine.

Mud from the road and the pathway
Cakes on my boots and puttees;
Puddles of water, unseen in the dark
Soak me half-way to the knees.
Can't I go out in the daytime
When all these things can be seen?
Not by a damn shot—not here in Bramshott
We are in quarantine!

Guarded like cattle or convicts
Seldom we dare pass the door;
This is the way we are fighting the Hun!
Oh, what a h— of a war!
Yet one bright beam in our darkness
One ray of hope shines serene:
Think how we'll cheer if we ever get clear—
Clear of our quarantine!

BACK INTO CIVVIES AGAIN.

I'm here in the same old line-up, here with the same old
crew
Handing the same old mess-tin up for the same old mess
of stew,
Hanging around at the same old door, in the same old
muck and rain,
And dreaming away of the wonderful day when I get back
to civvies again.

Here's to the day when we shed puttees and tunics and
army caps,
When we step into clothes with a Palm Beach cut and
dress like regular chaps,
In a coat whose buttons can not be shined, and a hat that
really fits,
In a clean white shirt with a collar and tie—when the
Army and I are quits!

Here's to the day that the mess-tin goes to a place we'll
not name here
When we sit at a snowy table-cloth and dine like the
Grand Vizier ;
We'll have to eat four square meals a day, for, figuring
up, you'll find
In the matter of eating, this Army life has put us three
years behind.

So here's to the day when the war is won and we start
back over the sea,
To the paper the Colonel will hand to us that says at last
we're free,
To the days when our troubles are all forgot, forgot with
our toil and pain—
Forgot in the joy of the one great fact that we're back
into civvies again.

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