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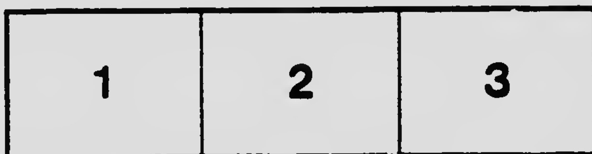

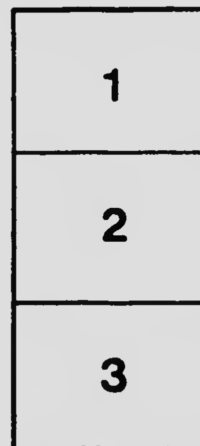

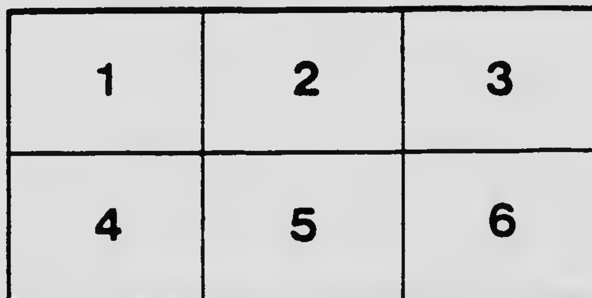

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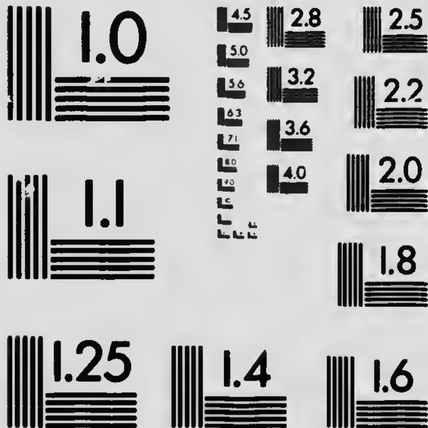

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POETRY AND WAR

BY

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POETRY AND WAR

Soul of the World, Knowledge without thee,
What hath the Earth that truly glorious is ?
Why should our pride make such a stir to be,
To be forgot ? What good is like to this—
  To do worthy the writing, and to write
  Worthy the reading and the world's delight ?

S. DANIEL.

SOMEONE, I forget who, has said that we English are not a military nation, but that we *are* a very warlike and even pugnacious people. It is very true. There is no fear that we shall ever become militarist, but we *are* a fighting race. ' If blood be the price of Admiralty, Lord God we ha' paid in full ! '

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why we English are, with all our practicality, pre-eminently a poetical nation, for that too we most certainly are. It may safely be claimed that no modern nation possesses a poetical literature finer in quality or richer in quantity than our own. Not France, though she has much fine poetry and more fine prose ; not Italy, though her fair fields have been watered by an ever-flowing stream of poesy from Dante to Carducci. Certainly not Germany. The Germans to-day have somehow got it into their heads that they are, before all other nations, a nation of poets. Can they compare with us ? Let us put it into naval language. Their ' Grand Fleet ' seems somewhat limited. Grant that they have one ' super-Dreadnought ', the ' Goethe ', admittedly a fine and

powerful ship; still she is hardly equal in guns or speed to the 'Shakespeare'. Grant that they have two or three other Dreadnoughts, the 'Lessing', the 'Schiller', and that swift and dangerous craft, largely fitted on French lines, the 'Heine', and that they possess a flotilla of minor vessels: what have they to put against the number or the variety of our armament?

No; Germany has fine poets and poems, for which the world is the richer, and which we must never, not even to-day, forget.

Some of the most poignant of modern war-poems are those of Detlev von Liliencron, who, born at Kiel in 1844, died six years ago, and fought both in the Austrian and in the Franco-Prussian War. But England has been, almost since she became England, the most poetical of European countries, and there is no poetic literature which for variety or force can be ranked beside ours, except that of ancient Greece. The consequence is that the history of these islands of ours might very largely be written from their poetry, and to a great extent in its very language.

There is an interesting book by Dr. Firth, the Regius Professor of History at Oxford, entitled *English History in English Poetry*, which shows what might be done in this way. But Professor Firth only deals with a special short and recent period, that from the French Revolution to the death of Queen Victoria. He might have begun far earlier, for these islands have been, as long as they have possessed any history, homes of poetry and nests of singing birds. The ancient Britons, as we know, had their 'bards'. We have not their poems preserved in a form which is readily available. But the story of Boadicea has produced two of the best war-poems we have.

The quiet, pious, evangelical Cowper was no 'muff' or pacifist. He wrote: 'England, with all thy faults, I love thee still'.

He also wrote:

> When the British warrior Queen,
>   Bleeding from the Roman rods,
> Sought, with an indignant mien,
>   Counsels of her country's gods,

while Tennyson treated the same subject in one of the most splendid masterpieces of metrification which even he accomplished.

It is only when we come to the Saxons that what may be called the English poetic record begins. 'The Battle of Brunanburh', one of the most famous Early English poems, all can read in Tennyson's spirited and sledge-hammer version based on his son's prose translation. The English Chronicle contains other similar poems.

When the Normans came they brought their own poets in their train. It is interesting to contrast the account of the Battle of Hastings or Senlac, told in the *Roman de Rou*, with the English account both of Brunanburh and of Stamford Bridge. This Battle of Hastings again Tennyson has described for us in his play of *Harold*, briefly, but vividly, making happy use of a resonant Latin hymn.

The wars with Wales, with Scotland and France, the wars with Spain, the Dutch wars, the later wars with France and Spain combined, the great Napoleonic struggle, the Crimea, the Mutiny, the South African War, all of these have produced their poetry. The difficulty is to select. Some principle of selection is needed.

There are the 'descriptive' poems, the accounts of

stirring incidents by land or sea, there are the 'elegiac' poems, the dirges on the death of heroes, there are those special war-songs, the poems of stimulus or encouragement, there are the 'philosophic' poems speaking of the moral aspects of war.

Some pieces, of course, contain in one whole many, or all, of these elements.

Most striking, if rare, are the contemporary poems which preserve some touch of the life and colours of the time. They are like the Bayeux Tapestry, which is very poetical, and may indeed be called a war-poem in needlework, a drama or epic set out in *tableaux*.

One of the earliest collections of English war-poems has a special interest for us to-day, for it describes a war going on in exactly the region where we are fighting at this hour, the collection of poems by an author whose personal history is unknown, Laurence Minot,[1] describing the wars of Edward the Third, first in Scotland with the Battle of Halidon Hill, and then the Channel, and in the Low Countries. The very headings of the Cantos are suggestive.

I

Lithes and I sall tell yow tyll
Ye bataile of Halidon Hill.

II

Now for to tell yow will I turn
Of ye bataile of Banocburn.

III

How Edward ye King come in Braband
And took homage of all ye land.

[1] An excellent edition is that of Mr. Joseph Hall, M.A., published by the Clarendon Press.

> Our Kinge was cumen, trewly to tell,
> Into Braband for to dwell.
> Ye Kayser Lowis of Bavere
> That in that land han had no pere,
> He and als his sons two,
> And other princes many mo.
> Bishoppes and Prelates were thare fele
> That had full mekill worldly wele.
> Princes and people, ald and yong,
> All that spake with Duchè tong.
> All thai come with great honowre
> Sir Edward to save and socowre.

Then follows an account of the naval battle of Sluys, or the 'Swin', in which Edward defeated the French. The description is very graphic:

> King Edward unto sail was ful sune dight
> With erles and barons and many kene knight.
> Thai come before Blankebergh on Saint Jon's night
> That was to the Normondes a well sary sight,
> Yit trumped thai and daunced with torches ful bright
> In the wild waniand [1] was thaire hertes light.
> Upon the morne efter, if I suth say
> A meri man Sir Robard out of Morlay
> At half eb in the Swin sought he the w[illegible]
> Thare lered men the Normandes at bu[illegible]er to play
> Helped tham no prayer that thai migh[illegible] pray
> The wreches er wonnen, thair wapin[illegible]es oway.

A little later comes the account of Edward's march through Normandy and the famous battle of Crècy.

> Stedes strong bilevid [2] still
>   Biside Cressy upon the grene:
> Sir Philip wanted all his will,
>   That was wele on his sembland [3] sene

[1] 'The light of the waning moon.'
[2] Abode.
[3] Countenance.

With spere and schelde and helmis schene
The bare than durst thai noght habide ;
Ye King of Beme was cant and kene,
But there he left both play and pride.

But I must not linger. We must omit the cantos which tell how :

Sir David had of his men grete loss
With Sir Edward at ye Nevil Cross.

or

How King Edward and his menié
Met with ye Spaniardes in ye see.

or

How gentill Sir Edward with his grete engines
Wan with his wight men ye castill of Gynes (*Guines*).

From Crècy (1346) and Poitiers (1355) it is natural to pass to Agincourt (1418).

This famous battle may perhaps fitly open the chapter of what may be called modern English War Poetry. It is celebrated in some of the finest and most famous lines in our own or any tongue, by Shakespeare, and there are two very interesting ballads about it.

Alas! that historians have to tell us that those battles and wars meant death to literature.

War, when it is really exhausting, crushes out, or burns up, poetry. It enfeebles the body politic, absorbs the interest, and lowers the vitality of a nation.[1]

'No age of our history', says J. R. Green, 'is so sad and so sombre as the age which we traverse from the Third Edward to Joan of Arc.'

[1] Dr. Charles Saleeby, F.R.S., the well-known authority, has been most opportunely working out this problem, as may be seen in his 'Dysgenics of War'.

These wars are therefore for the most part told, they are at any rate best commemorated, not by contemporaries, but by poets of a later time, writing when peace and her arts had plucked up heart and merriment again. Thus the melancholy and inglorious civil wars at home, the wars with France, sometimes melancholy too, but more glorious, are sung by the Elizabethan Drayton and Daniel, and above all by Shakespeare himself.

There is no need to quote again the passages of *Henry V*, about St. Crispin's Day, 'Crispin, Crispian', which have appeared in every book of War Poetry, in every newspaper, and been on every lip, during the last few months. But of the famous special songs of Agincourt some mention must be here made.

The Battle of Agincourt indeed may be taken as the point of departure in dealing with what may be called modern or living English War Poetry. Of Agincourt there are two poetic descriptions. The first is very early and anonymous. It will be found in a little volume of the 'Oxford Garland' series, entitled *Patriotic Poems*, selected by Mr. R. M. Leonard, which can be bought for sevenpence. It begins :

> Agincourt, Agincourt !
> Know ye not Agincourt ?
> Where English slew and hurt
>   All their French foemen ?
> With our pikes and bills brown
> How the French were beat down,
>   Shot by our bowmen !

and it ends :

> Agincourt, Agincourt !
> Know ye not Agincourt ?
> Dear was the victory bought
>   By fifty yeomen.

Ask any English wench,
They were worth all the French,
Rare English bowmen ! [1]

The other is better known. It is the spirited poem by Michael Drayton, found in almost all the Anthologies, called 'The Battle of Agincourt', which begins :

Fair stood the wind for France
When we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance,
Longer will tarry ;
But putting to the main
At Kaux, the mouth of Seine
With all his martial train
Landed King Harry.

and ends :

Upon St. Crispin's day
Fought was this noble fray,
Which fame did not delay
To England to carry ;
Oh, when shall Englishmen
With such acts fill a pen,
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry ?

At once famous it became. As Ben Jonson said :

Look how we read the Spartans were inflamed
With bold Tyrtaeus' verse : when thou art named
So shall our English youth urge on and cry
An Agincourt ! an Agincourt ! or die.

When Tennyson wrote 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' he was supposed to have taken the rhythm from this poem. But he did not. He took it from a line in a prose account in *The Times*, 'Someone had blundered.'

[1] There is a variant reading 'women' which male readers may prefer.

The great central contest with the Armada, though both in its general character, its greater incidents, its natural setting, and its successive moments, one of the most poetic of all encounters, produced at the time no adequate poems. It has since, in the last and in the present century, found not a few poets.

There is Macaulay's ballad, a little rhetorical, but finely poetical too. There is Swinburne's tercentenary poem. There is Mr. Noyes's epic of Drake, large in its conception and its treatment. To-day there is Mr. Masefield's beautiful and magic poem 'Philip the King'.

But the contests with Spain, both before and after the Expedition of the Armada, have left their record in splendid and spirited ballads.

Three of these ballads, the 'Ballad of Lord Willoughby', the 'Ballad of Mary Ambree', about 1587, and the 'Ballad of the Winning of Cales', i. e. Cadiz, by the English, all date before the Armada.

That delightful sea song 'The Honour of Bristol', a little later in date, is inspired by the same spirit.

Above all, there is one most perfect and beautiful poem which does not deal, it is true, with the fight of the Armada, but with a fight in the same struggle, Tennyson's ballad of the *Revenge*.

This R. L. Stevenson rightly called one of the noblest ballads in the English language. It is also surely one of the most artistically perfect. Why is it so ? What is it makes its peculiar excellence ? It is, that it combines so many elements of beauty. The story is a very singular one. As Tennyson wrote about it to his wife, 'Sir Richard Grenville in *one* ship, the *Revenge*, fought *fifty-three* Spanish ships of the line for fifteen hours, a tremendous story, outrivalling Agincourt.' As

Froude wrote, 'The action struck a deeper terror, though it was but the action of a single ship, into the hearts of the Spanish people, it dealt a more deadly blow upon their fame and moral strength than the defeat of the Armada itself.' Both the hero and his ship were remarkable. Sir Richard Grenville, as we know from Sir Walter Raleigh, who tells the tale, was truly a 'gallant gentleman' and a man of that transcendent courage, at once resolute and explosive, that seems to be more than human. The *Revenge* herself had been Drake's ship when he fought the Armada three years earlier.

The poem itself is full of both musical and pictorial effect. There is not a line or a word too little or too much. Throughout it all there is a sense of the 'setting', of the contrasting beauty of the natural scene. At the last, when the awful human struggle, the heroism even to death, is over, nature reasserts herself and whelms all in her vast engulfing peace. I will not attempt to read all of it to you, but only two sections, which may perhaps illustrate my criticism, the ninth and the fourteenth.

IX

And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the summer sea,
But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and the fifty-three.
Ship after ship, the whole night long, their high-built galleons came,
Ship after ship, the whole night long, with her battle-thunder and flame;
Ship after ship, the whole night long, drew back with her dead and her shame.
For some were sunk and many were shatter'd, and so could fight us no more—
God of battles! was ever a battle like this in the world before?

XIV

And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant and true,
And had holden the power and glory of Spain so cheap
That he dared her with one little ship and his English few;
Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they knew,
But they sank his body with honour down into the deep,
And they mann'd the Revenge with a swarthier alien crew,
And away she sail'd with her loss and long'd for her own;
When a wind from the lands they had ruin'd awoke from sleep,
And the water began to heave and the weather to moan,
And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,
And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake grew,
Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their masts and their flags,
And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-shatter'd navy of Spain,
And the little Revenge herself went down by the island crags
To be lost evermore in the main.

It is the magic of Tennyson, a really great poet with a great heart, head, and soul, with a great spirit of patriotism.

Its effect is like that of Turner's picture of 'The Fighting Téméraire tugged to her last Berth' in the National Gallery.

The Civil Wars again brought forth fine poetry on both sides, Milton and Marvell over against the Cavaliers. All through *Paradise Lost* echo and thunder Milton's own experiences, the same which found voice in his great war-sonnets, the sonnet to Cromwell and others. But

against these it is only fair to set the fine songs of Lovelace and the Cavalier poets. You remember Lovelace's song:

GOING TO THE WARS

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.

It is fair to remember this, and to remember that perhaps the best tribute of all to the ultimate nobility of the unhappy victim, the Royal Martyr, came from Marvell.

The struggle with Scotland produced fine poetry on both sides, the finest perhaps naturally in Scotland. Yet there is the magnificent English Border Ballad of 'Chevy Chase', which Sir Philip Sidney said moved his heart more than a trumpet, and which Ben Jonson would rather have written than all his works.

The last sad fight for Scottish independence in particular stirred her poets and her poetesses for many a long year. It inspired Scott. Who knows not *Marmion*? It also inspired one of the most beautiful pieces of war poetry in the world, not always recognized as such, 'The Flowers of the Forest'. Do you know it? Let me read it to you.

I've heard them lilting at our ewe-milking,
  Lasses a' lilting before dawn o' day;
But now they are moaning on ilka green loaning—
  The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

At bughts,[1] in the morning, nae blythe lads are scorning,[2]
  Lasses are lonely and dowie and wae;
Nae daffin', nae gabbin', but sighing and sabbing,
  Ilk ane lifts her leglin [3] and hies her away.

In har'st, at the shearing, nae youths now are jeering,
  Bandsters are lyart,[4] and runkled, and gray:
At fair or at preaching, nae wooing, nae fleeching [5]—
  The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

At e'en, in the gloaming, nae younkers are roaming,
  'Bout stacks wi' the lasses at bogle to play;
But ilk ane sits drearie, lamenting her dearie—
  The Flowers of the Forest are weded away.

Dool and wae for the order, sent our lads to the Border!
  The English, for ance, by guile wan the day;
The Flowers of the Forest, that fought aye the foremost,
  The prime of our land, are cauld in the clay.

We'll hear nae mair lilting at the ewe-milking;
  Women and bairns are heartless and wae;
Sighing and moaning on ilka green loaning—
  The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

Do you know it; do you know what its theme is, and how it came to be written? It is about the Battle of Flodden. It was written by a young Scotch lady of good family and education, Miss Jean Elliot. Her brother, also a poet, as they were riding home in the family coach, bet her a pair of gloves that she could not write a good piece on Flodden. In a short space she wrote this. It has not unnaturally often been mistaken for a contemporary popular ballad.

[1] Pens. [2] Rallying. [3] Milk pail.
[4] Grizzled. [5] Coaxing.

The Dutch Wars found their poet in Dryden. Some may remember his *Astrea Redux*, with the splendid couplet, as Professor Saintsbury calls it, on the British Amphitrite :

> Proud her returning Prince to entertain
> With the submitted fasces of the main.

and the *Annus Mirabilis*, which Mr. Pepys, Clerk of the Acts of the Navy, wrote down 'A very good poem'.

The eighteenth century, that formal age, was formal even in its war poetry. Take the great example, that of Addison's *Campaign*. The best way to read it is to read it restored to its setting in Thackeray's *Esmond*. Thackeray points the moral of the folly and sham glory which are the seamy side of war's splendour, and true heroism. But Addison himself knew what was good, as may be seen, though 'the little conceited wits of the Age' laughed at them, from his papers in the *Spectator* on 'Chevy Chase'.

And the same moral had been pointed more simply by Southey in that well-known ballad which Mr. Palgrave very rightly included in the *Golden Treasury*:

> It was a summer evening,
> Old Kaspar's work was done.

The century which began with formal classicism ended, as all know, in the Revolution and the Romance of the new era. Burns belongs to the eighteenth century, but he had caught the breeze of the coming dawn. He wrote of war, as he wrote of everything, with fire. He is one of the most signal examples of a truth which should ever be remembered, that passion is the secret of poetry. Burns was all compact of passion. The passing of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century is perhaps nowhere more happily focused and illustrated than in

the one meeting which took place between Burns and Scott. The story is one of the most charming in literature. It is given in a letter of Scott's own in Lockhart's *Life of Burns* :

As for Burns, I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantum.* I was a lad of fifteen in 1786–7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him ; but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and less with the gentry of the West Country, the two sets that he most frequented. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Fergusson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among them I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sate silent, looked, and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side,—on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms.

These lines were written beneath (lines pre-eminently characteristic of the eighteenth century) :

Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain—
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears.

Burns seemed much affected by the print, or, rather the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of The Justice of Peace. I whispered my information to a friend present, who mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word which, though of mere civility, I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

The great war with Napoleon and its poetry I pas over. To tell all is, as the French proverb says, to b a bore. All are familiar with the poetry of Byron and Scott, and of the rival group, Wordsworth who has already been mentioned, Southey, and Coleridge. Inde-pendent of both is the best of all, Thomas Campbell.

The Crimean War made Tennyson the laureate of th nation. The Queen, well advised by Sir Robert Peel had bestowed the official laurel on him only three year before.

Tennyson maynot be the greatest of English war-poets though I am not sure that he is not, but he is the most complete. He has treated war in so many ways. He has written poems, and those of the first order, upon it in every aspect. He has written on the spur of the moment, and after the event, sometimes not very long after the event, sometimes at a considerable distance of time.

The 'Charge of the Light Brigade', one of the very best ballads of its kind, was written in a moment, and on the moment, directly the news came to England; the 'Charge of the Heavy Brigade', less well known, and less fine, but still fine, was written some time after the event. So was that splendid ballad of the Mutiny, the 'Defence of Lucknow'.

A historic poem is the ballad of the *Revenge*, already dealt with. A splendid poem of the elegiac order, perhaps the finest of its kind in the language (Stevenson called it 'one of our few blood-boilers'), is the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington'.

Of fighting, handled in the artistic, pictorial, epic style, there is abundance in *The Princess* and in the *Idylls*. Magnificent examples of the imaginative ballad treatment are Sir Galahad and Oriana.

On the philosophy of war there is the monodrama of *Maud*, and the ' Epilogue ' to the ' Charge of the Heavy Brigade '.

For many years it was the fashion to scoff at *Maud*. Now the converted pacifist announces as his own discovery, exactly the teaching which *Maud* put forward sixty years ago, that war with all its horrors yet brings out many noble qualities.

Finally, of that kind of poetry which, when war is waging, is especially considered ' war poetry '—poems of the stimulating, hortatory, Tyrtaean kind, Tennyson has written many. It was no accident, though it was unexpected, that among his literary legacies his son should have found the vigorous ' Call to Arms ', which he gave to the world last autumn and which seemed as if written for the contemporary crisis and the living hour.

It is no wonder that he bulks so large in the war Anthologies. War gives new values to poetry, sometimes by reviving the old values. Names like those of Mrs. Hemans, Campbell, Macaulay, Tennyson, Longfellow, recover their lustre, if indeed they had ever lost it. Let me say to any here, especially young readers who are in doubt where to place him, Don't pretend to admire Tennyson if you really do not. There was a time, and a long time, during which that was done. But if you do care for the ' Charge of the Light Brigade ' or the *Revenge*, or ' Oriana ', or the ' Duke of Wellington ', don't be ashamed or afraid to say so.

The Crimea brought forth several fine war-poems by other poets besides Tennyson, such as Archbishop Trench's ' Alma '. Notably it brought forth one poem by an Englishman, but of New not Old England, worthy to be compared, though very different, even with

the 'Charge of the Light Brigade', Longfellow's tribute to the heroism of womanhood not less than that of manhood, his poem on Florence Nightingale, the 'Lady with the Lamp', in the hospital at Scutari.

To-day after sixty years she has her statue in London among the warriors with whom she was associated in her life, and from whom in her death it is meet that she should not be divided.

But the idea of her statue is based on the poem. You know the story on which that is founded? It is well told in Sir E. T. Cook's Life. At night, when all was quiet in the hospital at Scutari, she used to go round the wards with a little lamp. The soldiers were observed to kiss her shadow as it fell upon the wall as she passed.

St. Filomena

Whene'er a noble deed is wrought,
Whene'er is spoken a noble thought,
Our hearts in glad surprise
To higher levels rise.

The tidal wave of deeper souls,
Into our inmost being rolls,
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.

Honour to those whose words or deeds
Thus help us in our daily needs,
And by their overflow
Raise us from what is low!

Thus, thought I, as by night I read
Of the great army of the dead,
The trenches cold and damp,
The starved and frozen camp.

The wounded from the battle-plain,
In dreary hospitals of pain,
The cheerless corridors,
The cold and stony floors.

Lo! in that house of misery
A lady with a lamp I see,
 Pass through the glimmering gloom,
 And flit from room to room.

And slow, as in a dream of bliss,
The speechless sufferer turns to kiss
 Her shadow, as it falls
 Upon the darkening walls.

As if a door in heaven should be
Opened and then closed suddenly,
 The vision came and went,
 The light shone and was spent.

On England's annals, through the long
Hereafter of her speech and song,
 That light its ray shall cast
 From portals of the past.

A Lady with a Lamp shall stand
In the great history of the land.
 A noble type of good
 Heroic womanhood.

Nor even shall she be wanting here
The palm, the lily, and the spear,
 The symbols that of yore,
 Saint Filomena bore.

So she stands now, the foundress of an ever-lengthening line of war nurses and of peace nurses too, and a pioneer of army organization, *Dux femina facti.*

The Mutiny ag[illegible] furnished themes for several fine pieces, among the finest Tennyson's splendid 'Defence of Lucknow'. But the American Civil War is perhaps the best example in modern history of a war producing poetry.

The American War brought forth a large crop, and some of the best that America has produced, poetry indeed so far transcending the somewhat dead ordinary

American level that we are tempted to say that nothing but a great war will bring forth great poetry from America. All her best poets were roused—Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Bret Harte, Lowell, Holmes, Walt Whitman.

One of the best of the war-songs was a Southern poem, Randall's 'Maryland, my Maryland'. 'John Brown's Body', a war-song of the North, is, I believe, with some alteration, being sung amongst us to-day.

The War is still the heroic epoch of the States. It made Lincoln. It made Walt Whitman.

Walt Whitman distinctly says that it was the war that produced his *Leaves of Grass* and made him an effective poet.

These, however, and much more might have gone on and come to naught (almost positively would have come to naught) if a sudden, vast, terrible, direct and indirect stimulus for new and national poetic expression had not been given to me. It is certain, I say, that—although I had made a start before—only from the occurrence of the Secession War, and what it show'd me by flashes of lightning, with the emotional depths it sounded and arous'd (of course I don't mean in my own heart only, I saw it just as plainly in others, in millions)—that only from the strong flare and provocation of that war's sights and scenes, the final reasons for being of an autocthonic American song definitely came forth.

I went down to the war-field in Virginia (end of 1862), lived thenceforward in camp—saw great battles and the days and nights afterward—all the fluctuations, gloom, despair, hopes again arous'd, courage evoked—death readily risked—*the cause*, too—along and filling those agonistic and lurid years, 1863–4–5—the real parturition years (more than 1776–83 of this henceforth homogeneous Union) without those three or four years, my *Leaves of Grass*, as they stand, would not now be existing.

If you want to see how war strikes a real poet and

what it is indeed like, you should read not only Whitman's poems, but his prose, his 'Specimen Days'. I know nothing, not even Zola's *Débâcle*, that gives so vivid a picture of war—that war which, as one of Whitman's compatriots said, is *Hell*. Read in particular the section headed 'A Night Battle', 'Unnamed remains the bravest soldier', almost exactly like the German poem 'Death in the Cornfield', by Liliencron, 'A Glimpse of War's Hell-Scenes', and then, if your heart is too agonized, as it well may be, read 'The most Inspiriting of All War's Shows', and, best of all, 'Home-made Music'. Read 'Beat, Beat Drums', 'Vigil Strange', and above all the poem on the memorable year Eighteen Sixty-one. I know no war poetry which moves me more, though some satisfies more my artistic sense.

EIGHTEEN SIXTY-ONE.

Arm'd year—year of the struggle :
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible year,
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on your shoulder,
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at your side,
As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the continent,
Your masculine voice, O year, as rising amid the great cities,
Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you, as one of the workmen and dwellers in Manhattan,
Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,
Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait and descending the Alleghanies,
Or down from the Great Lakes or in Pennsylvania or on deck along the Ohio river,

Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers,
or at Chattanooga on the mountain-top,
Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs clothed in
blue, bearing weapons, robust year,
Heard your determined voice launched forth again and
again,
Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-
lipp'd cannon,
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

Longfellow, deeply stirred, wrote a fine descriptive poem, the 'Ballad of the Cumberland'. He also wrote the noble apostrophe to the Union :

Sail on, O Union, strong and great :
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate !

In spite of rock and tempest's roar,
In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on nor fear to breast the sea,
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee ;
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee, are all with thee.

Alter one word, alter 'Union' into 'Empire'; is it not true, ought not our American kinsmen to recognize its truth to our own cause ?

Time would fail to quote Julia Ward Howes's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', or Bret Harte's noble 'Reveille'. The spirit of each and all is the same.

Lowell, who also wrote the well-known humorous, wise, and witty *Biglow Papers*, when the war was over penned his beautiful Memorial ode :—

We sit here in the Promised Land
That flows with Freedom's honey and milk :
But 'twas they won it, sword in hand,
Making the nettle danger soft for us as silk.

We welcome back our bravest and our best :
Ah me ! not all ! some come not with the rest,
Who went forth brave and bright as any here !
I strive to mix some gladness with my strain,
But the sad strings complain,
And will not please the ear.
I sweep them for a Paean, but they wane
Again and yet again
Into a dirge, and die away, in pain.
In these brave ranks I only see the gaps,
Thinking of dear ones whom the dumb turf wraps,
Dark to the triumph which they died to gain.
Fitlier may others greet the living,
For me the past is unforgiving ;
I with uncovered head
Salute the sacred dead,
Who went, and who return not,—Say not so !
'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not by the way.
Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave ;
No ban of endless night exiles the brave ;
And to the saner mind
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.

The South African War is still recent in many memories and so are its songs, and I need not to revive them.

This war of to-day has had the natural effect of bringing into being many collections of war poetry, and I am bound to say that I think not a few of them are very good. Others there were, of course, in existence before. One of the very best books of the kind, I think, is still the *Lyra Heroica*, a book of verse for boys arranged by that indomitable ' poet of action ', W. E. Henley, in 1892.

The selection is excellent ; the notes tell just what needs being told, and are full of manly sense and sensibility Its happy motto is that often-quoted, incomparable quatrain of Scott :

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim:
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.

Its chief drawback for present purposes is that it does not contain any poems written after 1892, or any of Henley's own.

It is significant that of the war-anthologies of to day one of the best is a volume drawing its inspiration from Henley, dedicated to his memory, called by a name of his invention, and bearing on its title-page a strophe from his ringing and singing ode 'England, my England'. It is compiled by Mr. Goodchild and published by Messrs. Jarrold. It opens with a number of poems inspired by the present war, and then passes to a very excellent selection of pieces written for the American War.

Another is 'Our Glorious Heritage', with an excellent Introduction by that fine, discriminating judge, Dr. Beeching, Dean of Norwich. This too has a merit of its own, in that it includes some admirable Colonial pieces, the 'Canadian Volunteers', the 'Birth of Australia', and 'New Zealand'.

Another, again, somewhat more modern in scope, perhaps the most up-to-date of all, is a collection by that veteran Professor Knight, entitled *Pro Patria et Rege*, which again has an interesting Introduction.

The Oxford Press has put out two small volumes, both simple and cheap. One that is called *Patriotic Verse*, arranged by Mr. R. M. Leonard, already mentioned, sound both in its selection and in its brief notes. The other, entitled *War Poetry*, arranged by Mr. Christopher Stone, has a double interest. In the first place, it has a brilliant Introduction of an unusual, unconventional kind, written by that soldier who has so often shown how well he can wield the pen, General Sir Ian Hamilton.

Next, the collection itself is really 'historic'. It brings together many ballads and popular songs difficult to find collected elsewhere, and it gives them in their chronological order, and in their original form.

We wonder often what poetry our soldiers to-day really like. I suppose that the song which they have made the most use of, whatever it meant, is the well-known 'Tipperary'. It might look a little disappointing in an anthology. Here are many of what may be called the 'Tipperaries' of bygone times.

Of the poetry of the moment none, I think, is more significant than that which comes from the Colonies, from the heart and lips of those children of ours who are now grown to first manhood and are our youthful comrades in this common struggle. Significant, because it shows how deeply they are stirred. Canada has had her poets for some time. Conspicuous among them is Canon Frederick George Scott, of Quebec, now at the Front as an Army Chaplain. I should like to call your attention to a little volume of his entitled *The Gates of Time*, published by Messrs. Bagster in their sixpenny series. It includes his fine 'Hymn of Empire' and one or two other poems bearing on the war. Australia, to my mind, is a specially poetical country. Perhaps it is something in the geography of the South Seas. The Maoris seem to be a poetic race.

Certainly I thought one of the pieces of the truest poetry put out in the war, though it was not in verse, was the message of the small island Niue, or Savage Island, as it was most inappropriately called, in the region of New Zealand, inhabited by a people akin to the Maoris. You may have seen the message in *The Times*. It was a letter from twelve chiefs of the island. They sent £164 in money and the following words :

To King George V, and all those in authority and the brave men who fight. I am the island of Niue, a small child that stands up to help King George V.

Two poems from Australia have struck me very much. They are both by old Oxford men who have made their homes in Australia.

The first was a sonnet which appeared in *The Times*, by Mr. Archibald Strong, called 'Australia to England'.

The next has not, I think, appeared in England. It was inspired by the sight of the troops passing beneath the statue of Captain Cook at Sydney, and was written by Mr. John Sandes, of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* :

AUSTRALIANS TO THE FRONT !

(*Captain Cook hears the Drums*)

From the Scheldt unto the Niemen,
  Hark, the music of the drums !
Not unthrilled the souls of free men
  When that instant message comes.
Rolling east the wild fantasia
  Stirs the Orient blood to flame ;
And the drums call Australasia—
  And she answers to her name.

Far away from hosts in battle,
  Yet in time with marching feet.
Here and now the war-drums rattle
  In the sunbright city street.
Horse and foot in martial manner,
  Swift commands, and glances high,
Naked steel and silken banner—
  Thus the ranks go proudly by.

But within the gardens spacious,
  Not a stone's throw from the crowd
One who fronts the landscape gracious
  Listens to the war-drums loud.

Beats the eager drummer harder,
  And methinks the bronze can hear,
In those eyes a flash of ardour!
  On that cheek a noble tear!

'Dauntless Captain, did'st thou ever,
  With thy sailor-eyes of gray
Searching out from thy *Endeavour*
  That sequestered flower-starred bay,
Dream that some day those who love thee
  Here would stake their all of worth,
For the flag that waved above thee
  And the land that gave thee birth?'

And the dauntless Captain listens:
  Ah, if only he could speak!
But a vagrant raindrop glistens
  On that scorched and blistered cheek,
And the faith that does not falter
  Still may hear his whisper low:
'*Son, this new land doth not alter*
  Britain's breed of long ago.'

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? What does war do for poetry and poetry for war? Some say that war does not produce good poetry. The truth is it produces much bad, and little good, but even in time of peace that is the usual proportion. Good poetry is always rare, very good poetry very rare. A few good poems war produces at the moment, as I have shown. Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade', Longfellow's 'Santa Filomena', Newbolt's 'The Only Son', Kipling's poem written the other day 'For all we have and are'. More it produces after the event, when, as Wordsworth said, 'Passion is remembered in tranquillity', the *Persae* of Aeschylus, or the fine passages of Virgil and Horace on the Battle of Actium.

Others say that modern war is not romantic and that

science has destroyed the poetry of war. That, I imagine, has always been said. It was said when gunpowder superseded bows and arrows, and when steam made obsolete the stately sailing ship. I do not doubt it was said—there are signs that it was said—of the Iron Age which superseded that of Stone. It is partly, but only partly, true.

The accounts of the end of the *Emden*, of Admiral Beattie's or Admiral Sturdee's flying fight, when the ships were tearing through the seas at some thirty miles an hour and yet striking at eleven miles' distance, are as thrilling as anything I have ever read. The aeroplane, as Tennyson foresaw nearly ninety years ago, is as poetical as the sailing ship. Poetry, as I have endeavoured to show, brings out the deeper meaning, the 'lesson' of war. It shows its horror, and also its heroism, in a way which enables us to bear and to read both aright. In time of peace it keeps alive the noble temper which war, when it comes, evokes, the love of country, the spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice, the conviction that there are better things than ease and luxury, or party or personal gain or triumph. It fixes and it lights up those ideal values which, when all is at stake, and everything stands to be lost or won, are seen to be the real.

Let me conclude with one more example which, in its short space and beautifully simple form, illustrates, I think, much of what I have endeavoured to say, a poem produced in and by and for these days, the lines by Lord Crewe on the grave of his son-in-law Captain O'Neill, Member of Parliament, who fell in November last. They appeared first in the Harrow School Magazine and later were given to the world in *The Times*. With Lord Crewe's permission and that of *The Times* I quote them.

A Grave in Flanders

Here in the marshland, past the battered bridge,
   One of a hundred grains untimely sown,
Here with his comrades of the hard-won ridge
   He rests unknown.

His horoscope had seemed so plainly drawn—
   School triumphs, earned apace in work and play ;
Friendships at will ; then love's delightful dawn
   And mellowing day.

Home fostering hope ; some service to the State ;
   Benignant age ; then the long tryst to keep
Where, in the yew-tree shadow congregate,
   His fathers sleep.

Was here the one thing needful to distil
   From life's alembic, through this holier fate,
The man's essential soul, the hero will ?
   We ask ; and wait.

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