

REQUIESCANT

AND

OTHER POEMS

By

WILLIAM QUINTARD KETCHUM



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TO THE MEMORY
OF
JAMES CARLETON KETCHUM

23rd BATTERY
8th HOWITZER BRIGADE, C F. A

WHO DIED OF WOUNDS
RECEIVED IN ACTION

VIMY,
MAY 4, 1917

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PREFACE

THE writer of this volume has dedicated it, very fittingly and appropriately, to the memory of his cousin, James Carleton Ketchum, who died on May 4th, 1917, of wounds received in action at Vimy Ridge. He has asked me to write a few words as a preface and I am very glad to have the opportunity to do so. I remember James Ketchum only as a little boy, for I never had the pleasure of knowing him in the days of his early manhood as a student and a soldier. But his father, Thomas Carleton Lee Ketchum, is one of my oldest friends, with whom I have ties of association and good fellowship that carry me back thirty years to the time when we were young men and house mates together in Toronto. For that reason I had followed with more than usual interest the fortunes of his splendid and promising son. I have been privileged to see the letters that young Ketchum sent home during his service overseas and I have been able to understand how bright a life and brave a spirit was here given to the service of his country.

It is a great pleasure to think that such a volume of poetry as the present—tender and sympathetic, and in every way a fit offering to such a memory—should be put forward as a tribute to the son of my old friend.

It is proper here to set down in a few words the brief and honourable record of the boy's life. He was born on July 30, 1893, the son of Thomas Carleton Lee Ketchum, barrister-at-law, of Woodstock, New Brunswick, and his wife, Margaret, daughter of the late James Cadman, C.E., Chief Engineer of the Quebec and Lake St. John Railway. He was a descendant of that fine old stock which has reproduced in the Maritime Provinces of Canada the sterling character and the sturdy courage of the people of the British Isles.

Young Ketchum distinguished himself as a schoolboy by graduating at the head of his class from Woodstock High School, and he won at his matriculation into the University of New Brunswick, the Carleton County Scholarship. It was as a third year student in the University that he enlisted in the 23rd

Battery of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He received the usual training in Canada and in England, and in due time went to France attached to the 23rd Battery of the 8th Howitzer Brigade. He greatly distinguished himself as an expert telephonist at the battle of the Somme. He was wounded in the immortal action at Vimy Ridge, and died on May 4, 1917. His body was buried at Aux Reitz. The simple cross which his comrades erected there to his memory stands as a witness to the sacrifice of a gay and promising life gladly given in the cause of freedom.

It is his cousin, William Quintard Ketchum, who dedicated to him this volume of verse. William Ketchum was himself a soldier in the war, and served at the front in France with the Divisional Signal Company of the Canadian Engineers. He has returned now to his native country to enter the public service of the Government at Ottawa. He is one of the many young Canadians who have been spared to come back to their country and to bring back to the service of civil life something of the illumination and the inspiration of the heroic scenes in which they have borne a part. William Ketchum has already appeared as a contributor of verse to the *Canadian Sapper* and other publications, and one may with confidence prophesy that the distinction he has earned in the service of the King will be followed by an equal distinction in the republic of letters.

I must not in this little preface assume the air and dignity of a professional critic of poetry. I have no claim to such an attitude. But to the plain sense of a plain person these poems of William Quintard Ketchum are of a high quality. Such verses as those which appear under the title of *Requiescant* are fitted, I think, to appear in any Canadian Anthology of the poetry of the war. I can give no higher commendation for this volume than to say that it seems to me entirely worthy to be dedicated as it is.

STEPHEN LEACOCK

REQUIESCANT

They sleep, fair azure skies above them smiling,
Beneath the soil they died so well to save,
While careless hearts, with mirth the hours beguiling,
Think little of the lives their comrades gave.

They sleep, the calm of sombre twilight stealing
O'er crimson fields that once had known no stain;
By shattered shrines the peasant folk are kneeling
With hopeful eyes and faith supreme o'er pain.

They sleep, the stars above them softly gleaming;
How deep their rest beneath an alien sky;
O'er their rude graves the moonlight palely streaming,
They sleep the sleep of those who bravely die.

1916

FULFILMENT

The years to me, that once were sweetly flowing,
Hold charms that time and distance fail to dim;
Above me now the myriad stars are glowing,
Like tapers gleaming brightly there for Him.

In dreams I hear the selfsame church bells pealing,
Those silver chimes how sweet they sound to me,
They wake in me the old exalted feeling
For Him, who stilled the wave of Galilee.

I know that, if the dawn should find me sleeping,
Those dreams for me at last will be fulfilled;
For then I will be in my Master's keeping,
And peace will reign when mortal life is stilled.

December. 1916

To JAMES CARLETON KETCHUM

In the woods where once we wandered,
Now the leaves are faded dim,
And I hear them softly rustle
As they whisper prayers for him —
Prayers that mingle with the murmur
Of the pine trees tall and slim,
Where once the deep blue violets bloomed,
Beside the clear lake's rim.

There are lordly streams and rivers
In the land from whence he came,
There are skies of purest sapphire
Where the golden sunsets flame,
But he left them all for Freedom,
And the honour of his name,
And now he sleeps in Flanders
In a grave unstained by shame.

His young heart was high with purpose,
As he calmly faced his doom,
Now he sleeps in distant Flanders,
Where the scarlet poppies bloom.
And o'er his form in deep repose,
The great guns ceaseless boom,
Across the fields of Flanders,
Where all is death and gloom.

How I miss his cheerful greeting,
And his handclasp real and true;
How I miss his ringing laughter,
And his steadfast eyes of blue.
O Kinsman! Comrade! Hero!
In a grave afar, adieu!
Though I may soon be sleeping,
In those distant fields with you.

EDITH CAVELL

Dauntless and resolute you stood,
O flower of English womanhood!
With soul heroic, body frail,
Until the bullets' deadly hail.
Blazoned for you a lasting name
On the clear scroll of deathless fame.
Now you are with the saintly train
Of holy martyrs cruelly slain;
A saint uncanonized you rest.
Your death is all in vain
Unless we force the vandal hosts
From Belgium's crimson plain.
O Britons! if your hands are free,
Avenge this wanton cruelty,
Avenge the helpless, basely slain,
Rheims, and the ashes of Louvain.

QUIET

When will the bugles cease to peal?
When will our forms have rest?
Ever our columns deathward reel,
To sleep in nature's breast,
To sleep in kindly nature's breast,
Where sleep the myriad throng
Of those who perished in the strife,
Upon their lips a song.

1916

ARISE

Arise! the bugle pealeth
O'er forest, hill and plain;
Arise! the clear call stealeth
Through all our broad domain.

Arise, O sons of England,
Your banners fair unfurl;
The foe against your chivalry
His might doth vainly hurl.

Arise, ye sons of England,
"St. George!" your battle cry;
Oh! couch a lance for Freedom,
Beneath a crimson sky.

1916

TO A COMRADE FALLEN

J.G.M.F., Observer, R.A.F.

He is gone, the friend of my youth,
With his Galahad heart,
Into the valley of shadows,
Where we too soon must depart.

Into the mystic twilight,
He passed a lambent flame,
As the silent hills of the world
Re-echoed with his fame.

Though the night engulfed him,
Before him shone the Grail;
Its tender rays and holy
Gleamed o'er his armour pale.

Afar he heard the bugles,
Pealing silver and shrill
As the noise of tumult ceased,
And all was hushed and still.

HEARTHES OF ENGLAND

O Hearths of Home! O Hearths of Home!
 Beneath an English sky,
O Hearths of Home! O Hearths of Home!
 For thee we gladly die;
For Thee we gladly strive and die,
 Like our great sires of yore,
The free-born blood of England
 On alien earth outpour.

For English streamlet, river, tarn,
 For meadow, vale and wold,
We fell beside the crimson Marne;
 Our forms are still and cold.
Alas! our forms are still and cold
 In Honour's shroud we lie,
For English hearts are English still,
 Beneath a foreign sky.

O Hearths of Home! O Hearths of Home!
 Where half lights softly wane,
O Hearths of Home! O Hearths of Home!
 Our loss is England's gain.
Our loss is mighty England's gain;
 We sleep and dream of Thee,
The Hearths of Home! thy sons have kept
 In peace and liberty.

MORS FELICITATIS

When the maples flame again
In the mellow autumn-tide,
And vaguely through the casement-pane
She sees the valley wide.

The dreams of youth have fled,
With tears her tender eyes are dim;
The warm sweet joy of life is dead
On alien earth with him.

UNREST

In my heart the bitter unrest
Doth surge to the overflow,
I fain would the North wind breast
Across the leagues of snow,
With only the polar star to guide,
And only the stars to see,
As I face the winds of the great divide,
My soul untrammelled and free -
Face the winds of the great divide,
Over endless leagues of snow -
Wherever the restless wind doth ride,
With its tale of bitter woe.

FUTILITY

I have sought thee in the Arctic, with the Pole Star as
my guide,
I have sought thee in the stillness where the Northern
lights abide,
And ever in the glimmer of the stars that frost-like
shone,
I saw thy fair face shimmer like the glory of the dawn.
I heard the pine trees murmur as they swayed beneath
the blast,
By valley, stream, and river and mountain ranges
vast,
A name vague, sweet, elusive, by sad winds distance
borne,
Shaped by the rays of sunset and the freshness of the
morn.
In the weird and distant Northland I have sought for
thee in vain;
Now my feet are Southward turning, where the golden
sunsets wane.
Eastward, Westward, Northward, Southward, where
the hand of God prevails,
My tireless feet shall seek thee, till the parting of the
trails.

THE RIVER ST. JOHN

O stately river winding
Through the land I love so well,
O stately river winding
To meet broad Fundy's swell,
I knew thee in my childhood,
I have felt thy mystic spell.

In June, the month of roses,
I have plied my frail canoe,
The moon a golden pathway
On a field of silver hue.
In dreams once more my paddle
Ripples through thy peaceful blue,
O St. John! Queen of rivers,
Now my heart goes out to you.

THE LAST POST

I hear the pine trees swaying
Sweet music to my ears,
I hear the last post playing,
I see my comrades' tears.

Good-bye, O Comrades tender,
I bid you all adieu;
We all our lives must render
Until the last review.

I hear the bugles pealing—
Their sound seems far away;
My life from me is stealing,
All things grow cold and grey.

My life's blood fast is flowing,
I near the goal at last,
I see the portals glowing
Of Heaven dim and vast.

Good-bye! my soul is wending
To halls of blissful rest,
Where peace and joy unending
Will soothe the aching breast.

DISILLUSIONMENT

Was it the magic stillness of the night,
The splendour of the stars, or your fair face?
In all the world there was no rose so white,
No flower bloomed with such a tender grace.

Was it your wondrous hair, your gown of rose,
Your little slender hand so warm in mine?
Was it the smile I saw the moon disclose
That made your face to me a thing divine?

I see you now beneath the garish lights,
As yesterday comes back to me once more,
And as I view those resurrected nights,
I wonder vaguely what I loved you for.

THE DEAD

By shattered ways our comrades' forms are strewn:
How still they lie upon the sodden plain;
Through myriad foes a pathway they have hewn,
And died as heroes in their flower slain.

Mute and inert, with faces fair upturned,
Their holy slumber God alone can break;
Life's lesser gifts by them with scorn were spurned;
Though others failed, these hearts were sterner
make.

The trenchant bugles peal throughout the world,
As British valour answers to the call;
Against the foe their mighty force is hurled,
The force that girds the world as with a wall.

DUGOUT DREAMS

I saw some wondrous faces
Sparkle through my dreams like wine,
The belles of many countries,
With a beauty rare, divine,—
Eileen so fair, whose deep blue eyes
Held me for quite a time.
And Marguerite so cute and *chic*,
To whom I oft wrote rhyme.
Proud Evelyn so Junoesque,
Dear Phyllis sweet and shy,
With scores of other faces,
In my dreams go fitting by.

I stood once more beneath the moon,
With Maud so coy and gay;
Our heads were close together,
For we had lots to say;
I held her little hand in mine
The sequel was a kiss—
But a shell came by my dugout,
And broke my dream of bliss.
My good o d, top hole dugout,
And my sandbag, bunk, so fine,
My ripping little dugout,
Where Fritzie's big shells whine.

Oh, we were fond of lovers' moons,
 In happy days gone by,
But now, I think we much prefer
 A dull and cloudy sky.
For things have changed a bit, you know,
 And we have too, I guess;
Our dreams are all that comfort us,
 In these dark days of stress.
I used to like to telephone
 To winsome Claribel,
But now I hear across the line,
 Some words I dare not tell.

Strangers, methinks I hear a drone:
 Yes, Fritzie is above,
I guess that he will shortly drop
 Some tokens of his love,
Out goes this little candle bright,
 The chapter endeth here,
Good-bye, good luck, et cetera,
 Be ye of all good cheer.

Aix-Noulette, France

THE ONE STAR WONDER

How his twin stars used to shine,
As he sallied forth to dine,
His Sam Browne, you know, polished
In a way beyond compare.
Those jolly days are ended;
The country he defended
Upon the good old London front,
Will know his face no more.
Oh! he did his bit, you know,
Where the bright lights softly glow,
Displaying arms and shoulders
That would make a sculptor rave.
Well he knew the game of love;
But, by the gods above,
His name will be a washout
On the roll-call of the brave.
Some other gay old devil,
Well just as fond of revel,
Gave up the wine and women
For a simple wooden cross.
When the Lord Almighty
Separates the good and flighty,
I guess the good old "Buck"
Or "P.B.I." will win the toss.

THE SIMPLE SAPPER

You never hear of us, I know,
For we are "only sappers";
No stars upon our shoulders glow
To dazzle little flappers.

We sleep on good old beaver boards,
With trestles two thereunder;
Our spacious hut a breeze affords
That often makes us wonder

If we are not in Arctic zones,
With Captains Scott or Peary;
The boys all snore in divers tones,
As ones who are quite weary.

We shine from morn till dewy eve,
This phrase is quite Miltonic;
They sometimes even give us leave—
A thing that isn't chronic.

But when we die at home in bed,
By grateful friends surrounded,
They'll call us brave, heroic dead,
And have the "Last Post" sounded.

For we have done our bit, you know,
At whitewash and mess-hopping.
I guess it's time for me to go,
By Jove! The army's topping!

Signals, England

THE SKY PILOT'S SON

He was not a one star wonder,
But he knew the great gun thunder,
And we cursed when he went under
On the Arras-Cambrai road.

Oh! we found him shrapnel torn
Where the landscape was forlorn
On the Arras-Cambrai road.

He was just a parson's son
And his language weighed a ton,
But I guess his cross was won
On the Arras-Cambrai road.

POPPIES

There is a flare of poppies
In shell-torn Flanders fields,
And every little shattered spot
A rich red crimson yields;
For there beneath the poplars,
And the blue of arching sky,
Are stretched the myriad crosses
Where our youth and manhood lie.
The skies to them were, oh! so fair,
For youth has its romance;
They laid the guerdon life away
Upon the soil of France.
God send them summers warm and kind,
And o'er their resting place
May rarest flowers richly wind,
Man's fell work to efface.
And ye, who sit in pampered ease,
And know not gold is dross --
Thank God that there are such as these,
To bear for you a cross;
Thank God there is a Galahad,
To fight for you out there;
A peerless knight, in khaki clad,
With Arthur's courage rare.
In years to come the peasant folk
Will view each simple cross;
As overhead the selfsame way,
The wind-blown poplars toss,
With everywhere the calm of peace
In sheaves the golden grain,
The scarlet poppies rich, profuse,
To shield our cross-crowned slain.

France, July 1918

ROSE DU NORD

To Gabrielle

A rose of the North, with a wonderful face,
Smiled, and my heart stood still;
Though she was of an alien, Southern race,
Yet I loved her with a will.

A rose of the North in my dreams stands forth,
And her laughing eyes are dim;
Never again will I jest at love,
As an atheist sneers at a hymn.

For the searing arrow has pierced my heart,
And no one may pluck it forth,
Save two hands that are forever stilled--
My radiant Queen of the North!

Aniche, France

AUTUMN

To W.D.S.

As days and months and years roll by
I wonder if you will recall
The forest where the beech leaves fall,
In shecrest gold piled high.

Ah me! what precious store was this,
All Midas touched beneath the sun;
Oh! see the kind beams bend and kiss
The leaves so precious, one by one.

I never saw a rustic walk
That held such charm for weary eyes,
As when beneath those sunny skies
I heard the elves of Woodland talk.

Raismes Forest, France
November 1919

THE MEDALLION

Slashed at with vicious bayonets,
Where all was bleak and bare,
You radiated beauty like a spirit
everywhere;
Though you were just a painting,
Yet you warmed my Southern blood,
As you gazed out on the terrace,
Where roses were in flood.

Cambrai, *October 1918*

A THOUGHT

We who have lived to see the maple leaves,
Along the streets a splash of gold and red,
Will think of you, who sleep the last, long sleep,
In sunny France, O dear remembered Dead!

You blazed a trail the past can well sustain,
The future note, until the splendid quest
Had its reward, as softly hand in hand,
You walked with Death into the peaceful West.

LA BELLE FRANCE

Quaint cobbled roads where peasant folk
In sabots pass with cheerful tread,
The roofs of houses, spick and span,
All tiled a warm and cheerful red.

The forest paths with poplars lined,
The beech trees desolate and bare;
I'd give a kingly ransom now,
To find myself once more out there.

CAMOUFLAGE

O powder! powder everywhere
Upon your faces, damsels fair!
No wonder we were short out there.
Before the war you were quite prim,
But now you never sing a hymn,
For how can one pose as a saint
And still use tons and tons of paint?
Oh! that some little rustic belle
Would saunter in our midst to dwell.
I swear that we would never part
If she disdained the subtle art.
O artists of the powder puff!
A barrel seems almost enough,
And yet we know the song you sing
Is:---"Pile it on like everything."
At five o'clock we promenade;
In fact, it is our greatest fad,--
We pass and then repass our friends
Along a street that swiftly ends.
Preserve us, kind and gentle fate,
From where the flappers small and great,
To eat ice cream, all congregate.
Oh! for a dugout two by four,
With wine and whiskey on the floor;
We care not how the world goes up,
If we have *beaucoup* rum to sup.

Ottawa, May 1919

HOMeward BOUND

To Rowena

Oh! our ship is outward swinging
Down the Mersey at high tide,
And we seem to hear the ringing
Of the joy-bells far and wide;
For our hearts are filled with gladness
And a strange exultant pride.
Though we leave fair lands and faces,
Yet we go to open spaces,
To breathe the air of Heaven
By some snow-clad mountain side.

Oh! cherished ones now weeping
For the lads so softly sleeping,
Our brave and steadfast comrades,
In their simple graves afar—
Their blood fair France is steeping,
With no foe before them creeping:—
O, Mothers of our Heroes!
Have they vainly crossed the bar?

Oh! we often saw, in dreaming,
The pleasant sunlight streaming
Along the streets we never thought to see;
Now the lights of home are gleaming,
In a land well worth redeeming,
Where all are held as equal,
Where to live is to be free.

We will dip with zest our paddles
In a lake of placid waters.
When the mists are thick and rolling
With the sun obscured from view.
For the pine trees we are sighing,
And our very souls are crying
To hear once more the ripple
From the glide of a canoe.

At Sea, Empress of Britain
March 1919

MLLE X?

I saw a maiden, oh! so coy,
On Sparks Street promenading—
Methinks I thought there is no joy
In solitary gadding.

And so with courage born of old,
I said in accents tender:
"Oh! do not think me overbold,
I fain would homage render."

"Have we been introduced?" she cried;
A crimson blush suffusing
Her powdered cheeks a richer red,—
It really was confusing.

[Three hours elapse]

Beneath a full and placid moon,
That must have found it boring,
We had the old eternal spoon;
Our words of love outpouring.

So if you see her prim, sedate,
Across your pathway tripping,
O Stranger! do not hesitate;
She really is quite nipping.

Curtain

BEAUTY

I saw you first when dawn rose in the East,
Upon the blue Laurentians years ago,
And even now in looking back I see
That sudden rich and all-pervading glow

Your spirit breathed upon a magic lake,
Where mirrored lights gleamed tiny points of flame.
I heard you when the wind, in accents soft,
Hung like a benediction on her name.

O dear veiled face forever turned from me
Like austere marble shaped by hands divine.
I knew you ere youth's first transcendent flush
Had known how bitter are the dregs of wine.

Ottawa August 1919

MARGOT

You have a face so full of wistful charm,

That when you smile, there's sunshine everywhere:

These feeble words of mine but faintly praise

Your tender, shining eyes and raven hair.

I wonder if you will forget me, dear:

I hope not quite, and yet, so many do:

Though when I see a red and fragrant rose,

Each petal there will softly speak of you