

The Poetry
of the
War

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To Dr Geo Herbert Clarke

- a souvenir of friendship

John Ridington

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The Poetry of the War

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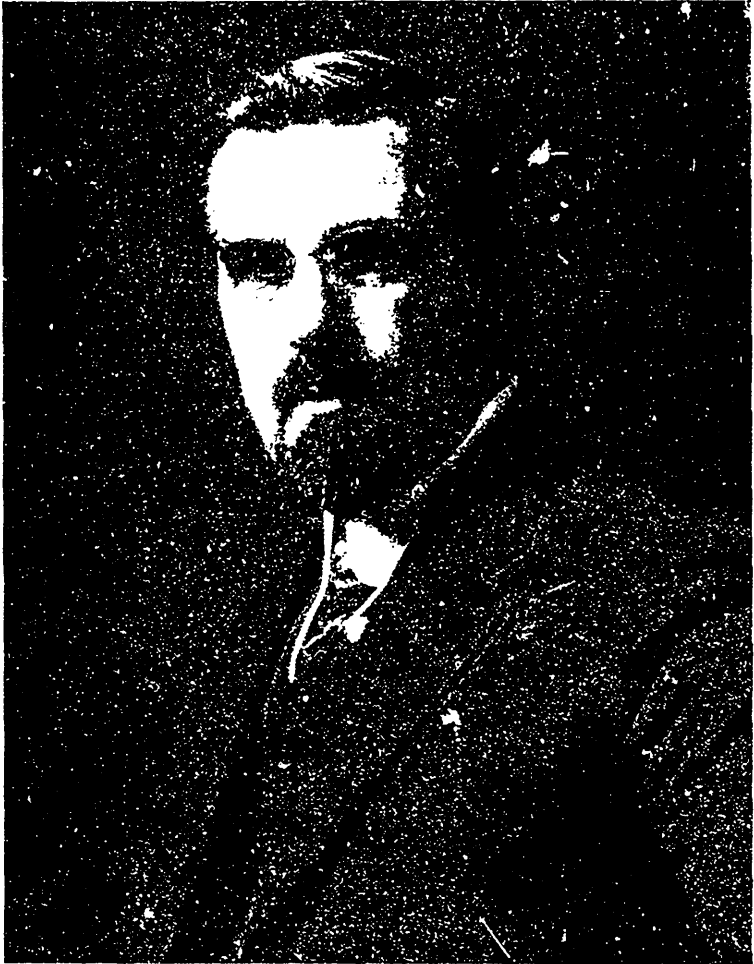
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John Ridington

The Poetry of The War

The difficulty of keeping abreast of the literature of his time, of which the wisest of kings complained, was a mere trifle by comparison with the task the printed page imposes on present day readers. To be widely and accurately informed on even one subject of general interest is impossible, when there are but twenty-four hours in a day, and sleeping, eating, and earning a living occupy all but a few of them. The literature of the Great War is a conclusive example of this. Messrs. Lange and Perry's annotated list, published less than six months after the outbreak, showed hundreds of books on the struggle, and in addition, over fifty entries under "Poetry, Songs and Plays," seventy volumes of "Sermons, Hymns and Prayers," twenty of "Humour," and more than a score of histories. When, to this beginning, is added the ever increasing and on-rushing volumes inundating us every month, and the scores of thousands of magazine articles, one realizes the futility of any effort to keep step with a literature that in forty months is in a position to mock any attempt at successful assimilation.

This is true, not only of the literature of the war as a whole, but also of its poetry. A Munich professor, replying to the charge of enemies, such as Maeterlinck and Vaerhaven, that his is a nation of barbarians, in disproof of the accusation triumphantly asserted that in the first five months of the cataclysm Germany had written 3,000,000 poems! Schumann, in his book "Germany and the World War," says 6,000,000 poems were produced in the first year of the war! Whether or not that be true, the output makes the hardiest of readers blench. More than three hundred volumes of verses have been written, with some phase of the war as the entire subject. A dozen anthologies have already been issued, and more are in preparation. "The Poets' Corner" of every newspaper contains fugitive verse on the war, and some of it worthy of permanent preservation. War verse dominates in the magazines. The human aspirations and passions, the emotional analyses and manifestations that, with the visible and natural world, constitute the basic poetic material, today are seen through, and colored by, the red mists that enwrap all civilization.

This is inevitable. Literature is Life, and Poetry, Passion. Confronted by Armageddon, with personal, social, national, racial ideals of liberty imperilled, men think deeply, feel acutely react powerfully. It would be unthinkable that this reaction should not find vent in poetry, the most permanent of all the great avenues of human expression.

It is a popular, but mistaken, expectation that great events necessarily produce great poetry. But it is not the biggest battles that have inspired the finest military and patriotic poems. Troy was an obscure town in Asia Minor: Balaclava was not one of the world's decisive battles. Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" is perhaps the only poem qualified for a place in the world's golden treasury of all that poured from the white hot crucible of the American Civil War. And the present war, though it has produced an enormous bulk of poetry, much of it good, some of it excellent, has produced little that promises to be immortal. There are several reasons for this. Foremost among them has been placed the vastness, the immensity, the complexity of the struggle. It is not merely a life and death conflict of millions upon millions of men, fighting on a dozen fronts, in fertile farmlands, in arid deserts, on snowy steppes. These innumerable hosts are fighting in the heavens above, on the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth—fighting not only with weapons of hitherto unimagined destructive power, and of unbelievable precision and ingenuity, but also with weapons as primitive as those used by the Philistines and Romans, and with adaptations of the plate armour of medieval knights. They are fighting each other with the science of the bacteriologist and of the chemist,—with disease germs, flame, and chlorine gases. Normally peaceful occupations are in reality the reserve forces of the titanic conflict—the shipyards of Seattle, Vancouver and elsewhere are in reality as much part of the battleground as the martial scenes in the training camps at Work Point, Hastings Park or Camp Lewis. The smudged-faced, overall-clad men of forge and smithy, the stoop shouldered men of office and loom, all are as much integral elements of the fighting forces as those wearing chevrons or epaulettes on khaki uniforms. Capital has ranged itself alongside Labor—symptom of a new national unity—and is freely contributing to the cause of democracy and international righteousness its powers of financial organization. Wives and mothers are planning economical meals, and thus by serving in the national army of conservation are as truly "doing their bit" as their Red Cross sisters in hospital ward and dressing

station. A thousand forces—military and naval, social and financial, industrial and economic—are inextricably interwoven in this war. Their ramifications have such interrelations and reactions that they affect, if not personally and directly, at least subconsciously, the most humdrum and prosaic lives. With us in Canada war has become the normal condition, to which we instinctively and automatically adjust our personal and communal lives. In future days these conditions will be studied and set forth by historians, economists and psychologists, but, in the mass, they cannot be set forth by poetry. Poetry seeks and insists upon the personal, the dramatic, elements of life. This vast, machine made war dwarfs the merely personal: no cycle of human experience can comprehend or include its immensities. At best a poem can but reflect a single and minute facet from the blood red ruby of war. From the gigantic task of depicting it as a whole, in all its horror and heroism, its sacrifice and tragedy, its degradation, exaltation, purification, the Muses shrink back, appalled, shuddering, impotent.

Perhaps, too, the poets, in common with the rest of mankind, are too near to see or sense its titanic perspectives. All feel themselves mere human atoms engulfed in a madly swirling maelstrom, incapable of aught but blind struggle for the preservation of the interests and ideals they hold dear, incapable of striking deeper notes than those of vehemence and outraged sensibility. Wordsworth said of poetry that it was emotion, remembered in tranquility. Who can—who would—be tranquil now? This may be one reason for the measure of disappointment over the admitted fact that, while much of the war poetry yet produced seems destined to survive the tumult of its origin, but little yet promises to be immortal. The real singers of the present cataclysm may be yet unborn: that Weltgericht, which it is the peculiar province of the poet to pronounce upon it, may not find expression until its horrors have become

“Old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.”

To this generally accepted reason for the comparative infrequency with which really excellent poetry has appeared under the stimulus of the War, should be added another, in my opinion equally important. Nationalism is passing away: the era of internationalism has not only dawned, it has brightened almost into day. Patriotism in its old sense—that of love for a geographical locality or historical sequence of events—has been

gradually dying as a motive stimulus to men. It was easy, in Napoleon's day, for any Englishman to hate any frog-eating Frenchman. It was easy, perhaps, for an American Revolutionist to hate all Englishmen, though they were of the same race and speech, and it is only lately that Americans have come to realize that it was not England, but England's stupid and stubborn German king, that compelled loyal and self-respecting colonists to proclaim their independence. But these things were before the days of steam and electricity, of cables and airships. To-day the world is one big neighborhood—whether men like it or not, they must live in association. Association, kindred interests, common activities, beget, not hate, but tolerance, understanding, appreciation. Men cannot deify themselves, their own nation—cannot put their own traditions, achievements, aspirations, on a pedestal, and proclaim their superiority to all others, if they have intimate knowledge of the men of other races and lands. We should be thankful for the sense of humor that prevents this. The traveled man is always the most tolerant—he whose life centers about the parish pump is ever the most willing to think the worst of nations he has never seen. But patriotic poetry, as we read it in our school-books, stresses—indeed, deals almost wholly with—the history and achievements of a particular people, living in a particular place, and, at least by implication, asserts that that people are great and good and glorious because certain among them were heroic. Hampton, Havelock, Pym, Pitt, Wellington, Haig in England; Washington, Franklin, Madison, Lincoln, Wilson in the States,—we are all apt to ascribe to ourselves the virtues of these great men of our own countries, and feel ourselves more important thereby. This is, of course, the merest reflective vanity, but the patriotic poet of former days played upon, if he did not at times even pander to, this feeling.

That day is over, because nationalism is dying, and internationalism is here. The stock in trade of the patriotic poet of our fathers will soon become as obsolete as the stage coach. Our poets will sing of Caruses, not of Countries. The beginnings of this date back to the American Civil War. Fundamentally, this also was a war of ideals. Lowell and Whittier blazed in righteous rage, or pilloried with bitter jest, the anti-democratic concepts that underlay one side of that great struggle. American poets did not personify Columbia,—they passionately proclaimed the democracy they fought for, and made triumphant social ideals of which every one now recognizes the inevitability and the justice.

But if the war has produced little of the super-excellent in verse, it has produced much that is better than good, and a quite prodigious welter of tolerable mediocrity. The poets have risen as promptly to the appeal to arms, as did the men of England to that of Kitchener. At their head were the recognized masters of modern verse—Bridges and Begbie, Noyes and Newbolt, Kipling, Phillips and Watson. The spirit of almost all this, and of the work by poets less known, has been laudable—sometimes admirable, but as poetry it often leaves something to be desired. None of the bigger men have added to their reputation through their war verse—perhaps some of them have herein been eminent failures. Among such must certainly be mentioned Mr. William Watson, the best of whose war verse is marked by a set formality, a sort of worn solemnity, and whose worst attains almost to a sublimity of bathos. He brings forth in all seriousness lines like these:

As rose the murky sun
 Our men the North Sea scanned,
 And each rejoicing gun
 Welcomed the foe at hand,
 And thundering its delight
 Opened its mouth outright
 And bit them in the Bight,
 The Bight of Helgoland.

This is one of the things we try to forget: but it is not very forgettable. A witty London journalist scored these poets in a clever jingle thuswise:—

Has Robert Bridge's success with fighting
 Been such as to encourage emulation?
 Or Dr. Watson's "Bit them in the Bight"—ing?
 Or the same author's lucubration,
 (Yet one more blow for a distressful nation)
 In which, dead gravelled for a rhyme for "Ireland"
 He struggled out with "motherland and sireland?"

Did even the voice from Rudyard Kipling's shelf
 Say anything it had not said before?
 And was not Stephen Phillips—just himself?
 And was not Newbolt's effort in the war
 Distinctly less effective than of yore?
 And would not German shrapnel in the leg be
 Less lacerating than the verse of Begbie?

With thus much of generalization as to its quality, let us look a little more closely at the poetic product. And, as by almost universal consent, the war was willed, planned and started by Germany, a summary of typical Teutonic war poetry has logical precedence.

All the German poets have lined up behind the Kaiser and his warlords. So far as can be judged by translations, many have sustained the role of patriot with great ability. All accept without hint of question the official German view that they were forced into the war. Examples are legion—take this, from Hauptmann's "Reiberlied."

Three robbers came upon us.
 "Who goes there? Who goes there?"
 "Germany, yield your honor to us."
 "Never shall we yield!
 And were you not three, but were you nine,
 My honor and country should still be mine,
 No one shall take them from us,
 God, Emperor, and Germany's army fight for us,
 Never shall we yield!"

All of us must have noted how men of opposing armies beseech victory from Heaven, reverting in time of war to the primitive idea of a tribal God. Sudermann, whose plays most of us have read and enjoyed, is typical of much of the abounding Teutonic poetry of this type. His "Die Grosse Stunde" (The Great Hour) begins thus:—

Whether, O Father in Heaven, we still put our trust in You
 Or whether You are but a dream of the severed past—
 See now, we swear to You, witness of Truth,
 We have not deserved it—
 This murder, this world-ending murder—
 Which, now, with blood-hot sighs,
 Stamps over the shuddering earth,
 True to the soil, the bread-giving soil
 Happy and cheerful in business and trade,
 Peaceful we sat in the oak tree's shade
 Peaceful—
 Though we were born to the sword.

Little of the German war poetry, however, is as regretful in tone as this. Most of it reflects devotion to the State, joy

that the opportunity had come for the German people to show their warrior spirit. The joy of fighting, the expectation of conquest, is its Leitmotif. One of the most popular is by Dehmel. Every German knows it by heart.

Blessed be now this solemn hour,
 Making us one, and our hearts of steel;
 In everyone's mouth were the words of peace,
 But suspicion had paralyzed friend and foe.
 War now is here,
 War for our honor!

One fiery will in its clearness hovers
 Over the powder and dust and smoke:
 Not for life, oh, not for life
 Is man fighting the battle of life!
 Death always comes—
 Death divine!

Strong in our faith, we seize the sword,
 Fight for the spirit of our race.
 Nation, thy honor is at stake!
 Man, in sacrifice be thy joy!
 Then will come triumph,
 Glorious triumph!

Every event of the war has been celebrated by German poets. The capture of Liege, the occupation of Brussels, the sinking of Admiral Craddock's ships off Chili, the 'Emden' raids, even the raising of the first war loan, and the submarine blockade—all have their own literature. Then there is a great body of poetry with "Gott Strafe England!" as its basis. The most famous of these is, of course, Lissauer's "Hassgesang Gegen England"—the "Hymn of Hate." Lissauer was a Bavarian trooper, and Crown Prince Rupprecht, realizing the tremendous stimulating power of the poem as a war-song, pursued the striking course of issuing it as a special army order to his troops. It was set to music, with electrical effect. For a year it was sung by troops going into battle, hummed by business men in their offices, whistled by newsboys and declaimed at the theatres. It is not so popular now—the spirit of the Hun is somewhat chastened. He sees the handwriting on the wall. The Teutonic poets are today pining for, and praising, Peace.

Read aloud in the original, the "Hymn of Hate" has a dreadful, a prophetic, a fateful quality. I give part of it in Barbara Henderson's fine translation.

French and Russian, they matter not!
A blow for a blow, and a shot for a shot!
We love them not,
We hate them not,
We hold the Weichsel and Vosges gate.
We have but one and only hate,
We love as one, as one we hate.
We have one foe, and one alone,
England!

He is known to you all, he is known to you all,
He crouches behind the dark grey flood,
Full of envy, of rage, of craft, of gall,
Cut off by waves that are thicker than blood.
Come! Let us stand in the Judgment Place.
An oath to swear to, face to face.
An oath of bronze no wind can shake.
An oath for our sons, and their sons, to take.
Come! hear the word! repeat the word!
Throughout the Fatherland make it heard:
We will never forego our hate.
We have all but a single hate.
We hate as one, we love as one.
We have one foe, and one alone,
England!

* * * *

Take you the folk of the earth in pay.
With bars of gold your ramparts lay,
Bedeck the ocean with bow on bow,
Ye reckon well, but not well enough now.
French and Russian, they matter not,
A blow for a blow, a shot for a shot.
We fight the battle with bronze and steel,
And the time that is coming, Peace will seal.
You will we hate with a lasting hate.
We will never forego our hate.
Hate by water, and hate by land,
Hate of the head, and hate of the hand,
Hate of the hammer, and hate of the crown,
Hate of seventy millions choking down.
We love as one, we hate as one.
We have one foe, and one alone,
England!

In England, the scorn, the bitter anger, the venomous malice of "The Hymn of Hate" was received with some amusement and more contempt. By many it was regarded as conclusive proof that Germany was a nation gone mad. But in the trenches Tommy Atkins heard it with howls of delight, and promptly appropriated it as his own. No canteen "sing-song" program is considered complete without it. On route-march any day "somewhere in France" you can hear some sturdy cockney regiment singing in stentorian tones:—

'Ite of the 'cart, an' 'ite of the 'and,
'Ite by water, an' 'ite by land,
'Ou do we 'ite to beat the band!

(notice how defective memory is compensated by efficient invention) and an answering roar from a thousand throats
"ENGLAND"!

Despite the splendid feeling three years of comradeship has developed between ourselves and our French allies, is it any wonder that, hearing a British regiment shouting the "Hymn of Hate" in apparently vociferous wrath, the French should still regard us an extraordinary, an incomprehensible, an amazing, people?

Perhaps I may be permitted, as an Englishman by birth, and a Canadian by adoption and affection, to set against this powerful, grotesque, repellent, Satanic production Helen Gray Cone's really beautiful poem that appeared two years ago in the Atlantic—"A Chant of Love for England." I quote only a part.

A song of hate is a song of hell;
Some there be that sing it well.
Let them sing it loud and long,
We lift our hearts in a loftier song.
We lift our hearts to Heaven above
Singing the glory of her we love—
England!

Glory of thought and glory of deed,
Glory of Hampden and Runymede;
Glory of ships that sought far goals,
Glory of swords and glory of souls!
Glory of songs that mount as birds,
Glory immortal of magical words;
Glory of Milton, glory of Nelson,
Tragical glory of Gordon and Scott,

Glory of Shelley, Glory of Sidney,
Glory transcendent that perishes not—
Hers is the story, hers is the glory,
England!

* * * *

Bind her, grind her, gird her with fire,
Cast her ashes into the sea;
She shall escape, she shall aspire,
She shall arise to make men free!
She shall arise in a sacred scorn,
Lighting the lives that are yet unborn;
Spirit supernal; splendor eternal;
England!

Before leaving Lissauer and the German war poetry, one of his poems might be mentioned that has a practical application to us all in these days of food dictators and conservation commissions. England's "Auhungerungsplan"—the policy of starving out Germany—is the theme of several of Lissauer's poems. A stanza of one runs:—

With arms they cannot overpower us,
With hunger they would fain devour us.
Foe beside foe, in an iron ring.
Has want crossed our borders, or hunger, or death?
Listen: I chant the tidings of Spring:
Our soil is our ally in this great thing;
Already new bread is growing in the earth.
Save the food, and guard, and hoard:
Bread is a sword!

Of the war poetry of the other Central Powers, Austria and Turkey, I am in no position to speak. Little from Austria or Hungary has been translated, and none that I have seen warrants more than the merest reference in a paper of this scope. Whether or not Turkish poets have celebrated the wholesale massacres in Armenia, or the surrender of General Townshead in Mesopotamia, this deponent saith not. Possibly both nations are content to have their war poetry, as well as their war policies, dictated from Berlin.

Let us now turn to the war-born poetry of the Entente. First place, by right of suffering, sacrifice and heroism, should be accorded Belgium.

Heartstruck she stands—our Lady of all Sorrows—
 Circled with ruin, sunk in deep amaze,
 Facing the shadow of her dark tomorrows,
 Mourning the glory of her yesterdays.

Yet is she queen, by every royal token,
 There where the storm of desolation swirled;
 Crowned only with the thorn, despoiled and broken—
 Her kingdom is the heart of all the world.

She made her breast a shield, her sword a splendor,
 She rose like flame upon the darkened ways;
 So, through the anguish of her proud surrender,
 Breaks the clear vision of undying praise!

Baron Curzon has given us a series of vigorous translations of Cammaerts and Bonaud, and also of some few anonymous Belgian poets. From these I quote a few samples. Can anything be more biting than this quatrain, apropos of the decoration by the Kaiser of the spoilers and ravagers of Belgium?

In older days they hanged the thief,
 And on the cross he hung,
 But now we've turned another leaf—
 The cross on thieves is hung!

What clarion could call clearer to danger and death than lines like these, from "The Song of the Belgians"?

Reck not that your wounds are bleeding,
 Reck not that your voice is weak:
 Louder than the roar of cannon,
 Higher than the battle shriek,
 Sing, my countrymen, the story
 Of the fields we have *not* won.
 Fields of failure, but of glory,
 Neath this fair autumnal sun;
 Sing how, when the tempter whispered,
 "Buy your safety with your shame,"
 Saith we, "Sooner no dishonor
 Shall defile the Belgian name!"

And surely not a heart that beats the throb of liberty, or a

soul that glows sympathetically to tragedy and suffering, but will respond to "Au Grand Roi d'un Petit Pays."—"To the Great King of a Small Country," voicing the passionate loyalty with which Belgium adores the heroic Albert. This is the last stanza.

Wheresoe'er you will to lead us
 We will come full fain.
 If you bid us shed our life blood,
 Sire, 'tis yours to drain.
 God protect you, our Protector,
 You, our shield, Sire, may He shield,
 King of Furnes, the Soldiers' Monarch
 King who scorned his pledge to yield;
 King of but a score of steeples,
 King of acres—few there be—
 Pride and Glory of our Homeland,
 Warden of Humanity!

One other gem from Cammaerts before we leave Belgium—a little poem that will make any English heart swell with mingled pride and pity. "L'Aveugle et son Fils"—"The Blind man and his son."

"The distant boom of angry guns
 No longer fills my ear.
 Oh! whither have we fled, my son?
 Tell me, that I may hear."
 "Father, we are in England!"

"No more I hear the stormy wind
 Amid the rigging roar,
 I feel beneath my tottering feet
 The firm ground of the shore
 Is this the end of all our woes?
 Shall we not suffer more?"
 "Father, we are in England!"

"I hear the sound of kindly speech,
 But do not understand,
 I feel I've wandered very far,
 Far from the fatherland:
 How comes it that these tones are not
 Those of an unknown land?"
 "Father, we are in England!"

"I feel in all the air around
 Freedom's sweet breath respire,
 I feel celestial fingers creep
 Along my quivering lyre;
 The birds, the trees, the babbling streams
 Speak to me of my home,
 Why does my grief less bitter grow
 And rest so dear become?"
 "Father, we are in England!"

"Bend down upon thy knees, my son,
 And take into thy hand,
 Thy wounded hand, and mine, somewhat
 Of the earth of this good land,
 That, dreaming of our home, we two
 May kiss the soil of England!"

The war poetry of France cannot even be touched in an address of limited length. It demands a whole evening. It reflects the spirit of the land all love next their own—"every man has two countries, his own and France." It is the poetry of a nation reborn, spiritualized through suffering, proud and heroic, dignified and patient, awaiting with courage and faith ultimate but inevitable victory. Even in translation much of this poetry cannot be read but with a choke in the throat. We will, therefore, salute it—salute it with deepest respect and admiration, and love for the splendid nation whose high qualities it gloriously voices and interprets.

In peace we held thy worth in scant esteem;
 Thy sons were dissolute, thy daughters frail;
 How light and fair and fickle didst thou seem,
 In time of need, alas, how sure to fail!
 But when war came, a war that was not thine—
 And the flame scared thee, then thy heart we knew,
 In that dark tumult how thy soul did shine
 Loyal and steadfast, pure and brave and true.
 Nay, thou art honored even by the foe,
 In martyrdom transformed and glorified!
 And we who scorned (how little did we know!)
 Stripped of the tattered mantle of our pride,
 Let us in self-abasement bow the knee
 And pray for God's grace to become like thee.

Nor can I deal herein with other poetry, which, though written in English, sets forth the outlook and emotional reactions of other faiths and civilizations. Sir Rabindranath Tagore is one of the few well known poets, whose reputation has been enhanced by his war poetry. His "The Trumpet" must be known to many of you. Fine as it is, I prefer "The Oarsman," with its calm faith in eventual progress.

Do you hear the roar of death through the listening hush
of distance,
And that awful call 'midst fire-floods and poison clouds, and
the wrestle of earth and sky in mortal combat,
The Captain's call to steer the ship towards a shore yet unnamed?
For that time is over—the stagnant time in the port—
Where the same old store is bought and sold in endless round,
Where dead things gather in the exhaustion and emptiness
of truth.

They wake up in sudden fear and ask "Comrades, what is the
hour of the night?
When shall we open the golden gate of the new dawn?"
The murky clouds have blotted out all stars—
Who are there to see the beckoning finger of the day?
They rush out with oars in hand, the beds are emptied, in the
house the mother prays the silent wife watches by the door.
The wail of separation sweeps the sky like rushing wings of
night birds.

And there rings the captain's voice in the dark:—
"Come, sailors, for the time in the haven is over!"
All the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks.
You oarsmen, take your places, with the blossoming of sorrow
in your souls!
Whom do you blame, brothers? bow your heads down!
The sin has been yours and ours.
The heat growing in the heart of God for ages—
The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong, the
greed of fat prosperity, the rancor of the deprived, pride
of race, and insult to man—
Has burst God's peace, raging in storm.
Like a ripe pod, let the tempest break its heart into pieces,
scattering thunders.
Stop your bluster of abuse, and self-praise, my friends,
And with the calm of silent prayer on your brows sail forward
to the shores of the new world.

Nawab Nramat Jung, a native judge of Hyderabad, India, has written a splendid ode, "India to England," and Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have raised their voices for Empire, Civilization and Humanity. This output can only be alluded to tonight.

Coming at last to the war poetry written in our own tongue, by our own race, well may we, confronted with so vast a mass of material, stand appalled at the prospect of selection and appraisal. Sound judgment is as yet difficult, and final judgment obviously impossible until the war is over. We will, however, pluck, or at least inhale the fragrance, of a few of the flowers that promise to bloom for a long season in the garden of the Muses, set amid the red ruin made by Mars.

Many British poets are well practised in the rituals prescribed for patriotic poetry—the poetry that is always the earliest fruitage of any war. This is poetry of the type of Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England," Drayton's "Agin-court," Tennyson's "Revenge." It is poetry with a local, a geographical, an historical appeal. It is more or less traditional in treatment, as it is tribal in origin. It is poetry that always ascribes to the country from which it springs valor and virtue in superexcellent degree. It has no naivete, no nuances, no half-tones—the drawing is in strong black and white, and vigorous and convincing as a Raemaeker cartoon. It is powerful in proportion as it is partisan. It has in every country produced poetry of noble note, but in none is the bulk bigger, or the quality finer, than in English literature. In Shakespeare the intensely localized love of country—the actual island, the speck of earth in the waste of waters—is represented by many magnificent passages, some of which one instinctively calls to mind. But even in those days the English idea of patriotism connoted something beyond mere locality: it was not pride of place only, but pride of race. England was praised as the home of a great breed of men, and the growth and extension of this idea began, as a necessary consequence, to include the ideals these men cherished, the free institutions they created. This is today, and has for long been, the underlying basis of the conception of patriotism, not alone in England, but in Canada and Australia, in France, in the United States—in all free democracies. Kipling voiced it for the British Empire in his "Seven Seas:" some poet will yet voice it with authority for the American Republic and the Canadian Dominion.

All the recognized British poets have produced poetry of this sort under the stimulus of the war, though none of it is

quite as good as the best of their own work. There are excellent lines in Sir Henry Newbolt's "The Vigil," but as a whole the poem is ineffective compared with his craftily constructed "Drake's Drum," or his ringing "Admirals All." The first and second stanzas seem to me the best.

England! where the sacred flame
 Burns before the inmost shrine,
 Where the lips that love thy name
 Consecrate their hopes and thine;
 Where the banners of thy dead
 Weave their shadows overhead,
 Watch beside thine arms to-night,
 Pray that God defend the Right.

Think that when to-morrow comes
 War shall claim command of all,
 Thou must hear the roll of drums,
 Thou must hear the trumpet's call.
 Now, before they silence ruth,
 Commune with the voice of truth:
 England! on thy knees to-night
 Pray that God defend the Right.

Similarly, Kipling's "For all we have and are" is inferior to his "Hymn before Action," or "Recessional," or the nobly elaborate "Address to France," which he wrote in the years of peace. It is grave even to grimness, direct, elemental in its frank statement of the situation, and courageous in its challenge to the most heroic qualities in man and nation.

For all we have and are,
 For all our children's fate,
 Stand up and meet the war.
 The Hun is at the gate!
 Our world has passed away
 In wantonness o'erthrown.
 There is nothing left to-day
 But steel, and fire, and stone.

Though all we knew depart,
 The old commandments stand:
 'In courage keep your heart,
 In strength lift up your hand'.

Once more we hear the word
 That sickened earth of old:
 'No law except the sword
 Unsheathed and uncontrolled.'
 Once more it knits mankind,
 Once more the nations go
 To meet, and break and bind
 A crazed and driven foe.

Comfort, content, delight,
 The ages' slow-bought gain
 They shrivelled in a night,
 Only ourselves remain
 To face the naked days
 In silent fortitude,
 Through perils and' dismays
 Renewed and re-renewed.

Though all we made depart
 The old commandments stand:
 'In patience keep your heart,
 In strength lift up your hand.'

No easy hopes or lies
 Shall bring us to our goal,
 But iron sacrifice
 Of body, will and soul.
 There's but one task for all,
 For each, one life to give,
 Who stands if freedom fall?
 Who dies if England live?

Dr. Bridges, the Poet Laureate, has necessarily produced a good deal of war poetry, but much of it is merely "official" verse. His "Wake up, England!" is one of the best known. It had little to recommend it but the promptness of its appearance, and its sincerity. Its title is the best thing about it—and that was borrowed from the address King George gave, when, as Prince of Wales, he returned to London from his great imperial tour. His sonnet on Kitchener's tragic end is far better work, showing fine craftsmanship, if little inspiration. I note that in Leonard's volume of Patriotic Poems, premier place is given to "August 1914" by Dr. Bridges—seven quatrains without a thought worthy of preservation (I

nearly said without a thought of any kind)—aggravated by at least one badly mixed metaphor, and, in the final stanza, by two hopelessly dislocated rhythms.

Up, careless, awake!
 Ye peacemakers, Fight!
 ENGLAND STANDS FOR HONOUR
 GOD DEFEND THE RIGHT!

The inclusion of verse such as this causes one to wonder whether the ways of anthologists are not past finding out. In my judgment, the best war poem by Dr. Bridges is "Our Men." The first two stanzas run:—

Our men, they are our stronghold
 Our bastioned wall unscaled,
 Who, against Hate and Wrong, hold
 This realm that never quailed:
 Who bear the noblest burden
 Life lays on shoulders broad,
 Asking not fame or guerdon
 Asking not gold or laud.

* * * * *

They go where England speeds them:
 They laugh and jest at fate.
 They go where England speeds them,
 And dream not they are great.
 And oft, mid smoke and smother
 By blinding war storm fanned,
 Sons of our mighty Mother,
 They fall that she may stand.

Many critics agree that among the half dozen finest poems of the war is Hardy's "Song of the Soldiers." I have never been able to forgive Britain's undisputed master novelist's abandonment of the writing of books because of the criticism of mid-Victorian prudery that resulted from the publication of "Jude the Obscure." The grievance was aggravated when "The Dynasts" appeared—we had lost a novelist, and had not gained a poet. A sense of something akin to resentment, therefore, prevents fair judgment of this poem. I admit its novel and beautiful metrical plan, its ringing formality, its fire rhythm, and a downright vigor of patriotism that is elemental and un-

analyzing, and I am unfeignedly glad to note the abandonment of that spirit of stark, sceptical pessimism that marks nearly all Hardy's work. I quote the first and two last stanzas.

What of the faith and fire within us
 Men who march away
 Ere the barn-cocks say
 Night is growing gray,
 To hazards whence no tears can win us:
 What of the faith and fire within us
 Men who march away?

* * * * *

In our hearts of hearts believing
 Victory crowns the just,
 And that braggarts must
 Surely bite the dust,
 March we to the field ungrieving,
 In our hearts of hearts believing
 Victory crowns the just.

Hence the faith and fire within us
 We who march away
 Ere the barn-cocks say
 Night is growing gray,
 To hazards whence no tears can win us;
 Hence the faith and fire within us
 We who march away.

Among the English poets, none have done finer war work than Noyes. Hating war, he yet fights: pity wrenches his heart for foe as for friend: none see more clearly than he that this is a conflict of ideals even more than of armies—that in both camps are thousands daily daring death for irreconcilable but strongly held faiths and creeds. The tragedy of this finds fine expression in Noyes' poetry.

They are blind, as we are blind,
 Urged by duties past reply.
 Ours is but the task assigned:
 Theirs, to strike us ere they die.
 Who can see his country fall?
 Who but answers at the call?
 Who has power to pause and think
 When she reels upon the brink?
 Hear, O hear,
 Both for foe and friend, our prayer.

Noyes looks forward, not merely to peace, but to brotherhood. No poem has a deeper insight into the spiritual conflict that underlies all other causes of this war, and few are so suffused with such a deep conviction of ultimate gain to humanity, than his "Forward!" "The Searchlights" has the same theme, differently treated. A few stanzas from "Forward!" will illustrate his outlook and method.

A thousand creeds and battle-cries,
A thousand warring social schemes,
A thousand new moralities,
And twenty thousand thousand dreams!

Each on his own anarchic way,
From the old order breaking free,—
Our ruined world desires, you say,
License, once more, not Liberty.

But ah, beneath the struggling foam,
When storm and change are on the deep,
How quietly the tides come home,
And how the depths of sea-shine sleep;

And we who march towards a goal,
Destroying only to fulfil
The law, the law of that great soul
Which moves beneath your alien will;

We, that like foemen meet the past
Because we bring the future, know
We only fight to achieve at last
A great reunion with our foe.

Reunion in the truths that stand
When all our wars are rolled away;
Reunion of the heart and hand
And of the prayers wherewith we pray;

Reunion in the common needs,
The common strivings of mankind;
Reunion of our warring creeds
In the one God that dwells behind.

Then—in that day—we shall not meet
Wrong with new wrong, but right with right;
Our faith shall make your faith complete
When our batallions reunite.

Forward!—what use in idle words!—
 Forward, O warriors of the soul!
 There will be breaking up of swords
 When that new morning makes us whole.

A whole evening could be delightfully spent on Noyes and his war poetry. The same note runs through it all—the deep consciousness that this is as much a moral as an international struggle, and that in this struggle every individual soul is as much a battleground as any field in France or Flanders. “The Searchlights” is a typical Noyes war-poem, and sets forth this view with directness and vigor.

Search for the foe in thine own soul,
 The sloth, the intellectual pride;
 The trivial jest that veils the goal
 For which our fathers lived and died;
 The lawless dreams, the cynic Art,
 That rend thy nobler self apart.

This quality in Noyes work is shared in greater or less degree by all the war poets. In fact, one of the most distinctive features of this poetry is that it is not Martial, but Moral. It shows a bewildering spectacle of moral conflict, an enthusiasm that seems to inspire with equal fervor the apostles of reason and the apostles of unreason. There is the Poetry of the Pacifist—some of it artistically striking, some achieving a moral beauty that is undeniable, and with little that is contemptible save their denial of the irresistible logic of facts. Of the sincerity of these poets, of their passionate love of humanity, there can be no question. The great majority of the war poets have little of the old fashioned fighting note—Julian Grenfell is the only one of this type I call to mind. This rarity of the purely martial ring is one of the most significant generalizations that can be made about our topic. The literary trend of our day has been away from all high heroics, especially has the passion for military swagger grown more and more uncongenial to a generation of peace lovers, and even more than three years of war has not revolutionized our taste. The representative poets have all subdued their undoubted resolution to other than Phrygian moods. Their thought, like that of Noyes, is not so intent on the glory of the smashing blow, the delight in struggle and conquest, as on the sacrificial consecration of the spirit.

All the British poets hitherto referred to had assured and established places in literature. But much of the finest of the Motherland's war poetry has been written by men whose reputations have been born through their gift of expression of the reactions to emotion, or description of incidents, the war itself has created. Foremost of these, the name of Rupert Brooke suggests itself. His noble quintette of sonnets bid fair to be part of the imperishable heritage of mankind. They are perfect expression, not merely of a human, but a national, soul. His spirit is part of the light which is England. He had written poetry before 1914,—poems full of a passionate sense of beauty, of protest against destroying time, but they were "caviare to the general." At the outbreak of war he joined "the first one hundred thousand;" he fought at Antwerp and in the retreat of Mons, and early in 1915 went to the Dardanelles. He died on a French hospital ship, and was buried at Skyros, in the Aegean; his Grecian grave itself has been the subject of some notable sonnets.

Brooke had this decided advantage over other patriotic poets: when he celebrated the faultless beauty of sacrificing himself for England, it was his own immediate emotions he expressed. He exults to welcome, as the highest imaginable privilege, the chance of dying for his country. It is as if his life had leapt into a new element, brighter and finer, and nearer to spirit:

Oh! we who have known shame, we have found release there.
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending.

Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing hearts long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;

And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

Between the opening of the first sonnet—

"Now God be thanked Who has matched us with this hour."

And the last line of the fifth—

"In hearts at peace, under an English heaven."

the whole splendor and tenderness of English patriotism is set forth with the assurance of an intensely personal experience. I cannot refrain from quoting the last of the series, known

though it must be to all of you: such a perfect passion of patriotism has perhaps never been so completely uttered in so few lines. It is pure gold.

If I should die, think only this of me;
 That there's some corner of a foreign field
 That is for ever England. There shall be
 In that rich earth a richer dust concealed:
 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
 Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
 A body of England's, breathing English air,
 Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
 Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given:
 Her sights and sounds: dreams happy as her day;
 And laughter, learnt of friends: and gentleness
 In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Of a totally different quality, and varying in range from invective to humor, is the poetry of Sir Owen Seamans, the gifted editor of "Punch." His "Pro Patria" is one of the noble poems of the war. Addressed to his own country, it is peculiarly applicable to your Republic and my own Dominion.

England, in this great fight to which you go,
 Because where Honor calls you, go you must,
 Be glad, whatever comes, at least to know
 You have your quarrel just.

* * * * *

Forth then, to front that peril of the deep
 With smiling lips, and in your eyes the light,
 Steadfast and confident, of those who keep
 Their storied scutcheon bright.

And we, whose burden is to watch and wait,
 High hearted ever, strong in faith and prayer,
 We ask what offering we may consecrate,
 What humble service share.

To steel our souls against the lust of ease;
 To find our welfare in the general good;
 We hold together, merging all degrees
 In one wide brotherhood;

To teach that he who saves himself is lost;
To bear in silence, though our hearts may bleed;
To spend ourselves, and never count the cost,
For other's greater need;

To go our quiet ways, subdued and sane;
To hush all vulgar clamour of the street;
With level calm to face alike the strain
Of triumph or defeat;

This be our part, for thus we serve you best,
So best confirm your prowess and your pride,
You warrior sons, to whom in this high test
Our fortunes we confide.

Sir Owen has written one of the finest of the many poems that have the Cross for its motif. It is "The Wayside Calvary," and was written on the first anniversary of the war. It is an indictment the more scathing because of its measured gravity.

Now with the full year Memory holds her tryst
Heavy with such a tale of bitter loss
As never earth has suffered since the Christ
Hung for us on the Cross.

Of God, O Kaiser, makes the vision plain:
Gives you on some lone Calvary to see
The Man of Sorrows Who endured the pain
And died to set us free—

How will you face beneath its Crown of thorn
That Figure, stark against the smoking skies,
The Arms outstretched, the Sacred Head forlorn
And those reproachful Eyes?

How dare confront the false quest with the true!
Or think what gulfs between the ideals lie
Of Him Who died that men might live—and you
Who live that men may die.

Ah, turn your eyes away: He reads your heart;
Pass on, and having done your work abhorred,
Join hands with Judas in his place apart,
You who betrayed your Lord.

The dreadful welter of blood and agony in which we are living lends itself but little to the gayer aspects of life. It is true that countless humorous incidents lighten the grim monotony of the trenches, and many such are found in the rhymes of the soldier poets. But the civilian, sitting at home, has neither the knowledge, or the right, to treat the war tragedy with levity. But a few clever parodies of well known poems have been perpetrated, and as one of the best known has been committed by Sir Owen, it will slacken the tension if that phase of the subject is disposed of at this point. Seaman's parody on Wordsworth's "We are Seven"—"Truthful Willie"—is as faithful to its model in form as it is delicious in its satire.

A simple, earnest-minded youth,
 Who wore in both his eyes
 A calm, pellucid lake of Truth—
 What should he know of lies?

I met a gentle German Prince,
 His name was Truthful Will,
 An honest type—and ever since,
 His candour haunts me still.

"About this War—come, tell me, Sir,
 If you would be so kind,
 Just any notions that occur
 To your exalted mind."

"Frankly, I cannot bear," said he,
 "The very thought of strife:
 It seems so sad: it seems to me
 A wicked waste of life.

"Thank Father's God that I can say
 My constant aim was Peace:
 I simply lived to see The Day
 (Der Tag) when wars would cease.

"But, just as I was well in train
 To realize my dream,
 Came England, all for lust of gain,
 And spoiled my beauteous scheme.

"But tell me how the rumors run;
Be frank and tell the worst
Touching myself; you speak to one
With whom the Truth comes first."

"Prince," I replied, "the vulgar view
Pictured you on your toes
Eager for gore; they say that you
Were ever bellicose.

"'Twas you, the critics say, who led
The loud War Party's cry
For blood and iron." "Oh!" he said,
"Oh! what a dreadful lie!"

"But your Bernhardi," I replied,
"He preached the Great War Game."
"Bernhardi! who was he?" he cried;
"I never heard his name!"

So, with a smile that knew no art,¹
He left me, well content
Thus to have communed, heart to heart,
With one so innocent.

And still I marvelled, having scanned,
Those eyes so full of Truth,
"Oh, why do men misunderstand
This bright and blameless youth?"

Another of the few popular parodists is Horace Wyatt, whose "Malice in Kulturland" cleverly imitates Lewis Carroll. I quote typical verses.

The Kaiser and the Chancellor
Were walking hand in hand;
They wept like anything to see
Such lots of foreign land;
"If this were only Germanized,"
They said, "it would be grand!"

"The Time has come," the Kaiser said,
"To talk of blood and wars;
Of Me, and Germany, and God:
And Culture, and the Cause;
And why the sea is much too hot;
And whether Bears have claws!"

You will at once recognize another of Wyatt's war imitations of well-known poems.

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,
 "And the end of your life is in sight;
 Yet you're frequently patting your God on the head—
 Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," said his sire, "I established my case
 As a being apart and divine;
 And I think if I try to keep God in His place,
 He ought to support me in mine."

Let us return to more serious efforts. There yet remains a fine body of genuine poetry to which I would like to draw attention, but time and space forbid. Binyon's "For the Fallen," W. W. Gibson's "Between the Lines," and a dozen of his thumbnail sketches in "Battle," L. Hussey's "Things that were yours," Julian Grenfell's fine fighting poem, (indisputably the best of its kind yet produced by the war.) "Into Battle"—these, and dozens of others, I have read and liked, and would like to quote from, but cannot. But I must refer to two others, for both touch me very nearly. In the hall of the Arts Building of the University of British Columbia, just outside my office door, is the University Honour Roll—the names of students and staff who counted not their lives dear unto them, but at once answered the call to the defence of free peoples and free institutions. The University has been teaching but three years: it numbers today but 450 students, yet there are 435 names entitled to be blazoned on its Roll of Honor. Thirty three of these men we know will never come back—how many more there will yet lie under little wooden crosses "In Flanders Fields" who can say? As I look up at the Roll, and catch the familiar names of lads I knew—some of whom I taught—I think of Lord Crewe's "On a Harrow Grave in Flanders", written on the death of his own son.

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 his holier fate,
The man's essential soul, the hero-will?
—We ask; and wait.

I think, too, of Miss Letts "The Spires of Oxford," and feel a link between my own—the youngest university in the British Empire,—and that on the Isis, the oldest, and experience a thrill that the challenge to duty, to patriotism, to humanity, of these dark and fateful days, met a response as gallant, as immediate, as noble, in the men of the New as in those of the Old World.

I saw the spires of Oxford
As I was passing by.
The gray spires of Oxford
Against a pearl-gray sky.
My heart was with the Oxford men
Who went abroad to die.

The years go fast in Oxford,
The golden years and gay.
The hoary Colleges look down
On careless boys at play.
But when the bugles sounded war
They put their games away.

They left the peaceful river,
The cricket field, the quad,
The shaven lawns of Oxford
To seek a bloody sod—
They gave their merry youth away
For country and for God.

God rest you happy, gentlemen,
Who laid your good lives down,
Who took the khaki and the gun
Instead of cap and gown.
God bring you to a fairer place
Than even Oxford town.

Many of you will have been witness to the entraining of troops bound for "an Atlantic Port" enroute for "somewhere in France." To Vancouver and to every other city in Canada, this has been a story many times repeated in the last forty months, but "custom cannot stale its infinite variety." Indeed, repetition tightens rather than slackens the grip of these scenes on our emotions and imaginations. The contrast between the scenes of peace they are leaving and those of carnage for which they are bound, as well as the gay valor with which most of them go, are well set forth in a poem published anonymously in the London "Daily Mail."

Through peaceful fields the long train rushes by,
 And o'er the rumbling roar of hurrying wheels
 Rises the sound of cheering, loud and high,
 While every crowded window-space reveals
 The eager lads, who wave a cheery hand,
 Bidding farewell to this most pleasant land.

A pleasant land, yet one whose very peace
 Makes its appeal, that all her sons must hear,
 To guard her well until her wars shall cease,
 To peril all for her they hold most dear,
 Battling against the waves of that grey sea
 Rolled back across the fields of Picardy.

From this, the heaven of peace, to that strange land
 Of ruined villages and shell-ploughed earth,
 Where they shall meet the foemen hand to hand,
 They go triumphantly to prove their worth,
 To share a glorious labor, well begun,
 To carry on for those whose task is done.

So shall they cheer when up the death-strewn slope
 They charge, unheeded of the fiery blast,
 And thews and steel fulfil the desperate hope,
 Winning the crown of victory at last,
 In those young, ringing voices, proud and gay,
 There sounds the pledge of triumph in the fray!

The War Poetry of Women would in itself make a fine subject for the whole evening's discussion. Their poetry runs the whole gamut of the war,—protest against war itself, its barbarity, its horror, its ruin of their personal happiness; it

voices their courageous steadfastness, the terror they will not permit to conquer their souls; it inspires men to heroism, and sometimes flames with a white heat of patriotism: it sets forth women's many sided missions of mercy, and looks across the vale of tears and terror to calm, bright plains of peace. Many of the best American war poems were written by women—Charlotte Crawford's "Vive la France," Amelia Burr's "Kitcheners' March," Florence Frank's "Jewish Conscript," Alice Corbin's "Fallen," Harriet Monroe's "On the Porch," Ruth Mitchell's "He went for a Soldier," Mrs. Swift's "Message from America"—all these are fine poetry. In our own Canada, the poetesses often equal the poets in the quality of their work. Marjorie Pickthall's poems are fine in conception and strong in treatment, and Katherine Hale's "Grey Knitting" is included in most of the war anthologies.

No discussion, however brief, of War poetry should close without reference to the work of the men who, in air or in trench, on or under the sea, in and behind the lines, are doing the actual work of fighting. A long and delightful evening could be given to this phase of the subject. Rupert Brooke has already been spoken of. By his side I always mentally place Alan Seeger, who, like many another gallant American, fell in France or Flanders long ere the Republic as a nation joined the Entente. Thousands of other sons of the Stars and Stripes will soon be thinking the thoughts that inspired Seeger to write

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes round with rustling shade,
And apple blossoms fill the air,
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land,
And close my eyes and quench my breath;
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year,
And the first meadow flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
 Pillowed in silk and scented down,
 Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
 Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
 Where hushed awakenings are dear * * *
 But I've a rendezvous with Death
 At midnight in some flaming town,
 When Spring trips north again this year,
 And I to my pledged word am true,
 I shall not fail that rendezvous.

War poetry is as catholic in art as in outlook. Much of the American poetry is irregular in form—imagist, futurist, cubist—what you will,—“vers libre” is the prevailing present name, I believe. I am admittedly old-fashioned in my poetic standards: serrated lines and dislocated, syncopated rhythms move me to wrath, but none can deny the power of some of this work, though whether it be poetry is arguable. Altar Brody's “Kartushtiya Beroza,” Lincoln Colcord's “Vision of War” are photographs of emotion,—they are scenes and sensations made visible by word magic.

It is interesting to note that Edgar Lee Masters, one of the highest priests in this sanctuary, writes blank verse about the war that is almost orthodox. The reader will discover, in the eloquent beauty of his apostrophe to France, more poetry than in all “Spoon River.” Has Mr. Masters, under the stress of profound feeling, realized that the old poetry is after all closest to life? On the other hand William R. Benet, whose own resources in rhyme and rhythm are surely ample, has here gone halfway over to the enemy. With his sun “clanking across the blue” and other figurative shrillnesses, he seems to approach the very extreme of that artificiality against which the new poetry thinks it is protesting: yet even here it is plain that his wit-play proceeds from a sincere inward impulse. This insistent striving after the clever is but one way of reaching toward the expression of the inexpressible.

Vachel Lindsay, one of the most irreconcilable of the poets protesting against stanzaic regularity, has also written some verse of the more metrically conservative kind. Of these I like best “Lincoln Walks at Midnight,” which appears in several anthologies.

A bronzed, lank man. His suit of ancient black,
A famous high top-hat and plain worn shawl
Make him the quaint figure that men love,
The prairie-lawyer, master of us all.

He cannot sleep upon his hillside now,
He is among us;—as in times before!
And we who toss and lie awake for long
Breathe deep, and start, to see him pass the door.

His head is bowed. He thinks on men and kings.
Yet, when the sick world cries, how can he sleep?
Too many peasants fight, they know not why,
Too many homesteads in black terror weep.

The sins of all the war-lords burn his heart.
He sees the dreadnaughts scouring every main.
He carries on his shawl-wrapped shoulders now
The bitterness, the folly and the pain.

He cannot rest until a spirit dawn
Shall come;—the shining hope of Europe free;
The league of sober folk, the Workers' Earth
Bringing long peace to Cornland, Alp and Sea.

Any general view of the American poetry of the War is impossible in any paper of this length. Like that of France, it demands a whole evening. Moreover, the best of it is only now appearing, under the stimulus of active alliance and participation. Its character during the past months is totally different, both in outlook and quality, from that prior to April 1917. Pick up any issue of the "Literary Digest," and compare the representative American poetry printed therein with that of two years ago, and you will at once see the transformation, both in outlook and in sentiment. In many important respects the present feeling of the American nation is even finer, at once more clear of vision and more passionate—than ours in Canada after more than three years of war.

Having admitted my inability to adequately discuss the national contribution of your Republic to the sum total of the poetry of the war, you may perhaps be interested in hearing a few samples of that of my own Dominion. The best poem on the tragic death of Kitchener was written by a Canadian—it is one of the few poems ever included in its entirety in a telegraphic news service.

Weep, waves of England! Nobler clay
 Was ne'er to nobler grave consigned;
 The wild waves weep with us to-day
 Who mourn a nation's master-mind.

We hoped an honored age for him,
 And ashes laid with England's great;
 And rapturous music, and the dim
 Deep hush that veils our Tomb of State.

But this is better. Let him sleep
 Where sleep the men who made us free,
 For England's heart is in the deep,
 And England's glory is the sea.

One only vow above his bier,
 One only oath beside his bed,
 We swear our flag shall shield him here
 Until the sea gives up its dead!

Leap, waves of England! Boastful be,
 And fling defiance in the blast,
 For Earth is envious of the Sea
 Which shelters England's dead at last.

Another poem loved by Canadians is "Langemarck" by Wilfrid Campbell, by whose death a few weeks ago we lost one of America's truest singing voices. "Langemarck" is too long to quote at length: it tells the story of the gas attack by the Germans at the second battle of Ypres,—the Canadian Thermopylae—when 5000 sons of the Dominion for three days kept back 80,000 of the foe, and held what otherwise would have been an irreparable breach in the British line. In a few years this poem will be as well known in Canada as is the "Battle Hymn" in the Republic—spouted by school children as they now recite Portia's "Mercy Speech" or Macaulay's "Horatius." I quote typical verses to give an idea of the poem.

Then red in the reek of that evil cloud,
 The Hun swept over the plain;
 And the murder's dirk did its monster work,
 Mid the scythe-like shrapnel rain.

Till it seemed that at last the brute Hun hordes
Had broken that wall of steel;
And that soon, through this breach in the freeman's dyke,
His trampling hosts would wheel;—

And sweep to the south in ravaging might,
And Europe's peoples again
Be trodden under the tyrant's heel,
Like herds, in the Prussian pen.

But in that line on the British right,
There massed a corps amain,
Of men who hailed from a far west land
Of mountain and forest and plain;

Men new to war and its dreadest deeds.
But noble and staunch and true;
Men of the open, East and West,
Brew of old Britain's brew.

For the word was "Canada," theirs to fight,
And keep on fighting still;—
Britain said, "Fight," and fight they would,
Though the Devil himself in sulphurous mood,
Came over that hideous hill.

Dr. John McRae is another Canadian poet who recently
"went west." His "In Flanders Fields" is one of the best,
and one of the best-known, poems of the war.

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.

No discussion, however sketchy and incomplete, of the poetry of the war should close without reference to the verse of the men in khaki or in blue—the living bulwark that guards us all. We shall never know how much this war has cost us. Miltons, Turners, Hampdens, and Gladstones, Lowells, Lincolns and Lees, lie in Flanders Fields, under Gallipoli's cliffs, on Mesopotamian plains. Who can say what literature has lost through the deaths of Rupert Brooke, Harold Chapin, Julian Grenfell, Donald Hankey, Dixon Scott, Alan Seegar, Gilbert Frankau, Leslie Coulsen, Francis Ledwidge and a score of others, who died too early for fame, but not for glory? Well might we echo the question asked in the poem found in the pocket of Leslie Coulsen, instantly killed by a sniper.

Who made the Law that Death should stalk the village?

Who spoke the word to kill among the sheaves?

Who gave it forth that Death should lurk in hedgerows?

Who flung the dead among the fallen leaves?

Who made the law?

Yet the soldier poetry, on the whole, is less grim than that of the civilian singers. Much of it is even jovial. And, like the army itself, the soldier poets range in social rank through all degrees—from young Asquith, son of England's late prime minister, to Pat McGill, once navy, and Francis Ledwidge, who promised to be to Erin all that Burns is to Scotia, and who, before the war, broke stone and scraped roads in Ireland. That much of this soldier verse is real poetry is beyond question. Listen to McGill's "In the Morning." It has the fidelity of a photograph, and it moves to the swing of victorious marching men.

Th firefly haunts were lighted yet,
 As we scaled the top of the parapet;
 But the East grew pale to another fire,
 As our bayonets gleamed by the foeman's wire;
 And the sky was tinged with gold and grey,
 And under our feet the dead men lay,
 Still by the loop-holed barricade;
 Food of the bomb and the handgrenade;
 Still in the slushy pool and mud—
 Ah! the path we came was a path of blood,
 When we went to Loos in the morning.

A little grey church at the foot of a hill,
With powdered glass on the window sill,
The shell-scarred stone and the broken tile,
Littered the chancel, nave and aisle
Broken the altar and smashed the pyx,
And the rubble covered the crucifix;
This we saw when the charge was done,
And the gas-clouds paled in the rising sun,
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the shell-scarred plain,
Where Death and the Autumn held their reign—
Like banded ghosts in the heavens grey
The smoke of the powder paled away;
Where riven and rent the spinney trees
Shivered and shook in the sullen breeze,
And there, where the trench through the graveyard
wound,
The death-men's bones stuck out of the ground
By the road to Loos in the morning.

The turret towers that stood in the air,
Sheltered a foeman sniper there—
They found, who fell to the sniper's aim,
A field of death on the field of fame;
And stiff in khaki the boys were laid
To the sniper's toll at the barricade,
But the quick went clattering through the town,
Shot at the sniper and brought him down,
As we entered Loos in the morning.

The dead men lay on the cellar stair,
Toll of the bomb that found them there,
In the street men fell as a bullock drops,
Sniped from the fringe of Hulloch copse,
And the choking fumes of the deadly shell
Curtained the place where our comrades fell,
This we saw when the charge was done
And the East blushed red to the rising sun
In the town of Loos in the morning.

Totally different in character are his "The Cross" and "Matey", but each in its own way beautiful, the one in its rough

pathos, the other in its restrained and tender grief. Then there are the verses of Private Godfrey of the Australian Anzacs, (written in Gallipoli,) the rough and ringing "Red Cross Rhymes" of Robert Service, (a British Columbian,) Arnold Graves, "The Long Retreat", Howard Steele's "Cleared for Action", St. John Adcocks "Hymns of Battle", and many another volume of poem or verse, all interpretations of the varied and awful aspects of the war by men actually participating in its heroisms and its horrors. There are also many little volumes of interesting verse—sometimes it is little better than doggerel—that still are of interest and value, as showing how the men on the firing line think and feel. Frank Brown's "Contingent Duties" and Captain Blackall's rhymes enable one to live with the soldiers as they are read.

This is the song of the bloomin' trench
 It's sung by us, it's sung by the French;
 It's probably sung by the German Huns.
 But it isn't all beer and skittles and buns.
 It's a song of water, and mud and slime,
 And keeping your eyes skinned all of the time.
 You dry while it's dark, and you work while it's light
 And then there's the "listening post" at night.
 Though you're soaked to the skin and chilled to the bone;
 Though your hands are like ice, and your feet like stone.
 Though your watch is long, and your rest is brief,
 And you pray like hell for the next relief.
 Though the wind may howl, and the rain may drench,
 Remember, you've got to stick to your trench.—
 Yes, stick like mud to your trench!

The verse of the soldier poets will be remembered, some of it longer even than their valiant deeds. Some of them hide their seriousness in laughter, some call like clarions to constancy and courage—all to duty, faith, service. They rebuke our flippancy, our indifference, our selfishness, our materialism. From the heavens above, and the waters under the earth: from the seas they sweep in triumph, the lines they hold, the fields they conquer, they call to us at home to do and to endure. Many of them "poured out the red wine of youth, gave up the years to be of comfort and of joy." From little wooden crosses in shell-torn, shot-swept countrysides they point us back to another, that in even greater darkness was once set on

"a green hill, far away,
Without a city wall:"

In these days of stress and peril to civilization and humanity the poets, soldier or civilian, are fulfilling their mission. They are still the seers, champions, consolers, inspirers of mankind. They voice our prayers, our hopes. They cry to us of Freedom, Truth, Sacrifice. They have reborn in us a poignant consciousness of the reality, the everlasting spiritual preciousness, of the ideals for which men gladly die. They have shown us anew

"That Truth and Justice draw
From founts of everlasting Law".

"Watchman, what of the night?", we cry, and from the high towers where humanity's seers look into the future, and whence can be seen the dawn through the darkness, comes the heartening, steadying answer. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand!" Strengthened in courage, in patience, in faith, albeit often in pain, and purified as by fire, let us learn the lesson the poets teach, and, with all who believe and hope, each set to our own work of sacrifice and of service, and thus

"redeemed and healed, and whole
Move on to the Eternal Goal".

