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Alan Seeger & Joyce Kilmer, American World War Poets

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1932

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ALAN SEEGER AND JOYCE KILMER,
AMERICAN WORLD WAR POETS

BY

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

AUGUST, 1932

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PREFACE

Much of the material for this thesis has been gathered from articles found in reputable magazines; William Archer's introduction to Poems by Alan Seeger, and R. C. Holliday's "Memoirs" with which he introduces his book on Joyce Kilmer have been very helpful; and the writer is greatly indebted to Mr. Charles L. Seeger and to Dr. Alfred Kilmer, both of whom have been very kind in answering letters and furnishing material relative to the lives of their sons.

Mary D. Gardner

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

That great crises produce, or at least reveal, great men, and that a great war will produce great literature, are two of our most firmly cherished convictions; therefore it was with intense interest and keen anticipation that the critics watched for the literary contributions of the World War. Newspaper and magazine articles began to appear filled with speculations and prophecies concerning the poetry that would spring from such a massive conflict.

As early as July, 1915, one writer asserted that more poetry had been written "in the past eleven months than grew in the preceding eleven centuries."[1] Several of these early discussions are rather cynical in tone. O. W. Firkins contended that, in January, 1916, a survey of the war verse disclosed little to justify the belief that a great conflict brought forth great results in literature.[2]

Even after two years of the conflict had passed, and its literary fruits had had time to ripen, at least one critic still insisted that "a poem written within the sound of guns is rarely a great contribution to literature."[3]

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[1] "Swarming of the Poets," Literary Digest, July 24, 1915, pp. 1-00.

[2] "Poetry in War Time," Nation, CII (1916), 88.

[3] C. E. Andrews, From the Front (New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1918), pp. 13-14.

Most critics, however, were ready to concede that some very good poetry had been produced, and that the more distinctive part had been written, not by the onlookers, but by soldiers themselves.[4] Soldiers discovered "to the amazement of their friends and their own amusement" that they had the gift of thinking poetically.[5]

When America came into the conflict, Mr. Thomas M. Johnson, the New York Evening Sun's correspondent, was convinced that there would be many soldier poets in the American Army. He believed that the song would "swell to greater volume in the spring season of song-birds when the rumble of the guns will not be so far distant and there will come the first great soul-trial of the American soldier."[6]

American war poetry did swell to greater volume, but much has been written already about this poetry and much more will be written before it has passed the test of time and found its proper rank in the literature of the ages. Numerous collections and classifications have been made, but, strange to say, very little attention has been paid to the poets themselves. We have brief sketches or scattered magazine articles on the lives of some of the war poets, but it seems that the most interesting phase of the work has been neglected, that of making a detailed study of the environmental factors (particular-

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[4] I. B. Cillet, "Poets in the World War," North American Review, June 14, 1918, pp.822-36.

[5] C. B. Osborn, "Real War Poetry," Living Age, CXIII (1917), 82-

[6] "First Soldier Pipings" Literary Digest, March 23, 1918, pp.80-

ly the war experience) in the lives of the various poets and the influence of their environment on the poetry.

It is in this connection that I have attempted to discuss two of America's most outstanding war poets, Alan Seeger and Joyce Kilmer. I have chosen these two because they succeeded best in making a name for themselves among the immortals. They have made a particularly interesting study because they are so much alike and yet so different.

The former was a real soldier poet, a mere boy who found himself and made his great contribution to the world of poetry only after he entered the ranks of battle; the latter, a poet soldier, grown to man's estate and well established in the literary world before he answered his country's call; but both had delightful personalities, colored with a glamour of romance and a life of freedom, that caused them to lay down their lives together in a great war; and both had a peculiar gift of breathing life into their poetic masterpieces that will cause their names to be put down together on the tablets of literary fame.

There are others who achieved a mark of distinction as American soldier poets, and I have listed a number of these in the appendix. The list is by no means an exhaustive one, since biographical material has been extremely hard to find and the nationality of many of the war poets difficult to determine.

PART I

ALAN SEEGER

CHAPTER I

Juvenilia

I

Juvenilia, the name which Alan Seeger gave to his early poetry, may well be applied, also, to his early life; because the two are so closely interwoven that it would be nearly impossible to separate them. This is true of almost any writer, but so much so of Alan Seeger that it is difficult to say whether the romance of his environment was responsible for his poetic trend, or whether his poetic nature threw a glamor of romance about his environment; probably both statements are true.

Alan Seeger was born in New York City, June 22, 1888. He was the son of Charles Lewis Seeger, one of the empire-builders of modern commerce, and Elsie Adams Seeger, a member of an old and distinguished New England family.[1] Both parents are now living and reside at Patterson, New York. When Alan was one year old, the family moved to Staten Island, where the children could look out upon the gateway to the Western Hemisphere. It was their chief delight to watch the gigantic ships come in, and Alan often came home and drew crude representations of the great vessels upon his nursery walls.[2] Thus, early in life, he showed a desire to create.

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[1] H. M. Robinson, "Love, Arms, Song, and Death," Century, CXIII (1917), 185.

[2] William Archer (ed.), Poems by Alan Seeger (New York, Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. xv.

In 1898 the family returned to New York, and Alan was transferred from the Staten Island Academy, where his education was begun, to the Horace Mann School. At this time the chief delight of the ten-year-old boy was to follow the powerful fire engines as they dashed through the streets of New York, and even in manhood he could never quite resist their lure.[3]

II

In 1900 the Seeger family removed to Mexico. Here Alan spent several of the most impressionable years of his life, and it is easy to trace the influence of this period in the atmosphere of many of his rare and beautiful sonnets. The pink walls of Moiro Castle, the lagoon of Havana, the Spanish Main, the tierras, all had their effect on the creation of his rich poetic quality. In fact, it was during this period that the boy, under the guidance of a teacher who helped to develop his taste for good literature, really began his literary career, as is made evident by the following account written by a member of the family:

> "One of our keenest pleasures was to go in a body to the old bookshops, and on Sunday morning to the 'Thieves Market' to rummage for treasures: and many were the Elzevirs and worm-eaten, vellum-bound volumes from the old convent libraries that fell into our hands. At that time we issued a home magazine called The Prophet------. The magazine was supposed to appear monthly but was always months behind its time. Alan was the sporting editor, but his literary ability had even then begun to appear, and he overstepped his department with contributions of poetry and lengthy essays. No copies of this family periodical are extant: they all went down with the wreck of the Meridian."[4]

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[3] Ibid., p. xv.

[4] Ibid., p. xvii.

III

When, at the age of fourteen, Alan left his Mexican home, it was to go to the Hackley School at Tarrytown, New York. Again he found himself in an environment of beauty, as this institution is very picturesquely situated on a high hill overlooking the Hudson.[5] Here he spent a period of three years (1903-1906) preparing for college. Concerning his scholastic activities during this time, Mr. Walter Gage, the present headmaster at Hackley, says:

> "Alan Seeger entered this school in September, 1903, and graduated in June, 1906. At Hackley he showed himself distinctly of literary inclinations and capacity. He took little part in achletics, but, rather, spent his odd moments with matters that were to him more serious and worthwhile. He was an excellent scholar."[6]

H. M. Robinson takes quite a different viewpoint of his lack of participation in athletics, saying that he failed to excel because of physical weakness, and that this caused him much concern.[7] This weakness was probably due to an attack of scarlet fever which he had suffered at some time before, and which caused him to spend one of his vacations among the hills of New Hampshire. Mr. Archer says that he was given a year out of school with the family of his former tutor in Southern California, but Mr. Archer also says that he entered Harvard in 1906.

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[5]William Archer, op. cit., p. xix.

[6]Letter to the writer, February 8, 1932.

[7]Op. cit., p. 166.

[8]Op. cit., p. 120.

and his record at Hackley shows that he graduated there in June, 1906. It is possible that he pursued his studies in California for a year and returned to school in the spring to graduate.

IV

Be this as it may, he entered Harvard College in the fall of 1906 and remained there for four years, graduating in the spring of 1910. Upon entering college, he plunged immediately into a wide and miscellaneous reading, both at home and at the Boston Library. According to Mr. Archer, his first two years at college were devoted exclusively to study, but about the middle of his college career he emerged from his shell and threw himself into the social life of his comrades.[9] During his senior year he became one of the editors of the Harvard Monthly and contributed ten poems to the Harvard Monthly.[10] These are probably not of very great literary value, as only a few of them appear in later publications of his works.

An article written for the Outlook by one of his school fellows contains a very striking description of the young poet's appearance at this time:

> "Alan Seeger was conspicuous at Harvard. In thought, word, and deed he was different from his fellows. His appearance was striking. He made it more striking still. He was very tall. His hair was jet black, remarkably thick and straight, his eyes had a peculiar liquid look, and his face was a beautiful oval.

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[9] Ibid., p. 20.

[10] H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 167.

"He lived in an atmosphere of mediaeval romance, such as would have delighted Keats and Shelley. It was devotion to the past so poignant that one wondered how he could ever live in the modern workaday world."[11]

Some years later Alan Seeger himself gave a description of these years at college in a letter to a friend:

"In the years when I was at college, I was a devotee of learning for learning's sake. I shut myself off completely from the life at the university. I felt no need for comradeship. I never regret those years."[12]

This same letter gives us some insight into the ruling passions in the life of the young poet. He explains that of all the formulas that claimed his early youth there was one to which he continued to adhere: "the three catagories, the lust for power, the lust for feeling, and the lust for knowledge." Of the three it is the last one which seems to have dominated his life thus far, although he showed an early ecstasy, as has already been mentioned, in watching the powerful fire engines.

Primarily, he was a deep, silent youth who "did and said what he felt and thought, and when he had nothing to say he was silent."[13]

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[11] "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," Scribner's Magazine, January, 1917, p. 123.

[12] A. Seeger, Letters and Diary (New York, Scribner's, 1917), "To A Friend, February 26, 1916."

[13] "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 123.

CHAPTER II

"A Message to America"

"Oh look over here and learn from France."

I

The spring of 1910 marked an even greater event in the life of Alan Seeger than the completion of his college career. It marked a definite change in the ruling motive of his life. With the passing of Harvard from his life, his devotion to strong intellectualism also passed, and the "lust for knowledge" gave way to the "lust for feeling." He began to feel the stirring of a new and greater passion, and "life broke over him with a great and glorious wave of romance. He became obsessed with a vision of romantic happiness, and left the quiet groves of the Academy to go down into the city in search of it."[1]

There followed a period of two years which seem to be somewhat confused and indefinite in the minds of Seeger's critics, and, indeed, they were probably so in his own mind.

When he went down to New York, he established himself in a small attic room of a weather-beaten house at 61 Washington Square. This old house seems to have had nearly thirty years of literary tradition, Frank Norris having written most of The Octopus here, and Crane and O. Henry having been among its

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[1] H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 167.

guests.[2] Regardless of its literary tradition, however, it was merely an old house in the poorer section of New York City. Here the young poet, fresh from the sheltered campus of Harvard, practically isolated himself for two years. Is it any wonder that he failed to find the romantic stimulus for which he sought?

These two years were probably the least satisfactory of his life. He consistently refused to become implicated in any sort of job and was always writing poems which he refused to show to the public. We learn from an article in Scribner's Magazine that, on one occasion, an offer was made and urgently repeated for the publication of his poems, but he never took the trouble to reply and apparently made no effort himself to materialize his dreams in that direction.[3]

Another writer puts the matter rather strongly by saying:

> "He fell upon the thorns of life in the very city toward which he had looked so hopefully. He seemed to be criticizing the United States, its people and its art, and was well on his way to become a complete dilettante."[4]

To say the least of it, he failed to find his world of romance, and pausing irresolute on the threshold of manhood, he was not only unhappy himself, but caused his parents much concern.[5]

W. A. Roberts, who also resided at 61 Washington Square, gives the following description of Alan Seeger in 1911:

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[2]W. A. Roberts, "The Alan Seeger I Knew," Bookman, XLVII (1918), 585-89.

[3]"Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 124.

[4]H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 167.

[5]William Archer, op. cit., p. xxi.

> "He was twenty-five years old, and as handsome as a child of the sun. His features were classic, his complexion of a singularly lu inous brunette tinge, his lips full and red, his black hair very thick. I have retained no definite impression of his eyes. He was about six feet tall, straight and well proportioned. He affected closely clipped side whiskers, extending about three-quarters of the way down in front of his ears. Usually he wore a soft shirt and a scarlet tie which harmonized with his complexion." [6]

Mr. Roberts also tells us that Alan Seeger frequented a little table d'hote during this period, and that they had some very interesting chats together across the dinner table. During the course of these conversations he found that the young poet was quite out of sympathy with America. "He did not believe that she had accomplished anything worth speaking about in art, and was savage in his denunciation of low standards fostered by American magazines."[7]

It was probably not so much America as the life that he was leading in America that Alan Seeger learned to hate, but his existence here finally became unbearable, and he decided to sail for Paris, deserting the old house in Washington Square, which now so proudly bears a plate testifying to the world that Alan Seeger, poet and soldier, once lived there, and the garret window beneath which the city has now raised a memorial tree in his honor.[8]

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[6] W. A. Roberts, on. cit., p. 287.

[7] Ibid., p. 288.

[8] Ibid., p. 289.

[9] "Letting the Poet Live," Literary Digest, June 4, 1930, p. 32.

II

Alan Seeger loved Paris and was obsessed with a great desire to live there long before he was able to realize this ambition. In 1911 he told his friend Mr. Roberts that he considered France the only country worthy, in this materialistic age, of anyone's affection. "He said, with considerable bitterness, that he would never be happy until he could arrange to live there permanently."[10]

In 1912 the opportunity to go to Paris as a graduate student came to him, and he accepted, "doubtful and groping for expression, for his hour had not yet come."[11]

He was happier in Paris than he had ever been before, and he made friends with several distinguished and celebrated figures in the world of art and letters.[12]

He accepted life there with a curious wholeheartedness and seemed to have found something of the spirit of romance for which he sought. He was devoted to the city, but it did not absorb all his time. He occasionally went on long tramps through the French provinces and once spent some weeks with a friend in Switzerland.[13]

It was in Paris in the spring of 1914 that he was reunited with his friend Roberts, and again it was in a French cafe that they met.

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[10] op. cit., p. 586.

[11] Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature (New York, Century Co., 1930), p. 380.

[12] "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 124.

[13] William Archer, op. cit., xvii.

At this time Seeger lived at Number 17 rue de Sommerard, immediately behind the Musee de Cluny. This was in the heart of the old Latin Quarter, but Seeger was more at home there than he could have been in an American city. He was often rather hard up but wrapped his poet's cloak about him and went his way without sacrificing either his dignity or his happiness.[14]

He was still uncertain of himself and his aims and seemed to be waiting for destiny to prepare a place for him. Robinson gives a rather striking description of the young poet at this time:

> "Wrapped in a Byronic cloak, he stood arrogantly aloof, steadily refusing to implicate himself in the crawling affairs of business and convention: and so, until the time of his enlistment in the Foreign Legion in 1914, he was a failure before men's eyes, having accomplished nothing they could measure by the thumb-rule of success."[15]

III

It was in Paris that he produced most of the poems which he chose to label Juvenilia.[16] This collection consists of a number of odes, descriptions, and sonnets, which compose his published writings before the war. Most of them are gay, romantic and imaginative and show to a marked degree the influence of his environment. Only two of these selections are

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[14] W. A. Roberts, op. cit., p. 87.

[15] H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 164.

[16] William Archer, op. cit., p. xviii.

melancholy. One, "The Rendezvous," treats of the infidelity of woman:

"Tonight, tomorrow, nay nor all the impending years,
She will not come, the woman that he awaits."[17]

The other one, "Eudaemon," concerns the fruitless search for happiness:

"Only forever, in the old unrest
Of winds and waters and the
varying year,
A litany from islands of the blessed
Answers, 'Not here.....not here'!
And over the wide world that
wandering cry
Shall lead my yearning heart
unsoothed until I die." [18]

A few of these poems were written in America and contain distinctly American subject matter. Two of the best are his sonnets, "The Old Lowe House, Staten Island" and "On the Cliffs, Newport," from the latter of which I quote:

"Tonight a shimmer of gold lies
mantled o'er
Smooth lovely Ocean, through the
lustrous gloom
A savor steals from tender trees
in bloom
And gardens ranged at many
a palace door." [19]

Most of them, however, were produced in Paris and contain sparkling tributes to that city, to beauty, and to the spirit of romance that he learned to love in Mexico. Among his odes

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[17] Ibid., p. 98.

[18] Ibid., p. 106.

[19] Ibid., p. 95.

to beauty are found "My Spirit Only Lived to Look on Beauty's Face," "The Sultan's Palace," and the lovely "Ode to National Beauty" which begins:

"Spirit of Beauty, whose sweet
impulses
Flung like the rose of dawn
across the sea,
Alone can flush the exalted
consciousness
With shafts of sensible divinity."[20]

The first, fifth, and sixth sonnets are written to Paris, but the last one seems to be most expressive of the poet's real feelings:

"Give me the treble of thy horns and roofs,
The ponderous undertones of bus and tram,
A garret and a glimpse across the roofs
Of clouds blown eastward over Notre Dame." [21]

The sonnets which show a distinct influence from the romance of Mexico are quite numerous, including "The Bayadere," "Coucy," and "Comtesse de Noilles." One of the most beautiful of them all is the "Deserted Garden":

"From the dark vale where shades
crepuscular
Dimmed the old grove-girt belfry
glimmering white,
Throbbing, as gentlest breezes rose
or fell,
Came the sweet invocation of the
evening bell."[22]

Another of these sonnets which is particularly interesting in the light of what was to follow is called "Do You Remember Once?" A brief quotation will reveal something of its

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[20] Ibid., p. 95.

[21] Loc. cit.

[22] Ibid., p. 10.

nature:

"Dear face, when courted Death
shall claim my limbs and find them
Laid in some desert place, alone or
where the tides
Of war's tumultuous waves on
the wet sand behind them
Leave rifts of gasping life when
their red blood subsides." [23]

The critics seem to be somewhat in dispute concerning the literary value of these early poems. Roberts says that they were merely:

> "Some odes and descriptive poems about Mexico, overcharged with romanticism; a juvenile lyric or two; a few sonnets, which exhibited a fine feeling for form. That was all. Only the veriest flatterer could have gone into raptures over his juvenile work." [24]

Others view Juvenilia more optimistically, one saying that it shows sincerity, and a real beauty and another that:

> "They have the affinity with youthful associations and that mood of pensiveness which give a quality to the drama of youth. They are touched with the color, fragrance, and magnificence of the poet's Mexican recollections, and show an influence of classical culture, from which source Alan Seeger evoked his first images of beauty." 25

It is obvious even to the casual reader that these early attempts of one who has had "no great struggle of the soul or very rending tempest of the heart"[26] have no tragic depth, but they do have a note of sincerity and a lack of affectation that make them delightful reading.

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[23] Ibid., p. 13.

[24] W. A. Roberts, op. cit., p. 887.

[25] W. S. Braithwaite, The Poetic Year for 1916 (Boston, 1917), p. 385.

[26] William Archer, op. cit., p. xviii.

CHAPTER III

"I Have a Rendezvous With Death"

"I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade
When spring comes back with rustling
shade
And apple blossoms fill the air."

I

The fateful summer of 1914 found Alan Seeger in London, whither he had brought his Juvenilia with a view of finding a publisher for them; but it does not seem that he took any very definite steps toward accomplishing his aim. Most of his days were spent in the British Museum and his evenings among his friends at the Cafe Royal. About the middle of July his father came to England and spent a week with him.[1]

As soon as a European war became inevitable, he returned to France, passing through Burges, where he left the manuscript for his poems in the keeping of a printer. On August 24, 1914,[2] less than three weeks after war was declared, Alan Seeger, along with forty or fifty of his fellow countrymen, enlisted in the Foreign Legion of France.[3]

Just why a young poet, standing on the very threshold of life and fame, should offer up his life for a country which he could

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[1] Loc cit.

[2] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 23.

[3] William Archer, op. cit., p. xxiv.

not even call his own is a question which has caused quite a bit of speculation. The most valuable information in this connection comes from Alan Seeger's Letters and Diary, which also gives a very realistic account of his feelings and activities during the war.

Perhaps the young poet was again influenced by one of the trinity which shaped his life, "the lust for power."[4] Mr. Archer thinks that the soldier's life had long been included among the possibilities which fascinated him,[5] and, in a letter to his mother dated August 8, 1915, Seeger confirms this belief by saying: "I have always had the passion to play the biggest part within my reach, and it is really in a sense a supreme success to be allowed to play this."[6]

"It is for glory alone that I engaged" is the statement that he makes at one time in his diary;[7] at other times he expresses the idea that he had no choice in the matter but was a conscript of the strange destiny which seemed to pervade his life, and that he "could not have done otherwise;"[8] but we like to feel that there was a deeper motive back of the act, a love for freedom and for France. This last conception is expressed in a letter

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[4] Ibid., p. xv.

[5] William Archer, op. cit., p. xxiv.

[6] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 144.

[7] Ibid., p. 118.

[8] Ibid., p. 120.

which he wrote to his mother in one of his more serious moods:

> "Come to love France and understand the almost unexampled nobility of the effort this admirable people is making, for that will be the surest way of your finding comfort for anything that I am to suffer at their cause." 9

II

Regardless of how it care about, the young poet became a full-fledged soldier, and October found him at Camp de Mailly Aube, France, brimming over with enthusiasm to get into action. He wrote to his mother at that time:

> "After two weeks here, and less than two months from enlistment we are actually going at last to the firing line. Imagine how thrilling it will be tomorrow and the following days, marching toward the front with the noise of battle growing continually louder before us." 10

His company was moved up, but again it was to a position of safety, which did not satisfy his craving for adventure. On November 12 he wrote to his father: "As long as this condition lasts the danger is very slight, and it may last all winter. If it does it will be more to your satisfaction than mine." 11

There followed two long years of conflict in which the young poet was indefatigable. He volunteered for all the most dangerous reconnoitering at the Marne and at Champagne and wrote soul-stirring poetry by night in the trenches.[12] He was experiencing a thrilling combination of feeling and power; he had found

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9 Ibid., p. 144.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 Ibid., p. 9.

12 "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France", op. cit., p. 124.

his niche in life; and at last he was perfectly happy. On November 9, 1915, he wrote: "I can only say that I am perfectly content here and happier than I possibly could be anywhere else. I was a spectator, now I am an actor. I was in a shallow, now I am moving in a full current." [13]

Again in June, 1916, he wrote to his mother: "I have already said all I have to say, how I am glad to be here, have no regrets, and would wish to be nowhere else in the world than where I am."[14]

His Letters and Diary shows that he was still a peculiar lad, silent, unsociable, and fond of solitary rambles. His comrades' failure to understand him brought about the following incident which a friend relates:

> "The Alan Seeger I knew was prouder than Lucifer, and contemptuous of whether the average run of humanity approved either his verse or his personality. At first he was unpopular in the Legion. They resented Seeger's habit of sitting apart and writing, then refusing nonchalantly to show anyone what he had written. Before the training period was over, the feeling toward him had grown so bitter that at a mass meeting of the volunteers it was voted to ask him to get himself transferred to another company. A close friend of mine, who was also friendly with Seeger, was delegated to notify him of his comrades' wishes. He approached Seeger and explained the situation, adding that it was to the poet's advantage to go. The reply was in character. Seeger flung up his head and said scornfully: 'I never alter my course because I am threatened or disliked. My reason for being here is to serve France. For me, the men who sent you simply do not exist.' The result of this courageous stand was to create a new respect for Alan Seeger in the Foreign Legion." [15]

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[13] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 176.

[14] Ibid., p. 205.

[15] W. A. Roberts, op. cit., p. 586.

In spite of this attitude of indifference, however, Alan Seeger realized his inability to adjust himself to the Foreign Legion and did consider being transferred to a French company, "where the patriotic and military tradition is strong, where my good will may be recognized";[16] but the move was never made. He remained true to the company and made at least one staunch friend among his comrades, Rif Baer, the Egyptian, whom he often mentions in his letters.

During these trying days the young poet's service as a soldier was both steady and loyal.[17] His one complaint was against inaction. In November, 1914, he wrote in his diary: "It is a miserable life to be condemned to shivering in these wretched holes, in the cold and smoke and semi-darkness."

In direct contrast he wrote to the Sun in May, 1915: "I should like to give you some impression of the state of mind before going into action, but unfortunately there is no time. The sacks must be made right away. Let me only say that I am heartily glad."[18]

Seeger spent the month of February, 1916, in the hospital, where he suffered an attack of bronchitis, and in the spring of 1916 he spent a glorious month in Paris, returning to the firing line about the first of May.[19]

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[16] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 118.

[17] G. H. Clark, A Treasury of War Poetry (Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1917) p. 127.

[18] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 108.

[19] Ibid., p. 192.

Shortly after his return he was asked to write an ode in memory of the American volunteers who had fallen for France, to be read on Decoration Day before the statue of Washington in Paris. He was given only two days in which to complete the poem, "days full of digging with a pick and shovel," but his efforts resulted in the famous "Ode to American Volunteers Fallen for France." The ode was to have been read by the author, who should have had a forty-eight-hour leave of absence, but the permission failed to arrive, and the young poet was sorely disappointed.[20] It was discovered later that a mistake had been made in the order, and the permission granted for June 30 instead of May 30.

In addition to this ode and his Letters and Diary Alan Seeger produced some nineteen other poems during the war, including his masterpiece, "I Have a Rendezvous With Death." On the whole, however, his writing was somewhat scant, as most of his time and thoughts were occupied with fighting. His spirit was most exultant when he was in the very thick of the fight, and he proved to the world his firm bel ef in the bit of philosophy that he wrote to his mother:

> "Nothing but good can befall the soldier, so he plays his part well. Come out of the ordeal safe and sound, he has had an experience in the light of which all life thereafter will be three times richer and more beautiful; wounded he will have the esteem and admiration of all men and the approbation of his own conscience; killed, more than any other man, he can face the unknown without misgiving."[21]

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[20] Ibid., p. 202.

[21] Ibid., p. 117.

III

During his two years of experience in the army Alan Seeger is chiefly characterized by his love of romance, portrayed in his courting of danger and his appreciation of nature; and by the peculiar fatalistic attitude which colored both his actions and his writings.

In a letter to the Sun he expresses his keen delight in being able "to stalk out into the perilous zone between the lines and court danger under a fine, starlit sky," declaring that there, only, can be found "a breath of true romance."

During all these two years of strife Alan Seeger never became so heartsick from waiting, or soul weary with fighting, that he lost his poetic gift. He never failed to see beauty in the scenary and romance in the adventure of fighting. In one lone entry of his diary (October 20, 1914) he makes three separate references to the beauty of the landscape.[22] In April, 1915, he wrote to the New York Sun: "There below them Southward-tempting, provoking--- lies expanded, almost coquettishly, the fair realm of France, and over behind the sunset hills--Paris!" [23]

In May of the same year he wrote:

> "One would never have thought that it could be so beautiful, this world of green and blue that suddenly, almost without perceptible gradation, has succeeded the world of black and grey which has made winter so discourag-

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[22] Ibid., p. 8.

[23] Ibid., p. 88.

ing here, the air sweet with exhalation from the heavy, dew drenched grass; from the forest the sweet call of cuckoos and wood pigeons; ...ay morning, rustle of leaves, sunshine, tranquility." [24]

Alan Seeger's third characteristic of this period, that of fatalism, manifested itself as early as 1911, when he wrote to one of his college officials: "My only salvation will be to die young, and to leave some monument, which being, if such a thing is possible, more beautiful than the life it commemorates, may seem to posterity an only and an adequate excuse for that life having been." [25]

During his life spent in Paris before the war he adopted as a favorite an Indian phrase to which he often referred in conversation, "Inshallah, Death is a transient thing." [26]

After he entered the war and went into the danger zone, he felt more and more profoundly the sense of fatalism creeping over him until it finally culminated in "I Have a Rendezvous With Death," the last poem that he sent to friends in this country. Fatalism was prevalent in the letters that he sent home, and he often spoke of death in battle as being not only an inevitable, but a very much desired, climax to his career. Most of these letters were written to his mother, to whom he always seemed to express his deepest and tenderest thoughts. In June, 1915, he wrote to her:

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[24] Ibid., p. 105.

[25] E. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 168.

[26] "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 825.

"Death is nothing terrible after all. It may mean something even more wonderful than life. It cannot possibly mean anything worse to the good soldier. If I should not come back you must be proud, like a Spartan mother, and feel that it is your contribution to the triumph of the cause whose righteousness you feel so keenly." [27]

In July, 1915, he wrote:

"The tears for those who took part in it and who do not return should be sweetened by the sense that their death was the death which beyond all others they would have chosen for themselves, that they went into it smiling without regret, feeling that whatever value their continued presence in the world might be to humanity, it could not be greater than the example and inspiration they were to it in so departing." [28]

IV

After having a taste of his philosophy of life, we find it less difficult to become reconciled to the glorious death which followed. On June 30 the Foreign Legion left Bayon-villiers and marched to Proyart to be nearer the line of battle which was at its height. At this time Alan Seeger renewed an agreement made with Rif Baer many months before, that if one of them should be fatally wounded, the other was to kill him outright.[29] What followed that day has been recorded in a very realistic fashion by this Egyptian comrade, who remained beautifully devoted to the young poet until the very last:

"On July 1 Alan was beaming with joy and full of impatience to join the action. On July 2 I passed almost all the day with Alan. He was perfectly happy. 'My dream is coming true,' he said to me, 'and perhaps tomorrow we shall attack.'" [30]

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[27] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 120.

[28] Ibid., p. 127.

[29] H. M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 174.

[30] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 213.

On July 3 the famous attack on Belloy-en-Santerre was made, but again destiny took a hand, and Alan Seeger was fated never to reach the field of victory. The Germans were lying in wait for him on the way, and the Rif describes his supreme sacrifice as follows:

> "Hidden in the road from Estrees to Belloy, they had taken our men in flank, cutting to pieces the 11th company. One of the first to fall was Alan Seeger. Mortally wounded, it was his fate to see his comrades pass him in their splendid charge, and to forego the supreme moment of victory to which he had looked forward through so many months of bitterest hardship and trial. He cheered on the fresh files as they came up to attack, and listened anxiously for the cries of triumph which should tell of their success." [31]

What happened to the young poet after this, just when and how he met his death, probably no one knows. One writer states that "it was at night by the light of a pocket electric lamp that he was hastily recognized";[32] while another states that "the following morning he died from his wounds."[33] The Rif says that it was not until the next day that he was found in the following condition: "Seeger was found dead. His body was naked, his shirt and tunic being beside him and his rifle planted in the ground with the butt in the air. He had tied a handkerchief to the butt to attract the attention of the stretcher bearers. He was lying on his side with his legs bent."[34]

The very fact that Alan Seeger died at the hands of the enemy has been disputed. Robinson relates: "A story that goes about the Legion telling how Seeger, horribly wounded in the stomach and knowing that death was only a matter of a few agonizing

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[31] Ibid., p. 314.

[32] "Poet's Death in Battle," Literary Digest, November 4, 1919, p. 58.

[33] "Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 826.

[34] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 214.

hours, was seen to lift his revolver to his head and blow out the remaining sparks of his life."[35]

An article in the Literary Digest comes out boldly with the statement that "he died by his own hand, after being terribly wounded by a German shell,"[36] but it is again to Rif Baer that we turn for the most plausible explanation. He is convinced that "after undressing to bandage himself, he must have risen and been struck by a second bullet."[37]

Thus the stretcher bearers found him. They took the body and buried it in the big grave made for the regiment, where lie a hundred bodies. His tomb is situated at Hill 78, south of Belloy-en-Santerre.[38]

The young poet wrote his own epitaph in these lines from his "Ode to American Volunteers Fallen for France":

"And on those furthest rims of
hallowed ground
Where the forlorn, the gallant charge
expires,
When the slain bugler has long
ceased to sound,
And on the tangled wires
The last wild rally staggers, crumbles, stops,
Withered beneath the shrapnel's iron showers
Now heaven be thanked, we gave a few brave drops.
Now heaven be thanked, a few brave drops were ours."[39]

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[35]H.M. Robinson, op. cit., p. 174.

[36]October 27, 1917, p. 55.

[37]Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 214.

[38]"Poet's Death in Battle," op. cit., p. 53.

[39]William Archer, op. cit., p. xlix.

CHAPTER IV

"The Eloquent Dead"

"But they are silent, calm; their eloquence
Is that incomparable attitude;
No human presences their witness are,
But summer clouds and sunset crimson hued."

I

The tragic death of the young Alan Seeger was deeply mourned both at home and abroad. The world grieved for him not alone because of his poetry but because of himself, and friends and admirers everywhere hastened to do honor to one so brave, so fearless, and so filled with the romantic vigor of youth. "If ever there was a being who said 'yes' to life, accepted it as a glorious gift, and was determined to live it with all his might, it was Alan Seeger"; and yet, though he would fain have lived, "he met death with eyes undimmed and pulse unslackened."[1]

In a sense Alan Seeger did not die for America. "He gave his life for alien principles, alien traditions, alien purposes, and alien lands";[2] but in another sense he was as truly an American soldier as those who fought under the stars and stripes, because he was fighting for the freedom and democracy for which America had always stood and for a cause which he believed she should have defended. He was one of the forerunners of the American army. John Hall Wheelock says:

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[1] Ibid., p. xiii.

[2] E. E. Hunt, "Prophets of Rebellion," Outlook, CXXXIX (1916), 411.

> "Seeger had become, in a sense, the mouthpiece of many Americans who in heart, at least, are anything but neutral, and who in heart have responded to his challenging and exalted celebration of the cause which he himself, with life and song, served so passionately and so completely."[3]

Many of his countrymen caught the spirit of his sacrifice, and newspapers and magazines were filled with heartfelt tributes to the young poet. Some of them came from his personal friends, but many others were written by men who had learned to admire him from a distance because he was a dreamer who had the courage to live his dream. Shortly after Seeger's death Washington Van Dusen wrote the beautiful little poem "Alan Seeger" to his memory:

> "No beauty could escape his loving eyes,
> Not even ruthless war could hide from view
> The smiling fields where crimson poppies grew,
> Nor mar the sunsets rose and purple dyes;
> He watched a vine clad slope, with glad surprise
> To hear grape-pickers sing although they knew
> Just on the other side, the cannon threw
> Their deadly shells and woke the startled skies.
>
> "But over all that made Champagne so fair,
> He saw the grandeur of the field of strife,
> Exulting in the cause that placed him there,
> He left a calm, mid all the carnage rife,
> And faced the battle with a spirit rare,
> 'For death may be more wonderful than life!."[4]

Others were quick to follow with expressions of their appreciation. In 1916 Braithwaite said: "In the last hour of their lives, they have been like roses cast into vinegar. It was so Alan Seeger went, America's hero-poet who, fighting and dying for France, also fought and died for the conscience of America."[5]

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[3] W. S. Braithwaite, op. cit., p. 336.

[4] W. D. Eaton (ed.), Great Poems of the World War (Chicago: T. S. Denison and Co., 1922), p. 14.

[5] Ibid., p. 336.

In 1917 an article in Scribner's states:

> "Seeger's hope was, indeed, realized. He had tasted that privilege, to him the highest, of death in a pure cause. He has lived as well as sung his poem, and his whole being has found at last an adequate means of expression for its immeasurable love and sense of beauty-- its haughty courage, and scorn of all lesser things. If this love and this courage might not express and fulfill themselves completely, save only in death, the loss is ours and not his." 6

In 1918 C. E. Andrews makes the following reference to Alan Seeger in From the Front: "The finer spirits like Seeger, who go through the world on a knight-errant quest for beauty, find it even where most men see but ugliness and pain."7

In 1919 Gillet says of him:

> "It is granted few to live out so completely their true and inner selves. Alan Seeger put his dreams and loves and aspirations all into burning practice.----He lived his poet's vision. The rendezvous with death that was his lot must have been quite after the heart of him whose poem presaged it." 8

Even today our wonder and admiration have not slackened. July 4, 1931, marked the fifteenth year that has passed since Alan Seeger fell on the field of battle, and the following verses, written by Gibbs Ofmann, show that the young poet still lives in the minds and hearts of America:

> "Dear, budding soul, how well we knew
> You could not fail that rendezvous.

6"Alan Seeger, Poet Killed in France," op. cit., p. 185.

7C. E. Andrews, op. cit., p. 21.

8"Poets in the World War," North American Review, CCIX (1918), 834.

"Now your disputed barricade
And that scarred slope of battered hill
In Maytime's sweetness stands arrayed;
And in Belloy-en-Santerre
The shouts of children pierce the air.
Aye! Where you fought and carried through
That peace forever would be still
The spring returns each year for you
And scatters blossoms at your feet.
Tonight the moonlight's misty down
Caresses your once flaming town
Where life no longer sounds retreat;
And all that's indistinctly seen
With your fair memory is green.

"Dear, budding soul, not you--not you!
But Death has failed that rendezvous." [9]

II

The feeling of admiration and appreciation for Alan Seeger the man is no less genuine and enthusiastic than that for Alan Seeger the poet.

His collected poems were published in 1916 with an "Introduction" by William Archer. The collection includes Juvenilia, a group of thirty sonnets, translations, and his last poems.

He portrayed his love of knowledge and his indebtedness to classical influence by translating portions of Dante's Inferno, Orlando Furioso, and "On a theme in Greek Anthology after Epigram of Clement Marot".[10] Mr. Archer says of these translations:

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[9]"To Alan Seeger," Literary Digest, August 1, 1931, p. 23.

[10]William Archer, op. cit., pp. 117-128.

> "His work gives ample proof of real, if not of systematic culture. He genuinely loves and has made his own many of the great things of the past. His translations from Dante and Ariosto show no less sympathy than accomplishment. Very characteristic is his selection of the twenty-sixth Canto of Inferno, in which the narrative of Ulysses brings with it a breath of romance of the antique world."[11]

The next section of the book consists of a series of thirty sonnets which contain some of the poet's most beautiful expression. These are sometimes classed with his earliest attempts under the title of Juvenilia, and several of them have been discussed in that connection. They are highly romantic, dealing principally with love and beautiful women. Regarding the form of these poems one author has said: "Seeger did not conform to the strict rules of rhyme which are laid down for the sonnet. As Charles Lamb said: 'These are fourteen liners, not sonnets.'"[12]

The last and most important section of the book is called "War Poems." Here we see Alan Seeger at his best. He did not write a great deal during his military life, but the quality of his work more than atones for any lack in quantity. One critic offers as an explanation of his limited writing the supposition that his preparation for poetry had been romantic, and "he must have realized that it was inadequate to the grim subject of war,"[13] but a study of the life of Alan Seeger would seem to indicate that to him war was romance. It is probable that because he was living so intensely he had little time to devote to composition.

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[11] Ibid., p. XII.

[12] "Alan Seeger, America's Soldier Poet," Living Age, July 28, 1917, p. 223.

[13] "Letting the Poet Live," Literary Digest, June 4, 1921, p. [illegible]

"We should regard his work, then, as a mere fragment, a foretaste of what he might have achieved had his life been prolonged."[14]

He did, however, give to the world at this time a dozen beautifully written sonnets and half as many longer poems. This last series of sonnets shows a marked improvement over his first attempts, and these are more personal than most of his other poems, as the following quotations will show:

I--"Down the free roads of human happiness
I frolicked poor of purse but light of heart."

II-"For I have ever gone untied and free
The stars and my high thoughts for company."

IV-"My creed is simple; that the world is fair,
And beauty the best thing to worship there."[15]

The subject matter and form of the individual poems is quite varied, and we get a rather general conception of the young poet's reaction to the war.

"Bellinglise," a beautiful description of an old chateau, composed to while away the hours on guard,[16] shows again the poet's appreciation for the picturesque:

"Deep in the sloping forest that surrounds
The head of a green valley that I know,
Spread the fair gardens and ancestral grounds
Of Bellinglise, the beautiful chateau."[17]

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[14] W. S. Braithwaite, op. cit., p. 341.

[15] William Archer, op. cit., p. 124.

[16] Alan Seeger, op. cit., p. 127.

[17] William Archer, op. cit., p. 130.

The beauties of an old chateau is a theme which many of the poets used, but it appears at its best in this poem of Alan Seeger's:[18]

"The Aisne" tells of the change which takes place in passing to the life of the soldier:

"There we drained deep the cup of life,
And on sublimer summits came to learn,
After soft things, the terrible and stern,
After sweet Love, the majesty of Strife."[19]

In "Champagne (1914-1915)" the young poet hints at a belief in reincarnation:

"I love to think that if my blood should be
So privileged to sink where his has sunk,
I shall not pass from earth entirely,
But when the banquet rings, when healths are drunk
And faces that the joy of living fill
Glow radiant with laughter and good cheer,
In beaming eyes some spark of me shall still
Brim toward the lips that once I held so dear."[20]

The "Hosts" and "Katoob" ('tis written) show again the strange trend of fatalism in:

"We saw not clearly nor understood,
But yeilding ourselves to the master hand,
Each in his part as best he could,
We played it through as the author planned";

and

"Learn to drive fear, then, from your heart,
If you must perish, know, O man,
'Tis as inevitable part
Of the predestined plan";

while in "Resurgam" we have still another reference to death in battle:

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[18] C. E. Andrews, op. cit., p. 20.

[19] William Archer, op. cit., p. 131.

[20] Ibid., p. 135.

"Exiled afar from youth and happy love,
If death should revere my fond spirit hence,
I have no doubt but, like a homing dove,
It would return to its dear residence." [21]

The most famous and best loved of Alan Seeger's poems is "I Have a Rendezvous With Death."[22] "It is a cry from a human soul at life's zero hour," and people everywhere have come to love and appreciate it. It has taken its place in literature as "truly great"; it occupies a page in such collections as the Oxford Book of American Verse;[23] it has crept into our text-books, finding a place as early as 1919 in W. F. Field's Readings from English and American Literature"; [24] and thousands of people everywhere have committed to memory, for sheer love of them, the lines:

"I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade
When spring comes back 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,

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[21] Ibid., pp. 140, 141, 161.

[22] C. M. Andrews, op. cit., p. 391.

[23] (New York, Oxford U. Press, 1927), p. 309.

[24] (Boston, Ginn and Co., 1919), p. 107.

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." [25]

"I Have a Rendezvous With Death" is often classed with Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" and Colonel McCrae's "In Flanders' Fields" as the war poems that still look "fresh and new."[26]

Marguerite Wilkinson, in her recent book Poetic Verse, says of it: "'IHave A Rendezvous With Death' is a gravely beautiful lyric, personal, intimate, a young man's word about himself and his last adventure. All the lavish generosity of youth, going out to death while the love of life is still hot in the heart, is in the last lines of this stern singing."[27]

Second only to "I Have A Rendezvous With Death" is the "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France":

"Yet sought they neither recompense nor praise,
Nor to be mentioned in another breath
Than their blue-coated comrades whose great days
It was their pride to share...&ye, share even to the death!
Nay, rather, France, to you they render thanks
(Seeing they come for honor, not for gain),
Who, opening to them your glorious ranks,
Gave them that grand occasion to excel,
That chance to live the life most free from stain
And that rare privilege of dying well." [28]

These two poems are often mentioned together, but most critics agree that the former is the greater, even though the

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[25] W. D. Eaton, op. cit., p. 99.

[26] Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandburg, (New York, Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 178.

[27] (New York, Macmillan Co., 1930) p. 260.

[28] William Archer, op. cit., p. 172.

letter contains some very noble passages. C. L. Andrews says of it: "For an elegy in the dignified style for a public occasion we have, in Alan Seeger's 'Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France,' an ode equaled but two or three times in all American literature." [29]

These last poems of Seeger's are far superior to his earlier efforts. Inspired by the war, they "reach a far higher level of feeling and imagination."[30] Braithwaite says of them: "In these war poems the poet speaks unfalteringly from the soul and from no other source but the soul. The spirit of the man was baptismal with the living fire of poetry";[31] and William Archer, who does not pretend to be a critic, can see that:

> "The last poems speak for themselves. They contain lines which he would doubtless have remodeled had he lived to review them in tranquillity--perhaps one or two pieces sprung from a momentary mood, which, on reflection he would have rejected. But they not only show a great advance on his earlier work: they rank high, or I am mistaken, among the hitherto not very numerous poems in the English language produced, not in mere memory or imagination of war, but in its actual stress and under its haunting menace." [32]

So far Alan Seeger has stood the test of time, but much more than fifteen years will have to elapse before his place in literature can be accurately estimated; and what his place might have been had he reached maturity can never be determined. At present

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[29] Op. cit., p. 25.

[30] E. Bronson, American Literature (New York, Macmillan Co., 1919), p. 338.

[31] Op. cit., p. 342.

[32] Op. cit., p. xlv.

we can only speculate, and a few opinions expressed by those who have really studied poetry will show something of the trend of criticism.

C. E. Andrews compliments his ability to get away from the accepted virtues of the soldier and to see all life in its true proportion;[33] Braithwaite expresses the thought that regardless of what this poetry contains we must accept it because through the "spiritual baptism of war" it has become a common heritage of humanity;[34] George H. Clark contends that the poetry of Alan Seeger is of the highest quality of any produced during the war;[35] and Gillet praises his harmony of words.[36]

It was William Archer who struck the real keynote when he said that regardless of their purely literary quality they had at least the value of "a first hand human document, the sincere self-portraiture of a vivid and virile soul."[37]

III

Appreciation of Alan Seeger and love for his beautiful poems has not been confined to America alone:

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[33] Op. cit., p. 25.

[34] Op. cit., p. 339.

[35] Op. cit., p. 127.

[36] Op. cit., p. 824.

[37] Op. cit., p. xiv.

> "His poems, as well as his letters and diary were published in England and in all that was written about England's war poets Alan was adopted as one of them, as if he had been a son of England. He was always associated with Rupert Brooke in the English mind. At a great meeting in Westminster Abbey in February 1917, at which were present the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Bryce, Whitelaw Reid and other dignitaries, Bishop Brent preached a sermon on the sympathy which America felt for France and England citing Alan as 'foremost a young American poet of the same promise as your own Rupert Brooke.' He sang his sweetest songs only when his lips were swept by the hot breath of battle. This young men, Alan Seeger, represents those of the American nation who have not stopped short of their life-blood in behalf of the common cause--- -" [38]

But it is to France that we turn for the deepest appreciation of the young hero who "not unmindful of the antique debt, came back the generous path of La Fayette."[39] At the time of his death there was only a brief notice in some of the French newspapers and a translation in the Matin of a part of the poem "Champagne (1914-1915)," for France had no time then to realize the greatness of the sacrifice.[40] That came later. In 1918 W. A. Roberts writes:

> "Richepin has translated some of Seeger's verse into French and called others 'too beautiful to admit of translation'. Laurels have been piled high about the American's grave. Paris has decided to erect a statue to him in the Latin Quarter. France is grateful to him. She has inscribed his name first on the roll of honor of foreigners who have died in this war that she might live." [41]

Nor was this all. Alan Seeger's father gives the following summary of the manner in which France paid her debt of gratitude:

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[38] Chas L. Seeger, letter to the writer, February 14, 1932.

[39] William Archer, op. cit., p. xlv.

[40] Loc. cit.

[41] Op. cit., p. 586.

"Alan's poem"Champagne (1914-1915)"which was translated into French by the poet Andre Riviore, and his Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers first called the attention of the French public to the young American poet who had died for France. His complete poems, published late in 1916, were widely read in France and highly praised by Jean Richepin, Pierre Mille and other prominent men of letters. When the war poems and his letters and diary appeared in French some time later he became more widely known, articles in the Revue de Deux Mondes, the Nouvelle Revue, Mercure de France, etc., were read and he soon became, in French eyes the 'herald of American intervention'. Meanwhile he was honored by a memorial ceremony at the Theatre Francais in January, 1917, when his poems were recited by the great actors of the Comedie Francais. I often found the humblest people in remote villages of France who knew of and loved Alan Seeger. When the monument to the American volunteers was placed in the Place de Etat-Unis in Paris, his figure was chosen and extracts from his poems were carved on the pedestal. His memory is still reverenced in a manner even more poignant than in his own country."[42]

The monument to which Mr. Seeger refers in the Place de [illegible] Unis was dedicated on July 4, 1923, to commemorate the American volunteers fallen on the field of honor. Among the distinguished personages who were present and delivered addresses were M. Raymond Poincare, Myron T. Herrick, M. Georges Lalou, M. H. Julliard, Marshall Foch, Generals Mangin, Berdoulat, and Baut.[43] They paid many beautiful tributes to the American volunteers, particularly to Alan Seeger. General Mangin, President of the Monument Committee, says of him: "He was profoundly happy in the trenches. He fought for the freedom of the world, for Right and Justice.";[44] and the following words were spoken by M. Raymond Poincare, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs:

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[42]Charles L. Seeger, op. cit.

[43]Dedication of the Memorial to the American Volunteers fallen on the Field of Honor (Paris, Estienne School, 1924), p. 36.

[44]Ibid., p. 40.

> "Alas, there were magnificent samples of humanity, such as the generous poet Alan Seeger, who sang the chalky fields of Champagne and the bloodstained hills of La Pompelle, winter in the icy trenches along the Aisne and on the tragic Craonne table-land, and who, one day, set out calmly for his rendezvous with Death.-----But their blood was not shed in vain for the cause in defense of which they had freely rallied, they were forerunners and inspirers, they led their great nation along the paths of Truth." 45

At the conclusion of the speeches "I Have a Rendezvous With Death," "Champagne," and "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers," were read by M. Silvain and Andre Brunot, members of the "Comedie-Francaise." 46

One of the most outstanding of the magazine articles which Mr. Seeger mentions is the one by Francois Le Grix which appeared in a 1917 issue of La Revue Hebdomadaire.[47] Le Grix reveres Alan Seeger not only as a poet and a martyr but as a precursor, believing that he was among the most active influences that drew the new continent into the war.

He contends passionately that this "brother of Shelley, Keats, and Byron" is in no way a fanatic, an extremest, or even a thoughtless youth, and that he should not be claimed by America alone, as he belongs to the noblest of humanity.[48] It is impossible to mention all the phases of the young poet's life which are touched upon in this rather lengthy account, but one which is particularly striking is the attitude that Le Grix assumes toward Seeger's conception of death: The following is a translation from his article:

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[45] Ibid., p. 52.

[46] Ibid., p. 57.

[47] p. 400ff.

[48] Ibid., p. 437.

> "This young man, happy to be alive and apparently lacking the expectations which the Christians call spiritual, celebrates Death, not as an introduction to some unknown happiness but as the fulfillment of a destiny. When in the poem, also celebrating Death, which he has dedicated to the soil of Champagne, Alan Seeger hopes that if he is buried there, that his blood will climb again to earth in the juice of the vine and that it will moisten human lips, he is not wishing so much that he may survive as that he may again have some ecstatic moments.-----Paganism, if one wants to call it such, but does not a paganism inspired by such sacrifices accord in some part with the purest doctrines which have enobled the soul of mankind? How can one not bow before the grandeur of these sentiments----religious in spite of themselves, truly bound to all of earth and all of heaven?" [49]

Le Grix's article closes with one of the most beautiful tributes that it is possible to pay to one so young, so brave, and so romantic; therefore, I have chosen it with which to end my discussion:

> "And because this prince of a bloody youth, this mystic pagan, this comrade of the stars has loved so much, we should be permitted to call him the child and the soldier of God, hidden from all but father of all." [50]

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[49] Ibid., p. 443.

[50] Ibid., p. 452.

PART II

JOYCE KILMER

CHAPTER I

"A Citizen of The World"

I

It is small wonder that Joyce Kilmer found the above title a fitting one for a poem when one considers how aptly it may be applied to the first thirty years of his life.

Alfred Joyce Kilmer, bookseller, lecturer, lexicographer, college teacher, editor, critic, interviewer, and poet,[1] was born at New Brunswick, New Jersey, December 6, 1886,[2] of mixed ancestry, Irish, German, English, and Scotch.[3] He was a son of Annie Kilburn and Fredrick Kilmer. His father, Doctor Fredrick B. Kilmer, is now living at 147 College Avenue, New Brunswick, New Jersey;[4] and his mother, who has written several books pertaining to the life of her son, recently passed away.[5]

The life history of Joyce Kilmer really begins six months before his birth. It was then that his mother prayed nightly that God would make her baby good, and she assures us that her prayer was answered. He was a very welcome child and arrived

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[1] J. B. Rittenhouse, "Poets Militant," Bookman, XLVII (1918), 93.

[2] R. C. Holliday (ed.), Joyce Kilmer (Garden City, New York, Doubleday Doran Co., 1918), p. 3.

[3] Manly and Rickert, Contemporary American Literature (New York, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1922), p. 3.

[4] John J. Morrison, Mayor of New Brunswick, letter to the writer, February 5, 1932.

[5] William C. Kelley, Headmaster of Rutgers, letter to the writer, February 5, 1932.

with a sweet disposition, a great beauty, including a wealth of golden curls, and a light of intelligence in his dark brown eyes that showed the promise of his later years.[6]

Kilmer's friends describe him as being the "funniest" small boy they ever saw,[7] and his mother relates some very amusing incidents of his childhood in an old diary of hers:

> "June 5, 1889-- A man by the name of Snyder was working in the yard. Joyce looked at him and said: 'Mr. Snyder sat down beside her, ha! ha!' in evident parody of 'Little Miss Muffet.'"
>
> "June 10, 1889-- Part of the ceiling fell down, disclosing laths and plaster. When Joyce saw it he pointed to it and said: 'Mamma, is that Heving?' I said, 'No, darling, that's where the ceiling has fallen,' upon which he rejoined, 'I thought you said seals lived in the water.'" [8]

When young Joyce was eight years of age, he was sent to Rutgers, where he graduated in 1904. It has been reported that somewhere between the ages of eight and twelve he fell violently in love with one of his teachers of thirty-five. The passion endured for a considerable time, and it was when he saw that he was doomed to disappointment that he determined to stand at the head of his class.[9] He immediately set about accomplishing this aim and met with marked success, receiving the Lane prize in public speaking and the editorship of the school paper. During

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[6] Annie K. Kilmer, Memories of My Son, Sergeant Joyce Kilmer (New York, Grove Publishing Co., 1920), p. 1.

[7] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 4.

[8] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 2.

[9] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 21.

this period he often spent his summers in the Berkshires,[10] and in 1899 he accompanied his father and mother on a business trip to England.

His college freshman and sophomore years were spent at Rutgers also, where he won the first Sloan's entrance examination prize and became associate editor of the Targum and a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity. Two more trips were made to England with his mother in the summers of 1904 and 1905.[11]

During all this time the boy had been a regular communicant of the Episcopal Church, into which he was christened, becoming a licensed lay reader at the age of eighteen with the intention of going into the ministry. It was about this time that he wrote his first published letter to his mother, portraying his subtle, dignified sense of humor:

> "Mrs. Kilburn-Kilmer---I will be delighted to have you attend service at 5 in the church today. Do the responses loudly and wait for me after church. Hooray!
>
> I remain, Your's scornfully,
>
> Alf. J. Kilburn-Kilmer.
>
> Official representative of the Kilburn familee."[12]

He completed his second year of college at Rutgers in 1906 and entered Columbia, where he graduated in 1908. His university life seems to have been fairly normal, since neither the register

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[10] Annie M. Kilmer, Op. cit., p. 7.

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

[12] Ibid., p. 33.

nor the files of the Alumni News at Columbia contains any outstanding information regarding him.[13] A note to his mother in 1907 leaves the impression that he was rather studious:

"Dear Brat-- I am not soused, but writing on my knee in the train, which renders my chirography slightly irregular. Please bring my two physics note-books. They are in the top drawer of the reception room desk. I must have them.

Yours affectionately,

Joyce."[14]

During his sophomore year at college he became engaged to Aline Murray of New Jersey. He received his A. B. from Columbia, May 23, 1908, and in June of the same year he was married. Aline Murray Kilmer was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1888. She attended Rutgers, and it was there that she met her future husband. She, too, was a poet; and the two seemed to have been kindred spirits, living in close companionship during his brief but happy life.

le Gallienne, a friend of Kilmer's gives a very interesting description of the young poet's appearance at this time. The two had met on a subway, and it was there that he gained his impression:

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[13]Wilton H. Thomas, Curator of Columbiana, letter to the writer, February 19, 1932.

[14]Annie M. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 36.

"There was a suggestion that his body might be over delicate for the gleaming will inside, that the sword might outwear its sheath. In short, he left me with something of the feeling of having met a spirit on the subway.

"The other feeling I had is that hint of destiny. We have all met young people who give us that, beautiful, brilliant, lovely natured, so superabundant in all their qualities as to make them suggest the supernatural, and touched, too, with the finger of moonlight that has written 'fated' upon their brows." [15]

II

Immediately after his marriage Joyce Kilmer set about establishing himself in a suitable line of work. He first hit upon school teaching as a profession and accepted a position as Latin instructor at the Morristown High School, Morristown, New Jersey.[16] It was during this year of teaching that his first son, Kenton, was born. At the conclusion of the school year 1908-1909Kilmer evidently decided that he was not predestined for a school teacher; so he pocketed the few youthful poems he had written and took his wife and infant son down to the metropolis of New York.[16]

This move was obviously taken, not because he had failed in his profession in the world's eyes, but because his interests were somewhere else. He wrote to his mother in the spring of 1909:

"I don't know what I will do next year. I have to get literary work of some kind. I have been offered three principalships, two in New Jersey and one in Bermuda, but I want literary work, not school teaching." [17]

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[15] Richard Le Gallienne, "Joyce Kilmer, Bookman, XLVIII (1918), 133.

[16] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 23.

[17] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 46.

His wish was certainly gratified, because it was "literary work of some kind"that he got. While looking about for suitable employment, he was offered the editorship of a journal for horsemen. He had no particular knowledge of or interest in horses, but he was interested in journalism; so he set out very enthusiastically to make a success of this new occupation. The story goes that one day, while searching in an old desk drawer, he discovered a bulky manuscript and, having nothing else to do, decided to edit it. This he succeeded in doing very nicely; and, feeling rather proud of himself, he mentioned the fact to his employer, assuring him at the same time that while the manuscript had evidently been written by a man familiar with horses, it showed no evidence of the art of literary composition. Unhappily for the young hopeful, it turned out that the manuscript had been written by the employer himself, and the editorship came to an abrupt termination.[18]

Then followed a brief period of employment as a retail salesman in the bookstore of Charles Scribner's Sons. Mr. Holliday, who was an intimate acquaintance of Kilmer's, tells us that at this time he resembled very much a lad from Eton, lacking only the white collar and small high hat to make the picture complete. He had a winning smile and a courtly manner with a clever way of saying "Pardon?" when he failed to understand.

So youthful did he appear that it was hard for the bookclerks to believe that he was married, and when he informed them

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[18]R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 23.

that he had a son, they fairly gasped for breath. But with all his youthful charms he did not make a success as a salesman, and his career as a bookseller ended after an extended period of two weeks.[19]

Before the year of 1909 was over, this very versatile young man found himself engaged in an entirely different sort of work, that of lexicography.[20] He was employed on the editorial staff of the Standard Dictionary, 1909-1912. At first, Kilmer found himself defining certain ordinary words assigned to him, at the pay of five cents per word; but something of his real value was soon recognized, and he was rapidly promoted to more advanced phases of the work with a constant increase in salary. He was assigned to research work into dates of birth and inception of inventions and to the defining of words of contemporary origin, in which he was quite successful. To Joyce Kilmer there was nothing dry or boresome about the business of lexicography. He found among his co-workers a rich and colorful school of humanity.[21]

By the time the work on the dictionary was completed in 1912 the young lexicographer had become quite a celebrity, occupying a place in Who's Who at the age of twenty-five. He had also developed something of a literary bent, characterized by a striking fluency of speech and the apt employment of words.[22]

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[19] Ibid., p. 25.

[20] A. N. Marquis, (ed.), Who's Who in America, 1916-17. (Chicago, A. N. Marquis and Co., 1917), p. 1887.

[21] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 28.

[22] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 31.

It was at this stage of the game that he decided to go entirely literary and religious. He became literary editor of the Churchman, 1912-1913,[23] moved to Mahwah, a suburban village of New Jersey, and settled down to the writing of editorials---"meditations" he called them.[24]

In 1913 he astonished his family and friends by entering, with his wife, the Roman Catholic Church. He frequently remarked that he felt that he had always been a Catholic, and he must have been impressed with Catholicism for some time, because in 1907 he brought home to his mother a Rosary of garnets.[25] His second child, Rose, had been stricken with paralysis, and it was this affliction which fixed his religion. On October 6, 1913, he wrote to Father Daly regarding Rose's paralysis: "I think that there are compensations, spiritual and mental, for the loss of physical power. My wife and I are studying Catholic doctrine, and we hope to be received this autumn."[26]

In December of the same year he wrote: "My wife and I are very comfortable now that we are Catholics." This change in conviction brought no cloud between him and his broad-minded parents. His father uttered not a word of disapproval, and his mother "blessed the day when he became a Catholic." [27]

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[23] A. N. Marquis, op. cit., p.1385.

[24] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 55.

[25] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 4.

[26] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 124.

[27] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 4.

During the next four years Joyce Kilmer did any number of things. Mr. Holliday says that it is doubtful if anyone but himself knew how many employments he had altogether or at any one time. He was a member of the staff of the New York Times Sunday Magazine and the New York Times Review of Books, conductor of the poetry department of the Literary Digest and Current Literature, and a regular contributor to the Book News Monthly, the Review of Reviews, and other literary periodicals.[28] He was a fervent follower of Dickens and for a long time president of the Dickens Fellowship Society, besides being an active member in a number of other outstanding clubs. By the time he was thirty he had obtained a prominent position as a lecturer on poetry, an interviewer of famous men of letters, an essayist, an anthologist, and, finally, a lecturer on literature at Columbia University.[29] In the words of Christopher Morley, he had "a thousand schemes for outwitting the devil of necessity that hunts all brain-workers. Nothing could quench him."[30]

III

During this period of his life Joyce Kilmer's poems consisted of two collections: Summer of Love (1911) and "Trees" and Other Poems (1915). The first book proves that he not only had knowledge of traditional methods of poetry and skill at apply-

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[28] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 38.

[29] "Sketch," Review of Reviews, LVIII (1918), p. 431.

[30] Quoted in "How Joyce Kilmer Died," Literary Digest, September 7, 1918, p. 32.

ing his knowledge, but that he possessed a very admirable attitude of mind and quality of nature.[31] This book lacks the immaturity that is found in most early attempts and shows promise of a real budding genius. The second collection continues along the same lines, deeper in thought, more skillful in workmanship, and well on the way to the fulfillment of that early promise.

"Trees" and Other Poems bears the date 1915, but it must have been ready for publication some time before, as Joyce speaks of it in a letter to his mother in July, 1914: "The publishers called the book "Trees" and Other Poems. I think that the titles you suggested are much better."[32] One of the titles that his mother suggested was "The Fourth Shepherd" and Other Poems, the name being taken from one of his beautiful religious verses:

> "On bloody feet I clambered down
> And fled the wages of my sin.
> I am the leavings of the town
> And meanly serve its meanest end."[33]

These two collections contain some sixty well-written poems on every conceivable subject, and one can imagine that it was extremely difficult to determine which of them would be most popular in the future. But the publisher evidently knew what he was about, because it is "Trees" (first published in A Magazine of Verse in 1913)[34] that has best stood the test of time and is

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[31] Richard Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 137.

[32] Annie M. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 26.

[33] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 208.

[34] Ibid., p. 208.

now being quoted almost everywhere, from the schoolroom, the lecture platform, and the pulpit. The words have been set to music of a classical nature, and the song has become immensely popular. One can tune in a radio almost any day in the week and hear:

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

"A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

"A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

"A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

"Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

"Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree." [35]

During the period of reconstruction after the war the Bird and Tree Club of New York City printed a card with the figure of a little French girl standing under a quince tree, and a grey stone bearing the words of "Trees" and the quotation "I am planting a tree in France for you." Several thousand dollars have been raised in this way for the planting of fruit trees in devastated France.[36]

A number of beautiful things have been said about "Trees." R. C. Holliday believes that it was only when the young writer

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[35] "Joyce Kilmer," Literary Digest, August 31, 1918, p. 37.

[36] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 11.

realized that "only God" could make a tree that he really became a poet;[37] and another poet pays the lines a beautiful tribute when he says: "No one who has ever read the poem that Joyce Kilmer made in celebration, will ever look in wonder at a tree again without remembering what Kilmer said of it and of its brethren."[38]

Joyce Kilmer, himself, believed that "Trees" was his best known poem, but he had several other favorites, as is revealed in the following quotation from a letter written to Katheryn Bergy

> "I will say that I am gratefully pleased when people like 'Trees,' 'Stars' and 'Pennies,' when they see that 'Folly' is a religious poem, when they praise the stanza fourth from the end of 'Delicatessen,' and understand stanza three of section four of 'The Fourth Shepherd.'" [58]

Another very interesting poem, the one by which Le Gallienne believed the young poet would live "if aught remaineth of our mortal soul," is "Davy Lilly." This is a tribute paid to an old fisherman who spent most of his time fishing and drinking rye but had a heart of pure gold. The poem ends very impressively with:

> "I guess I'll go down to the tavern
> and get a bottle of rye
> And leave it down in the hollow
> oak where Lilly's ghost went by.
> I meant to go up on the hillside
> and try to find his grave
> And put some flowers on it--but
> this will be better for Dave."[39]

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[37] Op. cit., p. 208.

[38] "The Poems of Joyce Kilmer," Outlook, CXX (1918), 12.

[39] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 39.

The poem is made doubly interesting by the information furnished by Dr. Kilmer that "Joyce, himself, loved to fish and that Davy Lilly was a real person, so much so that the people of the Berkshires (where he lived) objected somewhat to it."[40]

Yet another poem which is sometimes considered the best of the lot is "The White Ships and the Red." This is really the first sample of Kilmer's war poetry, but it was written in 1915, more than a year before his enlistment. He had gone with his mother to England when the Lusitania went down, and these lines were written in angry protest against the deed:[41]

"My wrong cries out for vengeance;
The blow that sent me here
Was aimed in Hell--my dying scream
Has reached Jehovah's ear.
Not all the seven oceans
Shall wash away the stain;
Upon a brow that wears a crown
I am the brand of Cain.

"When God's great voice assembles
The fleet on judgment day,
The ghosts of ruined ships will rise
In sea and strait and bay.
Though they have lain for ages
Beneath the changeless flood,
They shall be white as silver
But one---shall be like blood."

Written as a newspaper assignment, the poem became quite popular and was at once reprinted all over this country and in Europe. It is not so popular today as is "Trees," but the young poet had again come face to face with life, this time with its

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[40] Letter to the writer, February 15, 1932.

[41] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 27.

terrors rather than its wonders, and the lines that he wrote as a result still have a powerful appeal.[42]

This period also produced some excellent prose. In 1915 Joyce Kilmer "went in for fiction" on a small scale, writing a very clever short story, "Try a Tin Today";[43] but the essay was his best field. "The Circus" and Other Essays was published in the fall of 1916, containing a number of delightful sketches and several remarkable bits of criticism. Two of the best of the sketches are "A Bouquet for Jenny" and "The Inefficient Library," both of which show the poet's love for an individual touch in his own library. In the latter he whimsically asks, "Except for an efficient family, what could be less interesting than an efficient library?" [44]

"The Poetry of Hilaire Belloc" and "The Catholic Poets of Belgium" show Kilmer's ability as a critic and also portray the deep power of religion in his life. In the former he says, "On earth there is but one genuinely democratic institution, and that institution is the 'Catholic Church'"; and in the latter, "There is scarcely a man of letters in Belgium who does not owe his interest in literature to the Catholic Church."[45] "The Poetry of Hilaire Belloc" also contains a very striking definition of a true poet:

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[42] "The Poems of Joyce Kilmer," op. cit., p. 12.

[43] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 21.

[44] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 52.

[45] Ibid., p. 77.

> What is the difference between a poet who writes prose, and a prose writer who writes verse? The difference is easy to see but hard to describe.---One sign that he is naturally a poet is that he is never deliberately a poet."[46]

Joyce Kilmer has published a number of excellent sketches and criticisms that did not find their way into a collection. The Living Age has published a humorous prose defense of "The American Interviewer"[47] which is very clever, and in the Bookman for December, 1915, is found an excellent review of the poetry of Sarah Teasdale, Margaret Widdemer, and Gilbert Chesterton.[48]

With all his success and efficiency, however, Joyce Kilmer evidently did not like the job of critic. In February, 1916, he wrote to a friend: "I have quit being a critic, thank God!" But we are glad to see that he had not quit entirely, because in April of that year he made a statement regarding Rupert Brooke's Collected Poems which is singularly applicable to his own situation a few years hence:

> "They would win our hearts less surely if we knew them to be the work of Mr. Robert Bridges, or some other unadventurous gentleman. But the tragically beautiful death of a poet is not alone sufficient to make 25,000 people buy his book. Collected Poems was forcefully called to the world's attention by his death, but the welcome which the work received is nevertheless a manifestation of a genuine appreciation of poetry."[49]

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[46] Loc. cit.

[47] March 9, 1918, pp. 14-17.

[48] "This Autumn's Poetry," p. 68.

[49] "Prosperous Poetry," Bookman, XLIII (1916), p. 182.

CHAPTER II

"The Peacemaker"

"What matters Death if Freedom be not dead?
No flags are fair if Freedom's flag be furled.
Who fights for Freedom, goes with joyful tread
To meet the fires of Hell against him hurled."

When the United States entered the World War, Joyce Kilmer enlisted with Company G, Seventh Infantry, New York National Guard, on April 23, 1917, and reported for federal service with that organization on July 16, 1917.[1] He was stationed at the Regimental Armory, New York, and from there went back and forth to his desk at the New York Times and his home at Larchmont. The act of his voluntary enlistment, he being a man of such rare talent and with a family, was rather singular. Christopher Morley assures us, and we are quite convinced, that he did not go in merely to make journalism.[2]

Someone has suggested that the sinking of the Lusitania was "the direct impetus that led Mr. Kilmer to join the army," [3] while Mr. Holliday remembers that he had soldier blood in his veins, the members of both his father's and mother's families having fought in the Revolution;[4] but it is Joyce Kilmer himself

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[1] C. H. Bridges, Major General, letter to the writer from the Adjutant General's Office, War Department, January 26, 1932.

[2] Op. cit., p. 57.

[3] "Sketch," op. cit., p. 58.

[4] Op. cit., p. xli.

who makes the matter perfectly clear. He says, "Naturally I am expecting to go to the war, being of appropriate age and sex."

At this time the young poet was the father of four children: Kenton, Rose, Michael, and Deborah. The oldest son has since followed somewhat in the footsteps of his father, having had several of his poems, including "Our Mother"[6] and "River of Vanished Dreams,"[7] published. During the summer of 1917 the second daughter, Rose, died; and just after this sad event another son, Christopher, was born.[8]

Joyce Kilmer was transferred, by his own request, to Company H , 165th Infantry, on September 17, 1917, and to Headquarters Company, 165th Infantry, on September 25, 1917. He was now stationed at Camp Mills, Mineola, where his family often motored out to see him on Sunday afternoons, until he sailed for France on October 29, 1917, on the S. S. America.[9] Just before he left, he was reported to have said that he was half Irish and that was why he belonged with the boys of the Sixty-ninth. By this he probably meant that there was some Irish blood in his veins, because when questioned about it he replied, "I am American, but one cannot be pure American in blood unless one is an Indian."[10]

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[5] Ibid., p. 106.

[6] Literary Digest, January 18, 1930, p. 26.

[7] Literary Digest, December 17, 1927, p. 38.

[8] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 6.

[9] C. H. Bridges, op. cit.

[10] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 17.

Joyce Kilmer evidently found life in France rather amusing at first, or perhaps he only managed to keep up his spirits and look on the bright side of things. In May, 1918, he assured his mother that he was "absolutely in love with France, its people, its villages, its mountains, and everything about it." He wrote Amelia Josephine Burr that it was a "nice country and a nice war"; and he informed his wife that it was "a terrible thing, this war, what with a pine forest to live in, all the latest novels to read, and bridge every evening." But with all his bravado a note of homesickness crept in occasionally, and he confessed that he would like to see his wife and babies, "and some roast lamb and dry sherry, and a Blackwood's Magazine, and a straw hat, and the circus."[11]

Nor was this leisure to last long. When the regiment began to see active service, Joyce Kilmer was always found in the thick of the fight.[12] "He served in the Luneville, Bacarat, and Esperance-Souaine defensive sectors and participated in the Champagne-Marne and Aisne-Marne until July 30, 1918, when he was killed in action while serving as a Sergeant."[13]

This last battle took place on a height overlooking the Ourcq. At dawn on July 28 the 165th made a gallant charge across the river and up the hill.[14] When the regiment was ready for the

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[11] Ibid., pp. 32-38.

[12] Christopher Morley, quoted in op. cit., p. 57.

[13] C. H. Bridges, op. cit.

[14] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 97.

attack and Joyce Kilmer found that his own battalion was not to take the lead, he asked to be transferred to the battalion that would go first; and there he served, side by side with his Major, until the fatal day of July 30, 1918.[15] On that day, while conducting a scouting party, he discovered that the woods ahead harbored some machine guns, reported the fact, and went out again to establish their exact location.[16] A couple of hours later, when the battalion advanced to clear the wood, several of Kilmer's comrades found him dead, with a bullet wound through his head. The first one to see him was Sergeant-Major Esler, and he tells the story in the New York Times:

> "The last time I saw him alive was on the morning after he had crept forth alone into No Man's Land. He was full of enthusiasm and eager to rush back into the woods.....
>
> "(A few hours later) In the course of the advance I suddenly caught sight of Kilmer lying on his stomach on a bit of sloping ground, his eyes just peering over the top of what appeared to be a natural trench. Several of us ran toward him thinking that he was alive and merely lying there with his attention fixed on the enemy.
>
> "We called to him, but received no answer. Then I ran up and turned him on his back, only to find that he was dead with a bullet through his brain." [17]

It was not customary to bury an enlisted man beside an officer, but Joyce Kilmer was so deeply loved and respected by men and officers alike that the commander of the regiment ordered his grave dug beside the young and heroic Lieutenant Ames at the edge of the Wood of the Burned Bridge, so close to the purling

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[15] "How Joyce Kilmer Died," Literary Digest, September 7, 1918, p. 58.

[16] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 97.

[17] "How Joyce Kilmer Died," op. cit., p. 42.

Curcq that, standing by the graveside, you could throw a pebble into its waters.[18] Two days later the blue star in the service pin that his mother wore was changed to gold.[19]

II

Joyce Kilmer did not write a great deal while he was in France, the reason for which he explains in a letter to his publisher; "To tell the truth I am not at all interested in writing nowadays, except in so far as writing is the expression of something beautiful. And I see daily and nightly the expression of beauty in action instead of words, and I find it more satisfactory."[20]

His last volume, Main Street, contains most of his war poetry, but it also contains a great deal that was not war poetry. This latter verse, which is usually considered his best, is imbued with the religious spirit of Roman Catholicism and reveals a buoyant, lovable personality. It is in Main Street that the author has most tenderly expressed the love of a father for his children, in such selections as "The Snowman in the Yard":

"But I have something no architect
or gardener ever made,
A thing that is shaped by the busy
touch of little mittened hands:
And the Judge would give up his lovely
estate where the level snow is laid
For the tiny house with the trampled
yard where the snowman stands." [21]

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[18] Ibid., p. 42.

[19] Annie K. Kilmer, p. 6.

[20] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 121.

[21] Ibid., p. 127.

The few war verses that are contained in this volume and the others that were written after the book was printed are excellent. "Rouge Bouquet," his first attempt at versification in a dugout, is probably best of them all:

"In a wood they call the Rouge Bouquet
There is a new made grave today,
Built by never a spade or pick
Yet covered with earth ten metres thick.
There lie many fighting men,
Dead in their youthful prime,
Never to laugh or love again
Nor taste the summertime,
For death came flying through the air
And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,
Touched his prey and left them there
Clay to Clay.
He hid their bodies stealthily
In the soil of the land they sought to free
And fled away.
Now over the grave abrupt and clear
Three volleys ring;
And perhaps their brave young spirits hear
The bugle sing:

"'Go to sleep!
Go to sleep!
Slumber well where the shell screamed and fell.
Let your rifles rest on the muddy floor,
You will not need them any more.
Danger's past;
Now at last
Go to sleep!'" [22]

Joyce Kilmer sent these lines to his publisher May 7, 1918, with the note: "It is probably the best I have written." The poem was written in March, 1918, in memory of some comrades who were killed by a shell, and the lines were first read at the funeral service by Joyce's beloved Father Duffy. It will be noted that the refrain calls for bugle notes, and the desperate, sad, notes

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[22] Literary Digest, August 31, 1918, p. 37.

of "Taps" were sounded from a distant grove when the lines involved them. It is said that the tears streamed down the faces of every boy in the regiment, and that many weeks later any number of men could fish around in their tattered blouses and bring out a copy of the poem.[23]

The other verses which were sent back to the States were just as heartrending and deeply expressive of the trials of the young poet. Several of them involved bodily pain, and this is fitting, since that thought was naturally uppermost in the writer's mind. One of the best of these, "The Prayer of a Soldier in France," which first appeared in Good Housekeeping, is included in A. P. Forbes' collection called Modern Verse. Its closing lines are:

"My rifle hand is stiff and numb
(From thy pierced hand red rivers come).

"Lord thou didst suffer more for me
Than all the hosts on land and sea,

"So let me render back again
This millionth of thy gift, Amen."[24]

Two other selections which sound a real depth of pathos are "The New School" and "Mid Ocean in Wartime." The "Mirage du Cantonment" was written in a lighter vein, featuring visions of laughing ladies, and "When the Sixty-ninth Comes Back" shows

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[23] "How Joyce Kilmer Died," op. cit., p. 44.

[24] Op. cit., p. 117.

the poet's genuine love for the Irish:

"God rest our valiant leader dead,
whom we cannot forget,
They'll see the fighting Irish are
the fighting Irish yet." [25]

Joyce Kilmer's last poem, "The Peacemaker," which is quoted at the beginning of the chapter, was printed in the Saturday Evening Post in October, 1918.[26]

During these trying days he also wrote some very commendable prose. "Holy Ireland," the selection which he considered the best prose writing he could do "nowadays," has found its way into the Literature and Life series.[27] It is a description of a French peasant family and the touching welcome that they gave to the American soldiers and contains several passages, one of which I quote, that are almost as musical as poetry:

"There are mists faint and beautiful and unchanging that hang over the green slopes of some mountains.---I think that they are made from the tears of good, brave women." [28]

There are two other especially interesting sketches, one, "Water Colors," of a little French girl in a red coat sitting in a boat with her father, and the other, "Breakfast," of a meal in the army served by a French peasant woman;[29] to say nothing of the delightful letters which he wrote home to his family and friends.

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[25] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 113.

[26] Ibid., p. 69.

[27] Greenlaw and Miles, Literature and Life (New York, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1918), II, 438.

[28] Ibid., p. 438.

[29] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., pp. 124, 126.

III

It is from these letters, supplemented by the testimonies given by his mother in her books, that we get a glimpse of many of the little personal characteristics that were so lovable. One cannot help admiring the deep affection for his wife which caused him to write: "If there could ever be the perfect novel of love it would begin rather than end 'and they were married.'"[30] His devotion to his mother is also very appealing, to that mother who believed that her boy had never told her a falsehood in all his life. He always addressed her as "Infant," brought her flowers to wear to evening affairs, and wrote her poems on Valentine Day and on her birthday.[31] One of these, "To My Mother on Her Birthday, 1914," shows something of his real feeling:

"Gentlest of critics does your memory hold
(I know it does) a record of the days
When I, a schoolboy, earned your generous praise
For halting verse and stories crudely told?
Over those boyish scrawls the years have rolled.
They might not bear the world's unfriendly gaze,
But still your smile shines down familiar ways,
Touches my words and turns their dross to gold."[32]

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[30] Op. cit., p. 120.

[31] Annie M. Kilmer, op. cit., pp. 6, 16.

[32] Ibid., p. 10.

Then too a great deal of this family love was bestowed upon the Kilmer children. Mr. Holliday tells us that night after night the young poet would "radiantly" walk the floor crooning a lullaby to a wailing infant.[33] He seemed to regard his young offspring as something of a joke. In 1909 he informed his mother that Kenton took possession of an unlit cigar and began to eat it, but he stopped him "as it was a good cigar."[34] Eight years later his sense of humor had not failed him, and he wrote; "Michael is very elastic--when you punch his stomach your fist bounds back as from a punching bag."[35]

Joyce Kilmer's one other great love was for his pipe. He refers to it repeatedly in his letters, both before and after he entered the war; and of all the gifts which he received from his family and friends he seemed most thankful for a new pipe or a tin of tobacco. On one occasion he humorously requested his mother to "send Aline a box of tobacco please."[36]

Other interesting characteristics of the young poet were his genuine attachment to the Irish, especially the poor; his hearty enjoyment of good food; and his clever habit of adopting a particular word or phrase and using it repeatedly. The word "amiable" was one of his favorites,[37] and it was that very ability

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[33] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 47.

[34] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 8.

[35] Ibid., p. 27.

[36] Ibid., p. 10.

[37] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., passim.

to find everything "amiable" that was one of his most admirable characteristics. His friend Le Gallienne declares that he was always laughing whatever else he might be doing.[38]

He possessed a rare combination of romance and common sense that enabled him to shoulder the responsibilities of life and go gaily along his way, even when that way led to a tragic death.[39]

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[38] Op. cit., p. 133.

[39] Ibid., p. 133.

CHAPTER III

"Laurels"

"He did not sing, he did not serve in vain,
Whose laurels crimsoned in the freedom strife,
The brave man's sacrament therein to gain
Transcending memory, eternal life."

I

These lines,[1] which were written in memory of Joyce Kilmer, are true in more than one sense; not only does he live in our memory for having fought in freedom's strife, but he has also gained eternal life through his works. His complete poems, essays, and letters were published late in 1918 with a "Memoir" by R. C. Holliday, and since that time they have been widely read all over America.

It is too early yet to place Joyce Kilmer as a writer, and he has met with some adverse criticism, just as has every other poet who has met with enough success to be criticized at all. Someone has said that the greater part of his volumes are not poetry at all, and that it is not because of, but in spite of, them that we pause to pay tribute to him;[2] and another insists that he never outgrew a dilettantism, and that his death gave

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[1] J. L. C. Clark, "Laurels," Literary Digest, November 9, 1918, p. 59.

[2] "The Poems of Joyce Kilmer," op. cit., p. 12.

his poetry a bogus popularity similar to Alan Seeger's.[3] But the same critic that makes the former statement admits that his verse has a charm and a tenderness, "now humorous, now devotional, always sincere, sane, wholesome, vigorous, courageous. It reveals a man one would have loved to know."[4]

A great deal more has been said in praise of the young poet and the deep undercurrent of thought, forceful and masculine, that permeates his works, both prose and poetry.[5] He had the rare ability of being playfully serious, if you please, and of still driving home his point. Kreymborg classes Joyce Kilmer as "one of a group of poets whose work still belongs to the body of American poetry";[6] and Christopher Morley praises him for "his vigorous idealism, his keen sense of beauty, his devout and simple religion, his touch on the preciousness of common things."[7]

It is probably true that none of Kilmer's verse represents the maturity which he might have reached if he had lived to develop his art;[8] but if we take a hint from Wordsworth's "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads" and judge him by his own conception of what poetry should be, we must admit that Joyce Kilmer was a successful poet. He said of Belloc, "a true poet

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[3] Alfred Kreymborg, Our Singing Strength (Chicago, Coward McCann Co., 1929), p. 295.

[4] "The Poems of Joyce Kilmer," op. cit., p. 12.

[5] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 65.

[6] Kreymborg, op. cit., p. 295.

[7] Quoted in op. cit., p. 57.

[8] "Tide in the War Poet's Inspiration," Literary Digest, March 22, 1919, p. 60.

will never write in order---not even his own order." Nor were his own poems written in order. He sang because he could not help singing about the little things in the life he found about him, and his books are noted for their honest simplicity.[9]

He expressed his poetic creed in a letter to Howard Cook, June 28, 1918:

> "All that poetry can be expected to do is to give pleasure of a noble sort to its readers, leading them to the contemplation of that Beauty which neither words nor sculptures nor pigments can do more than faintly reflect, and to express the mental and spiritual tendencies of the people of the lands and times in which it is written." [10]

Again how like Wordsworth, who said, "The poet writes under one restriction, namely, the necessity of giving pleasure to the human being";[11] and anyone that has read Kilmer's poetry, even casually, can see that he measures up to his creed. Probably that is why his publishers have described him as the poet who is the most human of the younger generation. Humanity! that is the greatest gift of the poet, and Joyce Kilmer certainly had it. Had his poems no other quality, they would still be read and loved for that alone.[12]

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[9] Quoted in op. cit., p. 32.

[10] R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 123.

[11] G. E. Woods (ed.), English Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement (Chicago, Scott, Foresmen and Co., 1929), "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads," p. 332.

[12] Richard Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 135.

II

While reading and admiring the works of Joyce Kilmer, the world did not forget to pause and pay its tribute to the life that was so gloriously given for the cause of freedom. A number of memorial services have been held in his honor, the first one being at St. Patrick's, New York. On this occasion Lieutenant Nichols, a British soldier-poet, placed a laurel on the altar as England's tribute, and Mr. J. I. C. Clark commemorated the episode in "Laurels," a part of which is quoted at the beginning of the chapter.[13] His mother, who was present, says that the ceremony was a beautiful vision, and that it seemed as though the great Catholic Church opened wide her arms and said, "All this pomp and splendor I gladly give to dear Joyce Kilmer, who found his greatest comfort in his brief life with Me."[14]

Other services were held in his honor by the Poetry Society, the Dickens Fellowship, and Columbia University; and a number of memorials have been made. A private room has been furnished in the St. Peter's Hospital, New Brunswick, New Jersey; and two beds have been given to the Crippled Children's Home in New York City, one for him and one for his daughter Rose. A painted photograph of the young hero in uniform, together with one of his poems in manuscript form, has been placed in the Author's Club, while large framed photographs have been given

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[13] "An Ambassador of the Dead," Literary Digest, November 9, 1918, p. 59.

[14] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 10.

to the Dickens Fellowship and to the Delta Epsilon Fraternity of Columbia University.[15] The house in which he was born has been taken over by the Joyce Kilmer Post of the American Legion as its headquarters; and the room in which he was born has been fitted up with personal material relating to him.[16]

These memorials are not confined to America alone. A monument thirty-five feet high marks the poet's grave in France. The memorial is the work of Paola Abbate, famous Italian sculptor who, like Sergeant Kilmer, was a member of the Dante Society. The statue, erected in 1923, is called "David the Soldier."[17]

Far back in the mystic aisles of the Pantheon in Paris the French Republic has inscribed in gold the names of 560 writers who died in the World War, including thirteen Americans, one of whom was Joyce Kilmer.[18]

The young hero was also awarded the posthumous honor of the Citation of Valour[19] and the French Croix de Guerre with the following inscription:

> "Assigned to an assaulting battalion by his own request, he showed himself to be very active and brave in accomplishing his work of gathering information. July 9, 1918, when his battalion was obliged to execute a flank movement, he was of great help to his commander in assembling the different elements and executing the movement. The adjutant of the battalion being killed, he replaced him in a remarkable manner. Fell gloriously July 30, struck by a bullet while attacking at the side of his Colonel."[20]

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[15] Ibid., p. 11.

[16] Fredrick. Kilmer, letter to the writer, February 8, 1932.

[17] "Monument to Mark Grave of Young Poet," New York Times, January 21, 1923.

[18] "Americans Enshrined in France," Outlook, CXLVII (1927), 322.

[19] Annie M. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 12.

[20] C. H. Bridges, op. cit.

III

There is an old saying that "actions speak louder than words," but no discussion of the memorials to Joyce Kilmer would be complete without a mention of the verbal tributes that were laid on his altar. Hundreds of people in every walk of life have paused to express their appreciation for so noble a life. His fellow poets were not too busy singing to make some of their songs in praise of him. A number of beautiful verses have been written which present the poet from almost every conceivable angle. Perhaps James Bernard Rethy best describes the Kilmer that his friends knew:

"He loved the songs of nature and of art;
He heard enchanting voices everywhere;
The sight of trees against the sunlit air,
The fields of flowers, filled with joy his heart.

"He knew the romance of the busy mart,
The magic of Manhattan's throbbing life,
And sensed the glory of the poor man's strife,
And humbly walked with Jesus Christ apart.

"All kindly things were brother to his soul;
Evil he scorned and hated every wrong;
Gentle--another's wounds oft wounded him;
But when his country called the freedman's roll,
Forthwith he laid aside his wondrous song
And joined in Flanders God's own Cherubim"; 21

while Helen Gray Cone succeeded in portraying a very rare combination of the poet and the man in "The Way of the White Souls":

21"Sketch," op. cit., p. 58.

"A road runs bright through the night of time,
since ever the world began,
The wide Way of the White Souls,
the Main Street of Man,
The sky-road of the star souls,
beyond all wars and scars;
And there the singing soul of him
goes on with marching stars.

"So, as I stand in the summer night,
when the hosts of heaven seem nigh,
And look at the powdery swirl of stars,
where it sweeps across the sky,
The wide way of the white stars,
where it runs up and down,
My heart shall be glad for the friend who said
'It was Main Street, Heaventown.'"[22]

But it was his mother who reached the real depth of tenderness of feeling when she said, in "To My Boy Who Lies in France":

"Are you lonely, Dear, beneath the shining lilies?
Do you miss the tramp of marching feet all day?
When the 69th had left you for the home-land,
With their bright young faces resolute and gay--

.....

"Oh! My darling, rest in quiet 'neath the lilies,
God is good and gives me courage for your sake!
For the mother of a hero should not falter,
And the bitter cup He gives me, I will take."[23]

A number of tributes have been paid by writers who have really arrived. Edwin Markham expressed a belief that Kilmer's death is a great loss to the forces of idealism; that every line from his pen was an honor to his mind and his manhood; and that, choosing to serve good, he guarded his principles with the sense of honor within his breast.[24] Christopher Morley pays him a beauti-

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[22] Scribner's Magazine, LIV (1913), 73.

[23] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 15.

[24] "Sketch," op. cit., p. 58.

ful compliment by saying that he will spare him the dishonesty of saying that "he died as he would have wished to, because no real poet wishes to die"; but that nothing could have given Joyce Kilmer more honest pride than the two lines that appeared in a double column front page article of the Ledger.

"Joyce Kilmer, Poet
Is Killed in Action"

"He died," says Mr. Morley, "as he had lived, in action."[25]

These are all very fine, but the most genuine words of appreciation for the young poet have come from those who knew him best. His comrades spoke with awe and valor of his coolness and his nerve; and Woolcott, who was at the scene of action shortly after his death, tells how the captain under whom he served, the major at whose side he fell, and even the stray cooks, doughboys, and runners mourned his death. This was at a time when death was too common to distinguish anyone; so the admiration and the sorrow that they voiced must have been genuine.[26]

His friend and publisher R. C. Holliday says of him, "All that Kilmer wrote, every line of it, he wrote in two ways; he wrote it in his words and he wrote it in his acts";[27] while the editor of the Literary Digest, on the staff of which Kilmer

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[25]Quoted in op. cit., p. 32.

[26]"How Joyce Kilmer Died," op. cit., p. 30.

[27]R. C. Holliday, op. cit., p. 77.

worked for nine years, speaks of him as a "gallant gentleman who never wrote a line that was not pure and sweet and clean";[28] and his friend le Gallienne says rather pathetically:

> "Some day I will take a hint from 'Davy Lilly,' and instead of giving Joyce Kilmer flowers, I will find some quietude of Broadway, and there, over a pipe and some old ale, will dedicate an afternoon of memory and gratitude for his splendid young manhood, for the sunlit valor of his singing, and, above all, for his having kept the faith in a day of small things."[29]

But the highest compliment of them all, the one that I believe Joyce Kilmer would like best, was paid by his mother when she said:

> "I do not claim to be like the Spartan mother, who told her sons to return to her bearing their shields or upon them. But I do claim to be the very proudest mother in the whole world because Sergeant Joyce Kilmer was and is my son."[30]

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[28] "Tide in the War Poets Inspiration," op. cit., p. 60.

[29] Op. cit., p. 139.

[30] Annie K. Kilmer, op. cit., p. 7.

APPENDIX

Other American World War Poets

Franklin Pierce Adams, better known as F. P. A., was born in Chicago, Illinois, November 15, 1881. He attended the University of Michigan (1899-1900); then, after a brief career as an insurance agent, he took up journalism. In 1903 he began conducting a column in the Chicago Journal; in 1904 he went to New York and started his "Always in a Good Humor" section in the Evening Mail and in 1914 gave that up for "The Conning Tower" column in the New York Tribune.[1]

He is the author of five volumes of light verse: Tobogganing on Parnassus (1909), In Other Words (1912), By and Large (1914), Weight and Measure (1917), and Something Else Again (1920). His books reveal a spirit of good-humored mockery, healthy satire, and genuine fun-making.[2]

When the war came on, F. P. A. went as a captain and succeeded in dispensing a little of his cheer in the trenches. The army did not quench his wit, and his war poems have the characteristic marks of humor and sarcasm.[3] "A Change of Heart" and "War and Peace", are two of the best.

War and Peace

"This war is a terrible thing," he said,
"With its countless numbers of needless dead;
A futile warfare it seems to me,
Fought for no principle I can see.

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[1] Louis Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), p. 238.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] J. D. Rittenhouse, "Poets Militant," Bookman, XLVII (1918), 93.

Alas, that thousands of hearts should bleed
For naught but a tyrant's boundless greed!"
Said the wholesale grocer, in righteous mood,
As he went to adulterate salable food.

Spake as follows the merchant king:
"Isn't this war a disgraceful thing?
Heartless, cruel, and useless, too;
It doesn't seem that it can be true.
Think of the misery, want, and fear!
We ought to be grateful we've no war here.
Six a week"--to a girl--"that's flat!
I can get a thousand to work for that."[4]

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Everard Jack Appleton, who served as a Private in the United States Army, is the author of "Soldiers of the Soil" and "An American Creed."

An American Creed

Straight thinking,
Straight talking,
Straight doing,
And a firm belief in the might of right.

Patience linked with patriotism,
Justice added to kindliness,
Uncompromising devotion to their country,
And active, not passive, Americanism.

To talk less, to mean more,
To complain less, to accomplish more,
And to live so that every one of us is ready to look
Eternity in the face at any moment and be unafraid. [5]

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[4] Louis Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 259.

[5] With the Colors (Cincinnati, Steward and Kedds Co.,1918), p. 10.

Kendall Banning was a major in the Signal Reserve Corps, Aviation Section, United States Army. He wrote the poem "The Great Adventure."

The Great Adventure

God, the Master Pilot--
Or gods, if such there be--
Pour me no weakling's measure
When ye pour the wine for me!
Of pain, of love, of pleasure,
I'll drain the draught you give:
Of good and ill, give me the fill
Of the life ye bade me live.[6]

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William Rose Benet, the elder brother of Stephen Vincent Benet, was born at Fort Hamilton, New York Harbor, in 1886. He was educated at Albany Academy and at Yale, graduating in 1907. He has worked as an editor and a free lance writer, joining the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post and becoming editor of the publishing firm of Payson and Clark and one of the editors of the Saturday Review of Literature.[7]

His poetry consists of four volumes: Merchants of Cathay (1913), The Falconer of God (1914), The Great White Wall (1916), and The Bugler of the Zodiac (1918).[8] He has also published a novel, The First Person Singular, a volume of fugitive pieces, Wild Goslings, and a book for children, The Flying Ming of Kurio.[9]

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[6]Ibid., p. 15.

[7]Canby and Benet, Twentieth Century Poetry (Cambridge, The Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), p. 464.

[8]Marguerite Wilkinson, Contemporary Poetry (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 189.

[9]Canby and Benet, op. cit., p. 464.

During the War he was a ground officer in the Air Service, and this experience gave us his popular poems, "The Red Country" and "Front Line."

The Red Country

In the red country
The sky flowers
All day.
Strange mechanical birds
With struts of wire and glazed wings
Cross the impassive sky
Which burgeons ever and again
With ephemeral unfolding flowers,
White and yellow and brown,
That spread and dissolve.
And smaller rapid droning birds go by,
And bright metallic bees whose sting is death.

Behind the hills,
Behind the whispering woods whose leaves are falling
Yellow and red to cover the red clay,
Misshapen monsters squat with wide black maws
Gulping smoke and belching flame.
From the mirk reed beds the age of coal,
Wallowing out of their sleep in the earlier slime,
They are resurrected and stagger forth to slay--
The prehistoric beasts we thought were dead.
They are blinded with long sleep,
But men with clever weapons
Goad them to fresh pastures.

Beside still waters
They drink of blood and neigh a horrible laughter,
And their ponderous tread shakes happy cities down,
And the thresh of their flail-like tails
Makes acres smoulder and smoke
Blackened of golden harvest.

The beasts are back,
And men, in their spreading shadow,
Inhale the odor of their nauseous breath.
Inebriate with it they fashion other gods
Than the gods of day-dream.

Of iron and steel are little images
Made of the Beasts.
And men rush forth and fling themselves for ritual
Before these Gods, before the lumbering Beasts-
And some make long obeisance.

Umber and violet flowers of the sky,
The sun, like a blazing Mars, clanks across the blue
And plucks you, to fashion into a nosegay
To offer Venus, the old time paramour.
But now she shrinks
And pales
Like Cynthia, her more ascetic sister---
Vulcan came to her arms in the grimy garb
Of toil, he smelt of the forge and the racketing
workshop,
But not of blood.
And, if she smells these flowers they bubble ruby bloo
That trickles between her fingers.

Yet is a dream flowing over the red country,
Yet is a light growing, for all the black furrows
of the red country-----
The machines are foe or friend
As the world desires.
The Beasts can sleep again.
And in that sleep, when the land is twilight-still
And men take thought among the frozen waves of
the dead,
The sowers go forth once more,
Sowers of vision, sowers of the seed
Of peace or war.
Shall it be peace indeed?
Great shadowy figures moving from hill to hill
Of tangled bodies, with rhythmic stride
and cowled averted head,
What do you sow with hands funereal--
New savageries imperial,
Unthinking pomps for arrogant, witless men?
Or seed for the people in small democracy?
What do you see
With your secret eyes, and sow for us, that we
must reap again? [10]

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[10] S. A. Leonard, Poems of War and Peace (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1921), p. 121.

Howard A. Breeding was a Sergeant in the American Army and belongs to the large group of camp poets.

Vision

There's a strain in my heart all morning,
There's one thought in my mind all day;
I am thinking of home and my loved ones-
What they do when I'm far away.

My eyes turn inward with longing
And I live in a day passed by,
I can see my home and my mother
As she goes 'round with a sigh.

I can see my father so boastful
And his eyes with lovelight burn,
As he tells of his son in the army,
As he longs for his return.

I can see my sister's devotion,
As she knits long hours in the night,
That my fingers and ears and "tootsies"
The frost won't be able to bite.

I can hear the door bell tinkle
And the shout: "It's the mailman, I bet";
And the sigh of keen disappointment
When they find it's not time for him yet.

I picture these things in my fancy,
And live the days long gone by,
And pray for the day in the future
When "Homeward" will be the glad cry.[11]

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Frank C. Brewer, another camp poet, who was stationed at Camp Beauregard with the 141st Field Artillery, wrote the following lines to which he failed to give a name:

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[11]F. H. Rimage, Jr., _op. cit._, p. 84.

I'll lay my plans and none may say me nay,
My guns shall train upon the spot today,
The quarters of my foe.
They plan to wreak their vengeance on me and mine,
But by my plans, and mayhap, plans Divine,
I'll say them no!

.....

The storm increases, then I will defy
The elements! Snow comes first; and God on high
Shall stay the blast!
At your positions, all is ready now!
Ah! the storm has spoken, and a fiery sword
Ends this great defiance to the Lord.[12]

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Dana Burnet was a war correspondent in France for the New York Evening Sun. Besides "Napoleon's Tomb" he wrote "The Plaint of Pan," "Storm," "The Forge of God," and "Christmas in the Trenches."

Napoleon's Tomb

Through the great doors, where Paris flowed incessant,
Fell certain dimness, as of some passed hour,
Caught from the ashes of the Infinite
And prisoned there in solemn purple state,
To make illusion for dead majesty!
A dusk of greatness, such as well might brood
Beneath the wings of Destiny's proud day;
A cool, immortal twilight mantling
To the great dome, where painted trophies
High o'er the dust that once bestrode it all--
Forever flown on firmer firmament!
It was as though the ambition still should live

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[12]Loc cit.

In a role over him; as though his dream--
From whose high tower and colored casements round
He, with a royal thievery in his eye,
Did look upon the spoils of a world--
Should tame this shape, and being clothed with walls,
Stand, in such permanence as matter gives,
To house his glory through the centuries.
Then I went in, with Paris pressing slow,
And saw the long blue shadows folding down
Upon the casket of the Emperor.
A soldier in a faded uniform
Stood close beside me. He was one of those
Who die and leave no lament on the wind--
And straightway gazing on him I beheld
Not death's magnificence; not fame's hushed tomb--
But grim Oblivion, and the fields of France!
And on some nameless hillside, where the night
Sets out wild flaming candles for the dead,
Innumerable corpses palely sprawled [13]
Beneath the silent, cold, anonymous stars.

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Harvey Decker, a member of the 141st Field Artillery, is the author of "Sammy's Puzzle."

Sammy's Puzzle

I left my girl at eventide,
Among the roses red;
Old Glory floated free and wide
Above her golden head.

The sunshine lit the diamond tear
That flashed from eyes of blue;
She kissed me as she murmured: "Dear,
I'll wait right here for you."

---

[13] S. A. Leonard, op. cit., p. 172.

Now when this war is over,
And from the Hun we're free,
When I come sailing home again
Will she be there for me? [14]

****

Charles Devine was a private in the 105th Infantry. He is the author of "To Spartanburg," "When Private Mugrumps Parley Voos," [15] and many other war verses.

To Spartanburg

O hail, kind host, whose warm heart beats
As Spartan of the nation
To us who come to swarm your streets
With twice the population.

Invaders we, of quiet ways,
Your dream-lit lanes and mountains
With yore we spend our training days
And nay at soda fountains.

We thank your skies for all their gold,
We crave no nights of zero.
We like your sons, but when it's cold
It's hard to be a hero.

Your misses, soft in speech and eyes,
Your genial, pleasant matrons,
Your cakes and sweet potato pies
And cooks with steaming aprons.

O hail to thee--though rains may flow
Upon our roads so ruddy--
The sun is bound to shine, and oh!
Your smile is never muddy. [16]

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[14] F. H. Kinsey, Jr., op. cit., p. 22.

[15] With the Colors, p. 123.

[16] F. H. Kinsey, Jr., op. cit., p. 84.

Arthur Davisson Ficke was born at Davenport, Iowa, November 10, 1883, received his A. B. from Harvard in 1904, and was admitted to the bar in 1908.[17] He gave up his law practice in 1919 to devote himself entirely to literature.[18]

He is the author of ten volumes of verse, the most representative of which are Sonnets of a Portrait Painter (1914), The Man on the Hilltop (1915), and April Elegy (1917). He also wrote two books on the theme of Japanese prints, of which he was an expert collector, and collaborated with Witter Bynner in the writing of Spectra (1916).[19] In the preface to the 1926 edition of his selected poems he expresses his theory of poetry:

> "Time has proved that the function of poetry is not to impart messages, but to explore the depth of emotion. The poet is never a teacher, but always a learner. His poem is a venture at a perilous discovery, not under any circumstances a complacent undertaking to instruct the world."[20]

During the war he served in France for two years, became a major in the ordnance department, and wrote a number of war verses, including "To Rupert Brooke" and "To the Beloved of One Dead."

To the Beloved of One Dead

The sunlight shall not easily seem fair
To you again,
Knowing the hands that once amid your hair
Did stray so maddeningly
Now listlessly
Is beaten into mire by summer rain.

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[17] Louis Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 273.

[18] Canby and Benet, op. cit., p. 449.

[19] Louis Untermeyer, loc. cit.

[20] Canby and Benet, op. cit., p. 450.

The spirit has its sanctity in death
But the bright clay
Knows naught of recompense and the swift breath
That in some darkened place
Once swept your face--
What shall sublime that memory away?

He died amid the thunders of great war;
His glory cries
Even now across the lands; perhaps his star
Shall shine forever---
But for you, never
His wild white body and his thirsting eyes.[21]

****

Charles Buxom Going, deserting his editorial desk, became a major in the Engineering Department during the World War.

They Who Wait

Oh, the gold hills of Ireland
The gorse blossoms on
Are all gray with heart-break
Since Michael is gone.

The blue hills of Scotland
Where heather blows gay
Are weary with crying,
For Colin's away;

And who sees, in England,
The daffodils dance?
.....
Oh laddie--oh, laddie,
Those red fields of France.[22]

****

James Norman Hall, who was an American, enlisted at the outbreak of the War with the British Army and was afterwards

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[21] Scribner's Magazine, LXII (1917), 575.

[22] Ibid., p. 289.

in the French Aviation Corps. He was wounded and taken prisoner in 1917 and held in Germany until after the Armistice. His war poems include "A Finger and a Huge Thick Thumb"[23] and "Hate."

Hate

Three of us sat on a firing-bench
Watching the clouds sail by--
Watching the gray dawn blowing up
Like smoke across the sky.
And I thought as I listened to London Joe
Tell of his leave in town,
"That's good vers libre with a Cockney twang;
I'll remember and write it down."

.....

It's a funny thing. The farther yer git from the trenches
The more 'ate yer finds;
An' by the time yer gits ter Lunnon,
Blimy! They could bite the 'eads off o' nails
If they was made in Germany!
I reckon they're just as cheerful an' lovin'-like in Berlin.
Give us a fag son, I'm clean out.[24]

****

Glen L. Houchkin, another of the American camp poets, was a member of the Motor Machine Regiment stationed at Camp Hancock, Georgia.

A Mother's Gift

Picture a home in a cottage small,
Picture a frame on the cottage wall;
Picture a mother old and gray,
Kneeling each morn at a picture to pray.

---

[23] S. A. Leonard, op. cit., pp. 42, 53, 150.

[24] Ibid., p. 53.

Prays for the one that looks up from the frame;
Laughing, full lips seem to whisper her name.
The load at her heart seems to lift with the light;
She knows that her boy has passed safe through the night.

She kisses the flag that she draped o'er the frame
And tenderly whispers her darling boy's name.
And smiles through her tears as she thinks of the day
When Uncle Sam called and her boy marched away.

She's proud of her offspring so noble and brave;
She's proud of the fact that she gave him to save
The country for freedom, the hope of the world
Lies in our dear flag, the flag he unfurled.[25]

****

J. Mopps was a seventeen-year-old member of the 130th U. S. Infantry, the famous Paris Division. His company saw thirty consecutive days of front-line service just prior to the armistice.

Now That It's All Over

Did you ever hike millions of miles,
And carry a ton on your back,
And blister your heels and your shoulders, too,
Where the straps run down from your pack,
In the rain or the snow or the mud perhaps,
In the smothering heat or cold?
If you have, why then you're a buddy of ours,
And we welcome you into our fold.

Did you ever eat with your plate in your lap,
With your cup on the ground at your side,
While cooties and bugs of species untold,
Danced fox-trots over your hide?

---

[25] E. H. Hindge, Jr., op. cit., p. 84.

Di you ever sleep in a tent so small
That your head and your feet played tag?
Then shake, old man, you're a pal of ours,
For you've followed the same old flag.

Did you ever stand in a front-line trench,
With Fritzie a few feet away,
With Jerries and Minnies a-whistling around,
And gas coming over all day?
With No Man's Land a sea of steel
And a tempest of bursting shell?
Then, come in, old man, and toast your shins,
For we're all just back from hell.[26]

****

William Henry Ogilvie, Professor of Agricultural Journalism in the Iowa State Teachers' College (1905-1907), entered the Remount Department at the beginning of the war, but ill health prevented long service. He was assigned to the Army Reserve in 1918. His war poems include "Australis" and Other Verses.

Queenslanders

Clean-limbed lords of the Brisbane beaches,
Lithe-limbed kings of the Gulgoa bends,
Princes that ride where the roper reaches,
Captains that camp where the gray gulf ends--
Never such goodly men together
Marched since the kingdoms first made war;
Nothing so proud as the Imperial feather
Waved in an English wind before!

Ardor and faith of those keen brown faces!
Challenge and strength of those big brown hands!

---

[26] Literary Digest, May 24, 1919, p. 36.

Eyes that have flashed upon wide-flung spaces!
Chins that have conquered in fierce far lands!
Flood could not daunt them, drought could not break them;
Deep in their hearts is their sun's own fire;
Blood of thine own blood, England, take them!
These are the swords of thy soul's desire! [27]

* *

John Pierre Roche was a Sergeant in the American Army. He has written quite a number of poems, which are collected into a little volume known as Rimes in Olive Drab.

On Guard

A cloudless sky of peaceful stars
Above a camp in tranquil rest;
The keen wind stirs the pine-trees,
And the white road stretches on
Like a path to the warring world.

Halt! Who goes there?

Was it nothing but the wind?
There is a shadow on the grass
And the crunch of brush underfoot.

Advance friend, and be recognized!

Let us see the future's face:
See if it be friend or foe;
Let us tear its mask away--
If this is Fate, then tell us so! [28]

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[27] G. M. Clark, A Treasury of War Poetry, second series (New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), p. 70.

[28] "Camp Poetry," Literary Digest, March 27, 1918, p. 46.

Murray Roth was a member of the 325 Infantry, and another soldier-poet.

The Red Cross Nurse

In her snow-white bonnet, with the red cross on it,
She's the mother of the battle field;
Where the shot and shell are flying,
You'll find her 'mongst the dying,
Always beside them, whate'er betide them,
Dressing each wound 'til it's healed.
On some brighter day, when we've reckoned the gain and loss,
We'll owe more than we can pay
To the girl with the Red Cross;
For she's the mother of the battle field.[29]

****

Clinton Scollard is the author of "The Vale of Shadows" and Other Verses of the Great War.

A Summer Morning

The summer meads are fair with daisy-snow,
White as the dove's wing, flawless as the foam
On the brown beaches where the breakers comb
When the long Trades their morning bugles blow;
And over all there is a golden glow,
For the sun sits ascendant in the dome;
And smoke-wreaths rise from many a cottage home
Where there is peace, and joy's full overflow.

This is our heritage, but what of those
Who crouch where Yser's sad, ensanguined tide
Winds with its sluggish crescents, toward the sea;
Where Termonde bells are silent, and the fire
And stricken leagues of Flemish land disclose
The ruthless wrong, the piteous agony![30]

---

[29] F. H. Ridge, Jr., op. cit., p. 84.

[30] Ibid., p. 119.

Robert Haven Schauffler was born in Australia in 1879 of American parents and came to this country in 1881. He was educated at Northwestern University, Princeton, and the University of Berlin. He is a 'cellist and a sculptor as well as a poet and prose writer. "Scum-O'-the-Earth" is his most famous poem.[31]

When the war broke out, he was among the earliest to volunteer.[32] He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and assigned to Camp Meade to teach an Officer's Training School. His war verse includes "The White Comrade" and "After Action".

After Action

Once, in my moment of earth,
Before the immortal re-birth,
I thought of my flesh as a thing
Like the house of a king,--
Beautiful, worthy to stand
Proud on the heavenly strand.

I remember it now as a clod
Prone in the gardens of God,--
Mean, without honor or beauty,
Justified but by the duty
Of spending its pittance of power
In rearing a heavenly flower.[33]

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[31] Marguerite Wilkinson, Contemporary Poetry (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 138.

[32] Rittenhouse, op. cit., p. 37.

[33] H. C. Clark, op. cit., p. 225.

Walter Scott, a member of the 108th Field Artillery, wrote a number of very delightful parodies to such tunes as "Good-By Boys I'm Through," "Liberty Bell," and "No Man's Land."

Old General Bell
(Parody on "Liberty Bell")

Old General Bell, he's round to inspect again, inspect again,
Old General Bell, he's round to inspect again!
We're in a worse sort of fix than the boys of '76;
We keep on grooming and raking on one slice of bacon
Till our sides are aching.
Why do we fall when they blow that old mess call?
It's a stall;
Left-over stew they'll feed to you; the meat is few.
Though we're pretty rotten I'll confess,
Still we managed to ditch the S. O. S.,
When old General Bell came round to inspect again.[34]

****

Bill Swag, a member of the 155th Infantry, is the author of "A Little Music by the Band."

A Little Music by the Band

It was a Sunday evening when the band began to play,
They had a little concert just to pass the time away.
They played some lively marches that made you prance and "rare,"
And tunes like dear old "Dixie" and songs like "Over There."
All the soldiers hollered and they laughed their cares away,
Why, you couldn't help but love 'em, if you'd been there
on that day.

Then all at once the leader picked up his little horn,
And he played a piece of music that was
"wrote 'fore we was born."
It was just old "Annie Laurie," but somehow our eyes got wet;

---

[34] Edward Arthur Dolph, Sound Off (New York, Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1929), p. 166.

It made us think of many things that men sometimes forget---
Our promises to mothers and sweethearts far away;
Why you couldn't help but love 'em, if you'd been there
on that day.

****

Sigourney Thayer served as a First Lieutenant in the Aviation Corps, U. S. A., and saw active service in France.

The Dead

I feared the lonely dead, so old were they,
Decrepit, tired beings, ghastly white,
With withered breasts and eyes devoid of sight,
Forever mute beneath the sodden clay;
I feared the lonely dead, and turned away
From thoughts of sombre death and endless night;
Thus, through the dismal hours I longed for light
To drive my utter hopelessness away.

But now my nights are filled with flowered dreams
Of singing warriors, beautiful and young;
Strong men and boys within whose eyes there gleams
The triumph-song of worlds unknown, unsung;
Grim death has vanished, leaving in its stead
The shining glory of the living dead.[36]

****

George O. Van Camp, a southwestern cowboy who enlisted in the cavalry, wrote amusing parodies on "In My Harem," and "My Wild Irish Rose."

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[35] T. H. Hindge, Jr., op. cit., p. 82.

[36] G. M. Clark, op. cit., p. 291.

Our Wild Irish Rows

When our wild Irish throws
French bombs on freedom's foes,
You may search everywhere,
But no Hun will be there.
Where they'll be only Beelzebub knows.
There'll be "Wild Irish Rows"
Where the tide of victory flows,
And the flags of Berlin
Will turn green when we win
By the might of "our wild Irish boys."[37]

****

E. F. Wilkinson, a Lieutenant in the American Army, wrote "Dad o' Mine," which teems with emotion born of actual fighting experience.

Dad o' Mine

Midsummer day and the mad world a-fighting,
Fighting in holes, Dad o' Mine.
Nature's old spells are no longer delighting
Passion-filled souls, Dad o' Mine.
Vainly the birds in the branches are singing,
Vainly the sunshine its message is bringing
Over the green-clad earth; stark hate is clinging
Shadow for shine, Dad o' Mine,
Shadow for shine.

Strengthened by shadow and shine borne together,
Comrades and chums, Dad o' Mine,
We shall not falter thro' fair or foul weather,
Whatever comes, Dad o' Mine.
So in the years to be, when you grow older,
Age puts his claim in and weakness grows bolder,
We'll stand up and meet them, Dad, shoulder to shoulder,
Your arm in mine, Dad o' Mine,
Your arm in mine.[38]

****

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[37]Edward Arthur Dolph, op. cit., p. 172.

[38]R. H. Kindge, Jr., op. cit., p. 84.

Cornelius Vanderbuilt, Jr., a private in the American army, expresses a feeling of faith and idealism in his little poem "Courage."

Courage

Courage! What if the snows are deep,
And what if the hills are long and steep,
And the days are short, and the nights are long,
And the good are weak, and the bad are strong;
Courage! the snow is a field of lay,
And the longest hill has a well-worn way;
There are songs that shorten the longest night;
There's a day when wrong shall be ruled by right.
So courage! courage! 'Tis never so far
From a plodded path to a shining star! [22]

[22] Ibid., p. 22.

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