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SONNETS ON THE WAR

BY

COURTNEY LANGDON



PROVIDENCE, R. I.
PRESTON & ROUNDS CO.

1917

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TO MY SONS IN FRANCE

CHAUNCY TAFT LANGDON

AND

ROBERT COURTNEY LANGDON

PRUSSIA

OF old, when time was still eternity,
God made the angel Lucifer, a bright
And rising star of intellectual light,
Lord of matter and necessity.

But filled with pride, and hating Liberty,
Great Lucifer rebelled, and turned his might
'Gainst Love and Justice, till, self-outlawed, Night
Received him, and the loyal heavens were free.

A myth! Yet Jesus, too, beheld him fall
As lightning out of Heaven, and we, as well,
In spirit see the same, who now behold

Prussia's despotic pride attempt to thrall
Mankind, and fall eclipsed, as Satan fell,
By world-wide Freedom's dawning Age of Gold.

April 19, 1917.

LIÈGE

AH, little Belgium, that in Cæsar's age
Wast of the Gauls the bravest, thou hast won
In ours the glorious prize of those that run
On honor's course, and dare take up the gage

Tyrants throw down. Thy name shines on the page
Time saves for deeds eternal. When the Hun
Sprang at his western victim, there was none
But thee, at first, to brave his brutal rage—

None but thy soul and thee at Liège to stand,
As at Thermopylæ the Spartans stood,
That Hellas might belong to Freedom's heirs.

All that Leonidas' immortal band
Gave at its gates for their world's highest good,
Leman and his brave Belgians gave for theirs.

October 3, 1916.

THE MARNE

GREATEST of rivers crowned by destiny,
Time has not given thee all thy glory yet,
Nor realized how measureless the debt
Of gratitude mankind will owe to thee;

For on thy banks, proud Marne, the chivalry,
Intelligence and faith of Freedom met,
Lured on, and, crushing, prisoned in a net
Of trenches Blood and Iron's tyranny.

Along thy eighty leagues of ravished plain
France's outnumbered armies stood, and fought,
To save the culture of the Christian West;

And, flanked by Britain's vanguard, raised again
The walls of Justice Greece and Rome had wrought,
The spires of Peace which Palestine had blest.

October 10, 1916.

JOFFRE

WHENE'ER her goal is threatened, Nature makes
A man in her own image, and endows
His spirit with her gifts. Upon his brows
Her modesty sits lightly, as he takes

His country's fate in hand, and slowly wakes
To gratitude a world, whose wonder bows
Before a name long centuries will house
As nobly as the stars are shrined by lakes.

Such, Joffre, seem the gifts revealed by thee,
Since the full flood of Prussia's pride was rolled
Back to its ebb by thy sublime Retreat.

Thy calm prepared the Marne for victory ;
Thy patient firmness steeled the Meuse to hold ;
Thy silence warns the Rhine of its defeat.

September 24, 1916.

KITCHENER

NOT his to draw, but his to forge, the sword
Which Europe asked of Britain in her need ;
Not his to hear the plaudits of the freed,
When God's ' Day ' dawns on Prussia's broken word ;

Nor his to live, who could so well afford
To pass, and let some fellow Briton lead
The promised hosts, whom only he could breed
And steel, to conquer Prussia's ruthless horde.

Not his to win on Marne, or Meuse, or Rhine ;
Nor, dying, on the Thames to lie in state ;
But from the sea to be a cry at night,

Bidding his millions rise and break the line,
Where Belgium's thousands hold their own, and wait
Till Right is strong enough to vanquish Might.

June 10, 1916.

VERDUN

AS stands a lighthouse on a headland rock,
And with its beams illumines the surging waves
Hurl'd blindly by the envious sea, which laves
Its deep foundation's challenge to their shock ;

While, maddened by the patient rays that mock
Its utmost strength, the pride-lashed water braves
The beacon-tower, and scorns the flame which saves
From shipwreck all that on the ocean flock

Its wild and starless waste ; so standest thou,
Verdun, against the dark, material might,
Which vainly storms thy spirit walls. Naught daunts

The courage of thy sacrificial vow
That none shall pass o'er thee, to quench the light
Flashed worldward from the towering soul of France.

June 17, 1916.

FUORI I BARBARI

TO thee was given the hardest task of all,
Brave Italy, when Europe to her aid
Summoned the nations centuries had made
Prime guardians of the light which Rome to Gaul,

And Gaul to Britain, passed, till o'er the wall
Of western seas it shone, too bright to fade.
For thine it was to challenge, undismayed,
The eastern Huns who, with thy gates in thrall,

Threatened thy garden ; then, through gun-swept snows,
Master each Alpine peak and torrent-bed,
And fight,—by faint praise cheered,—till each redout

Held as a threat by Rome's transalpine foes
Was Rome's again, and Hadria's watershed
Joined in the Latin cry : “ Barbarians out ! ”

August 18, 1916.

ALMA ROMA

SPIRIT of Rome, eternal Latin Soul,
Remembered Mother of the South and West,
Thine heirs are met again, to stand the test
Set by Barbarians who would fain control

By ruthless Might a world, whose ancient goal
Was Peace through Justice! What the gods deemed best
They gave through thee; hence, at their new behest
Thy provinces reform their whilom whole.

Cæsar's three parts of Gaul, Britannia's strands
And Lusitania join with Italy
And Africa, to win the Alps and Rhine;

While on the Danube, Trajan's Dacia stands,
And calls on Greece to set the Orient free;
And only Spain forgets that she was thine.

September 6, 1916.

ENGLAND'S EFFORT

WHAT has old England ventured that will bear
The test of martyred Belgium's sacrifice
Of all for honor's sake, approach the price
France paid for loyalty, or yet compare

In pluck with what Italia's legions dare,
Who storm the Alps, and fight through fields of ice?
What that, in Death's dark ledger, will suffice
To balance patient Russia's piteous share?

As none of these did, England, with the flower
Of all her bravest having crowned the cup
All had to drink, to save each from the Huns,

Tasted its dregs when, in the midnight hour
Of Freedom's world-wide peril, she gave up
The individual freedom of her sons.

May 24, 1917.

THE LUSITANIA

(1)

OUT on the loyal Ocean's lap they sailed,
Scorning the threats of Man's disloyal foe,
Since sure that with their human rights would go
Protection from a flag which never quailed.

Alas, America, for naught availed
Thine endless, unbacked warnings to bestow
Safety on those who, now so long ago,
Were slain, and since—have only been bewailed!

The Lusitania's drowned unheeded lie,
Men, babes and women, clinging to a flag,
Which on the ocean's floor lies furled, but proud;

But which above its waves—the world asks why—
Floats impotent for peace, a flouted rag,
The shamed precursor of a people's shroud.

October 13, 1916.

AMERICA'S VERDICT

O'ER Europe's bomb-swept trench and battle field
The awful thunders of her War are heard,
Drowning the whispers of a peace deferred
Until Injustice has been forced to yield.

Yet, spite of fears which cannot be concealed,
The old world's hopes today are strangely stirred
To silence, as she listens for the word
Whereby the new world's soul shall stand revealed.

America unfolds her inmost mind,
Her doom upon herself, chooses her goal,
And paints her portrait for eternity ;

Hence as the winged words of her spokesman find
Their fated way to voice his country's soul,
Humanity asks God what they will be.

April 1, 1917.

THE LUSITANIA

(2)

NAY, not a shroud! For as a wedding-gown
For Russia's bridals with the hero hosts
Of Liberty, it rises with the ghosts
Of martyrs from the waves, eager to crown

The destined union of Mankind, and drown
Disloyalty. Unfurled between her coasts,
Columbia's flag makes good at last her boasts
Of humanism, her century-old renown.

For Belgium's and the Lusitania's sakes
Italia broke her bondage to the North,
And armed, to save the Alps from tyranny ;

So now, across the Sea, the new world breaks
Her western isolation, and sends forth
Her sons, to set the old world's valleys free.

April 13, 1917.

AVE DANTE

1321-1921

ABOVE Man's war-wracked world a veteran throng
Of singing spirits gathers in the air,
Called from the Poets' Heaven to take its share
In Right's impending victory over Wrong.

Far in its van the Eagle Eye of Song
Looms o'er Ravenna, where he died, and where
He saw God's Freedom in the dazzling glare
Of visions, which to every race belong.

Him his redeemed, united Italy—
Her Alps new crowned with Monza's iron band,
Her Hadria wedded with her Doge's ring,—

Hails as the Prophet-Bard of Liberty,
And bids the free of every tongue and land
Join in her Ave, and their tribute bring.

October 28, 1917.

THE PEACE OF GOD

PAST understanding is the Peace of God
By all that fail His Wrath to understand,
Who holds the olive in His gentle hand,
And in the other a chastising rod.

When lightnings kill at Jove's Olympian nod,
When tempests drown at Neptune's stern command,
Their deeds are His, whose face once cheered the land
With smiles of love, whose feet the seas once trod.

God grant us, then, to understand His wrath
By trusting in the justice of His will,
Whate'er its bidding, till War's trumpets cease ;

And follow listening on the painful path
Where wrongs are righted, loud His voice or still,
Who, not as man's world gives it, giveth peace.

June 22, 1917.

GERMANY

WHAT, Germany, avails thine old repute
For quaint geniality and truthfulness,
Now that in falsehood thou dost acquiesce,
And of humanity art destitute?

For, having made thyself the prostitute
Of Prussia's lust for power, thy pitiless
Ambition leaves thee naught, wherewith to dress
With love or trust a strength which none dispute.

And yet thy music, wherein thou didst reign
Supreme, and what was once thy spirit's bent,
Gemüthlichkeit, unless thy lute be riven,

Doom thee to sing, whatever Europe's pain,
Her saddest songs, and be—if thou repent—
Her dearest child, because her most forgiven.

June 28, 1917.

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