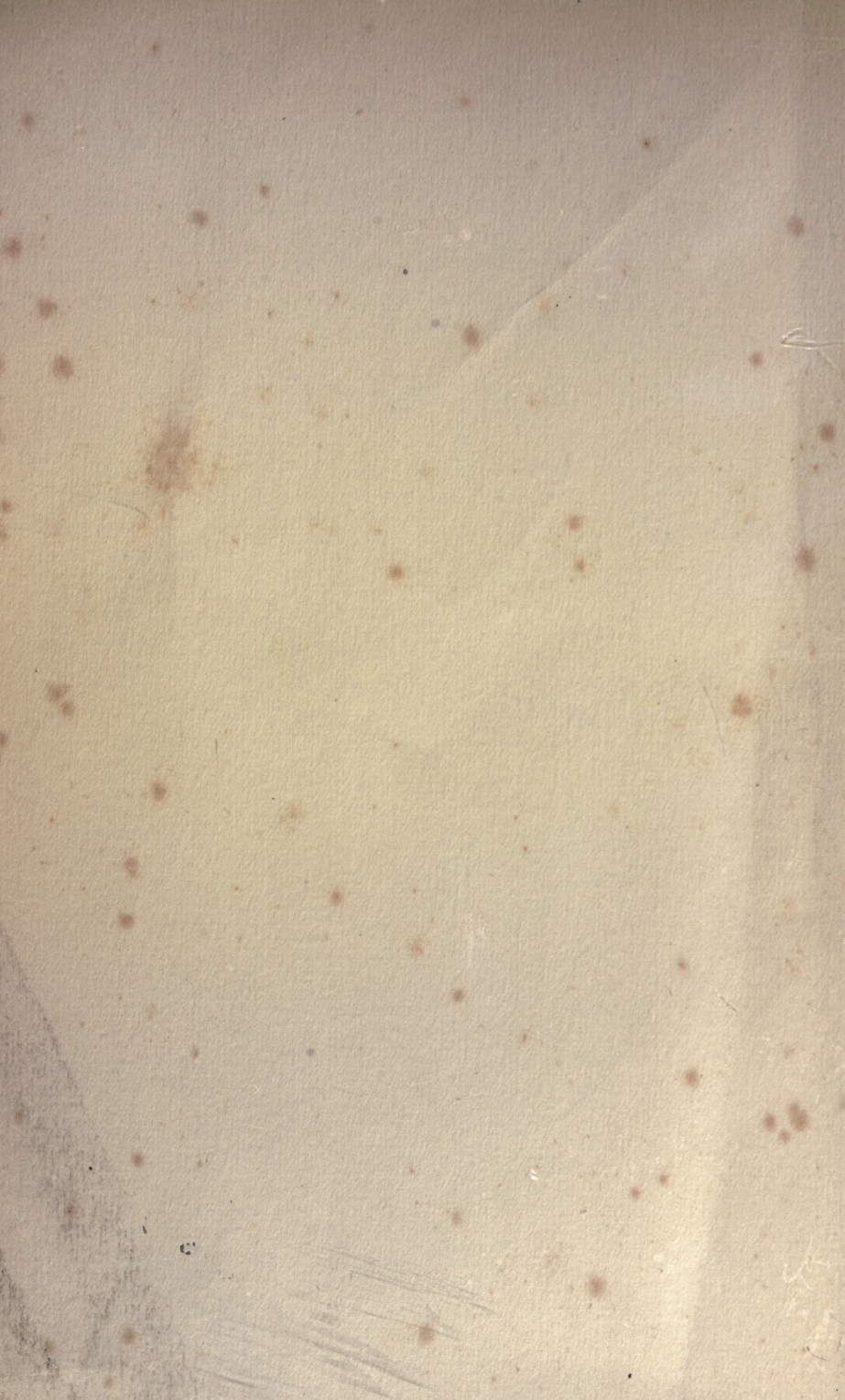




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With the author's
compliments and
kind regards.



~~W. J. B. S.~~
STUDIES IN
CONTEMPORARY
LITERATURE

BY

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY FRIEND
VIVIAN G. STARKEY,
WHO FELL AT LOOS IN 1915.



VII

PREFACE.

THESE lectures were delivered at University Hall, Bangor, during the session 1917-18. My object in giving them was to enlist the sympathies of students on behalf of the literature that is in process of formation at the present day. As the exacting demands of an academic course not infrequently leave little time for general reading, more quotation was necessary than in dealing with the well-worn classics.

The first of these lectures has been published separately by Messrs. Jarvis & Foster, and I wish here to repeat my cordial thanks to those who enabled me to quote from the works of the authors concerned. I am deeply indebted to Lord Dunsany for permission to quote from the poems of Corporal Francis Ledwidge, published by Messrs. Herbert Jenkins; to Professor W. R. Sorley who has allowed me to make extracts from *Marlborough and Other Poems* by his son, Captain C. H. Sorley; to Captain Robert Graves for poems from *Over the Brazier*; to Mrs. E. M. Freston for poems by her son, Lieut. H. R. Freston; to Lieut. Robert Nichols for his poem *The Last Morning*; to Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson for leave to include lines from Rupert Brooke's *Requiem*; to Mr. Erskine Macdonald for his great kindness in so readily permitting me to quote from Sergeant Leslie Coulson's *Outpost*, Sergeant J. W. Streets' *The Undying Splendour*, Lieut. E. F. Wilkinson's *Sunrise Dreams*, and the remarkable collection of *Soldier Poets*; to Messrs. Duckworth for excerpts from *Poems and Parodies* by Lieut. T. M. Kettle; to Mr. B. H. Blackwell for quotations from *The Quest of Truth* by Lieut. H. R. Freston; to Mr. John Murray for permission to quote from Lieut. Joseph Lee's *Workaday Warriors*; to Mr. Elkin Mathews for several poems from Private Alexander Robertson's *Comrades*; to Messrs. Chatto and Windus for the poem *The*

Last Morning from *Ardours and Endurances* by Lieut. Robert Nichols; to Mr. John Lane for quotations from *There is no Death* by Captain R. M. Denny and from Lieut. Coningsby Dawson's *Khaki Courage*; and to Messrs. Andrew Melrose for illustrative extracts taken from *A Student in Arms* by Lieut. Donald Hankey.

In connection with the other lectures I wish to express my sense of indebtedness to Mr. John Drinkwater, who has not only given me permission to quote from his works but also corrected my somewhat imperfect bibliography of his writings. Both to him and his publishers, Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson, I am extremely grateful. It is also a pleasant duty to acknowledge the information which Mr. Philip Thomas has generously placed at my disposal. It was of great service for the interpretation of Edward Thomas's work. At the same time I desire to thank Messrs. Duckworth for their permission to quote from *The Rose Acre Papers, Rest and Unrest*, and *Light and Twilight*, and Messrs. Methuen for an extract from *A Literary Pilgrimage in England*. I am also under great obligations to Mr. W. H. Davies who so willingly granted my request for leave to quote from his works. Finally I wish to mention my indebtedness to Mr. Frederick Niven, who has kindly permitted me to place an extract from his poem on the death of Edward Thomas at the head of my lecture on this author.

It is hoped that these lectures, imperfect as I know them to be, have done a little to bridge the gulf which only too often exists between university teaching and the best contemporary literature.

BANGOR, 1918.

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A

“ Prepare, prepare the iron helm of war,
Bring forth the lots, cast in the spacious orb ;
Th’ Angel of Fate turns them with mighty hands,
And casts them out upon the darken’d earth !
Prepare, prepare ! ”

(BLAKE : *War Song to Englishmen*).

“ Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust.”

(SHIRLEY : *Death the Leveller*).

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Soldier-Poets of To-day.

MY purpose in giving this lecture is not so much to embark on an attempt at literary criticism as to bring before you what has been passing through the minds of our soldier-poets during the last three years. Not all of us have the leisure to devote to such a study, and yet it is labour well bestowed. For after all, this body of poetry, whatever its intrinsic worth, represents something unique in the history of our literature. Such war-poems as have hitherto been composed have come from the pens of non-combatants. Some of the Old English poems, as for example the *Battle of Maldon*, may have been written by one who took part in the struggle, or was at least an eye-witness, but we do not know this with certainty, for even the author's name has perished. A similar obscurity enshrouds the warlike ballads of Minot about the exploits of Edward III. On coming to times when more is known of the individual poet, however, we find that all war-poems of literary merit are the work of men with no actual experience of war. In pointing out this fact, we intend no disparagement of their work. Not every soldier has a poet's power of expression, and it may well be that the vivid imagination of the great writer enables him to portray martial scenes that he has never set eyes upon. It would be folly to overlook or to belittle such spirited productions as Drayton's *Ballad of Agincourt*, Campbell's *Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, or Tennyson's ballads *The Revenge* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

The poets with whom we are about to deal differ from their predecessors. They embody the feelings of a nation in time of stress; they have looked death in the face, and they are not professional poets. Some of them had previously written poetry, but would have been unwilling to confess it. As C. H. Sorley puts it when contrasting the German and British temperaments :

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"They all write poetry and recite it with gusto to any three hours' old acquaintance. We all write poetry in England, but we write it on the bedroom washstand and lock the bedroom door, and disclaim it violently in public." The generalisation may be false, but the sentiments expressed here are doubtless characteristic of this young poet and many of his fellows. Others had probably never dreamed of trying their hand at verse. But under the strain of an unprecedented experience, of an unparalleled emotional crisis, they felt irresistibly urged to set forth their thoughts and sensations. They represent the best elements in our nation when suddenly confronted with the problems of life and death which had hitherto seemed so remote. As Robert Graves sings :

" On Achi Baba's rock their bones
Whiten, and on Flanders' plain,
But of their travellings and groans
Poetry is born again."¹

The Napoleonic wars stirred men deeply and their consequences were far-reaching. But the present crisis has been of a much more universal character, compressed within a much smaller space of time. Its effects have been all the more intense. And it is a testimony to the mysterious, undying power of poetry that these soldier-poets should have turned to it as the only adequate vehicle for conveying this experience to their fellow-men. Prior to the war, some of them, like Robert Graves, had revelled in the innovations of free verse. Their attitude was, no doubt, much the same as his in *Over the Brazier*, where he tells us :

" I now delight
In spite
Of the might
And the right
Of classic tradition,
In writing
And reciting
Straight ahead,
Without let or omission,
Just any little rhyme
In any little time,
That runs in my head."

¹From *A Renaissance* in *Over the Brazier*. This author's new volume, *Fairies and Fusiliers*, contains even more striking poems.

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When the war came, however, almost all the soldier-poets had recourse to the traditional form of metrical verse. Thus H. R. Freston invokes the old poets, saying :

“ Come, masters of a former age
And lend me magic how to sing
The music of the things I see,
The tidings that I have to bring.”

And again in *The Old Masters* he abjures free verse :

“ The clever tricks of modern verse,
With broken thought and broken line,
And nervous art, that would dispense
With the grand beauty and the fine
Calm strength the older poets knew,
How shall I find them true ?”

Perhaps the only period in our literature which offers a spectacle at all comparable to the one now before us is that of the Elizabethans. There are obvious differences. The squalor of a modern battlefield has little to inspire the spirit of knightly adventure which animated a Sir Philip Sidney. Life had a golden halo of romance when Raleigh sailed westwards towards unknown lands—a romance which is lacking to-day. Nevertheless, those were days when action and poetry went hand in hand, when even a scholar like Ben Jonson had fought on the battlefields of the Low Countries. And at least one of our fighting-men has felt conscious of this kinship with the Elizabethans. “There was a time,” says Coningsby Dawson in *Kkaki Courage*, “when we all doubted our own heroism. I think we were typical of our age. Every novel of the past ten years has been more or less a study in sentiment and self-distrust. We used to wonder what kind of stuff Drake’s men were made of that they could jest while they died. We used to contrast ourselves with them to our own disfavour. Well, we know now that when there’s a New World to be discovered we can still rise up reincarnated into spiritual pirates. It wasn’t the men of our age who were at fault, but the New World that was lacking. Our New World is the Kingdom of Heroism, the doors of which are flung so wide that the meanest of us may enter.”

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Before the war our literature ran in other channels. It was devoted to social problems as in the works of Wells and Shaw; W. H. Davies sang of the joys of the road and the delights of freedom from all conventional restraints, whilst across the pages of J. E. Flecker marched gorgeous pageants of high romance. John Masefield, it is true, differed from the rest, in that he was the founder of an energetic school of poetry based on experience, and his charm had been felt by at least one future soldier-poet, C. H. Sorley, who in 1912 wrote *A Call to Action*.

“ A thousand years have passed away ;
The sands of life are running low ;
The world is sleeping out her day ;
The day is dying—be it so.

.

It needs no thought to understand,
No speech to tell, nor sight to see
That there has come upon our land
The curse of Inactivity.

We do not see the vital point
That 'tis the eighth, most deadly, sin,
To wail, 'The world is out of joint,'—
And not attempt to put it in.

.

We question, answer, make defence,
We sneer, we scoff, we criticize,
We wail and moan our decadence,
Enquire, investigate, surmise ;

We preach and prattle, peer and pry
And fit together two and two :
We ponder, argue, shout, swear, lie—
We will not, for we cannot, *DO*.

Pale puny soldiers of the pen,
Absorbed in this your inky strife,
Act as of old, when men were men,
England herself and life yet life.”

It is such men of action, whose experience, intensely felt and transformed by imaginations working at white heat, is embodied in the work of the soldier-poets.

When Rupert Brooke wrote his poem *Peace*, he was no doubt moved by a feeling akin to that expressed in Sorley's *Call*

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to Action. He was painfully conscious of the pettiness, the selfishness and narrowness of the old life, and gave vent to this dissatisfaction in the cry :

“ Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary.”

Yet it would be a fatal error to regard Brooke as a blatant jingo, revelling in war for its own sake. Nothing could be less true of this passionate devotee who brought so many offerings to the shrine of beauty. Nor can such a charge be levelled at English poetry as a whole either before or since the war. It has been neither insultingly aggressive nor boastfully arrogant. On the contrary, from the work of our numerous soldier-poets, whatever their shortcomings in the way of expression, there gleams forth a lofty enthusiasm and ardent idealism. As Eric F. Wilkinson wrote, the sons of Britain come :

“ Not in vainglory with welter of wordiness,
Not in the boastings her enemies pour.”

Vapourings of the kind here referred to are conspicuous by their absence.

Equally striking is the attitude of the soldier-poet towards his foes. In the vast majority of poems the Germans are never even alluded to. They might almost be living on another planet. No doubt the soldier-poet has at one time or another felt bitterness and hatred, but the English equivalent of the *Hymn of Hate* does not exist. On the other hand, we find a tribute paid to the “brave men of both sides” who sleep their last, long sleep together. And C. H. Sorley can even rise to such heights of detachment as we find in his sonnet *To Germany* :

“ You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.
But gropers both through fields of thought confined,
We stumble and we do not understand.
You only saw your future bigly planned,
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.”

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When it is peace, then we may view again
With new - won eyes each other's truer form
And wonder. Grown more loving - kind and warm
We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,
When it is peace. But until peace, the storm,
The darkness and the thunder and the rain."

And what a feeling of genuine humanity breathes from Alexander Robertson's lines: *Thou shalt love thine enemies*, written on seeing the letters, cards, soldier's book and prayer-book found on a dead German.

"They were not meant for our too curious eyes
Or our imaginations to surmise
From what they tell, much that they leave untold.
Strangers and foemen we, yet we behold,
Sad and subdued, thy solace and thy cheer.
Even here we see thee as thou did'st appear,—
Tall, with fair hair, blue eyes. Heinrich the name
The Lord's anointed gave thee; Rome did claim
The homage of thy spirit: thou wert young,—
All this we know who read thy mother - tongue,
As that a farm Thuringian was thine,
Thou dead defender of imperial Rhine.
Thou had'st a wife and children: on this card
They are depicted; on another, marred
And soiled and crushed, thy mother, too, we see.
And here are cards with rustic eulogy
Of scenes that thou did'st know, old woods of pine
Through which doth pass a sunlit railway line.
These letters of thy wife, oh warrior slain,
No anguish tell, they give no hint of pain,
Cheerful her words, although the heart did weep
In solitude, thy babes and hers asleep,
The while on winter nights the wind would roar
And send its chills along the flagstone floor.
This was thy book of prayer, and underlined
The words that solaced most thine anxious mind;
Prayers for thy home and for thy comrades dead,
Such as for thee by her thou loved'st are said.
For thou art gone and nevermore shalt sway
The flaming scythe in some broad field of hay,
Or guide the plough or golden harvests reap.
Of thee, alas, thy children cannot keep
A single memory. But one doth pass
Oft to thy cenotaph and on the grass
In prayer doth kneel, still as memorial stone,
Too sad for tears, too proud by far to moan."

Coningsby Dawson, the author of *Khaki Courage*, tells how in

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the midst of one fierce engagement, a British officer saw a German officer entangled in the barbed wire and suffering agonies. After a while the British officer could stand the sight no longer, and, in spite of the shells bursting all around, left the trench, freed the German and carried him to the enemy. Seeing this noble deed, both sides ceased fire. The German commander came forward, and unfastening his own Iron Cross, pinned it on the breast of the British officer. Such chivalry towards the wounded is very marked in our soldier-poets, in spite of the inhuman spectacles round about them. This is illustrated by Joseph Lee's poem *German Prisoners*.

“ When first I saw you in the curious street
Like some platoon of soldier ghosts in grey,
My mad impulse was all to smite and slay,
To spit upon you—tread you 'neath my feet.
But when I saw how each sad soul did greet
My gaze with no sign of defiant frown,
How from tired eyes looked spirits broken down,
How each face showed the pale flag of defeat,
And doubt, despair, and disillusionment,
And how were grievous wounds on many a head,
And on your garb red - faced was other red ;
And how you stopped as men whose strength was spent,
I knew that we had suffered each as other,
And could have grasped your hand and cried ‘ My brother.’ ”

Mr. St. John Adcock has recently attempted to classify our soldier-poets and to set up a distinction between the Old Army and the New. He sees in the former the type of the born warrior, who revels in fighting by nature, whilst the new soldier has adopted his calling only for the time being, hates war at heart and longs for peace. It is, however, difficult to maintain such a rigid line of demarcation. There are soldier-poets of the New Army who have written war-like strains, and Julian Grenfell, usually taken as the type of the Old Army officer, knows other moods than the purely martial.

Julian Grenfell, the eldest son of Lord Desborough, was born in 1888, and educated at Eton and Balliol. In 1910 he obtained a commission in the Royal Dragoons and went out to India to join his

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regiment. The year following they were ordered to South Africa, and whilst here Grenfell distinguished himself as an athlete. He jumped a wall 6ft. 5in. high on horseback, and defeated a famous boxer at Johannesburg after a memorable struggle. Yet Grenfell was not merely a great athlete. His leisure was devoted to literature, and in one letter he wrote: "I hate material books, centred on whether people are successful. I like books about artists and philosophers and dreamers, and anybody who is a little off his dot." Elsewhere he wrote: "I agree with what you say about success, but I like the people best who take it as it comes or doesn't come, and are busy about unpractical and ideal things in their heart of hearts all the time."

On September 20th, 1914, Grenfell reached England and went to Salisbury Plain. The regiment was sent to Flanders on October 5th, and in May, 1915, he sent home his famous poem *Into Battle* :—

" The naked earth is warm with Spring,
And with green grass and bursting trees
Leans to the sun's gaze glorying,
And quivers in the sunny breeze ;
And Life is Colour and Warmth and Light,
And a striving evermore for these ;
And he is dead who will not fight ;
And who dies fighting has increase.

The fighting man shall from the sun
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth ;
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,
And with the trees to newer birth ;
And find, when fighting shall be done,
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.

All the bright company of Heaven
Hold him in their high comradeship,
The Dog - Star, and the Sisters Seven,
Orion's Belt and sworded hip.

The woodland trees that stand together,
They stand to him each one a friend ;
They gently speak in the windy weather,
They guide to valley and ridge's end.

The kestrel hovering by day,
And the little owls that call by night,
Bid him be swift and keen as they,
As keen of ear, as swift of sight.

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The blackbird sings to him, ' Brother, brother,
If this be the last song you shall sing—
Sing well, for you may not sing another ;
Brother, sing.'

In dreary, doubtful, waiting hours,
Before the brazen frenzy starts,
The horses show him nobler powers ;
O patient eyes, courageous hearts !

And when the burning moment breaks,
And all things else are out of mind,
And only Joy of Battle takes
Him by the throat, and makes him blind,

Through joy and blindness he shall know,
Not caring much to know, that still
Nor lead nor steel shall reach him, so
That it be not the Destined Will.

The thundering line of battle stands,
And in the air Death moans and sings ;
But Day shall clasp him with strong hands,
And Night shall fold him in soft wings."

On May 13th, Grenfell was wounded near Ypres, and died in hospital at Boulogne a few days later. The weather was hot, and amongst the last words he uttered were those of the song from Gilbert Murray's translation of *Hippolytus* :

" O for a deep and dewy spring,
With runlets cold to draw and drink,
And a great meadow blossoming,
Long-grassed, and poplars in a ring,
To rest me by the brink."

Whilst his Alma Mater, Oxford, was but little in the thoughts of Grenfell, it figures all the more prominently in the lines of another soldier-poet, Alexander Robertson. The latter was a graduate of Edinburgh, who in 1913 took the Oxford B.Litt., and who, when the war broke out, was lecturer on history at Sheffield. He joined the army as a private in September, 1914, sailed for Egypt in December, 1915, and was afterwards moved to France, where he fell early in July, 1916. His poem *On Passing Oxford in a Troop Train* is not without a certain pathetic interest. He reflects that two years have scarcely elapsed since he stood before the Vice-Chancellor to receive his degree :

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“ Had some one on that radiant morn
Foretold this day, a scholar's scorn
For wondrous stories would have seemed
Enough to answer what he dreamed.”

He recalls memories of happier bygone days—Cumnor Hills with
Arnold's Tree, Iffley Church,

“ And Merton tower and Christ Church spire
And Magdalen, where the May-day choir
The eucharistic hymn doth sing,
And old walls where old creepers cling,
And great umbrageous trees which hide
Still waters, silent lawns and wide
Of gardens old, wherein create
Their dreams the youth collegiate.”

Recollections of merry excursions, of long days of luxurious ease
on the river, of the twilight joy of the country inn, throng to his
mind. He ponders upon how he used to retire to a quiet nook
in the Bodleian, and

“ Find a scholar's joys
In volumes brought by tardy boys,”

or to the Radcliffe Gallery,

“ When the town
Holds dangers for the unworn gown,
And one avoids by devious ways
The Academic Argus' gaze.”

In other poems, written out at the front, Robertson wishes himself
back in the Library of New College,

“ Finding quaint wisdom in old volumes rare,”

or he dreams of his friends reassembled in the College garden.

As he sailed through the blue waters of the Mediterranean,
thoughts of Greece, Troy and Rome came to him. Whilst in
Egypt he knew nothing but the dull routine of army life, and his
longings to see the great monuments of the past had to be sternly
repressed. In his lines *On Leaving Egypt*, he says :

“ As men whose lives in pain and toil of hand
Have passed and have not known the high delight
Of Beauty's Day or Knowledge' star-lit Night ;
Even such are we who leave this storied land
And have but knowledge of its dreary plains

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Of sand bush - sprinkled, and its orient hills,
Its mid - day ardours and its midnight chills ;
Yet have not seen the splendour of its fanes,
Upraised to Allah's glory, nor the tombs
Near Memphis city, nor the solemn glooms
Of ancient palm groves, nor the giant face
Inscrutable ; and have not in some place
Of quiet and shadow by the shining Nile
Mused on long - vanished empires for a while."

From what has been said, it will readily be perceived that in Robertson we have a type of the student-in-arms. This appears also in his mental outlook. On the whole he is an optimist, and in his *Lines before Going*, he tells us that he cherishes

" Hope in beneficent pain,
Hope that the truth of the world is not what appears,
Hope in the triumph of man for the price of his tears."

Yet even here his optimism is not spontaneous and buoyant. It is overcast by a shadow of doubt, and he is "not assured." This slight strain of pessimism displays itself even more clearly in his poem *Survivors*, apparently written when he returned home on leave. He is seized with exultation at the prospect, but then reflects :

" That the years
To come will bring their own distress, their tears,
Their disappointments, their monotony,
That as men's lives have been their lives will be,
Though we have striven for the world's gain ;
War is not ended, and the world has pain
In store, and though the stream of Time is set
Towards the far infinite of Beauty, yet
Slow is its flowing, shaded oft its way,
Or dull and sullied amid flats of clay."

A very different type from this Scottish stoic is Tom Kettle. The editor of his poems describes him as "a genial cynic, a pleasant pessimist, a fellow of infinite jest—infinite sadness. His prototypes were Hamlet or the Melancholy Jacques." He may have figured as a cynic and pessimist, but his war poems suggest that all this was but a cloak for a very genuine idealism and optimism. His poem *On Leaving Ireland* may be quoted by way of illustration. As the boat left the coast, he tells us, "the sun

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was a clear globe of blood—with a trail of pure blood vibrating to us across the waves. It dropped into darkness before we left the deck. Some lines came to me, suggested by a friend who thought the mood cynical." Then follow these verses :

“ As the sun died in blood, and hill and sea
Grew to an altar, red with mystery,
One came who knew me (it may be overmuch)
Seeking the cynical and staining touch,
But I, against the great sun's burial
Thought only of bayonet - flash and bugle call,
And saw him as God's eye upon the deep,
Closed in the dream in which no women weep,
And knew that even I shall fall on sleep.”

The foreboding expressed in the concluding line was unfortunately destined to prove only too true before the end of the year.

At the outbreak of war, Kettle was profoundly moved by the spectacle of bleeding Belgium. In spite of the active part he had taken in Irish political controversy, he threw in his lot with the British Army, to help to right this flagrant wrong. And in *A Song of the Irish Armies* he exclaims :

“ Not for this did our fathers fall ;
That truth, and pity, and love, and all
Should break in dust at a trumpet call,
Yea ! all things clean and old.”

He was inspired with the feeling of the mediæval warrior entering on a holy war and no soldier-poet has written more “soul-animating strains” than those in which he cries :

“ Then lift the flag of the last Crusade !
And fill the ranks of the last Brigade !
March on to the fields where the world's remade,
And the Ancient Dreams come true !”

The same nobility of purpose, though in a more pathetic form, breathes from the lines addressed to his little daughter, “my darling rosebud,” from Guillemont on the Somme (September 4th, 1916). If she asks in future days why her father left her “to dice with death,” she must know that he died

“ For a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.”

In these days, after over three years of drab waiting, of dreary

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disappointment and wholesale slaughter, a mood of weariness and disillusionment is apt to come upon us. Yet, on reading such lines as these, we recover something of our early enthusiasm. Kettle's indomitable ardour is still a source of inspiration.

Though Kettle does not dwell on the horrors of war, they loom up like a hideous nightmare in the work of many soldier-poets. Such poems tell of the fierce inward struggle that must be fought out before a refined and highly civilised nature can learn the grim trade of war. The fear of death on the part of youth in its prime is natural, but it has to be overcome. And it is overcome, though only after a great effort in which every moral fibre is subjected to an almost overwhelming strain. "The war correspondent," says Donald Hankey in *A Student in Arms*, "sees the faces of the men as they march towards the Valley of the Shadow, sees the steadiness of eye and mouth, hears the cheery jest. He sees them advance into the Valley without flinching. He sees some of them return, tired, dirty, strained, but still with a quip for the passer-by. He gives us a picture of a man without nerves, without sensitiveness, without imagination, schooled to face death as they would face rain or any trivial incident of everyday life. The 'Tommy' of the war correspondent is not a human being, but a lay figure with a gift for repartee . . . We soldiers know better. We know that each one of those men is an individual, full of human affections, many of them writing tender letters home every week, each one longing with all his soul for the end of this hateful business of war which divides him from all that he loves best in life. We know that every one of these men has a healthy repugnance to being maimed, and a human shrinking from hurt and from the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The knowledge of all this does not do away with the even tread of the troops as they pass, the steady eye and mouth, the cheery jest ; but it makes these a hundred times more significant."

The possibility of death confronts every soldier and has to be faced. Questionings arise within him as to what follows after

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an untimely fate. This revolt is very marked in some of the poems of Robert Graves, who, like so many others in the first flush of youth, stood aghast at the bloodstained fields of France. In *The Shadow of Death*, this plaintive cry escapes his lips :

“ Here’s an end to my art !
I must die and I know it,
With battle murder at my heart—
Sad death for a poet !

Oh, my songs never sung
And my plays to darkness blown !
I am still so young, so young,
And life was my own.”

What is it then that enables the soldier to overcome his natural fears and to face death without flinching? Moral courage; the belief in the justice of the cause under whose banner he fights and the consciousness that he is helping, perhaps humbly, obscurely and indirectly, but nevertheless contributing to the creation of a fairer world for future generations to live in. This faith has been set forth in three brief poems of singular beauty by Richard Denny. He was educated at Winchester and St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, taking his medical degree in 1909. But the work of a doctor did not appeal to him, and when the war broke out he was in Florence working with Gordon Craig at his school for the improvement of the art of the theatre. In July, 1914, he penned his lines called *Love and Life* :

“ For now I know what loving means,
Who sought it many a mile :—
A great song rising from the Earth,
A burst of sun, a second birth,
A shouting of clean winds, and Life—
And Life how well worth while !”

War obtruded his grim visage upon these scenes of perfect happiness, and Denny at once returned to England. He was out in Flanders before the year was over, and was wounded at Contalmaison during the Somme offensive in July, 1916. He succumbed to his wounds at Rouen twelve days later.

The sight of the destruction and misery wrought by war

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moved him deeply. His heart bled as he gazed upon the smouldering farms and villages or gaunt, charred ruins. Still more did he feel for their unhappy inmates, now driven forth from their own hearth to wander into exile—old men and women and little children, too dazed or too young to understand the meaning of the blow that had fallen upon them. And as he thought of all this misery, he exclaimed :

“ Ah ! moon across the trampled fields,
Hanging low in a stifling sky,
Is it for this that we have lived ?
Is it for this that we must die ? ”

Any doubts which assailed him as to the utility of all this bloodshed and suffering were dispelled by a vision of the slain marching on in triumph towards the hope of a new dawn. He describes how he lay wrapped in sleep on a sultry night and saw before him a procession of those who had just died. Pale, battered and stained with blood their ghostly ranks marched past in utter weariness. But suddenly there flashed forth a light which shone upon their haggard faces and revealed the gleam of victory in their eyes. Onwards they rode upright and confident, aiming for some distant goal.

“ E'en as I looked they left my eager sight,
Like early morning mists that drift away,
And in the waiting East there showed a light
To tell the coming of another day ! ”

Finally, Richard Dennys arrived at a mood of absolute tranquillity and, cheered by the thought of future generations, he went to make his sacrifice gladly :

“ But now I know that nought is purposeless,
And, even in destruction, we can find
A Power whose steady motive is to bless
The ultimate redemption of mankind.
And 'tis a goodly thing to think upon,
Whene'er a doubting mind no solace brings,
That mighty Destiny sweeps ever on
Our little world to higher, better things.
From small come great, from great still greater things,
And day is sprung from night as peace from strife ;
Grieve not the fall of nations or of kings
If from their death is born a worthier life.

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Nothing is useless, nothing ever vain ;
No heart e'er breaks, no eye made dim with tears,
No drop of blood is shed, no grief, no pain
But yields its gift to enrich the coming years."

Here, truly, if ever, was the Happy Warrior of whom Wordsworth wrote.

Such men may have their imperfections, but for all that they are a revelation of the greatness of human nature. Under conditions of appalling horror which only the pen of a Dante or the hand of a Doré could portray, the spirit rises triumphant over the fears of the outward shell. The mind achieves a serenity of which it is incapable in the bustle of normal life. Man sees his comrades fall, and life in all its splendour is prodigally spent. Thus it is that a conviction arises within the soldier that the spirit is greater than the flesh ; the solemn mysteries of life and death are revealed to him, and peace settles within his soul. The splendour of the modern battlefield does not consist of the magnificent panoply of former days, for the "pride, pomp and circumstance of war" have vanished into the mists of the past. It is a spiritual splendour, and can be found only in the mind of the soldier. The squalor and desolation of the theatre of war are a revolting and nauseating sight ; it is the great-heartedness of even the humblest soldier that stirs and uplifts the comrades around him and the anxious watchers at home.

"Were one to paint the spirit of this War," says Coningsby Dawson, "he would depict a mud landscape, blasted trees, an iron sky ; wading through the slush and shell-holes would come a file of bowed figures, more like outcasts from the Embankment than soldiers. They're loaded down like pack animals, their shoulders are rounded, they're wearied to death, but they go on and go on. There's no 'To Glory' about what we're doing out here, there's no flash of swords or splendour of uniforms. There are only very tired men determined to carry on. The war will be won by tired men who could never again pass an insurance test, a mob of broken counter-jumpers, ragged ex-plumbers and quite

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unheroic persons. We're civilians in khaki, but because of the ideals for which we fight, we've managed to acquire soldiers' hearts."

Another soldier-poet who knows the joy of self-conquest and the peace that ensues is Robert Nichols, the author of *Ardours and Endurances*. His poetry is characterised by stark realism, but in *The Last Morning* there is no trace of the hectic excitement which he infuses into some of his work. We feel that he is on the heights, enwrapped in an atmosphere of serenity, and defies death with superb calm. His mood is reminiscent of that in which Henley declares himself "the captain of his soul." He says :

"Come now, O Death,
While I am proud,
While joy and awe are breath,
And heart beats loud !

While all around me stand
Men that I love,
The wind blares loud, the grand
Sun wheels above.

Naked I stand to-day
Before my doom,
Welcome what comes my way,
Whatever come.

What is there more to ask
Than that I have ?—
Companions, love, a task,
And a deep grave !

Come then, Eternity,
If thou my lot ;
Having been thus, I cannot be
As if I had not.

Naked I wait my doom !
Earth enough shroud !
Death, in thy narrow room
Man can lie proud !"

After great experiences like this, the preoccupations of the past seem very petty and aspirations for the future mere trifles. "Love and the future, and all the sweet and tender dreams of bygone days," says Coningsby Dawson "are like a house in which

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the blinds are lowered and from which the sight is gone." And Robert Nichols exclaims, "Was there love once? I have forgotten her." All his love and all his grief are bestowed upon the comrades who share his hardships and dangers.

The sense of comradeship finds an especially dignified expression in the poems of J. W. Streets. The latter might be quoted as an illustration of the old saying that the poet is born and not made, though it may be remarked that so great a genius as Tennyson was of opinion that the poet is both born and made. Before the war Streets was a Derbyshire miner, who had up till then not fully realised his gift for poetry. On the outbreak of hostilities he hastened to join Kitchener's army, and he is essentially the poetical representative of that army, for his work is imbued with the spirit that brought men of all classes to the colours in the early days of the war. He was sent out to Egypt and from there to France, where he fell during the Somme advance on July 1st, 1916. His company officer afterwards wrote of Streets as follows: "The only time we ever saw him shaken was when he lost several of his section, with whom he had lived and trained for over eighteen months." This sympathy of the poet with fallen comrades is displayed in two poems—*A Soldier's Funeral* and *Gallipoli*—both of them marked by a quiet dignity, singularly appropriate to his theme. The first of them runs thus:

"No splendid show of solemn funeral rite,
No stricken mourners following his bier,
No peal of organ reaching thro' his night,
Is rendered him whom now we bury here.

'Tis but a soldier stricken in the fight,
A youth who flung his passion into life,
Flung scorn at Death, fought true for Freedom's might,
Till death did close his vision in the strife.

No splendid rite is here—yet lay him low,
Ye comrades of his youth he fought beside,
Close where the winds do sigh and wild flowers grow,
Where the sweet brook doth babble by his side,
No splendour, yet we lay him tenderly
To rest, his requiem the artillery."

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Gallipoli was one of the poems which first drew attention to the work of Streets. It is as follows :

“ Upon the margin of a rugged shore
There is a spot, now barren, desolate,
A place of graves, sodden with human gore
That Time will hallow, Memory consecrate.

There lie the ashes of the mighty dead,
The youth who lit with flame Obscurity,
Fought true for Freedom, won, thro' rain of lead,
Undying fame, their immortality.

The stranger wand'ring when the war is over,
The ploughman there driving his coulter deep,
The husbandmen who golden harvests reap,—
From hill and ravine, from each plain and cover
Will hear a shout, see phantoms on the marge,
See men again making a deathless charge.”

This idea of the immortal fame won by the soldier reappears in the poem called *The Dead : A Requiem*.

“ There is a place beyond the bourne of Time,
A niche within the archives of Eternity,
Where souls that touched on earth a chord sublime
Dwell in concordant spirit - harmony :
There these repose, who gave their love, their youth,
To feed the dying, sacred flame of Truth.”

And the poet consoles himself that the illustrious example of the dead will be an inspiration to future generations :

“ Youth only reaches greatness when he dies
In fullest prime that love and truth may live.”

The favourite poet of Streets seems to have been Shelley, and as he read the *Ode to the Skylark* in the trenches, he felt himself transported to the distant realms of dreamland. Nor was his work, though widely differing from and far inferior to that of Shelley, such as to be dismissed with a smile of contempt by the great master. We see him at his best, perhaps, in two poems on Death—the one entitled *Triumph*, the other an *Impression*. Let them speak for themselves. *Triumph* embodies the poet's feelings as he wandered through a pinewood near Hurdcott Camp before leaving for France :

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“ Thus dreaming in the shadows of the pines,
Feeling the presage of the unborn years,
I know that Youth will brave the dark confines
And wrest from death his diadem of years.
I know that should I still and prostrate lie
Amid Death’s harvest there on Belgium’s plain,
No false regret shall scorning wander by
And taunt me that my Youth hath been in vain.
Rather in my last moments will I live
My life’s past purpose rich in destiny,
Its scorn of Ease, its eagerness to give
Challenge to all, blind to eternity.
Death will not, cannot wrest from out my mind,
The thought that Love its life in death can find.”

The *Impression* of death gives first a brief vision of the past and all its happiness and grief, then comes the charge and rest.

“ A breath of wind ; a fragrant memory
Soft music and the magic of a song ;
A night beneath whose moonlight pale and strong
Two souls thro’ love behold eternity.
A mem’ry of Love’s hours with gladness pent ;
Of Youth and Joy dancing high carnival ;
A fading of Love’s vision magical ;
A parting which Youth’s hope with dumb grief rent :
This hallow’d mem’ry dying on a deep
And bitter sigh : a movement on the marge ;
The *Élan* of men rushing to the charge ;
A stab of pain ; a thought ; a smile ; then sleep.”

Another young poet of promise was Leslie Coulson, a London journalist, who enlisted as a private in September, 1914. In December of that year his battalion was sent to Malta and thence to Egypt. Coulson passed through the inferno of Gallipoli with only a slight wound, and in April, 1916, sailed for France. He took part in the Somme campaign, and was almost continuously in the trenches from July 1st to October 7th, when, in the van of a charge near Lesboeufs, he was mortally wounded.

“ Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said—
This is my own, my native land ? ”

asks Scott.

Certainly that does not hold good of our soldier-poets. They do not talk glibly of patriotism and idealism—the words are almost entirely foreign to their tongue. But a profound

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attachment to their homes and to their country can easily be discerned in their work. Nowhere does it appear more distinctly than in the poetry of Leslie Coulson. After all, this is but natural, for before the war it was his chief delight to shake off the dust of Fleet Street and tramp the counties of southern and western England—Sussex, Surrey, Dorset and Devon. Writing of the havoc made by war on the Somme, he says: "This murder of old stone, and lichened thatches, this shattering of little old churches and homesteads brings the tragedy home to me more acutely. I think to find an English village like this would almost break my heart." It is to these English villages, leafy lanes, whitewashed cottages, and old-fashioned inns that his mind turns in so many of his poems. Coulson was a lover of nature, and even amidst the terrors and horrors of war, the beauty of nature is to him a sustaining power. This appears in *The Rainbow*, a poem based on the words of Genesis: "And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud." It runs thus:

" I watch the white dawn gleam,
 To the thunder of hidden guns.
I hear the hot shells scream
Through skies as sweet as a dream
 Where the silver dawnbreak runs.
And stabbing of light
Scorches the virginal white.
But I feel in my being the old, high, sanctified thrill,
And I thank the gods that the dawn is beautiful still.

From death that hurtles by
 I crouch in the trench day-long,
But up to a cloudless sky
From the ground where our dead men lie
 A brown lark soars in song
Through the tortured air,
Rent by the shrapnel's flare,
Over the troubleless dead he carols his fill,
And I thank the gods that the birds are beautiful still.

Where the parapet is low
 And level with the eye,
Poppies and cornflowers glow
And the corn sways to and fro
 In a pattern against the sky.

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The gold stalks hide
Bodies of men who died
Charging at dawn through the dew to be killed or to kill,
I thank the gods that the flowers are beautiful still.

When night falls dark we creep
In silence to our dead.
We dig a few feet deep
And leave them there to sleep—
But blood at night is red,
Yea, even at night,
And a dead man's face is white.
And I dry my hands that are also trained to kill,
And I look at the stars—for the stars are beautiful still."

Coulson had an indestructible faith in the enduring character of beauty. The hideous may triumph for a time, but ultimately it must yield to beauty. This acquires a symbolical significance, as applied to the war in his poem *Beauty* :

"The seed of beauty is in all things sown,
There is no ugliness that will not bring
Its meed of beauty when the time has grown
Ripe for its harvesting.

Nothing uncomely that will ever stand,
That will not yield to beauty in the end ;
Nothing is shapen that the magic hand
Of beauty shall not mend.

Do we lose heart that ugly things abide,
That we are passing ere the change begin ?
Have we not eyes to see the endless tide
Of beauty sweeping in ?"

One can well understand that it was not without a wrench that Coulson bade farewell to his world with its visions of beauty, to perform the work of a soldier—a grim task, repugnant to his sensitive nature. In the poem *The World of One* he tells us that before the war he was

"King of all that I could seek
Lord of the world of one.
But out of this has come a day
When I hear a bugle call ;
And forth I go from a world of one,
To serve for a world of all."

If there was one doctrine clearly laid down in English literature

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just before the war, it was the right and duty of every man to develop his own individuality to its utmost capacity, his legitimate claim to self-realisation. In Coulson, who like most of his young contemporaries had done homage to this ideal, a new conception sprang up—that of sacrifice, of serving his fellows, present and future. Yet he evidently felt it bitter that all his young and ardent hopes should be withered by the cold grasp of Death. This mood is reflected in *Who made the Law?* A tragic interest attaches to this poem, for it was found amongst his effects after his death and evidently contains the last lines he wrote before going into the action which was to end his life.

“ Who made the Law that men should die in meadows ?
Who spake the word that blood should splash in lanes ?
Who gave it forth that gardens should be boneyards ?
Who spread the hills with flesh, and blood, and brains ?
Who made the Law ?

Who made the Law that death should stalk the village ?
Who spake the word to kill among the sheaves,
Who gave it forth that death should lurk in hedgerows,
Who flung the dead among the fallen leaves ?
Who made the Law ?

Those who return shall find that peace endures,
Find old things old, and know the things they knew,
Walk in the garden, slumber by the fireside,
Share the peace of dawn, and dream amid the dew—
Those who return.

Those who return shall till the ancient pastures,
Clean-hearted men shall guide the plough-horse reins,
Some shall grow apples and flowers in the valleys,
Some shall go courting in summer down the lanes—
THOSE WHO RETURN.

But who made the Law ? The Trees shall whisper to him !
‘ See, see the blood—the splashes on the bark !’
Walking the meadows, he shall hear bones crackle,
And fleshless mouths shall gibber in silent lanes at dark.
Who made the Law ?

Who made the Law ? At noon upon the hillside
His ears shall hear a moan, his cheeks shall feel a breath,
And all along the valleys, past gardens, croft, and homesteads,
He who made the Law,
He who made the Law,
HE who made the Law shall walk alone with Death.
WHO made the Law ?”

In one of his last letters Coulson wrote: “ If I should fall, do

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not grieve for me. I shall be one with the wind and the sun and the flowers." No more fitting epitaph could be found for this proud and noble spirit.

Not less devoted to the homeland than Leslie Coulson was Francis Ledwidge. The latter was of humble origin, and indeed at one time a scavenger on the roads of Ireland. It is unfortunate that he should have been labelled "the scavenger poet," for those who are familiar with his tender, haunting and beautiful verse cannot help feeling the name ill-chosen. At the outbreak of war Ledwidge joined the Inniskilling Fusiliers in which his friend and literary adviser, Lord Dunsany, held the rank of captain. The battalion saw service in Egypt, Serbia, Greece and France, where Ledwidge met with his death. No matter where the poet goes, the memory of his native land pursues him and he sings of the fields and birds of Meath. It is only occasionally that the war intrudes upon his *Songs of Peace*. For a moment it flickers like lightning on the horizon and then is gone. In his poem *To a distant one*, he explains that there is so much to be accomplished in life, that he must needs leave love to grieve at the trysting-place till fame be won. On another occasion he looks forward to the days of peace, when he will again be able to take down his lute and sing of the gentle creatures whose home is the brake and thicket. Yet he too at times felt the chill hand of death upon him, and prepared himself for what might and eventually did come. The poems *In the Shadows* and *After* both express this foreboding, whilst elsewhere he says :

" My rose of youth is overblown
And trembles to the fall."

In this Irish soldier literature lost a singer whose fairy-like notes will long be missed.

There is one name which I have purposely left over to the last—that of Rupert Brooke. Since he took part in the expedition to Antwerp, and more especially since his death in the Ægean in the spring of 1915, his name has become a household word in many lands. To the younger generation he stands in

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much the same relation as Sir Philip Sidney to the Elizabethans. A youth with the beauty of a Greek god, a master-singer with a rare command of beauteous imagery, snatched away in the heyday of life whilst engaged on a noble and chivalrous task—no wonder that a halo of romance has come to enshrine his form. But what is the permanent worth of his poetry and that of the other soldier-poets?

It is notoriously difficult to arrive at a just estimate of contemporary literature, and the difficulty is more than doubled when our feelings are so deeply involved as in this case. Harsh criticism of these poems would be ungrateful on our part, for we cannot forget the conditions under which they were written. On more than one occasion the soldier-poet has penned his lines to an accompaniment of roaring cannon and some verses even reached home on bloodstained fragments of paper. There has been little time to retouch, to file and polish, so that imperfections are often evident even to the casual glance. The mastery of rime and metre, and the flow of words are not always equal to the poet's emotion. The feeling is unmistakably genuine, but not infrequently it fails to achieve that distinction of expression which marks the greatest poetry. And it is only by the test of artistic attainment that posterity will judge this work. Yet even if our descendants condemn the weaknesses we have noted, they can scarcely fail to appreciate the virility, sincerity, nobility, dignity and pathos of these poets. Much that the soldier-poets have written is no doubt ephemeral, and how much will live on to future generations we know not. But a few poems of Rupert Brooke at least are proof against the slowly-gnawing tooth of time. Amongst these is his proud requiem with which we conclude :

“Blow, bugles, blow ! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage ;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again ;
And we have come into our heritage.”

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“ Der Mai ist gekommen, die Bäume schlagen aus,
Da bleibe, wer Lust hat, mit Sorgen zu Haus!
Wie die Wolken wandern am himmlischen Zelt,
So steht auch mir der Sinn in die weite, weite Welt.

.
Frisch auf drum, frisch auf im hellen Sonnenstrahl!
Wohl über die Berge, wohl durch das tiefe Tal!
Die Quellen erklingen, die Bäume rauschen all,
Mein Herz ist wie 'ne Lerche und stimmt ein mit Schall.

.
Und find' ich keine Herberg, so lieg' ich zu Nacht
Wohl unter blauem Himmel, die Sterne halten Wacht;
Im Winde die Linde, die rauscht mich ein gemach,
Es küsset in der Früh' das Morgenrot mich wach.

O Wandern, o Wandern, du freie Burschenlust!
Da wehet Gottes Odem so frisch in die Brust,
Da singet und jauchzet das Herz zum Himmelszelt;
Wie bist du doch so schön, o du weite, weite Welt!“

(EMANUEL GEIBEL).



Mr. W. H. Davies.

If there is any justification for the use of the biographical method in attempting to interpret the personality of a poet, there is surely ample justification in the case of Mr. W. H. Davies, for his life throws much light on the nature of the man and lends additional meaning to his poetry. It has, moreover, the supreme advantage of being singularly interesting. This is a life that grips us and we are unusually fortunate in having it as told by the poet himself. It bears the strange title *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*.

Mr. Davies is a native of Newport in Monmouthshire, where he was born in 1870. He had therefore all the stimulus, physical and spiritual, possessed by those who grow up in sight of the hills, the forest, and the sea. Quite near his home were the beautiful valley of the Usk, the woods of Gwent and the hills which dominate the whole. Almost at his door was the lovely dale of Alteryne, a green solitude with cattle browsing in the rich pasture. Nor was Caerleon far away, enveloped in the mysterious, romance-laden atmosphere of Arthur and the Round Table. No wonder that in later years the poet's mind often turned back to his native district with a sigh of longing.

“ Can I forget the sweet days that have been—
The villages so green I have been in ;
Llantarnam, Magor, Malpas and Llanwern,
Liswery, old Caerleon and Alteryne ? ”

Elsewhere he writes :

“ When I'm passing Charing Cross,
Where porters work both night and day,
I oftentimes hear sweet Malpas Brook
That flows thrice fifty miles away.”

And as he wanders by St. Paul's, he sees beyond the dome and

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crowd Twm Barlum, the green hill in Gwent with its dark summit in a cloud.

When the boy grew weary of the hills and woods, he could always turn to the sea. From the neighbouring heights of Stow and Christchurch Hill he saw the Bristol Channel, the islands in it and the ships homeward and outward bound. Close at hand he had vessels come from strange lands and his plastic mind, like that of all boys, received strong impressions from those wondrous voyagers. Only those who have grown up in a port know the golden haze of romance which enwraps these wanderers to distant climes.

In the case of Mr. Davies the fascination of the sea was heightened by the stories he heard under the family roof. His father being dead, and his mother having married again, he was brought up by his grandfather, a Cornishman and a retired sea-captain. Old Captain Davies was a worthy, honest and straightforward mariner of whom the poet has left a delightful account in his autobiography and also in *A Poet's Pilgrimage*. Although now forced by old age to live ashore, he had preserved his nautical habits. He had a poor opinion of any one who did not know from what quarter the wind was blowing, and of an evening his question invariably was "Is everything made fast?" "In the dark winter evenings," says Mr. Davies, "I would sit with my grandfather, my brother and sister, painting ships or reading before a log fire that was never allowed to burn below its highest bar. My grandfather . . . would pace slowly up and down the dark passage, shutting himself out in the cold. Every now and then he would open the front door to look at the stars or to inform himself from what latitude the wind blew. The wind never changed without his knowledge; for this wary mariner invariably surprised it in the act of doing so. Three or four times in the evening he would open the kitchen door to see that his family were comfortable, as though he had just made his way from the hurricane deck to enquire after the welfare of passengers in the cabin. When this was done, the old lady would sometimes

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say, rather peevishly, 'Francis, do sit down for a minute or two.' Then he would answer gruffly, but not unkindly, 'Avast there, Lydia,' closing the door to begin again his steady pacing to and fro."¹

In the street where the family lived, almost every house had some one connected with the sea, and the old captain's great joy was to walk up and down the street informing the women what winds and tides were favourable to their sons or husbands. But on occasion the tender-hearted old sailor avoided them, for it sometimes happened that a boat was missing and long overdue. Then he would peep round the door and take good care to escape being drawn into conversation. An attractive figure this Captain Davies, who

" Leapt away from scandal with a roar,
And if a whisper still possessed his mind,
He walked about and cursed it for a plague.
He took offence at Heaven when beggars passed,
And sternly called them back to give them help."

There is something very winning about him, and who could resist the old sea-dog's way of silencing an embarrassing question on the part of young William—"Avast there; drop anchor: will ye have more pudding?"

The poet's grandmother was a strict Baptist, much opposed to all other creeds, who called the stage The Devil's Playground and was violently opposed to second marriages. She had only read one novel in her life—*The Children of the Abbey*—and she had been severely punished by her mother in consequence. She therefore tried to train up the poet in the right way, warned him against novels and recommended Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Young's *Night Thoughts* as suitable reading for a boy of his age. Her favourite quotation, from Young, was "Procrastination is the thief of time." A friend of hers traced a resemblance between William and John Bunyan which afforded great satisfaction to the old lady. But she had little hope of her grandson rising to such heights of piety as the Bedford tinker.

¹Cf. the poem *The Child and the Mariner* in which the poet's relations and early surroundings are also pictured.

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The boy's reading extended, however, beyond the limits set by his grandmother. Under the influence of another youth called Dave, who was given to wandering on the sands in melancholy solitude, William was attracted to Byron. He also read Shelley, Marlowe and Shakespeare with pleasure, though at this stage he was indifferent to one whom he afterwards learnt to admire—Wordsworth. When about fourteen years of age he had a great ambition to become a literary genius and took to writing poetry. Amongst his early productions was a poem on *Death* which was read by one of the boy's acquaintances. The latter introduced him to his wife, who exclaimed "I'm so delighted to meet the author of *Death*." William had never been called an author before, and was so pleased that he paid for two pints of beer and a bottle of stout for his admirers. He now came to the conclusion that he was intellectual, but not being satisfied with the size of his forehead resolved to remedy it. Obtaining possession of his grandmother's scissors and his grandfather's razor, he withdrew to his bedroom and removed his hair about an inch back from the forehead. The operation was not bloodless and his appearance so horrified his grandparents next morning that they sent for the doctor, under the impression that the boy had contracted some skin-disease. This was a rather unfortunate manifestation of William's poetical aspirations, but one cannot doubt that he was very much in earnest. About this period he actually walked from Newport to Tintern, a distance of seventeen miles, to see the abbey by moonlight. He was willing "to sacrifice both food and sleep . . . to see anything wonderful."

Mr. Davies has not told us whether his grandmother was aware of this nocturnal expedition. In any case it would only have been one of many youthful exploits which caused her to raise her hands in pious horror. He played truant, leapt over ditches, fought with other boys and came home with a black eye, a bleeding nose and a torn shirt. In short, he was a wild youth whose high spirits demanded more scope than could be found in quiet Newport. When old Captain Davies and his wife were dead,

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the boy was seized with that restlessness which long remained characteristic of him. He desired to set out on his travels, for he had his grandfather's seafaring blood in him and finally he sailed from Liverpool for America. The voyage was uneventful, but as they neared the coast a violent thunderstorm broke, which awed the young traveller by its violence. Noticing this, an American said "it was nothing to what he would see and hear if he remained long in God's own country of free and law-abiding citizens." The poet tells us that on hearing this, "he felt in no way reassured."

Now began a strange life of wandering. Mr. Davies was torn between two desires—that of finding suitable employment, so as to make his pile and return home, and on the other hand that of seeing as many states as possible. Needless to say, it was the second which proved the stronger, otherwise the life story of Mr. Davies would not have differed from that of thousands of other emigrants. From New York he made his way to Connecticut and here fell in with Brum, a notorious beggar who is described to us as follows: "Brum was a genuine beggar, who did not make flashes in the dark, having one day plenty and nothing on the next day. What he required he proceeded to beg, every morning making an inventory of his wants. Rather than wash a good handkerchief he would beg an old one that was clean, and he would without compunction discard a good shirt altogether rather than sew a button on—thus keeping up his profession to the extreme. He scorned to carry soap, but went to a house like a Christian, and asked to be allowed to wash, with a request for warm water if the morning was cold. Begging was to him a fine art, indeed, and a delight of which he never seemed to tire. I have known him, when surfeited with an abundance of common food, such as steak, chops, etc., to beg lozenges and sweets, complaining, I suppose, of throat troubles." Brum's artfulness is well illustrated by one of his many devices. On entering a town he would make his way to the house of the Roman Catholic priest and ask to borrow his razor. The loan

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was naturally refused, but Brum generally profited to the extent of a few coppers.

After meeting with this tramp, Mr. Davies gave up all thought of regular work, though he occasionally tried to earn an honest penny. But most of his time was spent in wandering. He idled away his first summer at the seaside, doing nothing but lounge about the sands and the caves near the shore. From Connecticut he made his way to Michigan and saw Chicago. Next he visited Baltimore, and made several trips from there to Liverpool, Glasgow and London as a cattle-hand. Then the old restlessness seized him and he travelled west, stealing rides on trains as usual. Leaving St. Louis he sailed down the Mississippi and ultimately reached New Orleans. His footsteps were next directed to Galveston and from here to Paris on the border of the Indian territory. Turning his back on Texas he worked his way through Arkansas and finally arrived at Chicago. A longing to see home came over him and this was no sooner thought of than done. But after a few months the old fever took possession of him and he made a trip to Bordeaux. His next plan was to set up a second-hand bookshop in London, but not knowing how to acquire the necessary stock, he spent his time in roaming about as the spirit moved him. His scanty store of money was almost exhausted when, one afternoon, as he passed through Trafalgar Square, he bought a newspaper and the first paragraph to catch his eye was "A Land of Gold." It was a description of Klondyke and its wonderful possibilities, which afforded an irresistible attraction to the penniless wanderer. He at once sailed for Canada, and after a few weeks in Montreal proceeded to Ottawa. It was some little distance from this city that he met with an accident which was to change his whole career. One evening, when trying to jump up on to a passing train with the object of stealing a ride, he slipped and his foot was severed from the ankle. He lay in hospital for some time and was overwhelmed with kindness by the inhabitants, though the literature brought him—"Freddie's Friend," "Little Billie's Button," "Sally's

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Sacrifice," and others of that ilk—proved rather a trial. All the golden dreams of Klondyke were, however, dissipated and nothing remained but to return to England. As he passed through Montreal he reflected sadly how changed he now was. "Only two months had elapsed, and what a difference now! Two months ago, and it was winter, snow was on the earth and the air was cold; but I was then full-limbed, full of vitality and good spirits, for summer-like prospects, golden and glorious, possessed me night and day. It was summer now, the earth was dry and green, and the air was warm, but winter was within me"

In many ways Mr. Davies was a changed man, for no one who had spent several years in so great a country, had his many and varied experiences, and seen life from so many angles, could remain what he was before. He had for months picked fruit under a blazing sun and longed for evening when he could bathe in the cool waters of Lake Michigan; he had confronted death in many forms, whether through boarding trains passing at a high speed or from the roots of submerged trees on the Mississippi. He had been nearly robbed by brutal desperadoes, and had actually been assaulted and rendered unconscious by negro thieves. Once he had nearly died of malaria and his feelings on that occasion are best described by himself. "I became too weak to move, and, coming to a large swamp I left the railroad and crawled into it, and for three days and the same number of nights, lay there without energy to continue my journey. Wild hungry hogs were there, who approached dangerously near, but ran snorting away when my body moved. A score or more of buzzards had perched waiting on the branches above me, and I knew that the place was teeming with snakes. I suffered from a terrible thirst, and drank of the swamp-pools, stagnant water that was full of germs, and had the colours of the rainbow, one dose of which would have poisoned some men to death. When the chill was upon me, I crawled into the hot sun, and lay there shivering with the cold; and when the hot fever possessed me I crawled back into the shade. Not a morsel to eat for four days, and very

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little for several days previous Certain that it would be death to remain longer in this deadly swamp, I managed to reach the railroad track, and succeeded in reaching the next station . . . The distance had been less than a mile, but it had taken me two hours to accomplish."

The future poet had tried his hand at many occupations and mixed with many classes of men. He had chopped wood, picked hops and fruit, worked in a stove-factory, as a cattle-hand and as cook to a gang of navvies. He had seen all the kindness, helpfulness and generosity of man towards his fellows; he had likewise experienced all the rascality, meanness and brutality of human nature. What strikes one in him is the facility with which he makes friends and one feels that it is due to his own geniality and good nature. It was fortunate for him that he was helped by others, for what would this unpractical dreamer have done without the resourcefulness of tramp-friends like Brum? How would he have fared in the harsh winter season, unless some one had been there to suggest the expedient of going to gaol for a few months?

In the autobiography there is an amusing account of Mr. Davies's experiences with the American law. He, Brum and Australian Red were making their way to Michigan, where the gaols were reputed to be comfortable, and as usual they were stealing rides on trains. Being seen at one spot, they were arrested by the marshal of the town and marched off at the end of a revolver to a drinking saloon. The judge was brought and after drinks had been exchanged, he led the way to a back room, followed by the marshal, the three prisoners and the citizens. Evidence having been taken, Judge Stevens enquired how much money the prisoners had and then fined them five dollars each. Mr. Davies said he preferred to go to gaol and finally the judge decided to take three, saying with irresistible magnanimity "Pass over the dollars, boys; you shall have a chance this time." Australian Red had, however, at once consented to pay five dollars, and so a citizen now rose and asked "Where is the justice

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of this? These men are all guilty of the same offence, and yet one is fined five dollars, and the other two get off more leniently, with the loss of three dollars each; this certainly cannot be called justice." At this the Judge showed the first signs of passion. "Sir," he shouted in wrath, "who is the Judge, I or you? If you ever again interfere with our proceedings in this manner, I shall fine you for contempt of court." The citizen collapsed, the Judge called for drinks, paying for them with a part of the fines and all made merry together until a late hour. But these proceedings become doubly ludicrous, when we hear that by order of the Judge, the marshal found a place where the prisoners could stow themselves away, in a train that was leaving the same night.

On their arrival at the town in Michigan which was known to have a gaol suitable for a rest-cure, they were met by the marshal and the following dialogue ensued: "Boys," said the marshal, "cold weather for travelling, eh?" "We don't feel the cold," was Brum's reply. "You will though," said the marshal, "this is but the beginning, and there is a long and severe winter before you, without a break. You would certainly be better off in jail. Sixty days in our jail, which is considered one of the best, if not the best, in Michigan, would do you no harm, I assure you." "As for that," said Brum, "we might take thirty days each, providing, of course, that you make it worth while. What about tobacco and a drink or two of whiskey?" "That'll be all right," said the marshal, "here's half a dollar for a drink, and the sheriff will supply your tobacco." "No, no," objected Brum, "give us a dollar and three cakes of tobacco, and we will take thirty days, and remember not a day over." The marshal consented and later in the day, coming out of a saloon, the three tramps pretended to be drunk and disorderly and were arrested. The following morning they were marched to the court house and tried. The Judge declared that he did not see why peaceable citizens should be thus molested by drunken strangers. He would therefore fine them seven dollars and costs, in default of which they would be lodged in the county jail for thirty days. The

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prisoners were catered for as customers, provided with plenty of food and when their time was up, the sheriff made them promise to return either that winter or the one following. The reason for all this solicitude was that the marshal got a dollar for every arrest made, the judge three or four dollars for every conviction and the sheriff one dollar a day for boarding each prisoner in his care.¹ Truly the future poet returned to England with a deeper insight into the intricacies of human nature. But he had been obliged to pay the price—he was a cripple. “All the wildness had been taken out of me, and my adventures after this were not of my own seeking, but the result of circumstances.”

The question of his future career now became urgent. His ambition was to make a name for himself in the world of letters. Nor was this a new ideal, for throughout his wanderings it had hovered before him as a distant goal. Even as a boy he had written both prose and poetry, receiving encouragement from a young woman of literary taste who recognised his genius. “Her encouragement at that early time has been the star on which these eyes have seldom closed, by which I have successfully navigated the deeps of misery, pushing aside Drink, my first officer, who many a day and many a night endeavoured to founder me . . . Her words of encouragement have been ringing in my ears ever since they were uttered.” And as Mr. Davies roamed through the United States his mind turned at times from his irregular, nomadic life. To his fellow tramp Brum he dilated on the joys of museums, theatres, and picture-galleries, of music and reading, though without finding in him a kindred soul. Whenever he visited a city like Chicago he patronised the theatre as long as his money lasted, and his occasional trips to Liverpool or London were always utilised for visits to public libraries or museums. At times he became acutely conscious that he was wasting the precious days of youth and energy, for he was

¹Mr. Davies does not forget to add that this corrupt system was not long after swept away. In general he has nothing but good to say of America, where he clearly felt at home. In particular he praises the kindness and generosity of the Americans.

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convinced that he was born to a very different life. On these occasions, dreams of the future would rise before him and he longed for "a small comfortable room with a cosy fire; books, paper, tobacco, with reading and writing in turns." These dreams were ultimately to be realised, but the poet had first to undergo much suffering, bodily and mental.

However, blissfully ignorant of all the misery awaiting him, Mr. Davies left his native place for London, carrying with him a cotton shirt, a pair of stockings, and a handkerchief in a brown paper parcel and £2 in his pocket. He settled in a lodging-house and contrived to live on eight shillings a week, this being the interest on a small sum left him by his old grandmother. Many were the curious characters whom the poet came across in these squalid surroundings. He was on good terms with them all, in spite of the fact that he wore a white collar, was almost a teetotaller and cleaned his teeth. One of the inmates enquired if Mr. Davies felt any actual benefit from this last process—"he had heard so many different opinions that he did not know what or what not to believe." The portrait of Flanagan is one of the best amongst many which adorn the pages of the autobiography. "It was at this time," says the poet, "that I came under the influence of Flanagan. That gentleman, seeing me often writing and apparently in deep thought, at once gave me credit for more wisdom than I possessed. He was a very illiterate man, having no knowledge of grammar, punctuation, or spelling. The upshot of this acquaintance was that he informed me in confidence that he was the lawful heir to nearly half the county of Mayo, in Ireland; on which estate was a house like the King's palace. In exchange for this confidence I told him I was the author of a book of verse, which could not be published except the author defrayed expenses. On which Flanagan expressed much sympathy—more especially when I read him aloud a few lines expressing my disapproval of landowners and rich tyrants—and promised sincerely to relieve me of all difficulty, providing, of course, that he made good his claims to the estate. Flanagan then proposed

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that I should put some of his arguments in grammatical form, which he would immediately forward to the proper authorities. This I began to do at once, and some of Flanagan's arguments were so strong that I am surprised at the present day at being a free man. I told one eminent statesman that he should retire and give place to a more honest man, and another that though he was born in Ireland and bore the name of an Irishman, yet he was a traitor, for his heart had ever been in England. Despite these powerful letters, the county Mayo never to my knowledge changed hands, and I was disappointed in my expectations, and Flanagan grieved daily."

But what of the poet's expected triumph in the realms of literature? It was long in coming. Mr. Davies began by writing a tragedy called *The Robbers*, the chief quality of which was its vigorous action. To the author's amazement it was returned by several publishers. It was some time before he could believe that it was not a masterpiece. He then set to work and produced a long poem, "in which the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and even the fishes of the sea, met in a forest glade to impeach man for his cruelty to them, and went on to describe their journey at midnight to the nearest town, and the vengeance they took on the sleeping inhabitants." This, as one might expect, was also a failure. The untiring author next decided to try shorter poems and resolved to compose a hundred sonnets, at the rate of five or six a day. The result—no more success than before. Thereupon he wrote another tragedy, a comedy, a volume of humorous essays and hundreds of short poems. These latter he kept by him for the time being, offering them to no publisher, but safely treasuring them, under the impression that they would some day find their market.

After the lapse of twelve months he despatched a volume of short poems to a well-known publisher, who declared himself willing to accept them, if the author would bear the expenses. Mr. Davies was almost delirious with joy and naively wrote to several prominent philanthropists, soliciting their support. "With

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all my heart I believed that there would not be the least difficulty in procuring money for such a grand purpose." On receiving unfavourable replies, he determined to get his poems printed on sheets and hawk them from door to door. After nearly starving himself in order to save enough money out of his weekly pittance, he succeeded in persuading a printer to fall in with his plans. But he found little appreciation of poetry sold by an itinerant author, and returning to the lodging-house "with the fury of a madman" burnt them all except one copy, which he preserved to remind him of his folly.

When he had been upwards of two and a half years in London, he decided to make another attempt at publication. This time his plan was to try and earn a living, letting his allowance mount up until there was enough to pay a publisher to bring out the volume of poems. He therefore bought a hawker's licence, laid in a stock of needles, pins and laces and left London. Misfortune dogged his steps, for heavy rain spoilt his scanty store. Before long, however, he came across a tramp who earned a living by street-singing and for a time the two kept company. But Mr. Davies went about it the wrong way, for instead of singing in a cracked, doleful tone, he made an effort to produce a tuneful bass—"I belong to a race of people that are ever prone to a song, whether it be in a public house or a prayer-meeting." By one means or another, he made his way through Northampton, Rugby, and Coventry to Birmingham. It is typical of the man that on arriving anywhere, as soon as he had obtained lodgings, he found out the public library and sat there reading until his money was exhausted.

With a Bible and a closely-printed copy of Wordsworth in his pocket, he turned southwards and passing through Warwick and Stratford, wandered about until November. The approach of winter was a source of great anxiety. In America he knew by experience what it meant. "What a difference it made in our feelings, this changing of seasons!" he writes. "It seemed but a few days ago the birds were singing, the orchards were heavy

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and mellow with fruit, and we could sleep in the open air all night. It was now necessary to light great fires, when the front parts of our bodies burned, whilst a cold chill crept up and down the spine." And a little further on he says, "How the snow falls in the north! Flake on flake falling incessantly, until the small dingles are almost on a level with the uplands. It throws itself on the leaves of autumn, and holds them down in security from the strongest winds." All this he remembered and dreadful visions of a rigorous winter rose before him. "I was suddenly confronted with a long winter before me, and I pictured myself starved and snow-bound in small out of the way villages, or mercilessly pelted by hailstones on a wild, shelterless heath. Side by side with these scenes I placed my ideal, which was a small room with a cosy fire, in which I sat surrounded by books, and I sickened at the comparison."

He now steered towards London, wandering about the outskirts, selling nothing until evening had fallen and then in a mad fit offering his goods, until he had enough to keep him out of the workhouse for that night. Under these circumstances he began to long for home and at the bidding of one of those impulses so characteristic of the man, he set out for Wales and within a week was on the border. When within thirty miles of his native place, another mood seized him and he turned aside, tramping through the hills to Swansea. More rambling followed and the day before Christmas Eve found him twenty-seven miles from Newport. On the morning of Christmas Eve he changed his mind once more and after nine hours arrived home. He drew his accumulated allowance, went back to London and determined to start writing again. His dreary existence at this period, dozing away the greater part of the day, half-stupefied by the fumes of the coke fire in the lodging-house is graphically described in his poem *The Lodging House Fire* :

“ My birth day—yesterday,
Its hours were twenty-four ;
Four hours I lived lukewarm,
And killed a score.

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Eight bells and then I woke,
Came to our fire below,
Then sat four hours and watched
Its sullen glow.

Then out four hours I walked,
The lukewarm four I live,
And felt no other joy
Than air can give.

My mind durst know no thought,
It knew my life too well :
'Twas hell before, behind,
And round me hell.

Back to that fire again,
Six hours I watch it now,
And take to bed dim eyes
And fever's brow.

Ten hours I give to sleep,
More than my need, I know ;
But I escape my mind
And that fire's glow.

For listen : it is death
To watch that fire's glow ;
For, as it burns more red
Men paler grow.

O better in foul room
That's warm, make life away,
Than homeless out of doors,
Cold night and day.

Pile on the coke, make fire,
Rouse its death-dealing glow ;
Men are borne dead away
Ere they can know."

Winter passed away and June came, bringing a new idea to the poet. He travelled home and his trustee promised that if Mr. Davies would manage to do without his allowance for six months, he should have the loan of £20, free of interest and in this way enough money would be brought together to ensure the publication of the poems. The poet therefore set out on the tramp once more. A change had come over him, for he who in America had found the nomadic life irksome without a companion, now shunned every one. He lived alone with his dreams,

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slept in the open air, under trees or sheaves of corn, paying little heed to direction or to distance and longing only for the day which should release him from this purgatory. "I began to look on this as a short life of sacrifice," he tells us, "killing a few worthless hours so as to enjoy thousands of better ones; and I blessed every morning that ushered in a new day, and worshipped every Sabbath night that closed another week." He tramped west and after two months reached Devonshire. Then he retraced his steps through Somerset to Swindon and so to the outskirts of London, where he was often at his wits' end for food and shelter. At the beginning of December he could bear it no longer but made for *The Farmhouse*, and was soon seated before the old coke-fire.

He proceeded to copy out his poems, made arrangements to have them printed and early in March received the first copy. The printer had posted presentation copies to some thirty papers and now followed weeks of waiting to see what their verdict would be. Only two reviews appeared and these were unfavourable. To drown his disappointment the poet took to drink and in a wild fit of despair contemplated burning all the two hundred and odd copies remaining. "I had come down to my last two shillings and had a good seven months to go before my money was again due." With his few remaining pence he posted copies of his poems to well-known people. Amongst others he wrote to "an Irishman, as to whose mental qualification the world is divided, but whose heart is unquestionably great"—Mr. Davies refers, of course, to Mr. Bernard Shaw. On reviewing the poems, Mr. Shaw tells us, "it horrified me to think of a poor man spending his savings in printing something that nobody buys; poetry, to wit. . . . I saw that this man might well be simple enough to suppose that he could go into the verse business and make a living of it, as one makes a living by auctioneering or shop-keeping. So instead of throwing the book away as I have thrown so many, I wrote him a letter telling him he could not live by poetry." At the same time Mr. Shaw helped him financially

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and before long the new poet was famous. Friendly letters, offers of help and interviews followed. Truly this success was not unmerited, for the poet might fairly claim to have been a "student who remained true to his aims and was sincere in his love for literature."

What is the nature of the poems published then and since by Mr. Davies? The first thing that strikes the reader is their originality, the almost entire lack of any sort of literary influence. One may search in vain for traces of the poet having read Wordsworth, Tennyson, Swinburne or any of their great predecessors. Occasionally we are reminded of Blake, but it is a matter of natural affinity rather than of a debt due to reading. It is true we may point to the poem *Sweet Youth* as being based on Wyatt's famous lines "And wilt thou leave me thus," but this is an exception. The poetry of Mr. Davies is not bookish, but fresh, natural and spontaneous. We feel that we have here his own experience, conveyed in the simplest and yet the most exquisite language. Let us now consider for a while his chief themes. As is only natural in one brought up in the surroundings of his childhood, he sings at times of the sea. The poem *The Call of the Sea* tells of its romance and glamour. Those who have sailed upon it will always be haunted by its call :

"Gone are the days of canvas sails !
No more great sailors tell their tales
In country taverns, barter pearls
For kisses from strange little girls ;
And when the landlord's merry daughter,
Heard their rough jokes and shrieked with laughter,
They threw a muffler of rare fur,
That hid her neck from ear to ear.
Ho, ho ! my merry men ; they know
Where gold is plentiful—Sail ho !
How they did love the rude wild Sea !
The rude, unflattering Sea ; for he
Will not lie down for monarch's yacht,
No more than merchant's barge ; he'll not
Keep graves with marks of wood or stone
For fish or fowl, or human bone,

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The Sea is loth to lose a friend ;
Men of one voyage, when they spend
Six months with him, hear his vexed cry
Haunting their houses till they die.
And for the sake of him they let
The winds blow them, and raindrops wet
Their foreheads with fresh water sprays—
Thinking of his wild, salty days,
And well they love to saunter near
A river, and its motion hear ;
And see ships lying in calm beds,
That danced upon seas' living heads ;
And in their dreams they hear again
Men's voices in a hurricane—
Like ghosts complaining that their graves
Are moved by sacrilegious waves.
And well they love to stand and hear
The old seafaring men that fear
Land more than water ; carts and trains
More than wild waves and hurricanes,
And they will walk with love and pride
The tattooed mariner beside—
Chains, anchors on his arm, and ships—
And listen to his bearded lips.
Aye, they will hear the Sea's vexed cry
Haunting their houses till they die."

The same theme is repeated in *Dreams of the Sea*, where the poet speaks in his own name :

" I know not why I yearn for thee again,
To sail once more upon thy fickle flood ;
I'll hear thy waves wash under my death-bed,
Thy salt is lodged forever in my blood.

Yet I have seen thee lash the vessel's sides
In fury, with thy many tailed whip ;
And I have seen thee, too, like Galilee,
When Jesus walked in peace to Simon's ship.

And I have seen thy gentle breeze as soft
As summer's, when it makes the cornfields run ;
And I have seen thy rude and lusty gale
Make ships show half their bellies to the sun.

Thou knowest the way to tame the wildest life,
Thou knowest the way to bend the great and proud :
I think of that Armada, whose puffed sails,
Greedy and large, came swallowing every cloud."

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The following stanza is most moving in its graphic simplicity. Here we have the tragedy of the sea in epitome.

“ But I have seen the sea-boy, young and drowned,
Lying on shore and, by thy cruel hand,
A seaweed beard was on his tender chin,
His heaven-blue eyes were filled with common sand.

And yet, for all, I yearn for thee again,
To sail once more upon thy fickle flood :
I'll hear thy waves dash under my death-bed,
Thy salt is lodged forever in my blood.”

Here, as so often in the work of Mr. Davies, an undertone of sadness breaks upon the ear. He is a man of many moods, now joyously enraptured, now restfully content, at other times filled with regret, longing or wistful foreboding.

Another sea-piece brings out his intense sympathy with all animals. The poem *Sheep* tells how the sight of the suffering beasts cooped up on board ship on the way from America to Scotland preyed upon his mind, this being corroborated by a passage in the *Autobiography* :

“ When I was once in Baltimore
A man came up to me and cried,
' Come, I have eighteen hundred sheep,
And we will sail on Tuesday's tide.

' If you will sail with me, young man,
I'll pay you fifty shillings down ;
These eighteen hundred sheep I take
From Baltimore to Glasgow town ? '

He paid me fifty shillings down,
I sailed with eighteen hundred sheep ;
We soon had cleared the harbour's mouth,
We soon were on the salt sea deep.

The first night we were out at sea
Those sheep were quiet in their mind ;
The second night they cried with fear—
They smelt no pastures in the wind.

They sniffed, poor things, for their green fields,
They cried so loud I could not sleep :
For fifty thousand shillings down
I would not sail again with sheep.'

The profound pity for animals expressed here is borne out

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by many other passages in the poet's works. In the *Autobiography* he tells us : "Although of a quiet disposition, my fondness for animals is likely at any time to lead me into danger. After reading cases of vivisectionists I have often had dreams of boldly entering such places, routing the doctors with a bar of iron, cutting the cords and freeing the animals, despite of any hurt I might receive from bites and scratches. Perhaps I should cut a ridiculous figure, walking through the crowded streets with a poor meek creature under each arm, but that would not bother me in the performance of a humane action."

And this tender humanity is extended to all animals, however insignificant, also to the fluttering insects and the tuneful birds. This finds a charming expression in *Nature's Friend*, where the poet tells how all creatures trust him :

" Say what you like,
All things love me !
I pick no flowers—
That wins the Bee.
The Summer's Moths
Think my hand one—
To touch their wings—
With Wind and Sun.
The garden Mouse
Comes near to play ;
Indeed, he turns
His eyes away.
The Wren knows well
I rob no nest ;
When I look in
She still will rest.
The hedge stops Cows,
Or they would come
After my voice
Right to my home.
The Horse can tell,
Straight from my lip,
My hand could not
Hold any whip.
Say what you like,
All things love me !
Horse, Cow, and Mouse,
Bird, Moth, and Bee."

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In another poem, *The World*, the poet declares that there can be no sweeter life than to gaze into the eyes of dumb creatures and imagine we have their innocence. At the same time, he protests against those who see in animals nothing but a means of satisfying the body's gluttony.

If there is one region of Nature's dominions to which the poet is more devoted than to any other, it is the world of the birds. They are small, frail beings and that in itself is enough to commend them to the generous, chivalrous nature of Mr. Davies, who has inherited not only his grandfather's roving instincts, but also his kindness of heart. Moreover, the birds have the gift of song and the poet is extremely susceptible to music of all kinds. How often in the course of his travels does he turn aside to hear a melodious voice, how often does he pause to listen to the tuneful singers of the woods and meadows. We can well believe him, therefore, when he says :

“ Do with me, sweet music, as thou wilt,
I am thy slave to either laugh or weep ;
Thy power can make thy slave a lover proud,
Or friendless man that has no place to sleep.”

The birds then are the poet's most intimate friends. In the *Autobiography*, he says in speaking of his wanderings : “ If I settled towards night time in any place where a bird came hopping restlessly from branch to branch, making a series of short cries of fear, to let me know that I was lying too close to its nest, I would without hesitation shift my position, often to my own discomfort.” As we read this passage and poems imbued with the same spirit, Mr. Davies seems in this respect a reincarnation of another great wanderer and lover of the birds—St. Francis of Assisi. The saint would have been able to find something in common with the poet who writes with such tender sympathy of the “ little things with beating hearts that hold shining eyes between the leaves.” One of Mr. Davies's favourites is the robin. In *The One Singer* he has succeeded most admirably in reproducing the mood of a short wintry afternoon, when complete silence reigns but for the rustling of the fallen leaves and the creaking of the

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boughs. Then into this tranquil solitude is poured the cheerful song of the robin :

“ Dead leaves from off the tree
Make whirlpools on the ground ;
Like dogs that chase their tails,
Those leaves go round and round ;
Like birds unfledged and young,
The old bare branches cry ;
Branches that shake and bend
To feel the winds go by.
No other sound is heard,
Save from those boughs so bare—
Hark ! who sings that one song ?
’Tis Robin sings so rare.”

Equally pleasing is the poem *Robin Redbreast* where the courage of this little creature, that sings on in spite of frost and snow, is the poet’s theme :

“ Robin on a leafless bough,
Lord in Heaven, how he sings !
Now cold Winter’s cruel Wind
Makes playmates of withered things.

How he sings for joy this morn !
How his breast doth pant and glow !
Look you how he stands and sings,
Half-way up his legs in snow !

If these crumbs of bread were pearls,
And I had no bread at home,
He should have them for that song ;
Pretty Robin Redbreast, Come.”

The poem entitled *Jenny Wren* reveals, if possible, an even more sympathetic insight. Mr. Davies has lived so much in the open air, that the birds are to him intimate companions and he addresses them with the words of a friend. He tells us how he had often seen Jenny Wren, “the smallest bird in England,” busying herself amidst the leaves and grass, as if forgetting to fly. Thereupon he spoke to her, saying :

“ My pretty runner, you prefer
To be a thing to run unheard
Through leaves and grass, and not a bird !
’Twas then she burst, to prove me wrong,
Into a sudden burst of song ;

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So very loud and earnest, I
Feared she would break her heart and die.
'Nay, nay,' I laughed, 'be you no thing
To run unheard, sweet scold, but sing.'"

Incidentally it may be remarked that Mr. Davies has a keen sense of humour, though it appears more often in his prose than in his poetry. On one occasion, however, he addresses the bellicose sparrows in a jocular vein :

" Stop, feathered bullies !
Peace, angry birds ;
You common Sparrows that,
For a few words,
Roll fighting in wet mud,
To see each other's blood.

Look at those Linnets, they
Like ladies sing ;
See how those Swallows, too,
Play on the wing ;
All other birds close by
Are gentle, clean and shy."

Elsewhere we are made to laugh at, and yet to sympathise with the cuckoo, "the simple bird that thinks two notes a song," or "the woodland brook, that could not drown a babe, with all his threatening mood." Truly, for Mr. Davies all nature pulsates with life like any human being.

His affection is, however, by no means restricted to the natural world. It would be impossible for a man who had hungered and thirsted like himself not to feel pity for the poor ; nor could he, as one who had discovered such richness of human nature even amongst the outcasts of society, fail to recognise the element of goodness in them. We know from his *Autobiography* that he had found pleasure in the absence of squalid poverty from Canada. He contrasted this great new land, where hunger is unknown, with the overcrowded cities of Europe and their starving underworld. His heart hardened as he thought of the great hotels on the Thames Embankment, where ambassadors and millionaires rise from a sumptuous repast to admire the silver light of the moon on the dark river—"but they cannot see this

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spectre of Hunger, moving slowly, and sometimes painfully, from shadow to shadow, shivering and anxious for the sun."

The poet at any rate had seeing eyes, and a feeling heart, for his is a sensitive and kindly nature. Who can forget how when his companions had lost or squandered their money, he gave up plans of returning home and shared his few dollars with them, or how he set apart a share of his meagre allowance for the use of a friend and retired from his usual lodging-house to a cheaper and less congenial abode? It was in one of the streets of London that he saw the *Heap of Rags* which suggested his poem with this title. On another occasion, it is the sight of the wretched outcasts lying on the Embankment which inspires his poem *The Sleepers*.

" As I walked down the waterside
This silent morning, wet and dark ;
Before the cocks in farmyards crowed,
Before the dogs began to bark ;
Before the hour of five was struck
By old Westminster's mighty clock !

As I walked down the waterside
This morning, in the cold damp air,
I saw a hundred women and men
Huddled in rags and sleeping there :
These people have no work, thought I,
And long before their time they die."

But just at this moment an electric tram passes, laden with weary men on the way to their day's labour. They are all asleep and involuntarily the poet asks himself whether their condition is better than that of the unemployed.

" Ten cars rushed down the waterside,
Like lighted coffins in the dark ;
With twenty dead men in each car,
That must be brought alive by work :
These people work too hard, thought I,
And long before their time they die."

The poet therefore flees into the country. Such sights are painful and leave his mind no peace, so he takes refuge with nature. In the poem *In the Country*, he explains these feelings and wonders if it is cowardly on his part to shun the sordidness of the city :

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“ This life is sweetest ; in this wood
I hear no children cry for food ;
I see no woman white with care,
No man with muscles wasting here.
No doubt it is a selfish thing
To fly from human suffering ;
No doubt he is a selfish man,
Who shuns poor creatures sad and wan.
But 'tis a wretched life to face
Hunger in almost every place ;
Cursed with a hand that's empty, when
The heart is full to help all men.
Can I admire the statue great,
When living men starve at its feet !
Can I admire the park's green tree,
A roof for homeless misery ! ”

In the large towns Mr. Davies feels acutely unhappy, because of the vastness and universality of poverty. Like many others he is conscious of the futility of individual liberality in coping with so widespread an evil. It is but trying to dam up the ocean. He is therefore more at home in the country, where the problem is not so gigantic.

“ When I can see few men in need,
I then have power to help by deed,
Nor lose my cheerfulness in pity,
Which I must do in every city.
For when I am in those great places,
I see ten thousand suffering faces ;
Before me stares a wolfish eye,
Behind me creeps a groan or sigh.”

Similarly in the poem *Now* he tells how he has fled the city, which was blunting and deadening his senses, strangling the spirit whilst the body was alive. His feeling is evidently the same as that described by Richard Jefferies in *The Story of My Heart*. The mind seems gradually to become enveloped in a thick husk which chokes the pores and stifles the soul within. That great writer of passionate prose would burst through this hardening shell to touch hands with Nature and Mr. Davies clearly knows the same sensation.

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“ But now, with this green world around,
By my great love for it ! I swear,
Though my flesh shrink, and my sight fail,
My heart will not grow old with care.

When I do hear these joyful birds,
I cannot sit with my heart dumb ;
I cannot walk among these flowers
But I must help the bees to hum.

My heart has echoes for all things,
The wind, the rain, the bird and bee ;
'Tis I that—now—can carry Time,
Who in that town must carry me.”

There is a striking passage in the *Autobiography* which illustrates Mr. Davies's delight in nature. It describes how he set out on his first tramp through England. The month was September, and after being cooped up so long in London, the poet noted with joy the first signs of the country. That night, making a pillow of his pack, he lay on a common gazing up at the sky, where “it seemed as though extra bodies of stars had been drafted into the heavens to guard and honour the coming of age of a beautiful moon.” Having nine shillings in his pocket, he decided that it was absurd to think of business whilst he possessed such wealth and so for three or four days he revelled in the beauty of nature. But to enjoy life to the full in this fashion, leisure is an essential and that is why the poet expressed pity for *The Sleepers* whose life is one unceasing round of toil. We find this thought again in the poem *Leisure*.

“ What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like stars at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.”

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The idea underlying the poem *No Master* is fundamentally the same, though here it manifests itself in the love of independence.

“ Indeed this is sweet life ! my hand
Is under no proud man’s command ;
There is no voice to break my rest
Before a bird has left its nest ;
There is no man to change my mood,
Would I go nutting in the wood ;
No man to pluck my sleeve and say—
I want thy labour for this day ;
No man to keep me out of sight,
When that dear Sun is shining bright.
None but my friends shall have command
Upon my time, my heart and hand ;
I’ll rise from sleep to help a friend,
But let no stranger orders send,
Or hear my curses fast and thick,
Which in his purse-proud throat will stick
Like burs. If I cannot be free
To do such work as pleases me,
Near woodland pools and under trees,
You’ll get no work at all ; for I
Would rather live this life and die
A beggar or a thief, than be
A working slave with no days free.”

Provided he may make a companion of Nature and be lord of himself, the poet envies no one. Riches and luxury are nothing to him. Even when he contemplated going to Klondyke, he did not intend to acquire a huge fortune, but just enough to fulfil his modest wishes. “ It was never a desire of mine to possess jewellery, fine raiment, yachts, castles or horses.” And after he had returned from America once for all, he exclaimed “ My first dreams were, and are, my best. I scorn clothes and jewellery ; I would rather take a free country walk, leaving the roads for the less trodden paths of the hills and the lanes, than ride in a yacht or a coach ; I would rather see the moon in the ruins than the gaslight of an assembly room ; gluttony I despise, and drink is seldom taken except at the invitation of other eyes : then what . . . would be to me the silver and gold of all Alaska !” With these sentiments we may compare those of the poem *A Plain Life* :

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“ No idle gold—since this fine sun, my friend,
Is no mean miser, but doth freely spend.
No precious stones—since these green mornings show,
Without a charge, their pearls where'er I go.
No lifeless books—since birds with their sweet tongues
Will read aloud to me their happier songs.
No painted scenes—since clouds can change their skies
A hundred times a day to please my eyes.
No headstrong wine—since, while I drink, the spring
Into my eager ears will softly sing.
No surplus clothes—since every simple beast
Can teach me to be happy with the least.”

And there is no mistaking the sincerity of Mr. Davies's love of Nature. There have been many ardent worshippers at her shrine, but few have found such sheer delight in the flowers, the birds, the stars and clouds as our poet. He is no mystic; he has no profound philosophy of the universe; but he quaffs deep draughts from the perennial well of beauty in the natural world. We can therefore believe him when he says:

“ I drink and drink, and thirst the more I see.
To see the dewdrops thrill, the blades of grass,
Makes my whole body shake,”

so that he ends this poem *Seeking Beauty* with the cry:

“ As long as I love Beauty I am young,
Am young or old as I love more or less;
When Beauty is not heeded or seems stale,
My life's a cheat, let Death end my distress.”

However, Mr. Davies's devotion has its limitations. He sings of spring and summer, but autumn fills him with regret and winter with unmingled horror. This can scarcely cause surprise in one who knows by hard-won experience what exposure to snow and frost, to rain and cold, really means. He has no illusions on the subject of winter and is well content to retire to his cosy fireside until the spring, when the stir in nature round him reanimates his dormant energies, and his blood beats time to the rising sap in the trees. This joy at the return of spring bursts forth in the poem *In May*.

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“ Yes, I will spend the livelong day
With Nature in this month of May ;
And sit beneath the trees, and share
My bread with birds whose homes are there ;
While cows lie down to eat, and sheep
Stand to their necks in grass so deep ;
While birds do sing with all their might,
As though they felt the earth in flight.”

Again the poem *Days too Short* exclaims with Elizabethan joyfulness :

“ When primroses are out in Spring,
And small, blue violets come between ;
When merry birds sing on boughs green,
And rills, as soon as born, must sing ;

When butterflies will make side-leaps
As though escaped from Nature’s hand
Ere perfect quite ; and bees will stand
Upon their heads in fragrant deeps ;

When small clouds are so silvery white
Each seems a broken rimmèd moon—
When such things are, this world too soon
For me, doth wear the veil of Night.”

And so in summer the poet is afoot with the dawn to hear the merry greetings of the birds and at night he lingers to gaze in rapt silence at the moon whose white beams fall across the throats of the nightingales. But the approach of autumn fills him with plaintive regret for what has been and with an uneasy foreboding of the gloom and cold to come. This is illustrated by the poem *Autumn* which contains some of Mr. Davies’s finest lines. The first three stanzas run thus :

“ Autumn grows old ; he, like some simple one,
In Summer’s castaway is strangely clad ;
Such withered things the winds in frolic mad
Shake from his feeble head and forehead wan.

Autumn is sighing for his early gold,
And in his tremble dropping his remains ;
The brook talks more, as one bereft of brains,
Who singeth loud, delirious with the cold.

O now with drowsy June one hour to be !
Scarce waking strength to hear the hum of bees,
Or cattle lowing under shady trees,
Knee-deep in waters loitering to the sea.”

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After what we have hitherto seen of Mr. Davies it cannot astonish us to find that he is a great lover of children. This is a natural result of his sympathy for that which is weak and defenceless and at the same time beautiful. Indeed, we feel at times that Mr. Davies himself has something of the *naïveté* which is one of the great privileges of childhood. He too is endowed with the power to wonder and his love of nature, if we come to analyse it, is based on the unfading freshness of nature's marvels rather than on an intense inward spirituality such as Wordsworth possessed. We cannot forget the delightful credulity he displays in his dealings with Flanagan, or his pleasing confidence in the ability of his early work to take by storm any stony-hearted publisher. His genius had but to knock and the gate would fly open. And who can repress a sympathetic smile on reading how he pictured Klondyke to himself? "I thought," he says, "the rocks were of solid gold, which so dazzled the sun that he could not concentrate his glance on any particular part, and that his eye went swimming all day in a haze. I pictured men in possession of caves sitting helpless in the midst of accumulated nuggets, puzzled as to how to convey all this wealth to the marts of civilization."

The poet who can feel like this is surely well-fitted to appreciate the innocence of childhood, to envy its unsophisticated outlook, its power of imagination and sense of romance. This appears in *The Dreaming Boy* :

"Sweet are thy dreams, thou happy, careless boy ;
Thou know'st the taste of immortality ;
No weary limbs can rest upon thy heart ;
Sleep has no care to ease thee of at night ;
The same move shuts together eye and mind,
And in the morning one move opens both.
Life lies before thee, hardly stepped on yet,
Like a green prairie, fresh, and full of flowers.
Life lies before thee for experiment,
Until old age comes, whose sad eyes can trace
A better path he missed, with fairer flowers,
Which other men have walked in misery.

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Thou hast no knowledge of a life of toil,
How hard Necessity destroys our dreams,
And castles in the air must pay him tithes
So heavy, that no tenant keeps them long.
To thee the world is still unknown and strange ;
Still full of wild romance, as in those days
Ere England launched her forests on the sea.

Oh, that sweet magic in thee, happy boy !
It makes a golden world for all things young.
Thou with an iron ring, a piece of bone,
A rusty blade, or half a yard of rope,
Art richer than a man with mines and ships.
The child's fresh mind makes honey out of soot,
Sweeter than Age can make on banks of flowers ;
He needs but cross a bridge, that happy boy,
And he can breathe the air of a new world.
Sweet children, with your trust in this hard life—
Like little birds that ope their mouths for food,
From hands that come to cage them till they die."

One can see very clearly from these lines how the innocent, confiding ways of children appeal to the poet, and not less their richness of imagination. Their material resources are small, but their sense of wonder carries them to the ends of the earth. The poet and the child are at one here and hence the pity with which Mr. Davies regards the wealthy tourist, as he dashes past in his dust-raising motor-car. With all his opulence, he is poor in comparison with those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. So in the course of his wanderings, Mr. Davies loses no opportunity of speaking to children and many are the delightful conversations narrated in *A Poet's Pilgrimage*. He pays little heed to older folk unless they are in some way unusual. For the maimed, the failures, the outcasts he has always a friendly word, but his supreme joy is to chat with children and gladden their hearts with a penny on leaving them. How well he realises the enormous gulf that yawns between the child's outlook on life and that of the adult ! Thus in *The Happy Child* he writes :

" I saw this day sweet flowers grow thick—
But not one like the child did pick.

I heard the packhounds in green park—
But no dog like the child heard bark.

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I heard this day bird after bird—
But not one like the child has heard.

A hundred butterflies saw I—
But not one like the child saw fly.

I saw the horses roll in grass—
But no horse like the child saw pass.

My world this day has lovely been—
But not like what the child has seen.”

In *The Boy, Child Lovers* and *The Laughters*, the child's capacity for feeling joy is again dealt with. But there is another and a sadder aspect of Mr. Davies's child poetry. In *The Two Children* the poet laments the sight of merry youth foredoomed to premature death, and again in *A Mother to her Sick Child* he is moved by the tragedy of the passing away of cherished innocence; in *The Weeping Child* and *The Little Ones* he mourns over the sorrows and disappointments of the child. In *A Blind Child* the pathos of such a sight is touched on with affectionate tenderness. Mr. Davies tells us that he has always had great sympathy for the blind and has often given them pennies when he could not afford more than four pence for a bed. Such characters as Blind William and The Blind Boxer¹ whom we meet in his prose works bear witness to the genuineness of this feeling. But a child thus afflicted stirs the poet even more powerfully. The sight of a child in a garden, deprived of the glorious spectacle of Nature, reduces his song to silence and he reflects sadly :

“I see them all ; flowers of all kind,
The sheep and cattle on the leas ;
The houses up the hills, the trees—
But I am dumb, for she is blind.”

We have already mentioned this occasional note of sadness, now wistful, now plaintive, in Mr. Davies's work. The way in which he passes from a mood of joy to one of melancholy reminds us of another poet, who was also a great lover of children and underwent a similar transition when contemplating childhood—William Blake. The latter is likewise one whose poetry is of

¹Cf. also *The Blind Boxer* in *Collected Poems*, pp. 133-134.

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limpid simplicity and intense expressiveness, though his mysticism is entirely foreign to Mr. Davies. At times our poet is overburdened with thoughts for which he cannot find expression and a heaviness of the spirit comes upon him, oppressive though fleeting. In *Thunderstorms* he says :

“ My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours :
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.
Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours ;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.”

The poet himself is fully conscious of these changing moods and makes allusion to them in several poems. Thus in *Sadness and Joy* he wonders which of them is the more inspiring to his Muse and finally calls upon Sadness to flee from him :

“ Therefore, sweet Sadness, leave me soon,
Let thy bright sister, Joy, come more ;
For she can make ten lovely songs
While thou art making four.”

One may be inclined to wonder what it is that brings sadness to a poet otherwise so full of the joy of life, so entranced by the beauty of the world. At times it is some inexplicable melancholy, a sense of the mystery of life, which settles upon him and is heightened by the disharmony between the poet himself and surrounding Nature. This mood pervades *The Dark Hour*.

“ And now, when merry winds do blow,
And rain makes trees look fresh,
An overpowering staleness holds
This mortal flesh.
Though well I love to feel the rain,
And be by winds well blown—
The mystery of mortal life
Doth press me down.
And, in this mood, come now what will,
Shine Rainbow, Cuckoo call ;
There is no thing in Heaven or Earth
Can lift my soul.

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I know not where this state comes from—
No cause for grief I know ;
The Earth around is fresh and green,
Flowers near me grow.

I sit between two fair Rose trees ;
Red roses on my right,
And on my left side roses are
A lovely white.

The little birds are full of joy,
Lambs bleating all the day ;
The colt runs after the old mare,
And children play.

And still there comes this dark, dark hour—
Which is not born of Care ;
Into my heart it creeps before
I am aware."

But more frequently his sadness arises from the thought of approaching old age. In *Plants and Men* this is the key-note and the effect is all the greater for the restraint and simplicity of his plaintive song.

"You berries once,
In early hours,
Were pretty buds,
And then fair flowers.

Drop, drop at once,
Your life is done ;
You cannot feel
The dew or sun.

We are the same,
First buds, then flowers ;
Hard berries then,
In our last hours.

Sweet birds, fair flowers,
Hard berries, then—
Such is the life
Of plants and men."

The poet's horror of old age is, however, not rooted in the fear of death, but in the paralysing prospect of his decaying poetic power. The thought that he will some day look on at the world and be unable to interpret it ; that

"to translate the songs of birds
Will be beyond his power in words,"

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—this is what dispels his joy. He gives vent to these feelings in several poems, but nowhere with greater pathos than in his *Farewell to Poesy* :

“Sweet Poesy, why art thou dumb !
I loved thee as my captive bird,
That sang me songs when spring was gone,
And birds of freedom were not heard ;
Nor dreamt thou wouldst turn false and cold
When needed most, by men grown old.

Sweet Poesy, why art thou dumb !
I fear thy singing days are done ;
The poet in my soul is dying,
And every charm in life is gone ;
In vain birds scold and flowers do plead—
The poet dies, his heart doth bleed.”

Fortunately, there seems no prospect of Mr. Davies yet being taken from our midst, for we could ill afford to lose so original, so amiable and so charming a poet. In the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries he is a unique figure. If we wish to discover some kindred spirit we must turn to the eighteenth century, where we find William Blake, or we must hark back still further to the Elizabethans. Here, too, we can point to a tuneful singer, who, in spite of a life spent in squalid surroundings or in vagabond hardship, preserved a love of beauty and of Nature and afterwards settled down to end his days in ordered peace—Thomas Lodge. Yet the relationship in this case is not intimate and in reality Mr. Davies stands quite apart. Above all he has a delicate fancy, a gracefulness which is absolutely his own. Who can forget his comparison of the sun rising over the crest of a hill to the launch of a dazzling, golden ship ; or when the alternating blushes and pallor of his love are likened unto a duel between a lily and a rose ; or yet again how he remembers a waterfall pouring down the side of a mountain—

“The white cascade that’s both a bird and star,
That has a ten mile voice and shines as far.”

Mr. Davies is not a prophet with some new and passionate gospel to preach ; his chief stress is laid on the delight of living,

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though incidentally he inculcates the duty of love, sympathy, pity and brotherliness and this is no mean lesson. But quite apart from these considerations, we should be unwilling to lose such poems as the intrinsically exquisite *April's Boys and Girls*. It is as follows :

“ Of primrose boys
April has many ;
He seems as fond
Of them as any ;
He shows the world
Those boys in gold.

But violets are
His girls, whom he
Shuts up in some
Green nunnery :
So does he prove
His deepest love.

April, a girl
Of yours I found ;
High walls of grass
Hemmed her around ;
April, forgive me—
I followed a bee.

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“ The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair ;
The sunshine is a glorious birth ;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there has passed away a glory from the earth.”

(WORDSWORTH :

Ode on Intimations of Immortality).

“ Lover of England in the sun and rain,
Of the Welsh marches all the seasons through,
No more by Taf - side will you walk again
And pause to hearken till the dim cuckoo
Calls nearer, wondering why his rich refrain
Doth move men so, heard through the May - time's blue,
Over the gorse - lands ; now our hearts have pain.
Knowing not here shall we encounter you.

Lover of England and the English tongue,
How must they mourn you who did know you well,
Who've heard you quote old tunes our fathers sung,
Or some new poet's song you had to tell,
As 'twere a noose of words by genius flung
Around Eternity. You, too, the spell
Of words had skill in, and your phrases rung,
Full oft with beauty, like a limpid bell.”

(FREDERICK NIVEN :

Edward Thomas—In Memoriam).



Edward Thomas.

In his little book on *Nature*, Mr. W. H. Davies mentions that after he had published his first volume of poems, an offer was made him of a cottage in the country where he could write his *Autobiography* in peace and quiet. The man to whose generosity he was indebted for this kindly interest in his work was Edward Thomas, also a Welshman and a nature-lover.

The salient facts about the life of Edward Thomas may be summed up very briefly.¹ Of Welsh origin, he was born in South Lambeth, London, and educated at Battersea Grammar School and St. Paul's School. His early years were therefore spent in the Metropolis, but this did not cut him off from all opportunity of becoming familiar with natural life. At an early age he began to watch the habits of the birds, animals, flowers and insects to be found in and about London. These interests were confirmed and developed by the holidays he spent with his grandmother at Swindon, where he was near the old haunts of Richard Jefferies. The result of these observations was seen in 189⁷, when, at the age of ^{seventeen}seventeen, he published his first volume, *The Woodland Life*. In 1897 he entered Lincoln College, Oxford. Here he held a History Scholarship, one of his tutors being Sir O. M. Edwards.

On leaving Oxford in 1900 he resolved to devote himself to literature. Nothing could persuade him to take up a lucrative profession, because it would have meant the sacrifice of his liberty and the abandonment of his quiet cottage in the country. He therefore relied on his pen and varied his work by long rambles through South Wales and Southern England. One cannot but admire the fertility of his genius. The biographies alone which came from his hand form a goodly company—Richard Jefferies,

¹For further details see Mr. Philip Thomas's account at the end of this lecture and the article on Edward Thomas in *The Welsh Outlook*, June, 1917.

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Lafcadio Hearn, Maeterlinck, Swinburne, Borrow, Marlborough and Pater. We also owe to him several delightful anthologies and adaptations of Celtic and Old Norse tales. But his best work appears in his essays and books of travel, describing his wanderings through England and Wales.

The position of Edward Thomas in literature was already assured when the war broke out. He joined the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps, but ultimately transferred to the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was killed on Easter Monday, 1917, by a direct hit from a shell, whilst guiding the fire of his battery from the forward observation post during the battle of Arras. The way in which he met with his death was characteristic of the man. He had given up a safe post behind the line in order to be in the open air and observe the wild birds and animals he loved so well.

Mention has already been made of our author's Welsh descent, and in this connection it may be pointed out that if we had but the names of W. H. Davies and Edward Thomas the indebtedness of English literature to Wales during the last twenty years would be considerable. Though such a large part of Edward Thomas's life was spent in England and devoted to the study of the English countryside, he ever felt drawn towards Wales and the west. In a splendid passage of *The South Country* he describes how a glance at the west coast of Britain fascinates him. He seems to hear a call, on beholding "the great promontories of Caernarvon, of Pembroke, of Gower and of Cornwall, jutting out into the western sea, like the features of a grim large face, such a face as is carved on a ship's prow." These protruding features, he goes on, "thrill the mind with a sense of purpose and spirit. They yearn, they peer out ever to the sea, as if using eyes and nostrils to savour the utmost scent of it, as if themselves calling back to the call of the waves. To the eyes of a child they stand for adventure. They are lean and worn and scarred with the strife and watching. Then gradually into the mind of the child comes the story that justifies and, still more, inspires and seems

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to explain those westward-pointing promontories. For, out towards them continually have the conquered races retreated, and their settlements give those corners a strangeness and a charm to our fantastic sympathies. Out from them conquerors in their turn have gone to found a legend like the Welsh Madoc, an empire like the men of Devon. The blood of conquered and conqueror is in our veins, and it flushes the cheek at the sight or thought of the west. Each man of us is as ancient and complicated, as lofty-spired and as deep-vaulted as cathedrals and castles old, and in those lands our crypts and dark foundations are dimly remembered. We look out towards them from the high camps at Battlesbury and Barbury: the lines of the Downs go trooping along to them at night. Even in the bosom of the South Country, when the tranquil bells are calling over the corn at twilight, the westward-going hills, where the sun has fallen, draw the heart away and fill us with a desire to go on and on for ever, that same way."

So as Edward Thomas tramps the roads and lanes of England his mind at times turns towards the west and its traditions. He inhales with zest the golden savours borne by the wind from Wales or the old tune of Caradoc's hunt flashes across his mind and inspires him to a noble passage of sympathetic interpretation. He keeps a keen look out for the ways along which Welsh drovers used to bring their cattle to London, or enjoys a brief spell of conversation with some wanderer whose home lies amid the western mountains. And when his steps have brought him to Cornwall, with what tender insight does he not reveal the spirit of the country to us. He describes the circle of "nineteen tall, grey stones round a taller, pointed one that is heavily bowed, amidst long grass and bracken and furze," where the old bards used to meet, "leaning upon the stones, tall, fair men of peace, but half-warriors, whose songs could change ploughshare into sword." Nor does he fail to criticise Mr. W. H. Hudson for his "uncomfortable, unsympathetic book," entitled *Land's End*.

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Edward Thomas himself, at any rate, could not justly be accused, of failing to appreciate the Celtic regions of Britain. He has given us some charming pictures of Welsh scenery and Welsh characters. We cannot forget the inimitable Captain Rowland, a hot-tempered old bachelor, who for days together used to sit in one room, "smoking over theology, night-capped, slippers, wearing a waistcoat whose folds were a diary of years past in vigorous characters. Into this faded room he used to summon his household before the dinner-hour, when he read aloud to them—an odd solemnity—a passage from the *Newgate Calendar* in a stormy bass voice. At the more terrible parts the maids were asked to conceal their faces. 'Amen,' he bellowed, at the end. 'Amen,' whispered the trembling assembly. 'And now, if you like, you can go to church' was his valediction on Sundays." However negligent his dress on ordinary occasions, he always wore black clothes, a talk silk hat, and a white cravat in order to go fishing. Whilst engaged in this pursuit he would not speak a word or tolerate any society, for, as he put it, "Fishing is fishing."

Another devotee of fishing is described to us in the *Rose Acre Papers*. He was a superannuated preacher who one day saw a Sunday sportsman lose a fine pike and exclaimed, "Go to chapel, you young fool go to chapel; you're no fisherman, though maybe you will become a fisher of men." In his old age this preacher himself took to Sunday sport, declaring that he was "still the only man that did not rest on the seventh day." One spring day, however, an elder took it upon himself to utter a word of rebuke, whereupon the old preacher seized his rod and his catch, placed them in the vestry of the chapel, and delivered a memorable sermon from the text "He taketh up all of them with his angle." It was not long afterwards that he fell asleep, "threading a bait beside the waters."

If we turn to *Mothers and Sons in Rest and Unrest*, we find a portrait of Owen, a South Wales tin-plater, of his house and his family, whilst the same narrative describes the room of a local

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bard in somewhat satirical colours. "The walls were hidden by books and portraits of poets and bards. Its floors were almost as densely overgrown as the coombe, with oak armchairs whose richness of decorative carving equalled their discomfort. These were prizes won at Eisteddfodau by the successful poem on some religious subject or subject which could be treated religiously. The poet had written more poems than there were chairs; for he was well-read in English and classical literatures and had a boldness of imagery, which the judges, ministers of various sects, sometimes declared in marginal notes to be affected." And how well the two worlds are contrasted in the sketch entitled *At a Cottage Door*—the old world with its natural beauty, its simplicity, its traditions as embodied in good Catherine Anne Jones, who believed the two swifts flying round her chimney to be the souls of her dead babes, and on the other hand the new, industrialised world with its ugliness, squalor, tawdry display and vulgar modernism. There can be no doubt as to which of the two Edward Thomas loved. The Wales that stirred his heart and kindled his imagination was the Wales of untamed mountain and unsullied stream, of bright eyes and tuneful voices, the Wales of ancient poetry and time-honoured legend; it was the land of that *Mabinogion* which he himself sought to make accessible to the English reader, the land which inspired his own beautiful dream-like tales, such as *The Castle of Llostormellyn*.¹

The memory of Wales was ever pleasant to Edward Thomas

¹Edward Thomas's Welsh sympathies appear very clearly in *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, a story of a London Welsh family; in the pathetic tale *Home (Light and Twilight)* and in the volume *Beautiful Wales*. The latter is remarkably successful in conveying the magic of the Welsh atmosphere. Many are the charming descriptions of scenery and of characters, such as Evan the harper, Llewelyn the bard, Gwilym Pritchard the poacher, Owen the innkeeper, and Jones and Rowlands the ministers. See also *February in England (Rose Acre Papers)*, the preface to *The Icknield Way* and various tales in *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*. Edward Thomas was no doubt attracted to John Dyer, whose works he edited, by the fact that the latter was a Welshman and Borrow's sympathetic account of Wales must have appealed strongly to his biographer. In *Beautiful Wales*, the author tells us how he loves the old Welsh names—Olwen, Myfanwy, Angharad. His own children are called Merfyn, Bronwen and Myfanwy.

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as was the recollection of his childhood days, though he himself tells us there was little joy in them, for he had inherited a certain melancholy strain from his mother. Here and there in his books we find a hint of what he was like as a child. Merry intercourse with other boys or with his schoolfellows plays little or no part in them. Now and then we catch a glimpse of him peeping into some London house or garden which sets his fancy to work, or of his happy, childish dreams. "Without vanity," he says, "I think in my boyhood, in my sleep, I was often in heaven." And even in those early years something of the beauty of nature had crept into his mind. In *Rest and Unrest*, describing a vision of a glorious, fairy-like being he has just seen, he adds, "As a boy it was of such a being I used to think when I felt, in loneliest places among the woods or clouds, that my footfalls had scared something shy, beautiful, and divine." We get an impression of a sensitive, dreamy child, whose lively fancy could build up romantic scenes out of prosaic reality. The portrait in *Beautiful Wales*¹ of a London child sitting in the late October twilight before the flickering fire and gazing up with rapt eyes at a picture of Wales illuminated by the pale rays of the setting sun, strikes one as wonderfully true to life. Was he not like the little boy described in *The Heart of England*, who beheld in wonder the water-cress man "with something magnificent and comely in his hoariness ; sleeping the boy knew not where, perhaps not at all, but going on and on, certainly not to church, but to places with mountains, icebergs, houses in the branches of trees, great waters, camels, monkeys, crocodiles, parrots, ivory, cannibals, curved swords. And the boy flushed to think that the quiet street was an avenue to all the East, the Pole, the Amazon to dark men who wondered about the sunlight, the wind, the rain, and whence they came to towns set down in the heart of forests and lonely as ships at sea."

¹It is unfortunate that the illustrations in this volume have absolutely no relation to Edward Thomas's text, and it is to be hoped that the latter may some day be published by itself, as it well deserves to be.

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Of his life as a student at Oxford, Edward Thomas's works do not tell us much more than about his boyhood. One of his early books, however, published three years after his leaving the university, gives a charming account of Oxford ways. His chapters on *Dons Ancient and Modern*, *Undergraduates of the Present and Past*, and *College Servants* make delightful reading. He dwells lovingly on "the retired Lincoln College Chapel, with its carved panels of perfumed cedar and rich, quaint glass," and remembers "the mysterious pleasure of being in an elevated Oxford chamber at night, among cloud and star," so that he seemed to join in the inevitable motion of the planets. Often he would gaze down on "the sea of roofs and horned turrets and spires," and they seemed to speak to him "strongly and clearly, pompous as Latin, subtle as Greek." He loved also to hear the bells and used to envy the bell-ringers their joyful task. There were likewise days of rain, summer mornings when the drops fell gently, "while invisible cattle were lowing and doves cooing, and a distant bell was tolled," or autumn evenings with the hissing showers completing "the luxury of tea at Oxford in November, when the heart is fresh from walking. There is a hot generous fire; seven league slippers on the feet; hot buttered brown toast, and, as evening changes from gray to gray in quiet crescendo, still the rain."¹ Of his companionships and associations at Oxford, Edward Thomas has little to say, and about his studies he speaks but once—in a humorous vein. "I have read a good deal of history," he says, "in fact, a university gave me a degree out of respect for my apparent knowledge of history—but I have forgotten it all." The libraries were nevertheless amongst his favourite haunts, and in fact he knew only two places that gave him entire satisfaction in August, the one a little, reedy, willowy pond, the other the Bodleian with its shade and tranquillity.

Concerning the books he loved, Edward Thomas has spoken at large. For the classics he cherished the greatest admiration, and to him Greek and Latin were anything but dead. "Magical

¹See the essay on *Rain* in the *Rose Acre Papers*.

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powers like those imputed to the flesh of mummies abide in the languages we call dead." So he conned his Homer and Virgil, his Catullus and Euripides with all the ardour of a faithful worshipper. "It is much to speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke," he exclaims, "but more perhaps to speak the tongue of Greece that gave light, and of Rome that gave fire, to the world. The scholar has upon his lips imperial accents. When I speak a line of Greek I seem to taste nectar and ambrosia." Even more extensive was his knowledge of English literature, ranging from Beowulf and Chaucer, through the mediæval ballad,¹ the great Elizabethans, the seventeenth century mystics, down to Blake, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, or moderns like Richard Jefferies and Swinburne. These were at all seasons his faithful companions, but it was of an evening and more especially in winter that he loved to take refuge with them. In his essay *Recollections of November* there is a fascinating sketch of the communion he would then hold with his books and pictures. "My books seem to be fond of the night—poor ghosts of buried minds—and are never so apt as in the faint candlelight to be taken down and read, or perhaps merely glanced at as I turn the pages, which I think they best enjoy. The portrait of Andrea del Sarto, by his own censorious hand, hangs near, and loves the twilight. If ever, he seems now to smile And now, by the hearthside, I like best among books the faint perfumes of those old forgotten things that claim a little pity along with my love. I had rather the *Emblems* of Quarles than mightier books where there is too much of the fever and the fret of real, passionate life. Odd books of devotion, of church music, the happy or peevish fancies of religious souls, please me well. I plead guilty to liking a thing because 'tis old. I believe, were I alive two hundred years hence, I should like silk hats." So he reaches down his George Herbert and his Charles Cotton and declares that he could even go to bed fasting after reading Ben Jonson's lusty lines *Inviting a Friend to Supper*.

¹ See the fine passage on the ballad in *The Heart of England*, pp. 206-207.

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These literary tastes make themselves felt everywhere in Edward Thomas's work. His nature books, for example, are a singularly beautiful blending of delicate observation of natural objects and sensitive appreciation of sounds, colours and fragrances, interwoven with charming passages on his favourite authors. One returns with ever increasing pleasure to such lines as those in *The South Country*, where he speaks of Chaucer, whose "gaiety bathes the land in the light of a golden age and the freshness of all the May days we can never recover," of Byron, who "was a man before he was a poet," and of Shelley, concerning whom he says: "Men may forget to repeat his verses; they can never be as if Shelley had never been. He is a part of all high-spirited and pure audacity of the intellect and imagination, of all clean-handed rebellion, of all infinite endeavour and hope. The remembered splendour of his face is more to us than Parliaments; one strophe of his odes is more nourishing than a rich man's gold." Well too did he know quaint old writers like Izaak Walton and Sir Thomas Browne, wanderers such as George Borrow, nature-lovers like Thoreau, and mystics such as Vaughan, Traherne and Blake. His characterisation of the latter is amongst the most vivid things he ever wrote. Blake's England, he says, "is just this: meadows and streets and cold churches, with children playing in twilight or weeping, lions and lambs mingled, birds singing, angels clustering in trees, venerable, seraphic old men pacing, harlots and soldiers plying, mighty figures descended from those in Westminster Abbey and the Italian churches and galleries, peopling the clouds and a misty region of 'Where?'" and Blake himself, a sturdy, half-Quakerish revolutionary, with rapt forehead carrying home his pint of porter."

It was Oxford then that afforded Edward Thomas an opportunity of cultivating those literary tastes, which he, "always a writer," already possessed. That his future career should in some way be connected with the writing of books seemed a very natural course. But what was to be his theme? In London there were men and women in plenty to portray, yet this was not

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a subject that appealed to him. Not that he was blind to the romance of London. "The names of the streets," he writes, "were an epitome of the world and time, commemorating famous and unknown men, battles, conspiracies, far-off cities and rivers, little villages known to me, streams and hills now buried by houses; the names of the inns were as rich as the titles of books in an old library, suggested many an inn by wood and mill and meadow and village square, but all confused as if in a marine store." He was appalled by the immensity of this region, by its complexity and amorphousness. It was a riddle to which he could find no solution. The streets of London, he tells us, "are the strangest thing in the world. They have never been discovered. They cannot be classified. There is no tradition about them. They are to us as mountains were in the Middle Ages, sublime, difficult, immense; and yet so new that we have inherited no certain attitude towards them, of liking or dislike. They suggest so much that they mean nothing at all. The eye strains at them as at Russian characters which are known to stand for something beautiful or terrible: but there is no translator: it sees a thousand things which at the moment of seeing are significant, but they obliterate one another. More than battlefield or library, they are dense with human life. They are as multitudinous and painful and unsatisfying as the stars. They propose themselves as a problem to the mind, only a little less so at night when their surfaces hand the mind on to the analogies of sea waves or large woods."

In *The South Country*, Edward Thomas declares that he is "neither townsman or countryman," and on the whole his attitude bears out the truth of his statement. He did not dislike London, and could even find beauty in the mudbanks below Waterloo Bridge, when the setting sun had transformed them as if with a magic wand. But the sight of the outcasts of the city aroused a feeling of dissatisfaction and at times there came a mood over him, when he was only too glad to escape from the tentacles of the capital. He knew there was beauty even in London but, he says,

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“for most of us this visionary or God-like view is impossible except in a few particular and irrecoverable moments. We cannot make harmony out of cities We may feel the painful splendour of our humanity in the town, but it is in the country more often that we become aware, in a sort of majestic quiet, of the destiny which binds us to infinity and eternity.” For this reason he cast a glance of regret at the relentless advance of London, absorbing woods, fields, commons and gardens. Hence the sympathy with which he describes the plight of the “Adventurer,” whose father had farmed the land that the rising tide of houses had engulfed until only a little oasis remained, and who at the age of seventy could bear the spectacle no longer and burst away to the country. On this account also, he rejoices at the sight of Nature recovering lost ground and, like Richard Jefferies, he reflects with pleasure that Nature will some day absorb London as she absorbed the mastodon. So he writes: “I like to see grass and flowers come down softly to take possession of any London soil that is, for a month or two, allowed to feel the sun, wind, and rain. With all their inhuman grace, lightness, and silence, the flowers and grass are related to me as the bricks, mortar, and iron are not, and I have a kind of far-off share in their victories.” When he is in this mood, even the sight of a house in a field cannot dismay him. It will soon be toned down and merged into the surrounding landscape, or as Edward Thomas himself poetically puts it, this house “is adventuring, it is going to mix with high, strange company, and to learn something from clouds and stars, from the long bays of corn and grass among the woods at the bases of the hills, which it will look down on perhaps for many generations.”

It may be true that Edward Thomas was never a countryman, that he always felt the countryfolk to be a different race from himself, that he brought with him an equipment of mind and sense very different from that of the rustic, and that he conceived the country-dweller to possess a gift of liberty and joy to which he was a stranger, but for all that one may safely venture to say

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that his heart was in the country rather than in the town. Edward Thomas could retire into his world of books and dreams and thus forget his surroundings, but it is impossible to ignore the horror of the winter greyness of London which emanates from his sketch *February in England*. Nor can we overlook his rapture at finding himself outside the enveloping bonds of brick, stone and concrete. "Suddenly," he says in *The Heart of England*, "my mind went back to the high dark cliffs of Westminster Abbey, the blank doors and windows of endless streets, the devouring river, the cold gloom before dawn, and then with a shudder forgot them and saw the flowers and heard the birds with such a joy as when the ships from Tarshish, after three blank years, again unloaded apes and peacocks and ivory, and men upon the quay looked on ; or as, when a man has mined in the dead desert for many days, he suddenly enters an old tomb, and making a light, sees before him vases of alabaster, furniture adorned with gold and blue enamel and the figures of gods, a chariot of gold, and a silence perfected through many ages in the company of death and of the desire of immortality." With such feelings did he at times set forth on his wanderings.

Our author's rambles led him into many remote corners of England and Wales, but the region he knew best was what he calls *The South Country*, embracing the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset. Here he roamed to and fro at will for many years. His purpose was to seek quiet and to escape towns of all sorts and sizes. If he used maps, it was to guide him away from the cities. "If I have some days before me," he says, "I prefer to be guided by the hills or the sun or a stream—or, if I have one day only, to go in a rough circle, trusting, by taking a series of turnings to the left or a series to the right, to take much beauty by surprise and to return at last to my starting-point." The quest of beauty then was his object, and so he refused to be tied down to regular, well-beaten routes or the customary tourist centres. "I never go out to see anything Castles, churches, old houses, of extra-

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ordinary beauty or interest, have never worn out any of my shoe leather except by accident." His most attractive books are written in this vein, and when he abandoned his long-established habits and followed a definite track marked out in advance, it was a sore trial to his liberty-loving spirit. Thus in *The Icknield Way*, which describes how he followed up this old road over hill and dale, we are conscious that he moves in oppressive fetters and the result is a work which cannot compare with *The South Country* or *The Heart of England*. He suffered from having to walk along "an unadventurous, level, probably commercial road," which was monopolised by tyrannical motor-cars and led past "brand-new, jerry-built, slated cages," and how true that passage rings in which he exclaims: "The scene awakened desire, but I could not turn aside to satisfy it."

When left to wander as the spirit moved him, however, Edward Thomas derived an extraordinary feeling of exhilaration and buoyancy from long days spent in contact with nature. He knew the delight of walking amidst the lanes and hedgerows, aiming at some remote goal without needing to concentrate the attention on it. He would cheer the way with song or sink into solitary reverie, holding high communion with earth, sea and sky. Turning his back on "politics, the drama, science, racing, reforms and preservations, divorces, book clubs," and similar things beyond his grasp, he would battle with wind and rain and at nightfall descend from the hills of Wales or Kent towards the bright, friendly lights of the nearest inn.

It is the fruits of the imagination working under these conditions that are embodied in his works. The descriptions given us there are not mere mechanical accounts of the country he has passed through. Where he does become somewhat matter-of-fact as in *The Icknield Way*, it is because the theme is uncongenial to him. Speaking generally, however, it is not the everyday world we see, but glimpses of beauty as mirrored in his noble imagination. He does not view nature with the eye of the naturalist, who "murders to dissect," but with the transforming

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gaze of the poet. His quest is not for knowledge or wisdom but for "one whom to pursue is never to capture"—the elusive spirit of beauty. And the country which is his province "is incomparably larger than any country that was ever mapped, since upon nothing else than the infinite can the spirit disport itself. In other ways it is far smaller, as when a mountain with tracts of sky and cloud and the full moon glass themselves in a pond, a little pond." The picture he gives us of *The South Country* is therefore a composite one. It does not contain name after name in regular local order, nor does he attempt to distinguish between one county and another. His landscape has, nevertheless, all the texture of reality combined with the charm of "an ideal country, belonging to itself and beyond the power of the world to destroy."

This is the great secret, it seems to me, of Edward Thomas's charm as a writer about the country-side. There had been other wandering nature-lovers before him, but none capable of summoning up that dream-like atmosphere which arose at the bidding of his enchanter's rod. The robustness of George Borrow seems almost crude in comparison with the magic subtlety of Edward Thomas's touch, and even the nature-studies of Richard Jefferies, superior though they may be in passionate power, fail to achieve our author's ethereal atmosphere of reverie. "What I saw," says Edward Thomas on one occasion, "was little compared with what reached me by touch and by darker channels still." And as he wandered, for example, down a sunlit road in June, he would behold about him a vision of beauty, which seemed free from any taint of earthliness. "The few people whom we see, the mower, the man hoeing his onion-bed in a spare half-hour at mid-day, the children playing 'Jar-jar-winkle' against a wall, the women hanging out clothes,—these the very loneliness of the road has prepared us for turning into creatures of dream; it costs an effort to pass the time of day with them, and they being equally unused to strange faces are not loquacious, and so the moment they are passed, they are no more real than the men and women of pastoral." In another striking passage of *The Heart of England* he tells us: "I rarely see much in the country—a few

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herbs underfoot, the next field, the horizon woods, some brief light that shows only its departing hem ; for, like others, I always carry out into the fields a vast baggage of prejudices from books and strong characters whom I have met. My going forth, although simple enough to the eye, is truly as pompous as that of a rajah who goes through the jungle on a tall and richly encrusted elephant, with a great retinue, and much ceremony and noise. As he frightens bird and beast, and tramples on herb and grass, so I scatter from my path many things which are lying in wait for a discoverer." We are here given another cause, humorously overstated, for the abnormal way Edward Thomas had of visualising things about him. But it is subsidiary and complementary to his visionary outlook, this being one of the most characteristic aspects of the man. Even as a child he had revelled in dreams and though with time their substance changed, the predilection, or ought we not rather to call it the happy gift, remained with him. Sometimes his visions have all the splendour of a pageant, as in *Winter Music*, where he falls to dreaming at eventide and sees before him "a dragon, enormous, many coloured, glittering." On other occasions they are permeated with a solemn sadness as in *July*, where he sees his own shade wandering happily through the forest with a beautiful maiden, to the distant accompaniment of the murmuring sea. Then the premonition felt the whole time by the watcher is fulfilled and the summer verdure of the words is changed into "a low, grey winter sky and a flat white winter land, and in the midst of it, under a yew tree, a man, shoulder deep in the ground, casting up dark earth on to the snow at a grave's edge." Yet whatever the mood of these visions, beauty is always present. We see, therefore, how in the finely strung temperament of Edward Thomas, the sights of nature aroused sensations unknown to the ordinary mind. Who can read his sketch, *An Old Wood*, and fail to be struck by the transmuting power of his imagination? Just at sunset, the last light of day pierces the rainclouds and glows through the ancient trunks of this impenetrable wood. The blue shades of evening descend and sever him "from all but the light in the

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old wood and the ghostly white cow-parsley flowers suspended on unseen stalks." "And there," he goes on, "among the trees and shadows, not understood, speaking a forgotten tongue, old dreads and formless awes and fascinations discover themselves and address the comfortable soul, troubling it, recalling to it unremembered years Druid and devilish deity and lean wild beast, harmless now, are revolving many memories with me under the strange, sudden red light in the old wood, and not more remote is the league-deep emerald sea-cave from the storm above than I am from the world."

From what has already been said, it will have been made perfectly clear that Edward Thomas was a very different sort of wayfarer from the subject of our last lecture, Mr. W. H. Davies. The writer with whom we are at present preoccupied has a being of more complex structure than the tramp-poet. In him there is also less of the vagrant and in the course of his travels he invariably makes for a house or an inn when the dusk of evening descends. On one occasion he mentions gypsies going out to sleep under the autumn moon although they might have had shelter close by, and for an instant the question flashes through his mind why he should be going farther on. The hesitation is, however, only momentary, and as usual he directs his steps towards some human habitation. Nor do tramp companions figure so frequently in his work as in that of Mr. W. H. Davies. In reality, Edward Thomas was by no means always alone in his wanderings, but one may doubt whether he had the same power of striking up an acquaintance as the author of *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*. In the sketch entitled *Hawthornden*, Edward Thomas portrays a man in whom one is inclined to suspect there is a little of himself. "He admired books of curious character and adventure, such as Borrow's, and adored the strange persons who frequented once upon a time, and perhaps even now, the inns and roads of England He used to sit by the roadside, or in the taproom of an inn, waiting for what would turn up. But something always stood in the way

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—himself He complained of his failure to get at the heart of the wayfaring man.

But even if there is no one in the pages of Edward Thomas quite equal to the inimitable Brum and other characters who abound in Mr. Davies's *Autobiography*, it would be unjust to overlook the quaint figures who occasionally appear in *The Rose Acre Papers*, *The South Country*, and more especially in *The Heart of England*. Thus we have the study of Hengest, the gigantic gardener of whom Edward Thomas writes: "His hair and beard are furze-brushes; the large, quiet eyes are like sweet birds hiding therein. His chest is so ample that to see him walking reminds me of the verse: 'The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.' Yet he has spent all that part of life which he cares to talk about, in growing columbines and wistaria, in providing for sweet williams and tea roses. His gardening always seems an infinite condescension." Again, in the *Two Scholars* we find a delightful account of a beekeeper, who in his youth had sailed to America in quest of adventure, had amassed great wealth and lost it all in some catastrophe of Nature, and then settled down in Wales with his bees and his Virgil.

In the first place, however, it is the genuine rustic, the simple labourer or sturdy farmer, that Edward Thomas loves to describe. His affectionate sympathy shows itself very clearly in the portrait of the young Sussex labourer standing before his picturesque cottage, with its pointed timbers and garden of apple trees and fragrant lilac.¹ An equally deep insight into rustic character is revealed in the study of Robert and Margaret Helen Page, an old labourer and his wife, in *Earth Children*.² How racy, too, and smacking of the soil is the sketch of old Peter Durrañt with his love of bygone days and reminiscences of squires, carols and coaches; how pathetic his tales of his exploits as a mower. But with all his weakness and garrulousness old Peter is a figure to be remembered. "He will bury his nose in a fragrant posy brought home by the children and say gravely, and I think with some dark

¹ *The South Country*, pp. 70-71.

² *The Heart of Eng. and*, pp. 126-137.

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wisdom, 'Why, they must be good for something,' and deeply inhaling, he continues, 'At least they are good for old age.' And his own old age he attributes to the diet of living tadpoles which he used against a decline, fifty years ago."¹ Not less delightful is the description of the Four Elms Inn and the rustics foregathered there. How well one sees the scene and breathes the scents of the country! "A faggot was burning on the hearth, more for the sake of its joyful sound and perfume than for its heat. The sanded floor, cool and bright, received continually the red hollowed petals that bled from a rose on the table. The pewter glimmered; the ale wedded and unwedded innumerable shades of red and gold as it wavered in the mystic heart of the tankard. The window was held fast, shut by the stems of a Gloire de Dijon rose in bloom, and through it could be seen the gloom of an ocean of ponderous, heaving clouds, with a varying cleft of light between them and the hills which darkened the woods and made the wheat fields luminous." In these surroundings the country labourers meet to discuss ploughs, crops and horses, or such profound mysteries as "which came first, parson or hay?" There they sit in a row, according to age, and this is how they appeared in the twilight to Edward Thomas. "The oldest, reddest and roundest of face, with white hair, looked like the sun at a mountain crest. The next seemed to be the spirit of beneficent rain, pale, vague, with moist eyes and tangled grey beard. The third was as the south wind, mild, cheerful, pink-faced, with a great rose in his button-hole. The fourth was the west wind, that lifts the hay from the level fields into the clouds at a breath, that robs the harebell of its dew and stores it with rain—a mighty man with head on breast, and small hands united, and flowing hair. And the youngest was the harvest moon, glowing, with close hair and elusive features, a presence as he sat there rather than a man."

It may be asked what it was that attracted Edward Thomas so strongly in these country-dwellers. He doubtless envied them their simple, tranquil life, far from the madding crowd, in the

¹ *The Heart of England*, pp. 77-82.

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midst of beautiful surroundings, and even if their powers of appreciation were not so sensitive as his own, were they not day by day, from earliest youth, brought into intimate contact with Nature? But this was not all. The countryman appealed to our author because of his solidness, his permanence, because he was not merely an individual but a representative. He stood forth as a link in the long chain of tillers of the soil, a chain which stretched backwards into the dim mists of time immemorial. Again and again Edward Thomas insists on this aspect of rustic life. Thus, in the description of the labourers to which we have just referred, he says: "They were of that great family which, at the prime of life or earlier, seems to begin growing backwards, to quote 'grandfather,' more often, and thus to give the observer a glimpse of the Dark Ages." The same sense of tradition appears even more strongly in the case of the farmer in *The Heart of England*,¹ with his property bearing the traces of many generations of hard-working ancestors. Of him we are told: "He speaks of the long-dead generations not as if they were names, but so that they were known certainly to have lived and worked and enjoyed. That one planted the spreading oak, that globed green world of nightingale and willow-wren and dove; that added the knolled pasture and cut the deep, stony lane that leads to it through the brook; another built the fruit wall and bought the copy of *Tristram Shandy* that stands with a hundred other books in the dining-room." These are old and precious, "but it is as what the family has approved and lived on that he values them." This farmer had a tray of coins going back to the reign of Charles II., each of them having some connection with his family. He himself had added a modern sixpence for, he asks, "What would they think of me in a hundred years' time if I had not put a sixpence in?"

When in London, Edward Thomas felt conscious that he was not a townsman, but in the presence of such sturdy old farmers as these, he realised that he was not a genuine countryman either.

¹pp. 66-68.

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He admired them—but was not of them. In him there were ever the two contradictory impulses, to wander and to settle, to seek variety and to know nothing of change.¹ So he envied the country dweller his restfulness, his complete agreement with his surroundings and his inward harmony. Nowhere does this appear more markedly than in the portrait of a farmer in *The South Country*. He is “the son’s son of one who rebuilt the house when the woods were darker and huger still. Life is a dark, simple matter for him; three-quarters of his living is done for him by the dead; merely to look at him is to see a man five generations thick, so to speak, and neither Nature nor the trumpery modern man can easily disturb a human character of that density. As I watch him going to and fro I lose sight of everything away from his rude house and the tall woods, because they and he are so powerful—he has the trees as well as his ancestors at his back—and it is no flight of fancy to see him cut off from all the world except the house and woods, and yet holding his own, able to keep his fire burning, his larder full, his back covered and his house dry. I feel but a wraith as I pass by.”

In the opening chapter of *The South Country*, Edward Thomas declares that he is “pure of history.” This may be correct in that he is little concerned with dates and details of history, but the passages we have quoted with reference to the inhabitants of the countryside prove that he had within him the finer spirit of history which defies all analysis. “Because we are imperfectly versed in history, we are not therefore blind to the past. The eye that sees the things of to-day, and the ear that hears, the mind that contemplates or dreams, is itself an instrument of an antiquity equal to whatever it is called upon to apprehend.”³ Hence his dislike of the motor-car on some quiet country road. Not that he is insensible to the charm of this modern creation, for on occasion it suggests to him “a wordless music of mystery and

¹ *The South Country*, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

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adventure,"¹ but because "the dust, the smell, the noise, the insolence of the new traffic"² are to be resented on behalf of the older and more peaceful world. Just as he regards the automobile as an arrogant intruder, so he feels distaste for the modern buildings which stand out so glaringly beside the time-mellowed walls of the country dwellings. Thus he notes how "an old farmhouse with ivied chimneys and ten blind windows in front stands bereaved with weedy garden, but for miles the air sounds with poultry, and the building of bungalows in deal and iron for strangers." And with what regret he tells of another old house to be sold by auction. "The two hundred autumns perpetuated in the tones of the bricks are in vain. Strangers will come, no doubt—I hope they will not—and be pleased, actually proud, at this mellowness, which ought to have died with the last of the family that built the houses." Truly, as we accompany Edward Thomas on his wanderings, we feel that our way is "over men's dreams," and that "there is no going so sweet as upon the old dreams of men."

In speaking of Edward Thomas's attitude towards the past, we have seen something of his imaginative power and his keen sense of the pathetic. To these gifts must be added a third—humour. How thoroughly he enjoys Peter Durrant's story of the hungry labourer who thrashed his master's pig, pretending that the greedy beast had stolen his dinner, and was finally appeased by a dish of roast pork from the farmer's kitchen! Or take the dialogue between the author and an old woman in *The Icknield Way*.³ She opens the conversation :

"Are you going far?"

"To Odsey, between Royston and Baldock."

"It's a long way. You're thin, boy."

"Food doesn't nourish me. Men cannot live on bread only, not even brown bread made at home."

"No."

¹ *The Icknield Way*, p. 101.

² *The South Country*, p. 220.

³ *The Icknield Way*, pp. 115-116.

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"Now in the moon, perhaps, I should get fat."

"Perhaps indeed, and I too. But look at the moon. You give me the horrors. You couldn't live there"

"But," I said, "I should like to try."

"Would you?"

"Yes, provided I were someone different. For, as for me, this is no doubt the best of all possible worlds."

"Better than the moon?"

"Yes, better than the moon; and there is nothing better in it than your well water, missus. Good afternoon."

We like that scene, too, in the Four Elms Inn where a number of tramps would insist on singing interminable songs until Edward Thomas went right through the sixteen verses of *Sir Hugh of Lincoln* in the hope of curing them. And with what zest does the author tell of the epitaphs in the village churchyard, the one with the quotation from Shakespeare, its source—*Romeo and Juliet*—being mentioned by name, or the other with the delightful lines:

"This world has lost old John the sexton,
What business has he in the next one?"¹

The humorous side and more especially the quaintly humorous aspect of life never failed to strike Edward Thomas.²

Yet his sympathies were not confined to the human inhabitants of the countryside. In spite of his disparaging remarks about his powers of observation, there is no denying that he was a loving student of the ways of bird, beast and flower. Had he written nothing else, his earliest book, *The Woodland Life*, would have been enough to prove it. In this respect he was conscious of a difference between himself and George Borrow, of whom he remarks that "he knew no natural history." Although Edward Thomas never obtrudes his knowledge upon us, we feel that it is there. With him, however, it was not a mere scientific acquaintance, but a friendship based on long-standing intimacy. How well he knew the trees and how exquisitely he could portray

¹ *The Heart of England*, pp. 108 and 113-114.

² See also his good-natured satire on the firm that specialises in rockeries and the improvement of nature. (*The South Country*, p. 105).

them! In early spring he tells how "the green fire of the larch woods is yellow at the crest," and a little later "the birch is now an arrested shower of green, but not enough to hide the white limbs of the nymph in the midst of it." If there was one form of nature rather than another in which Edward Thomas took delight, it was the world of trees. In a striking passage of *The South Country*, he says: "I like trees for the cool evening voices of their many leaves, for their cloudy forms linked to earth by stately stems—for the pale lifting of the sycamore leaves in breezes and also their drooping, hushed and massed repose, for the myriad division of the light ash leaves—for their straight pillars and for the twisted branch work, for their still shade and their rippling or calm shimmering or dimly glowing light, for the quick-silver drip of dawn, for their solemnity and their dancing, for all their sounds and motions—their slow-heaved sighs, their nocturnal murmurs, their fitful fingerings at thunder time, their swishing and tossing and hissing in violent rain, the roar of their congregations before the south-west wind when it seems that they must lift up the land and fly away with it, for their rustlings of welcome in harvest heat—for their kindness and their serene remoteness and inhumanity." Elsewhere he tells us that to walk under trees inspires him with a feeling of reverence, and more especially at eventide in the dim twilight when they suggest to him a temple, and ask him to bow his head to the unknown god.¹ A similar mood of magic mystery is conveyed by the sight of a misty mass of beeches, illuminated by the setting sun. "The opposite sun pours almost horizontal beams down upon the perfectly new leaves so as to give each one a yellow-green glow and to some a silver shimmer about the shadowy boles. For the moment the trees lose their anchor in the solid earth. They are floating, wavering, shimmering, more aerial and pure and wild than birds or any visible things, than aught except music and the fantasies of the brain. The mind takes flight and hovers among the leaves with whatsoever powers it has akin to dew and trembling

¹ *Rose Acre Papers*, p. 183.

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lark's song and rippling water ; it is throbbled away not only above the ponderous earth but below the firmament in the middle world of footless fancies and half thoughts that drift hither and thither and know neither a heaven nor a home."¹ To our author's fancy the trees pulsate with the feelings of man and after a summer rain, as he hears the drops falling from the leaves, it seems to him "a noise of rapt content, as if they were telling over again the kisses of the shower."

Considering the flowers also, he had come to the conclusion, like Maeterlinck, that they are not to be dismissed as "fragile toys from an exceptionally brilliant manufacturer," but that they are part of the great family which manifests itself in many forms of life. He loved them for their delicate beauty, and he revelled in their perfume as in all fragrances, which to him opened up a new world. So it was that he could speak of "all the joys of life that come through the nostrils from the dark, not understood world which is unbolted for us by the delicate and savage fragrances of leaf and flower and grass and clod, of the plumage of birds and fur of animals and breath and hair of women and children." Here, as in many other places, Edward Thomas shows a susceptibility to scents and odours which is none too common in English literature.

His ear is equally sensitive to the sounds of nature, and this makes him listen entranced to the songs of the birds. One cannot refrain from mentioning his description of the cuckoo in *The South Country*,² whilst the passage in which he speaks of the nightingale's notes, "wild and pure as mountain water in the dawn," is entirely admirable.³ It conveys in prose something of the magic and mystery expressed by Keats in his *Ode to a Nightingale*. Like the trees and the fragrances of the flowers, the nightingale's song carries Edward Thomas away to another world. "For this hour we are remote from the parochialism of humanity. The bird has admitted a larger air. We breathe deeply of it and are made free citizens of eternity."

¹ *The South Country*, p. 49.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

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Our study of Edward Thomas as a lover of nature would be incomplete without some reference to his fondness for rain. In this connection it may be remarked how he differs once more from the genuine tramp, the wanderer who is compelled to wander and has nowhere to lay his head. It will be remembered that in our last lecture we remarked upon Mr. W. H. Davies's horror of cold and rain. He who knows the discomfort of being soaked to the skin after sunset writes: "The greatest enemy to the man who has to carry on his body all his wardrobe, is rain." Edward Thomas, on the other hand, revels in rain, whether it be "heavy or light, freakish or continuous." He loves to feel the rain beating upon him, and declares: "Even at the fireside I am washed by rain until I seem to glimmer and rejoice like the white headstones on the hill." And in one of his poems he exclaims:

"Like the touch of rain she was
On a man's flesh and hair and eyes,
When the joy of walking thus
Has taken him by surprise."

In one of the *Rose Acre Papers*¹ he complains that the poets have had so little to say about rain, and that they have left its praises to be sung by hop-farmers. He himself delighted in rain for its beneficent activities. It is the veil in which Nature wraps herself "that she may toil and sing low at her myriad divine domesticities untroubled." In spring it is the rain and sun that reawaken Mother Earth and produce "the myriad stir of unborn things, of leaf and blade and flower, many silences at heart and root of trees, voices of hope and growth, of love that will be satisfied though it leap upon the swords of life."

On occasion, then, Edward Thomas derived a glow of exultation from battling with the elements, but it soon died down, leaving him only with a pleasant memory to which he could turn sadly in the after-days. An under-current of melancholy runs through his works and tinges his worship of nature with a plaintive regret. Sometimes it is because he is unable to interpret some sight or sound before him, and he cries: "I could have wept that

¹ *Rain*, pp. 103-126.

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my senses were not chastened to celestial keenness." But more usually it is the mystery of life which either consciously or subconsciously weighs upon him and presses him down. In his little book called *The Country*, he says of the eighteenth century that the countryside had not yet assumed "the pale cast of thought," and that the poets in wigs had nothing of "the modern sad passion for Nature." Clearly he was aware of a wide gap between himself on the one hand and Goldsmith and Shenstone on the other. Indeed, we need not seek very far in his writings to discover the thought and its attendant sadness to which he refers. His are the accents of modernity, and so when he meets a cheery old farmer, the latter seems like a being from another age and our author says with melancholy: "He breathes of a day when men had not so far outstripped the lark and nightingale in heaviness as we have done."

Nor can one fail to observe how this sadness becomes more and more marked as the years pass by, and a tone of disillusionment and asperity is heard. This is particularly noticeable in *The Ickniel Way*, so that one feels inclined to ask:

"Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

There can be little doubt that the tramping of the roads to write books about his wanderings had become irksome to Edward Thomas. Even in *The South Country* he had said, "I live by writing, since it is impossible to live by not writing in an age not of gold but of brass." But his discontent expresses itself most clearly in the preface to *The Ickniel Way*. He has become "a writing animal, and could write something or other about a broomstick;" he knows that he walks "because it is necessary to do so in order both to live and to make a living. Once those walks might have made a book; now they make a smile or a sigh." Much of the romance has gone out of life. The hills no longer lure him on, for he knows that "there is nothing beyond the farthest of far ridges except a signpost to unknown places." We hear for the first time that walking may be a painful operation, so

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that Stevenson is thrown over a hedge and only Borrow retained, because "he got really tired, and did not regard walking as an amusement." The charming old inns have vanished, and instead of *The Four Elms* we have the inn at Watlington with its hideous pictures and photographs. The wayfarer has now to bear hardship. He arrives hungry and weary in a village and, failing to obtain a lodging, must needs tramp four miles further "in the volcanic heat of evening, which produced several pains and a constant struggle between impatient mind and dull, tired body." And as he lies awake listening to the rain, it brings thoughts of death to his mind: "The all-night rain puts out summer like a torch. In the heavy, black rain falling straight from invisible, dark sky to invisible, dark earth the heat of summer is annihilated, the splendour is dead, the summer is gone. The midnight rain buries it away where it has buried all sound but its own. I am alone in the dark still night, and my ear listens to the rain piping in the gutters and roaring softly in the trees of the world. Even so will the rain fall darkly upon the grass over the grave when my ears can hear it no more. I have been glad of the sound of rain, and wildly sad of it in the past; but that is all over as if it had never been; my eye is dull and my heart is beating evenly and quietly; I stir neither foot nor hand; I shall not be quieter when I lie under the wet grass and the rain falls, and I of less account than the grass. The summer is gone, and never can it return."

It is this mood which permeates Edward Thomas's last work—his *Poems*. He who had always been imbued with the spirit of poetry, after the outbreak of war gave vent to his thoughts and feelings in metrical form. Some of his poems appeared in Constable's *Annual of New Poetry* in 1917. The favourable opinions of the reviewers in the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *New Statesman* reached him only a few days before his death. His poems were not published under his own name until after he had passed away. At first they appeared under the pseudonym of Edward Eastaway, the latter being the name of a Devonshire

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family from whom he was descended on his father's side.¹ To the Eastaways and others of his ancestors he refers in *The South Country* when telling of how he longs for the west. It calls, he says, "with a voice of dead Townsends, Eastaways, Thomases, Phillipes, Treharnes, Marendaz, sea men and mountain men."²

As might be expected, the war has left its mark on Edward Thomas's poetry. Not that he gives graphic details of its horrors and the suffering it entails. It is in the background and does not overshadow the personality of the poet, but it is ubiquitous and lends a more sombre tinge to his sadness. We feel its presence in many forms. It may be in a poem like *The Trumpet* with its suggestion of the beauty of life and peace all shattered by the rude grasp of Mars.

" Rise up, rise up,
And, as the trumpet blowing
Chases the dreams of men,
As the dawn glowing
The stars that left unlit
The land and water,
Rise up and scatter
The dew that covers
The print of last night's lovers—
Scatter it, scatter it !"

Or it appears in such expressions as "No man's land," or in comparisons like that of tall reeds to "criss-cross bayonets." Again in *The Owl*, the poet sits in the inn enjoying food, fire and rest, and as he listens to the melancholy note of the bird of night, he returns thanks for his own good fortune and sympathises with those lying under the open sky :

"Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice."

That Edward Thomas had been deeply moved by the tragic loss of life and the waste of youthful genius caused by war is shown by his bitter reference to the days

" when the war began
To turn young men to dung,"

¹See Mr. Philip Thomas's notes at the end of this lecture.

²*The South Country*, p. 9.

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and also by his lines, so touching in their brief simplicity, entitled
In Memoriam :

“ The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood
This Eastertide call into mind the men,
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should
Have gathered them and will do never again.”

On another occasion as he walks with a friend amidst trees and flowers, they speak of the great struggle, so incomprehensible in all its vastness :

“ Our eyes
Could as well imagine the Crusades
Or Cæsar’s battles.”

Once more we catch a glimpse of the poet’s feelings in the lines which describe his conversation with a ploughman in early spring. He declares his readiness to see action but his dislike of mutilation, death being preferable. The ploughman informs him that his fellow is dead, otherwise the fallen tree on which the poet is sitting would have been removed. Whereupon the latter reflects that if there had been no war, he would not be there and the world would have been different. To which the ploughman replies : “ If we could see all, all might seem good.” The only other definite reference to the war occurs in *Fifty Faggots*. The poet has brought together fifty bundles of brushwood, enough for several winters’ fires. And in the closing verses, so reticently suggestive of the danger he is about to face, he says :

“ Before they are done
The war will have ended, many other things
Have ended, maybe, that I can no more
Foresee or more control than robin and wren.”

In other poems, though the war is not explicitly mentioned, we feel that it is the experience on which the lines are based. Thus he tells how in bygone days, when standing by a stile on a July evening, he was accosted by a wayfarer with the words, “ The lattermath will be a fine one,” and now after the lapse of a score of years, these words flash across his memory and he wonders

“ What of the lattermath to this hoar Spring ?”

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In *Early One Morning* he bids farewell to his home, saying :

“ I'm bound away for ever,
Away somewhere, away for ever,”

and we involuntarily connect it with his army life. The same is true of the beautiful poem *Interval*, which deserves to be quoted in full :

“ Gone the wild day :
A wilder night
Coming makes way
For brief twilight.
Where the firm soaked road
Mounts and is lost
In the high beech - wood
It shines almost.
The beeches keep
A stormy rest,
Breathing deep
Of wind from the west.
The wood is black,
With a misty steam.
Above, the cloud pack
Breaks for one gleam.
But the woodman's cot
By the ivied trees
Awakens not
To light or breeze.
It smokes aloft
Unwavering :
It hunches soft
Under storm's wing.
It has no care
For gleam or gloom :
It stays there
While I shall roam,
Die, and forget
The hill of trees
The gleam, the wet,
This roaring peace.”

Is it fanciful to see in the poem *Liberty* the chafing of an independent spirit against the restraints of the army discipline to which he had voluntarily submitted himself for the cause he

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had at heart? It is a silent, moonlit scene and all the past seems blotted out, so that the poet and the moon appear to be standing over the grave of former days and men. He dreams what he would do if he had but liberty, and exclaims :

“ There’s none less free than who
Does nothing and has nothing else to do,
Being free only for what is not to his mind,
And nothing is to his mind.”

Even if this poem does not owe its inspiration to the source we have suggested, there can be little doubt that the lines bearing the title *Home* have reference to Edward Thomas’s feelings about camp life. He describes how he and his companions had spent a day walking in the snow and then returned to the cold roofs where they must spend the night.

“ Happy we had not been there, nor could be,
Though we had tasted sleep and food and fellowship
Together long.”

The mention of home in connection with such a place only brought an ironical smile to their lips and their thoughts flew to different counties.

“ We were divided and looked strangely each
At the other, and we knew we were not friends
But fellows in a union that ends
With the necessity for it, as it ought.”

The poet does not dare to let his mind dwell too much on the subject, and ends with the poignant cry :

“ This captivity
Must somehow come to an end, else I should be
Another man, as often now I seem,
Or this life be only an evil dream.”

What wonder, under these circumstances, if Edward Thomas’s inborn melancholy gathers new strength? The cloud which hung over *The Icknield Way* has become even more dense and casts the hues of darkness over these poems. The melancholy which pervades them is no new phenomenon in his work, but merely an accentuation of previously existing tendencies. To appreciate this one need only compare the poem *Rain* with the passage

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on the same theme in *The Icknield Way*.¹ His melancholy assumes various forms. Sometimes, as in *The Sign-post*, it arises from a consciousness of approaching old age and again it shows itself as an incapacity to partake of joy. Thus in the *Two Pewits* he compares himself to a ghost who gazes upwards through the twilight at the birds and wonders why they cry and fly so merrily. In *Melancholy* he describes a mood in which he shuns solitude and no less the company of men. Whilst all reality seems strangely remote, he is filled with a vague longing, which in any case can never be fulfilled :

“ What I desired I knew not, but whate'er my choice
Vain it must be I knew.”

On another occasion it is the impossibility of satisfying the ardours and aspirations evoked by the sight of nature, resplendent in all her fairness, which brings on these feelings of dejection.

“ The glory of the beauty of the morning,—
The cuckoo crying over the untouched dew ;
The blackbird that has found it, and the dove
That tempts me on to something sweeter than love ;
White clouds ranged even and fair as new-mown hay ;
The heat, the stir, the sublime vacancy
Of sky and meadow and forest and my own heart ;—
The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
All I can ever do, all I can be,
Beside the lovely of motion, shape and hue,
The happiness I fancy fit to dwell
In beauty's presence.”

So he falls to brooding over the nature of happiness, while the precious moments are slipping by, and he ends with the lament “I cannot bite the day to the core.” The same fatal inability to enjoy the passing hour without casting over it the shadow of pensive sadness is seen again in *October*. Having described the rich autumn landscape, the poet says :

“ Now I might
As happy be as earth is beautiful
Were I some other or with earth could turn
In alternation of violet and rose,
Harebell and snowdrop, at their season due,
And gorse that has no time not to be gay.”

¹See p. 97.

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In *The Penny Whistle* it is the thought of the futility of his own work which makes Edward Thomas a prey to despondency. This poem, which may very justly be called a study in black and white, describes a company of charcoal-burners in a forest glade, whilst close by, hidden in a thicket is a child, who,

“Slowly and surely playing
On a whistle an olden nursery melody,
Says far more than I am saying.”

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”—this is the cry which seems to echo from so many of these poems. All is fleeting and but for a time. We see things only to find them no more. Very striking are the lines which are wrapped in this grey atmosphere of regret for what has been :

“Gone, gone again,
May, June, July,
And August gone,
Again gone by,

Not memorable
Save that I saw them go
As past the empty quays
The rivers flow.

.
Look at the old house,
Outmoded, dignified,
Dark and untenanted,
With grass growing instead
Of the footsteps of life,
The friendliness, the strife ;

.
I am something like that,
Only I am not dead,
Still breathing and interested
In the house that is not dark ;—

I am something like that ;
Not one pane to reflect the sun,
For the schoolboys to throw at—
They have broken every one.”

Equally melancholy and even more suggestive of approaching dissolution is *The Long Small Room*. The poet describes this chamber which gave a glimpse of willows standing out against

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the western sky, whilst through the ivy-covered walls the moon, the mouse and the sparrow would peep. Then he adds mournfully :

“ When I look back I am like moon, sparrow and mouse,
That witnessed what they could never understand
Or alter or prevent in the dark house.
One thing remains the same—this my right hand

Crawling crab-like over the clean white page,
Resting awhile each morning on the pillow,
Then once more starting to crawl on towards age.
The hundred last leaves stream upon the willow.”

Yet Edward Thomas knew of other and more cheerful themes, even in his last work. He had still eyes for the beauty of this earth, “lovelier than any mysteries.” He had not entirely lost his old delight in the country, and *The Manor Farm* reveals his former skill in summoning up the atmosphere of a particular spot at any given moment. *Lob* displays his long-standing interest in rustic lore and his love of quaint-sounding place-names. In *Sowing* he recovers something of his early joy in the rain. The seeds are all safely sown—

“ And now, hark at the rain,
Windless and light,
Half a kiss, half a tear,
Saying good - night.”

A sunny day is enough to draw from him the exclamation that “there is nothing like the sun,” and the poem *Haymaking* is like a bright page from *The South Country*. It is a cheerful summer scene, and after the thunder of the night the sky is blue and clear and the birds sing. The haymakers lean on their rakes in silence, contemplating the scene. As in his prose work, the poet is impressed by the durability of country life, and reflects that :

“ Under the heavens that know not what years be
The men, the beasts, the trees, the implements
Uttered even what they will in times far hence.”

Mention should also be made of one or two love-lyrics which Edward Thomas wrote, such as the airy lines *After You Speak*, *The Clouds that are so Light* and *Some Eyes Condemn* with

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their charming fancy, or the exquisite *Will you come?* All these prove that the poet's melancholy did at times give place to a more peaceful or a more playful mood. But when all is said and done, most of the poems are pitched in the minor key, and if we had to choose the most characteristic, we should probably select *Lights Out*. It runs thus :

"I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight.
Oh winding, soon or late ;
They cannot choose.
Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travellers
Suddenly now blurs
And in they sink.
Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends,
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.
There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter and leave alone
I know not how
The tall forest towers ;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf ;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself."

However we may admire Edward Thomas's poems, his claim to fame will rest on his prose. For this no praise can be too high. It is true that he may sometimes be guilty of affectation as in the use of archaic words like "candle" and "lustihed," or he may be charged with preciousness for talking of the "sanity and amenity of the air." Moreover, in his early work we are

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sometimes conscious of a certain over-elaboration and straining after effect. But taking his work all in all, he undoubtedly deserves to stand in the front rank as a prose-writer, and there are passages in his writings that have something of Ruskin's beauty. His command of words, "light as dreams" and "tough as oak" is imposing, whilst striking metaphors are to be found on every page. In some of his earlier work he uses a rich, ornate style, flashing and bejewelled, as for example in his description of the dragon in *Winter Music*.¹ Later he abandoned this for a simpler but singularly supple, harmonious and effective manner. At all times he is a consummate artist. "I know nothing of literature," he says, in *The Heart of England* "I am a journalist." Would we had more such journalists!

Edward Thomas was a writer of many gifts. His was a refined and delicate nature with all the acute powers of perception of a poet. His graceful fancy is an unfailing source of pleasure, and at times he rises to heights of imagination which bear us upwards to a higher plane. He was withal somewhat of a mystic, and his predilection for Quarles, Traherne, Vaughan and Crashaw is not without significance. It is the spirituality of the man that attracts us most, and when we read certain passages we cast off our "batlike fears about immortality," and follow him in his bold flight. Who can repress a cry of admiration at those lines of *The South Country*, in which the sight of a laughing child inspires him to the following thoughts: "She is at one with the world, and a deep music grows between her and the stars. Her smile is one of those magical things, great and small and all divine, that have the power to wield universal harmonies. At sight or sound of them the infinite variety of appearances in the world is made fairer than before, because it is shown to be a many-coloured raiment of the one. The raiment trembles, and under leaf and cloud and air a window is thrown open upon the unfathomable deep, and at the window we are sitting, watching the flight of our souls away, away to

¹ *Light and Twilight*, pp. 81-95.

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where they must be gathered into the music that is being built. Often upon the vast and silent twilight, as now, is the soul poured out as a rivulet into the sea and lost, not able even to stain the boundless crystal of the air ; and the body stands empty, waiting for its return, and, poor thing, knows not what it receives back into itself when the night is dark and it moves away. For we stand ever at the edge of Eternity and fall in many times before we die."

NOTES ON THE LIFE AND ANCESTRY OF EDWARD THOMAS BY HIS FATHER.

Edward was our eldest son, born on March 3rd, 1878, in London. On his father's side his blood was mainly Welsh, but with a dash of Devonshire derived from the family of Eastaway whose name he took when he came out as a poet. They were mariners who plied up and down and across the Bristol Channel, and so came to mingle their blood with the Welsh blood of Glamorgan. This was on my father's side. On my mother's side his blood was that of the men of Gwent. Through his mother's family his blood was partly Welsh and partly English (her maiden name being Townsend) and through her mother he had also a dash of foreign blood from a Marendaz who came to this country from his native Switzerland along with a Talbot from Morgam (Glamorgan), who brought him over after a tour there.

So much for Edward's descent. As regards his personal environment it was first of all the open commons of Clapham and Wandsworth, afterwards the neighbouring outskirts of Surrey and Richmond Park. Later in his boyhood he spent his holidays in Swindon (Wilts.), and here it was, in the tracks of Richard Jefferies, that he mainly cultivated and indulged his inborn passion for natural history and country life and scenery. At this time he spent some of his holidays as a schoolboy at the Mumbles, near Swansea, and in the neighbourhood of Pontardulais in Glamorganshire. Later he tramped the southern counties of Wales and gained the close acquaintance with the land and people which is shown in his book on the Principality. I do not think he ever went into North Wales.

This love of his native land and all its natural features was the consuming passion of his life. He went afoot over Southern England and wrote several books thereon. After leaving Oxford, where he held a scholarship at Lincoln College, he lived in English

NOTES.

villages, as far as he could get from any railway ; he made and cultivated his gardens, and tramped about in the open air in all weathers as recreation from his studies and labour in literature.

After reaching the battle-front he was picked out for staff work in connection with his group of batteries and might have had comparatively safe quarters in the office, but he begged to be sent back to the guns where he could be in the open air observing nature as well as the enemy. It was in this way he met his death while regulating the fire of his battery from an advanced post. He died, as he had lived, in the open air, thus bringing to an end a consistent life by a dramatically appropriate death.

In view of his falling in battle, away in France on an April morning, it is curious to notice that in an essay called *Home*, written several years ago and published in a volume entitled *Light and Twilight*, he depicted a London Welsh boy, taken to Wales by his father, and having a vision of death as a soldier in a foreign land. I give a passage from pp. 36 and 37 : “ ‘ My country,’ muttered the dreamer lying still and blinked his eyes as the tent flapped, and he saw outside the sun of another country blazing and terrible as a lion above the tawny hills. The country that he had been fighting for was not this solitude of the marsh, the mountains beyond, the farms nestling in the beards of the mountains, the brooks and the great water, the land of his father and of his father’s fathers, of those who sang the same songs, the young men and the old, and the women who had looked kindly on him. Where were those young men scattered? Where had their war-march on that April morning led them? ” Is not that passage strangely suggestive of his own fate?

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“ I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.”

(BLAKE: *Milton*).

“. The great end
Of Poesy, that it should be a friend,
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.”

(KEATS: *Sleep and Poetry*).



Mr. John Drinkwater.

In one of his recent poems Mr. Drinkwater tells how the sight of an academic gown still overawes him, whilst the approach of a bishop makes him tremble. Those who have read the works of Mr. Drinkwater, lyric, drama and criticism, will feel that the reverse would be more appropriate, for in all these spheres he has attained to a high level of achievement, though still well on this side of the forties. Moreover, his influence is not confined to his books. As the literary genius of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, he has been a vitalising power in the artistic life of that city, and has done much to recall poetry from its exile to the stage. At this juncture it is difficult to say what inspiration he has given to contemporary poets. But no reader can fail to observe how Mr. Drinkwater is linked up with his fellow-artists in a circle of cordial fellowship. His works bear witness to his admiration for writers of the older generation like Mr. Watts-Dunton and Mr. Edmund Gosse, whilst the names of Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Rupert Brooke, John Masefield and Ernest de Sélincourt are connected with his own as apostles of art and beauty.

What, then, is Mr. Drinkwater's conception of poetry, the foundation on which his art is built? We are fortunate enough to know this with some precision, for he has been at great pains to make his position quite clear, and has set forth his views on various occasions with the greatest definiteness and perspicuity. Mr. Drinkwater sees in poetry the interpretation of life. Its inwardness is understood in varying measure by different men, according to their powers of perception. In other words each man has his own vision of life, and the nature of these revelations will change with the myriad minds of men. From this it follows that there is no finality about truth, for every one must necessarily see it from a different angle. The poet must, therefore, write just as he himself feels urged to write, and all we may

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demand of him is sincerity. As Mr. Drinkwater himself puts it in *The Loom of the Poets* (addressed to Thomas Hardy) :

“ They who are sceptred of the poets’ race
Their high dominion bear by this alone—
That they report the world as they have known
The world, nor seek with slavish hands to trace
Poor profitable smiles upon the face
Of truth when smiles are none, nor fear to own
The bitterness of beauty overthrown,
But hold in hate the gilded lie’s disgrace.

.
Great patience must be ours ere we may know
The secrets held by labyrinthine time ;
The ways are rough, the journeying is slow,
The perils deep,—till we have conquered these
And break at length upon the golden clime,
He serves us best who sings but as he sees.”

It follows that the poet’s business is not to reveal absolute truth, which is unattainable, but to reveal himself or rather the external world as it appears to him.

And what, we may ask, is the peculiar value of the poet’s vision? In what way is it superior to the outlook of the ordinary man? To this Mr. Drinkwater would answer that it is on an entirely different plane. The poet is endowed with great imaginative power and intensity of perception. By virtue of these he penetrates deeper into the mystery of life, comes nearer to the heart of things. The world is in a state of continual change and presents itself to the mind of man under new aspects from hour to hour. However alert we may be, much of this will escape us, but to the poet with his ardent spiritual activity more will be revealed. This is a very different view of poetry from that prevailing in the eighteenth century, and one can therefore well understand that Mr. Drinkwater should look on Pope and his fellows with but little approval. Repeatedly in his work we find this insistence on the essentially imaginative nature of poetry. In *Symbols* he tells us :

“ I imagined measureless time in a day,
And starry space in a wagon-road,
And the treasure of all good harvests lay
In the single seed that the sower sowed,

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My garden-wind had driven and havened again
All ships that ever had gone to sea,
And I saw the glory of all dead men
In the shadow that went by the side of me."

How he sympathises with the jolly men of Feckenham, whose heads were so full of dreams that one day in the height of summer, as the wind wafted the scent of the bean-blossom across the fields, they decided to make a rick of fragrant bloom. Elsewhere he rejoices that he can

" travel every shining way,
And laugh with God in God's delight,
Create a world for every day,
And store a dream for every night."

In one of his finest efforts, *Expectancy*, the poet describes how his imagination has vainly sought to penetrate the veil of mystery in which life is enfolded, how he waits in the hope of being granted some day the deeper knowledge, the profounder insight, the complete revelation. The beauty of this poem is such that one feels obliged to quote it in full :

"I know the night is heavy with her stars,—
So much I know,—
I know the sun will lead the night away,
And lay his golden bars
Over the fields and mountains and great seas,
I know that he will usher in the day
With litanies
Of birds and young dawn-winds. So much I know,—
So little though.

I know that I am lost in a great waste,
A trackless world
Of stars and golden days, where shadows go
In mute and secret haste,
Paying no heed to supplicating cries
Of spirits lost and troubled,—this I know.
The regal skies
Utter no word, nor wind, nor changing sea,—
It frightens me.

Yet I believe that somewhere, soon or late,
A peace will fall
Upon the angry reaches of my mind ;
A peace initiate

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In some heroic hour when I behold
A friend's long - quested triumph, or unbind
 The tressèd gold
From a child's laughing face. I still believe,—
 So much believe.

Or, when the reapers leave the swathèd grain,
 I'll look beyond
The yellowing hazels in the twilight - tide,
 Beyond the flowing plain,
And see blue mountains piled against a sky
Flung out in coloured ceremonial pride ;
 Then haply I
Shall be no longer troubled, but shall know,—
 It may be so."

In this daily expectancy of new revelations, the poet and the child resemble each other. For them life is full of marvel, with an adventure lying hidden around every corner, and were it not for this element of wonder, life would not be worth living. It is then of overwhelming importance that our minds should be unspeakably active so as to catch the beauty and significance of everyday life. So we find the poet exclaiming :

" Beat, world, upon this heart, be loud
 Your marvel chanted in my blood,
Come forth, O sun, through cloud on cloud
 To shine upon my stubborn mood.

Great hills that fold above the sea,
 Ecstatic airs and sparkling skies,
Sing out your words to master me.
 Make me immoderately wise."

It is not given to many to see as the poet or the child sees. The dull routine of work, the monotony of seemingly aimless existence have blunted the senses and deadened the souls of men. The world has become cold and harsh because they themselves are prosaic and matter-of-fact. By reason of this spiritual lethargy their vision is dimmed, and it is here that the poet with his superior alertness steps in as a corrective, stimulating and vitalising force. He at any rate has not lost the child's capacity for enjoyment and for marvel. The earth to him is ever fresh and wondrous, whether he be in town or country. How the

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poet's spirit can transform his surroundings we see from *A Town Window* :

“ Beyond my window in the night
Is but a drab inglorious street,
Yet there the frost and clean starlight
As over Warwick woods are sweet.

Under the grey drift of the town
The crocus works among the mould
As eagerly as those that crown
The Warwick spring in flame and gold.

And when the tramway down the hill
Across the cobbles moans and rings,
There is about my window - sill
The tumult of a thousand wings.”

And in *The New Miracle* we read how :

“ wonder has come down,
From alien skies upon the midst of us ;
The sparkling hedgerow and the clamorous town
Have grown miraculous.”

“ Every man,” says Mr. Drinkwater in his study of William Morris, “ is quick-witted in the ranks of battle or the sack of cities ; the true test of his vitality is to see whether he remains so under the orchard boughs or in the walk from his doorstep to the market-place.” These are words well worth pondering and indicate the part allotted to poetry in education and in the awakening of the masses of the people. But we shall return to this presently.

It is this capacity for being thrilled by simple things, for deriving great experiences from the events of everyday life, which marks off the poet from the average person. Nor is it dependent on unusual intellectual powers, but on intensity of passion and highly-developed perception. A poet may have other gifts besides those of pure poetry. He may be a moral force like Milton, a psychologist like Browning, but from the strictly artistic point of view all this adds nothing to his greatness. “ If we turn to Swinburne or to any poet,” says Mr. Drinkwater, “ for what is new in his thought, we shall waste our time, being unfit to pass into the presence of poetry ; but if we turn to him for great things

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greatly felt, for the old passionate adventures of the spirit wrought into new and lovely song, he will not fail us That is the distinction of the poet from all others : he creates old things anew."

This recreation goes on in the crucible of the poet's mind. The theme may be an immemorial phenomenon, love, death, or the passing of beauty, yet the expression lent to it confers on it the freshness of radiant youth. The poet with his finer spirituality makes a discovery concealed from the man of grosser mould and proclaims this new experience in words of singular beauty and meaning. The words make known the discovery and the music of the verse conveys something of the ecstasy, the exaltation of the poet at the moment of creation. The more we are enraptured by his song, the greater his poetry. But here again the poet is one apart. In the ordinary business of life we use words merely to exchange information, not to give vent to profound and individual experience. They, therefore, become worn like coins after long use ; their bright and keen edge is dulled. It is the gift of the poet to use the old, familiar words in such combinations that they acquire an unsuspected pregnancy and forcefulness. It might be allowed that the great prose-writer has also something of this command over words, but Mr. Drinkwater insists that poetry stands still higher. He abominates the term "a prose-poem," and claims that verse is the only fitting form for poetry. Lofty prose such as that of Ruskin represents good words in their best order, but poetry consists of the best words in the best order and the perfect expression of poetry betokens perfect experience.

Incidentally we may remark that Mr. Drinkwater is no believer in free verse but an upholder of the old forms. In his study of William Morris he tells us that "the wide acceptance of certain forms by the poets through centuries of practice does not point to any lack of invention or weak servility on the part of the poets, but to some inherent fitness in the forms. Tradition

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is a fetter only to the weak ; it is the privilege of the sovereign poet to invest it with his own personality and make it distinctively his own." Elsewhere he comes to the conclusion that free verse tends to irritate the ear and to obscure the meaning. Beauty of form is essential to the highest poetry, and Mr. Drinkwater has spared no pains in this direction. Nor have his efforts been fruitless. The perfection of his verse affords continual delight. His standard of workmanship is most exacting, and he is satisfied with nothing less than the best. Hence he has excluded from his later collections certain poems which many men would be proud to call their own. "Every poet is both born and made," he tells us in his *Prose Papers*. "The instinct, the energy, the fearlessness for poetry are a man's birthright or for ever beyond his acquisition ; but the faculty of shaping these into the tangible stuff of art is to be created by work as hard as a navvy's and in no other way. . . . - It is a ridiculous, but strangely common, fallacy to suppose that art is an easy enough thing if you have the knack of it. It is not. If you have not the knack of it, there is an end of the matter ; but if you have, then begins a lifetime of the most exacting labour that a man can undergo if you are to make anything of it." Form is of the utmost importance, because it evolves order out of chaos. Life is a bewildering perplexity of phenomena, and it is the task of the poet to disentangle this ravelled skein and separate the significant from the insignificant. Weighty and yet lucid thought expressed by beauteous imagery is, therefore, one of Mr. Drinkwater's supreme aims. How well he has succeeded can only be appreciated by those who have carefully studied his firm, clean-cut verse. In this connection his poem *The Building* might perhaps be mentioned. As the poet is walking through the city streets by night his eye is caught by the dark outlines of a building in course of erection. It suggests to his mind those ancient days when the Almighty transformed chaos into an ordered universe. Something of this marvel lives on in the creative power of the artist, and so the poet cries with solemn awe :

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“ In all I see
Of common daily usage is renewed
This primal and ecstatic mystery
Of chaos bidden into many - hued
Wonders of form, life in the void create,
And monstrous silence made articulate.”

From what has already been said it will be perceived that Mr. Drinkwater takes his art seriously. Art is holy, a sacred trust, a heavy responsibility. In the work of the great poet we have a continuous interpretation of life which few men can give. Consequently the poet should be regarded with reverence, not scoffed at for his departures from the conventional, but honoured because he is so wondrously different from the rest of men. Many are able to perceive the marvels of the world, but only the few elect have the power to create, to leave an enduring record of their vision. To read the great poets is, as Mr. Drinkwater says, to have “the priceless privilege of unrestricted intimacy with another mind,” and this is the most precious of all boons. Great men are rare, but poets are still rarer, and Mr. Drinkwater maintains that he who has written one perfect, immortal song is greater than the famous statesman or soldier. Rarest of all is the great poet, who is at the same time a great man and a poet. Our literature can boast of many such and Mr. Drinkwater, whose sense of continuity, of unbroken relationship with the goodly company of his predecessors, is very strong, is for this reason proud to own the name of an Englishman. Poetry, he tells us, is “the thing that of all things England has done best. No man could ask anything better of fate than to be remembered as an English poet.” Not all, however, can be great poets, and so the minor poet is to be treated with respect provided that he is sincere and sings as he sees, whilst even the critic can perform useful labour as an interpreter of those giants whom he can comprehend but not equal.

It is only natural that one who lays such stress on the rarity of poetic genius should be a pronounced individualist. The placing of the State before the individual is to Mr. Drinkwater

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far too common a fallacy. Society cannot be treated as a machine and men as its component parts. They are beings of flesh and blood, and so he has nothing but contempt for those statesmen who "buy and sell the souls that are a State." To help every man to develop his individuality and realise his own personality is clearly one of the ideals that hover before the poet's mind. This is revealed with great distinctness in the play *Rebellion*. Phane, the king, is fettered by his ideas of what a king ought to be. When the people rebel against him on account of the heavy taxes and demand that part of the burden shall be removed, Phane refuses. He does not consider that the loss to his treasury would have been small and the gain to his power through the contentment of his people immeasurable. Only abstract reasons of statecraft appeal to him. In the end he even sacrifices to this fetish the love of the woman whom he claims to worship, Shubia his queen. Set over against him we have Narros the poet, the leader of the rebels. At the beginning he is not over-eager to undertake the task, for to him there are far greater things than to dispute about the payment of more or less tribute. The strong man might well despise the thievish king and prefer to proceed with his labour of creation rather than squander his energies over trifles. Only with reluctance does he abandon his sacred calling of poetry to direct the insurgents. Finally, however, he comes to the conclusion that in doing so he was wrong, and on the eve of the decisive battle intimates to his followers that as soon as victory is theirs, he will retire. He has no ambition to succeed Phane; his one desire is to be himself, the poet.

“ ‘ My friends,’ he said—his voice was measured well,
Persuasive, nowise loud—‘ at dawn we go
To harvest these long months of husbandry.
The end is certain ; they are given to us.
Hereafter is our having as our will
In all for which our battle has been made.
But now before the end I tell you this :
The wage is lean for the great labour spent.
You urged me to your leading, and I came,

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And, coming, was a fool. I, made to drink
The flushed sharp wine of life, to read the earth,
Pity the sorrowful seasons of man's time,
Save beauty from the violater's hand,
Cherish the courteous humour of the hearth,
To sow and reap not troubled evermuch,
To free in living and song the passion caged
Here'—and he struck his breast as freeing it then—
' I, born to all these things, have turned aside
And spent myself in the cunning craft of men
Who think much pitiful hurrying to and fro,
The getting of some straightly forgotten right,
The twisting of laws that govern a yearly day,
Swift rigorous life. You called me out to compass
Ends not imagined of my spirit—well,
I came and they are compassed, but henceforth
I will have no man flatter—Thus did Narros,
This he accomplished, that he laboured for ;
I will not father acts that are not mine.
From dawn thenceforth enough of fevered doing,
Waste in her gaudy garment cries aloud
For service—I see through the fluttering veils
And know her barren ; let her ride on the wind,
I'll none of her. Henceforth I will be Narros."

The same idea is put more succinctly by Mr. Drinkwater in his study of Morris, where he tells us that "nothing is more dangerous to the poet than to be in close contact with the immediate questions of the moment, for, broadly considered, the things of immediate importance are the unimportant things." To this view we may perhaps attribute such characters in his poems as Dreaming John, Tom Tatterman and the Carver in Stone. The first of these went up to London to see the king crowned. At Westminster, however, he was refused admission, whereupon he laughed, whistled and returned to the fields of Warwickshire. As he lay there he saw a merry throng, the spirits of the trees and pools, of the meadows and rivers, of clouds and shadows, sun and rain. They approached and crowned him,

"And Dreaming John was king of the earth."

Tom Tatterman is a madman at whom the townsfolk jeer. Yet in some ways he is wiser than they. Whilst they drag on a life of drudgery, he has the consoling joy of imagination. So he says :

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“ All of you are making things that none of you would lack,
And so your eyes grow dusty, and so your limbs grow rusty.

.
But the Sea of Galilee
Was walked for mad Tom Tatterman, and when I go to sleep
They'll know that I have driven through the acres of broad heaven,
Flocks are whiter than the flocks that all your shepherds keep.”

If there is one poem which more than any other embodies Mr. Drinkwater's conception of the creative artist's attitude towards public opinion, it is the *Carver in Stone*, which contains some of his noblest lines. In a striking opening passage the carver is depicted as struggling with his thoughts, striving to set forth in beautiful, tangible form the glorious visions which flash through his consciousness. He is a true artist, for sincerity is his cardinal virtue, and he cares nothing for the opinion of other men, expecting but little praise or comprehension from them. An opportunity to display his powers is soon to be vouchsafed him. A temple is to be built and he, with other carvers, is commanded to raise the images of the gods. The rest are mere mechanical workers and he cannot bear to see his art side by side with their lifeless, uninspired productions. He therefore toils away in an obscure corner, mocked at or ignored by his fellows, but his work is inspired and finally

“ On the wall, out of the sullen stone,
A glory blazed, his vision manifest,
His wonder captive. And he was content.”

But though it is true “that the poet's vision is turned upon life from places remote and untrodden, that the seasons of his contemplation are seasons of seclusion,” this does not mean that he is indifferent to the great phenomena which stir the minds of everyday men. It does not imply that art has no connection with the vital factors in life. Such art failing to draw strength from the soil of experience, would necessarily languish and wither.

Consequently, if art is to play its true part in the world, it cannot afford to be divorced from life. Just because it is at

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present not ruling the kingdom which by right falls under its sway, men are morbid and miserable. Nationally we have neglected art in the past and have suffered for our neglect. The sense of beauty which the Elizabethans possessed was warped by the Puritan Revolution. Although Mr. Drinkwater pays his tribute to the loftiness of the Puritans' aims, he sighs to think of the havoc they wrought in artistic life. They made it "momentarily impossible for the English temper rightly to understand art, and from this sudden darkening of the æsthetic vision we have not yet, as a nation, fully recovered. . . . The mistrust of beauty was, perhaps, the heaviest price that we had to pay for an intellectual freedom that was new in the records of the nations." Another factor which militates against true art in modern England is our social system. To Mr. Drinkwater as to William Morris it appears monstrous in its lack of joy and beauty. "One who is overworked," he says, "or employed all the while in degrading work, or insufficiently paid for his work, one who is, in short, driven, cannot be himself, just as the man who is denied the chance of working at all cannot be himself." Elsewhere he says that "the great majority of men and women have been forced into a way of life that is damned by a devouring lethargy, which by some strange perversion is called busyness, and in this state all the vital, homely, beautiful events lose their force and delight, and are degraded from what should be hourly significance to sullenly accepted incidents of the daily struggle." Hence the restlessness and sensationalism of our time.

These are facts of which art must take cognisance, elements of life with which it has to contend, and yet at the same time it is only in the admission of art to a wider domain that Mr. Drinkwater sees hope of salvation. With Keats he believes that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," and so art, if given its chance, will stimulate and ennoble mankind. There is one of his poems, *June Dance*, which contrasts in a masterly fashion the glory of nature in her midsummer raiment and the blunted souls of the town workers who have come to spend a few brief hours in

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the woodlands. Then is described the spiritual awakening that comes to them, so that they draw nearer to the poet's ideal of what man should be. And what is this ideal? "A race of men inspired by Swinburne's magnificent spiritual intensity, living in Morris's conditions of labour and well-being and joyous human relationship." The power to think and to feel, to know beauty and gladness is what Mr. Drinkwater would like to see every man endowed with. Work must no longer be one long round of drudgery that reduces men to a state of lethargy from which they can be roused only by the most violent sensations. The workman must find pleasure in his labour, and when that is over he must have leisure to indulge in quiet contemplation and to feel delight at the marvels of the world.

These three things, joy, thought and beauty are strongly emphasised in Mr. Drinkwater's poetry, for they are a fundamental part of his philosophy of life. He refuses to believe that life is a poor business. If it is so, the fault lies with us. We are spiritually dead owing to our mismanagement of the world. The poet, like Morris before him, is very deeply concerned to make the most out of our present existence, and so he exclaims :

"Life and fierce life and life alone
Here upon earth I seek and claim,
Till my proud flesh again is thrown
To sea and wind and flame.

The gods are just ; eternity
May gird me for its lordlier clime ;
But here, where time encircles me,
I am a lord of time."

In the *Epilogue to Cromwell and other Poems* the same ideal is expressed in words of rare beauty.

"If the grey dust is over all,
And stars and leaves and wings forgot,
And your blood holds no festival—
Go out from us ; we need you not.

But if you are immoderate men,
Zealots of joy, the salt and sting
And savour of life upon you—then
We call you to our counselling.

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And we will hew the holy boughs
To make us level rows of oars,
And we will set our shining prows
For strange and unadventured shores.

Where the great tideways swiftest run
We will be stronger than the strong,
And sack the cities of the sun,
And spend our booty in a song."

This view of life is about as far removed as it could be from Carlyle's gloomy conception of the world as an abode of sorrow and tribulation. Joy is the birthright of every man whether high or low of birth, and there is no call for him to regard life as a dreamy pilgrimage to be endured with heroic stoicism. The king on the throne no less than the meanest of his subjects may justly lay claim to happiness. This is set forth to us in the play *Cophetua*, which at the same time defends the right of the individual against the over-reaching demands of the State. Cophetua has been requested by his people to wed, and he has promised to give them an answer after the lapse of a month. The time has now expired and he enters the hall of his palace to make known his decision. He refuses to seek a queen at their bidding; his vassals have the right to marry whom they will, and thus to win the highest joy from life; he will not forgo the same privilege.

"I will break my body to dust in fight,
I am careless of blood and bone,
I will forfeit my latest breath,
I will harry the stranger lords,
I will face unfriended the outland hordes,
I will kiss the lips of death,
I will keep no secret store
Of peace in my house, I will spare
No strength in what things a man may dare
Or men have dared before;
But the doors of my love shall be
Guarded and unbetrayed,
And reckoning there shall surely be made
'Twixt none but my God and me."

Equally essential to the new social order which Mr. Drinkwater has in mind is the gift of thought. It is through the dull accept-

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ance of the existing state of affairs that many of the imperfections of our time are due. We have our thinkers, it is true, but the mass of men are unaccustomed to consider life and its problems as a whole. To the artist also thought is an absolute necessity. Facile art cannot endure, and the creative mind must wrestle long before it can express its ideas with that inevitability and perfection of expression which is the highest art. How superbly this is conveyed in *The Carver in Stone* :

“ Out of his quiet life
He watched as any faithful seaman charged
With tidings of the myriad faring sea,
And thoughts and premonitions through his mind
Sailing as ships from strange and storied lands
His hungry spirit held, till all they were
Found living witness in the chiselled stone.
Slowly out of the dark confusion, spread
By life's innumerable venturings
Over his brain, he would triumph into the light
Of one clear mood, unblemished of the blind
Legions of errant thought that cried about
His rapt seclusion.”

“Beauty,” Mr. J. A. Mackereth wrote but recently, “may be the form and complexion of poetry, but thought is its character, its vital soul.” This article dealt with the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Meynell's poems, and in his lines dedicated *To Alice Meynell* Mr. Drinkwater dwells on the same characteristic. He has found in her a kindred soul, and though at times tempted to be satisfied with something less than the best, self-discipline has taught him :

“ To hate
Unhappy lethargies that wrong
The larger loyalties of song,”

and her example has encouraged him to

“ Cherish the difficult phrase, the due
Bridals of disembodied sense
With the new word's magnificence.”

It is just this element of thoughtfulness which is one of the most striking features of Mr. Drinkwater's work. There is no

¹ *The Poetry Review*, Jan.-Feb., 1918.

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danger with him that the love of beauty will snatch him away in a whirl of sensuous ecstasy. A due balance is preserved, and his Muse is chaste and austere, not riotous or luxuriant. His prototype in this connection is, perhaps, Milton, the Milton of the Horton period with a new strain of vivacity and joyousness. In more than one place Mr. Drinkwater's sympathy with Milton displays itself and, as we shall see later, he is conscious of his kinship with the sober-minded Puritans, though on this stock are grafted the gladsomeness of Morris and the Greek worship of beauty as set forth by Keats and Swinburne. It is entirely in keeping with this love of beauty that the poet should pray thus in his *Last Confessional*:

" For all the beauty that escaped
This foolish brain, unsung, unshaped,
For wonder that was slow to move,
Forgive me, Death, forgive me, Love."

The artist who can bring this trinity of joy, thought and beauty to the world is a public benefactor, and Mr. Drinkwater insists with all the passionate emphasis of a burning conviction that greater scope must be given to the creative artist in the society of the future. Art and above all poetry, which is one form of art, can awaken men to that state of spiritual activity which is what we ought to strive after. It will dissipate the miasma of spiritual lethargy that results from too close a preoccupation with facts, as the sun banishes the morning mists. A man in this state of inertia of soul cannot distinguish the just from the unjust, the good from the evil. He is a slave to convention and expediency; he is ensnared in the net of tradition and precedent. Talking about the hideousness of modern life will avail but little. People must be made to feel it. Injustice will be impossible in a nation that has undergone the quickening of spirit which follows where art has come to take up her habitation. Because he believes this so fervently, Mr. Drinkwater protests against those who regard art as a luxury, a pleasing pastime, and say "Yes, yes—it is consoling enough at stray moments when the armour is off

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to indulge in this pleasant pilgrimage to Lotus land, leaving the fret and burden of affairs, of the great problems of evolution, behind us. They are good fellows, these poets, in their way, giving us enchanting interludes of make-believe against the sterner business of life. But, remember, we are serious men and women in our normal hours, facing this great seething perplexity with stubborn wills to master it if we can."

To Mr. Drinkwater on the other hand art is not an anodyne; it is the elixir of life. The artist is not a decorative extra number but an essential part of society. He is not a visionary with wildcat schemes but a sane and normal individual. "It is time," says our poet, "that we who care for art and understand its character, insisted roundly and in every season that we are the strictly practical people, that we are the people who have our eyes set straight, not squinting, and so we can see beyond our noses." In this connection he breaks a lance with our university education, which, he claims, is too much given to mere assertion, to storing our minds with information, when it ought to try and quicken our receptive faculty, not to dull our consciousness. But this is only a side-issue. His main quarrel is with the way in which the creative artist has in the past been ignored. "We suffer daily," he wrote in 1912, "from a neglect of the positive and creative for the negative and destructive. In England the symbols of our national thought are curiously expressive of this fact. We decorate and honour our soldiers whose business, be it to destroy or to be destroyed, is, in any case, connected with destruction; those of our lawyers who are chiefly concerned with restraint and punishment; our politicians who spend their time protecting us from assaults of neighbours and communities as commercially rapacious as ourselves, or, in their more enlightened moments, in adjusting wrongs that are the dregs in the cup of civilization. The functions of these men may be necessities of society, but they nevertheless apply to the small negative aspect of our state and not the great normal life. It is that which is, rightly, the concern of our creative artists; but our creative artists are not

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decorated and honoured by the nation as such. Occasionally when Europe has insisted long enough on the presence of a great artist among us, we make some belated recognition of the fact, and occasionally we become sentimental and throw a few pounds a year to a poet whom we refuse to pay proper wages for his work. It is all very eloquent as to the frame of our national mind."

Since these words were written much has happened; events have taken place which have made the pillars of European society quiver to their very base. The flower of Europe's manhood has been arrayed in the ranks of deadly onslaught; the plains of Europe east and west are soaked with their blood; grim desolation stalks triumphant through a million ruined homes. In the face of this horror, so incredible and incomprehensible to the human mind, men have been driven to ask as never before since the Dark Ages, "Why should this thing be, and shall it return?" Amidst all the clamour and the hurly-burly of this strife Mr. Drinkwater has clung to his old creed. The war is to him a "hideous and blasphemous tragedy" and the bankruptcy of our civilisation. "You will not find a man," he says, "whose moral judgment has been evolved in that spiritual activity that is induced by habitual responsiveness to noble poetry who would have lent his sanction to the policies in which all the nations have carried themselves to this unthinkable madness. No: the method chosen by civilisation to conduct its social affairs has failed lamentably and disastrously, and again I say that it has failed because it has refused to accept the immeasurable services of art in quickening the nature of man so that he may develop his native morality to its full efficiency." Still, he hopes that good may spring from evil. The war has at any rate forced us to cast aside the old complacent satisfaction with the existing order; it has thrust on us a national stock-taking and the fabric of society is being subjected to a penetrating scrutiny. In this mental alertness, this new outlook stretching away towards wider horizons there lies hope. It is Mr. Drinkwater's eager desire that at last

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the creative artist may be given his chance to reconstruct our lives after a fairer model and on a surer basis than we have hitherto known.

As we have seen, Mr. Drinkwater's poetry is social in its aim and he is striving after the spiritual regeneration of mankind. At times, however, it would seem as if he despaired of seeing his purpose accomplished. He has no hope of seeing truly artistic work oust insincere and sensational drama from the stage ; and in writing of Rupert Brooke he tells us candidly that "we must remember that the people who care deeply and with understanding for rare and lovely art are very few ; a few thousands, perhaps, out of the many millions of an age. It is only the ineffectual visionary who supposes that the masses of the people will respond directly to the appeal of excellence in poetry or painting, or even in the more popular arts, as music and the drama." This mood we find again in his poem *Dreams* :

" We have our dreams ; not happiness.
Great cities are upon the hill
To lighten all our dream, and still
We have no cities to possess
But cities built of bitterness.
.
Give me a dozen men whose theme
Is honesty, and we will set
On high the banner of dreams . . . and yet
Thousands will pass us in a stream,
Nor care a penny what we dream."

There is an apparent contradiction between lines such as these and the poet's gospel elsewhere of art for the masses. It is, perhaps, to be solved if we assume that he regards the power to discriminate between true and false art as the possession of an elect few, but believes that through indirect routes great art may nevertheless exercise a most powerful and uplifting influence on the people at large.

Mention was made just now of the war. It is necessary to return to this theme and consider for a while the traces it has left on Mr. Drinkwater's work. These marks are deep, for what

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Olympian serenity could be proof against such a heart-rending world-catastrophe. All the poet's instincts and aspirations revolted fiercely against such a "disaster of blood." He had looked forward to an era of peaceful progress which should gradually open the door to opportunities of happiness for all men. Like Shubia in the play *Rebellion* he rated the welfare of the people higher than the abstract rights of any sovereign and the grim business of war meant to him the loss of irrecoverable golden possibilities. We feel that his sympathies are all on the side of Narros the poet when he says :

"How they strut on the quays of the world.
And the great ships of life go quietly on
And never call them to their company."

And in the poem entitled *The Soldier*, we read :

"It never seemed a noble thing
Some little leagues of land to gain
From broken men, nor yet to fling
Abroad the thunderbolts of pain."

To Mr. Drinkwater as to many an other creative artist the war came as a violent shock. His roseate dreams of the regeneration of mankind through the means of art paled before this icy blast from the world of reality. The incredible had happened, and with a speed which left all Europe breathless with amazement. A tragedy had begun of which no one could foresee the end, but it was a spectacle that moved all to the very depths. No wonder that the poet's heart turned cold at the sight of all this madness. The world seemed blind, incapable of thought, and in his poem with the significant title *Eclipse*, he sadly says :

"The thoughts of men are kings. They sleep
The thrones are empty overlong."

At the close with the accents of despair he cries :

"Dig deep the grave, hew down the tree,
Shatter the millstones, break the plough.
And was there once a Calvary?
And thorns upon His brow?"

Later on, this mood passes and yields place to one of greater

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calm, though still of profound melancholy. The poet contemplates the ploughed acres and the green pastures, the birds and beasts who are all at peace and to him they seem incomparably wiser than man with all his powers of creation and destruction. The magic of midsummer when the fragrant breath of the roses streams through the open window, while the song of the cuckoo dies away over the distant pools—all this with its message of peace is unable to cure man's heart of its everlasting bitterness and jealousy. With thoughts such as these passing through his mind the poet is troubled; a cloud has descended upon him. He still has eyes for the beauty of the lonely tarns and hills, for the bright birds and the gaily-coloured flowers, but he cannot sing as of old.

“ Now my mind that gave to these
Gesture and shape, colour and song,
Goes hesitant and ill at ease
And the old touch is truant long,
Because the continents and seas
Are loud with lamentable wrong.”

Under these conditions the poet naturally turns to the eternal recurrence of war, this scourge of mankind. We have seen already that his solution of the problem is the admission of the creative artist to a larger share in guiding the destinies of the world. He, by his very nature, is utterly opposed to all senseless destruction. Mr. Drinkwater has, however, reserved the exact statement of his views for prose. He feels quite rightly that poetry must transmute the facts into something more general, and this he has done with success in the poem *From Generation to Generation*. The opening stanza takes us back to the days of chivalry and summons up the picture of women leaning out of latticed casements through which the song of the nightingale comes thrilling. Their thoughts are with their soldier-loves who, clad in mail and armed with battleaxe and bow, are fighting distant battles. Then we are recalled to the present,

“ There is a wood in Warwickshire to-day,
Haunted and hushed with midnight nightingales—
O summer song. And there are fields of France,
And fields, O love, by many an alien sea

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One need but read these lines, so powerful in all their chaste simplicity and quiet beauty, to realise that the war has not passed by Mr. Drinkwater like a remote dream. It has come very near to him and constitutes a great spiritual experience. The sight of the pale legions of death has stirred him profoundly, and more especially when he reflects that these are the flower of Europe's manhood. A sense of the briefness of life, of the speedy passing of youthful beauty manifests itself in the poem *Birthright*. The nearness of death appears even more clearly in *Antagonists* which for poignant, melancholy brevity equals anything Herrick wrote.

“Green shoots, we break the morning earth
And flourish in the morning's breath;
We leave the agony of birth
And soon are all midway to death.
While yet the summer of her year
Brings life her marvels, she can see
Far off the rising dust, and hear
The footfall of her enemy.”

Youth and beauty sacrificed on the altar of Mars, genius and creative power laid waste by the folly of mankind and the ambition of its rulers—this is the aspect of the war which has cut most deeply into the poet's heart. In his *Prose Papers* Mr. Drinkwater tells of his acquaintance with Rupert Brooke, beginning in 1914 and brought to a premature end in 1915. They dined together in Soho in that ever-memorable month of July when the shadow of war lay dark and menacing over all Europe. Once more they met, after the fall of Antwerp, and their talk turned on Rupert Brooke's sonnets, then but just written, now immortally famous. On April 23rd, 1915, the day of the young poet's death, Mr. Drinkwater was in London. “The news that came on that day,” he says, “was the most terrible that I have yet known.” One cannot help feeling that he had Rupert Brooke in mind amongst many others, when he wrote the lines :

“Let us devise a music for to-day,
Solemn and sweet, worthy of solemn things,
For death now takes an unfrequented way.
Careless of age, his black and terrible wings
Fold upon youth ; the full imaginings
Of midmost life are but a little clay.

* *

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Most heavy toll has death of all the rare
Bright bounty of the summertide of men,
The brain of spring is stricken unaware,
The flowing boughs are hewn. Make music then
Solemn and sweet, till death shall choose again
The winter tree and the grey-dusted hair."

From this consciousness of the havoc wrought by war in the ranks of youthful genius has sprung one of the finest of Mr. Drinkwater's plays. It bears the somewhat enigmatic title $X=O$. In the opening scene we have before us the Greek encampment hard by the walls of Troy on a starry summer night. In a tent lit up by a torch are Pronax and Salvius, two young Greek soldiers. Their talk is of home and happier days. They know no hatred of the Trojans, for when Death hourly passes so near them, both they and their adversaries seem like ghosts. Yet they find it unjust that their youthful dreams should never be realised. Under the stress of war the Muse of Salvius has grown mute and Pronax, who had hoped to build a new State based on liberty and knowledge, has had to abandon these plans to learn the cruel art of attack and defence. They part, Pronax to climb the walls of Troy, Salvius to read his favourite poet Creon.

In Scene 2 we have the Trojan counterpart of this Greek comradeship. From the walls of Troy, Capys, who is on guard, gazes out over the plain below. Ilus laments that he has had to slay so many Greeks, the irony of it all being that he himself is such a passionate lover of beauty. He has dreamed of a regenerated Troy, whose people should know that "all evil is the lethargic mind," and often in the act of killing a Greek he has paused to reflect that here was perhaps one who cherished similar schemes for the welfare of Greece. Capys is a sculptor who has seen wondrous visions of beauty, but now his brain is benumbed by the monotony of war and he longs for the day when all the freshness and glory of life will return. Ilus leaves him to go scouting in the Greek camp, and as Capys passes the wall he says to himself :

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“ Or Greek or Trojan, all is one
When snow falls on our summer time,
And when the happy noonday rhyme
Because of death is left undone.

The bud that breaks must surely pass,
Yet is the bud more sure of May
Than youth of age, when every day
Death is youth's shadow in the glass.”

He hears a movement but has scarcely time to turn before he falls dead with the dagger of Pronax in his breast, and when Ilus comes back a little later he gives his comrade the signal in vain. In the meantime Pronax has returned to his tent and there discovers Salvius slain by Ilus.

A profound humanity and pathos breathe from this moving tragedy. The dramatist looks upon events from a distance, yet with an intense, aching sympathy. It justifies to the hilt his view that the poet should hold aloof from men sufficiently to secure clarity of vision. Here we have passion purified into serenity, and the result is a work of art, impressive in its dignity and restraint.

There is something of the same sober intensity in two short poems in the volume called *Swords and Ploughshares*. They bear the titles *Nocturne* and *The Ships of Grief*. The latter runs thus :

“ On seas where every pilot fails
A thousand thousand ships to-day
Ride with a moaning in their sails,
Through winds grey and waters grey.

They are the ships of grief. They go
As fleets are derelict and driven,
Estranged from every port they know,
Scarce asking fortitude of heaven.

No, do not hail them. Let them ride
Lonely as they would lonely be
There is an hour will prove the tide,
There is a sun will strike the sea.”

The one thought that consoles the poet amidst all this tragic desolation is the justice of England's cause. These soldiers who have fallen were crusaders battling “for a new apocalypse,” and on the occasion of the Shakespeare centenary in 1916 there comes to his mind the hope that when the darkness has vanished

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there shall thrive in England "the happy-willed free life that Shakespeare drew."

There can be no doubt that Mr. Drinkwater conceived of his country's participation in the war as a crusade against flagrant wrong and aggression. It is here that the Puritan strain in him becomes manifest. The year before the war he had published his series of poems on Oliver Cromwell, the "keeper of the gate of one proud temple yet inviolate," and now the call to arms against injustice had come again. There was once more need for the stern spirit of the victor of Naseby, and so in his lines *England to Belgium*, the poet exclaims :

"Our blood and thews with yours are set
Against this creed of bar and goad,
The Ironside is in us yet
As when the ranks of Cromwell rode.
For all things clean, for all things brave,
For peace, for spiritual light,
To keep love's body whole, to save
The hills of intellectual sight,
Girt at your Belgian gate we stand,
Our trampled faith undaunted still,
With heart unseared and iron hand
And old indomitable will."

Here, as in several other poems, *We willed it not*, *The Cause*, *Rebuke*, *Gathering Song* and *One speaks in Germany*, Mr. Drinkwater maintains with due sobriety and becoming dignity the uprightness of his native land and the purity of her purpose. We have already seen that he is the heir to the Greek ideal of beauty which was the gift of the nineteenth century to English thought; we now find that he has also inherited the moral strength and courage of a Cromwell and a Milton.

In his study of Morris Mr. Drinkwater tells us that it is only the great, common features of life which are worthy of the poet, for they never fail. The grotesque, the abnormal, that which forms no part of general experiences is doomed to perish. So he sings of immemorial things, of the spirit of adventure which is hidden "in every wind and bough and footstep," of the creative power of man, of his heroism in spite of misery and, as we have

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just seen, of the end which awaits all—death. There are also other themes for which his lyre is strung—the power of love, the devotion of woman, the exultation of the passing seasons and the joy of earth. Nature and love are the two great abiding things in this world. The seasons come and go, individual man appears and vanishes, but still the universe moves on and love endures. In the lines written in spring called *Full Day* the poet reflects how Launcelot and Galahad have perished :

“ They are but fruit among the grass,
And we but fruit upon the bough.”

And Elaine and Guenevere seem but a dream. Yet he continues :

“ the purple violet lies
Beside the golden daffodil,
And women strong of limb and wise
And fierce of blood are with us still.
And never through the woodland goes
The Grail of that forgotten quest,
But still about the woodland flows
The sap of God made manifest
In boughs that labour to their time,
And birds that gossip secret things,
And eager lips that seek to rhyme
The latest of a thousand springs.

The theme of love has indeed been a fruitful source of inspiration to Mr. Drinkwater, and it appears in his work under many different aspects. If we turn to his plays we find in *Cophetua* the lyric love of the king and the beggar-maid, in *Rebellion* the passionate love of Queen Shubia and Narros the poet, in *The Storm* the domestic love of Alice for the husband who has been overwhelmed by a snowstorm in the mountains. In the collections of lyrics entitled *Poems 1908-1914*, *Swords and Ploughshares* and *Olton Pools*, many phases of this great force are revealed. One might, perhaps, single out for special mention, though amidst such excellence it is no easy task to pick and choose, the poem *Uncrowned* with its tale of pathetic beauty and longing, *Derelict* with its mournful song of shattered love that can never be as before, and *From London* which gives voice to the poet's yearning for the country where his mistress walks

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amidst the daffodils and cherry-blossom. Mr. Drinkwater is not so shallow as to see in love nothing but unmingled happiness. On the contrary he perceives that it may bring dejection or even despair in its train, but it is in any case a great spiritual experience and as such an animating principle of incalculable potency.

The figure of Nature also looms large in Mr. Drinkwater's poetry. In his study of Morris he tells us that when one grows up in a countryside with no striking natural beauties, "a peculiar intimacy with the earth is born, a nearness to the changes of season and the nature and moods of the country, which form a background of singular values in the whole of a man's later development." I do not know whether Mr. Drinkwater's boyhood was spent in such surroundings, but in any case he possesses all that familiarity and sensibility to which he refers in speaking of Morris. His passionate love of the earth is shown by the poem *Sealed*. He is acutely conscious of her mystery and charm, and wrestles to comprehend fully, though in vain. Nevertheless from this contact comes a great exultation of spirit which enables him to say :

"You may be mute, bestow no recompense
On all the thriftless leaguers of my soul—
I am at your gates, O lover of mine, and thence
Will I not turn for any scorn you send,
Rebuked, bemused, yet is my purpose whole,
I shall be striving towards you till the end."

However, there is nothing of mysticism or pantheism in Mr. Drinkwater's attitude towards Nature. He does not conceive of Nature as coming half-way to meet man with inspiration. The splendour of the universe is really dependent on the imaginative mind. In his *Reverie* he tells us :

"I look upon the world and see
A world colonial to me,
Whereof I am the architect,
And principal and intellect,
A world whose shape and savour spring
Out of my lone imagining,
A world whose nature is subdued
For ever to my instant mood,
And only beautiful can be
Because of beauty is in me,"

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It is this all-penetrating creative faculty which evokes a vision of delight from the changing seasons. Whether we accept the poet's view of the universe or not, there is no denying the beauty of the poetry which it has inspired. The *Roundels of the Year* give a masterly characterisation of the four seasons and such lines as

“ The spring is passing through the land
In web of ghostly green arrayed ”

or

“ Proud insolent June with burning lips
Holds not now from sea to sea ”

are such as cannot readily be forgotten. A similar theme recurs in *January Dusk*, *June Dance*, *The Miracle*, *Late Summer*, and *In the Woods*, all of which bear witness to the poet's spiritual alertness and command of beautiful imagery.

The question may suggest itself whether Mr. Drinkwater's love of nature is not localised, whether there is not some particular region on which his devotion has seized. The answer must be in the affirmative. He may in fact be called the poet of the Midlands. It is true that on occasion he steps beyond this narrower sphere to sing the praises of Sussex, Kent, or Miller's Dale in Derbyshire. Or a visit to his friend Professor Ernest de Sélincourt at Grasmere inspires his poems *Travel Talk* and *Wordsworth at Grasmere* and the exquisite *Rydal Water*. But as a rule he is well content to range over the counties of Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire. Most of all he has sung of the Cotswolds. Mr. Drinkwater is neither the first nor the only one to love this part of England. William Morris knew it, as may be seen from his *News from Nowhere*. The *Orchard Songs* of Mr. Norman Gale tell us something of its charms, and for the same reason lovers of the Cotswolds turn gladly to Mr. C. G. Bradley's book *The Avon and Shakespeare's Country*. Since the war two young soldier-poets, Mr. Ivor Gurney¹ and Mr. F. W. Harvey² have expressed their affection and longing for this district, their homeland. Here, too, live Mr.

¹ *Severn and Somme.*

² *A Gloucestershire Lad.*

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William Rothenstein¹ and Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie,² both of them friends of Mr. Drinkwater's.

How completely the atmosphere of this region has been absorbed by the poet is shown by various lyrics in the collection called *Tides*. In *The Midlands* he describes how from his cottage in the hills he gazes down upon the plain beneath. At night the reign of silence is challenged only by the bark of a fox in the neighbouring spinney. In the morning the crests of the hills are lit up by the sun, whilst the valley below is swathed in mist. He sees the rosy-cheeked, cloth-gaitered farmers, the sunburnt shepherds twisted with age, the wagons going afield, the well-stocked barns, the little cottages with their white loaves and brown cider. Then evening comes down once more.

“ And now the valleys that upon the sun
Broke from their opal veils, are veiled again,
And the last light upon the world is done,
And silence falls on flocks and fields and men ;
And black upon the night I watch my hill,
And the stars shine, and there an owly wing
Brushes the night, and all again is still,
And, from this land of worship that I sing,
I turn to sleep, content that from my sires,
I drew the blood of England's midmost shires.”

Like Edward Thomas, our poet is struck by the permanence of rural life—this is truly an immemorial theme. One generation of wagons after the other climbs the hill, one generation of farmers after the other moves out to mow and reap, to plough and sow. At night the ghosts of the old Cotswold farmers, Tony Turkletob, Uncle Heritage, Ebenezzer Barleytide and all the rest venture forth to see what their descendants are doing. The poet's ambition is that his verse may live as long, and that two hundred years hence the lovers of that age will

“ . . . sometimes on my Cotswold hill
Renew my Cotswold rhyme.”

¹At Far Oakridge, Stroud. In the preface to his *Prose Papers*, Mr. Drinkwater thanks Mr. Rothenstein “for having found for me a corner of your enchanted Cotswold country.”

²At Ryton, Dymock. cf. Mr. Drinkwater's poem *Daffodils in Olton Fools*. Since the war Mr. Abercrombie has been elsewhere on service.

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And as he gazes at the distant walls and spires of Gloucester city, or contemplates the old cottages with their gray paths and the moon and stars shining down upon them, he is captivated by the beauty of it all. In such a mood as this his poem *Riches* is written.

“ The riches of the world have been
Magnificently told ;
The caravans of Sheba’s queen,
The chests of Tyrian gold,
And Alexander’s dusky spears,
And Solomon his mines,
Jeruselems of laurelled seers,
And gospels of divines.
But these are ghosts and foreign things
When meadow grass is mown
On Cotswold, where my summer sings
Her cottage of grey stone,
And no theologies have made
So quick a Paradise
As this my Cotswold corner laid
Under the Cotswold skies.”

In his essay on Rupert Brooke’s study of Webster, Mr. Drinkwater claims that there are two features common to the Georgian poets. The first is that their work is based on “the sharply defined and simple experiences and events of normal life.” The second is their downrightness, their ability to see “without any sacrifice of intellectual force or subtlety, the eternal distinction between yea and nay.” We have certainly no difficulty in tracing these characteristics in Mr. Drinkwater’s poems, plays and criticism. In his theory of the drama, with which we now propose to deal, the second is especially prominent. He knows no hesitation as to his opinions on this subject, and has acted on them boldly and successfully.

Casting a backward glance at the English stage no one can fail to note the great falling off after the golden age of Shakespeare. Of all the plays written since then very few have stood the test of time. To the Restoration dramatists we owe less than half a dozen, and fewer still to Goldsmith and Sheridan. Then comes the howling wilderness of the nineteenth

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century. In fact, it is not until the close of the Victorian epoch that we find stirrings which portend the marked revival of drama in the last two decades. Mr. Drinkwater has sought to explain this long period of decadence and, by bringing the necessary remedy, to infuse new life into our once so flourishing stage. It is his ambition, though modesty forbids him to speak of himself in this connection, to do his share towards writing a new and glorious page in the annals of our dramatic literature. The names of Wilde, St. John Hankin, Shaw, Galsworthy, Granville Barker, Masfield, Synge and Yeats all encourage him in the belief that a better era is about to dawn. This confidence is expressed in his *Lines for the Opening of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre*. After speaking of the great dramatists of the past, he tells how we have witnessed :

“ an age that stirred
But yesterday, whereof the dawning word,—
Spoken when Ibsen spake, and here reset
To many tunes on lips untutored yet
For speech Olympian, albeit pure of will,—
Shall ripen into witness that we still
Are countrymen of those glad poets dead ;
The seed is sown, the barren days are sped.
And they who sowed, are sowing? He beguiled
By who shall say what envious madness, Wilde,
Misfortune's moth and laughter's new wing-feather,
Remembering now no bleak spiteful weather :
Hankin, and he, the cleanser of our day,
Whose art is both a Preface and a Play,
And he who pities, as poets have pitied, life
Of *Justice* reft, so driven and torn in *Strife*,
And one who cries in *Waste* some news of man,
And one who finds in the bruised hearts of *Nan*,
And *Pompey* tragic and old yet timeless things :
And that dead Playboy, and his peer who sings
Yet of Cuchulain by the western sea—
Of these is sown the seed that yet shall be
A heavy-waggoned harvest, masters mine,
Gathered by men whom now the immoderate wine
Of song is making ready.”

After due consideration of the English drama, Mr. Drinkwater comes to the conclusion that we may divide plays into four categories (1) the few which hold the stage and live (2) the plays written by great poets which are immortal by virtue of their literary merit but lack the qualities requisite for success on the

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stage (3) sensational plays, which enjoy a momentary popularity, and (4) those plays which were written with artistic sincerity and also possessed to some extent the necessary stage qualities, but are now forgotten. Obviously there are some shortcomings both in the second and the fourth classes, the one ignoring stage requirements, the other lacking beauty of style and perfection of form. It is these two defects that Mr. Drinkwater seeks to remedy. He claims that the true dramatist must of necessity bear in mind the fact that his work is to be performed. The playwright has this advantage over any other literary artist that he appeals to a wider audience, but at the same time he is subject to the limitations imposed by mechanical contrivances. To write drama is not more difficult than to write epic or even lyric poetry, but there lies a deep abyss between the manuscript and the performance, and to cross this in safety is no easy undertaking. Nevertheless, if a play is to be more than a book-drama it must take into account the restrictions already mentioned. "The dramatists who have given to their work greatness of imagination in substance and also greatness of formative design," says Mr. Drinkwater, "have had a close knowledge of the conditions of the theatre in their day. Shakespeare, Jonson, Molière, Ibsen, Synge, to come no nearer to our own day, have all known the theatre as the weaver knows his loom." It follows that as stage conditions vary from age to age, it is absurd for a modern dramatist to model his work on the technique of the Elizabethans. Let him by all means seek to grasp the spirit in which Shakespeare wrote, and with this as his inspiration erect his edifice on the foundation of the present-day theatre.

Equal importance must be attached to the element of style. Mr. Drinkwater is of opinion that our drama will never recover its pristine splendour until it has again taken poetry unto itself as the natural vehicle of expression. Holding this view, he looks back with some scorn upon the drama of the nineteenth century. It is poor and flashy, but what might it not have been, had Browning, Tennyson, Morris and Swinburne recognised the limitations of the stage and attempted to satisfy them? At the

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present moment there are two marked currents in the drama, the blatantly sensational which usurps most of our theatres and the artistically imaginative, confined to one or two provincial theatres, where, as Mr. Drinkwater proudly remarks, "dramatic history is being made." In the same paper he complains that "in London, the greatest city of the world, with I know not how many theatres, you may search from end to end of the town and from month to month, and except at an odd half-private performance or two given under crippling difficulties, you will not find any passionate or beautiful work whatever." To some it may seem that prose is a more natural medium for the drama than verse, since it is the ordinary form of speech. Mr. Drinkwater disposes very summarily of such objections. He disapproves of plays that attempt to reproduce everyday speech, simply because everyday speech is not significant and is consequently unsuitable for conveying forceful ideas. The older nineteenth century plays which he so despises were often a fairly accurate representation of colloquial speech, when they were not a mass of rhetorical fireworks. And yet they will perish. So Mr. Drinkwater praises the prose dramatists of the revival who, because they had ideas and sought to expound them with sincerity, were driven to use prose that cannot be called the speech of everyday conversation. For this reason he regards the language of Henry and Eustace Jackson in St. John Hankin's play *The Return of the Prodigal* and that of Mrs. Jones in Mr. Galsworthy's *Silver Box* as a step in the right direction. It is so, because it aims not at reproducing the external features of ordinary dialogue but at rendering its essential spirit in an artistic way. Perhaps it will be said that this is artificial, but Mr. Drinkwater would answer that such is the way of all art. To portray human character one must select the outstanding features, the most significant aspects, otherwise it is too chaotic to be apprehended. In other words "Nature—life—becomes art only by concentration and selection," and even the realistic dramatist is compelled to make a certain choice, so that his play cannot be said to reproduce the doings of everyday life. Art, then, to be significant must be artificial and a correspondingly

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artificial form must be found for it. "It is for this reason," says Mr. Drinkwater, "that the greatest drama is the poetic drama, where the expression reaches the highest artificiality, and the symbol most consistently takes the place of the traditional formula of speech." This being a fundamental tenet of his creed, he has acted on it and the result is seen in a number of striking plays, written both in blank and rimed verse, of high distinction and beauty. Nor does Mr. Drinkwater stand alone amongst the Georgians in this belief in poetry as the most fitting medium for drama. He has sympathisers in Mr. Gordon Bottomley, and Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, not to speak of the poetic plays amongst Mr. John Masefield's work.

Another matter about which Mr. Drinkwater is greatly concerned is the part to be allotted to action in drama. The playwright, he argues, sets forth his ideas through human character, and to have this revealed, action is necessary. But this should be the sole purpose of action, nor should it go beyond. Within these limits, however, as much action as is thought desirable may be crowded. In reality, action can almost be dispensed with, provided there is a progression of idea or a spiritual conflict, and Mr. Drinkwater has shown how this can be done in various of his plays, for instance, *The Storm* and *The God of Quiet*. Here we have such a spiritual conflict or progression of idea going on against a background of action. The abuse of action is amongst the most serious weaknesses of the ordinary stage. It was this evil which drove the poets to the other extreme of writing plays where the characters and the ideas were not related to the action. Mr. Drinkwater's strictures on the vicious over-emphasis of event in the typical modern play are justly severe. There has come into being, he tells us, "a new kind of play, in which character giving rise to action no longer has any place, but in which sensational and abnormal event is of paramount interest. It is a kind of play invented expressly for minds that need an excitement which they can no longer find in nature, that supreme source of excitement when there is sanity to perceive; for tired minds, for sick minds, for restless and frightened minds, but not

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for minds that are quiet, vigorous, and eagerly in touch with the simple and normal life that is so marvellously beautiful. Along with this travesty of action in the theatre is a relative travesty of character. The abnormal, the fantastic, the character that is in fact merely an eccentricity—these are the sureties of success, and we have our popular dramatists confessedly depending for motive not upon any profound vision of life quickened through many years of patient and delighted experience, but waiting upon the discovery of some striking situation altogether unrelated to significant life, or of some idiosyncrasy that shall masquerade as character instead of being known as the negligible accident of character. These are the dramatists of occasion, and there is no health in them, but they have infected the theatre, encouraged or commanded by the managers of the theatre, and overrun it with apparently irresistible power." Mr. Drinkwater has, however, no idea of reforming all these abuses at one blow. The vested interests in the ordinary theatre are powerfully entrenched and cannot easily be dislodged, while the mass of theatre-goers is indifferent to imaginative art. The hope of the future lies in the small, provincial theatres which are supported by people with insight and understanding. These are the leaven of the drama.

Yet even if one does not build castles in the air which would of necessity crumble under the hard grasp of reality, there is no cause for undue pessimism. Some progress towards a healthier state of affairs has been made. Those who read with an open eye can see what has been accomplished by the modern prose dramatists. A significant indication of the change is to be found in the attempt of St. John Hankin to maintain an appropriate balance, to free the drama from the tyranny of action. One sees also how he and other modern dramatists have felt the necessity for some form of dramatic comment. The Greeks, of course, used the chorus, whilst Shakespeare, "neglecting to do this, was forced to the artistic contradiction of identifying chorus with character." The result is "that those passages which can be isolated from his plays without serious loss of significance are generally choice utterances spoken by characters of whom they

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are not an integral part." As soon as sincerity returned to the drama at the close of the nineteenth century, the dramatists realised that they must have some means of conveying their comment on the events and characters of the play. St. John Hankin and Mr. Bernard Shaw both utilised the stage directions for this purpose. Mr. Drinkwater considers that the most complete attempts in modern drama to satisfy this natural craving on the part of the playwright are to be found in certain of Mr. Yeats's plays and in the Gaffer of Mr. Masefield's *Nan*. He himself has attempted in some of his plays to adapt the Greek chorus, the comments being placed in the mouths of beggars or old men and women. *Cophetua*, in particular, shows this feature very clearly.

To the modern prose dramatists, then, we owe a deep debt of gratitude. In the first place their sincerity of purpose has brought a healthy breeze into the sickly atmosphere of our sensational theatres, and secondly it has made it clear that without literary excellence the drama cannot thrive. These writers have done the work of pioneers, and now the road is made straight for what Mr. Drinkwater believes to be the consummation—poetic drama.

We have now followed Mr. Drinkwater in his various spheres of activity as critic, poet and dramatist, and we cannot help thinking that in each of these fields he has made a distinguished contribution to the great body of English literature which he regards with such veneration. Of recent years one of the themes on which Mr. Drinkwater has dwelt has been that of poetic immortality. It may well be that future generations will link his name with that of Rupert Brooke for common praise, and

“ sometimes shall be told
How one, who died in his young beauty, moved,
As Astrophel, those English hearts of old.”

Then his petition will be fulfilled, and men will say of him :

“ He had a heart to praise, an eye to see,
And beauty was his king.”

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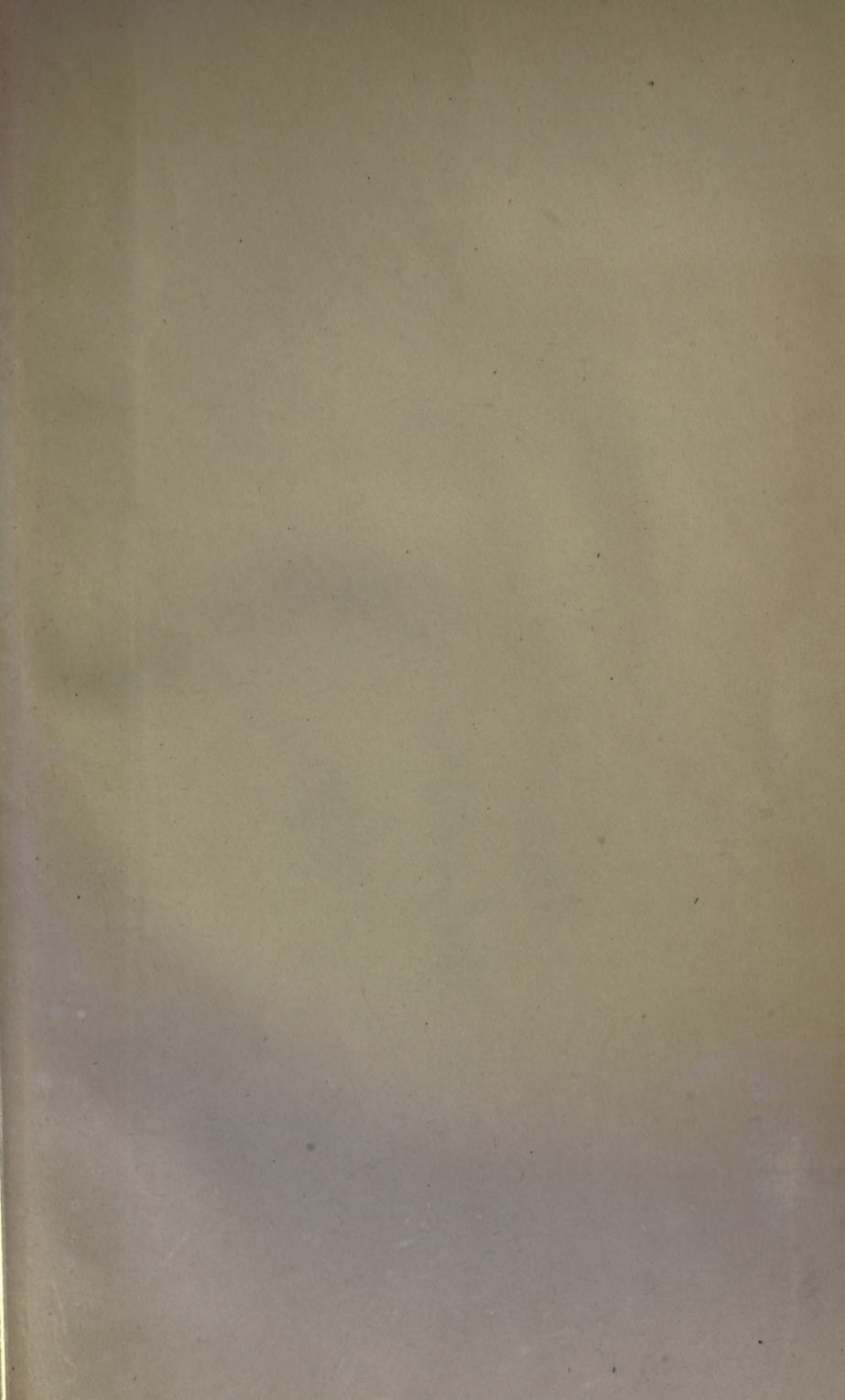
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