

# WITHERED BUT NEVER STALE

## "Q" Wrote To The End

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch died a few days ago at the age of 80. How long before his death he ceased to write we do not yet know, but should not be surprised to learn that he did not cease at all. On his 80th birthday (November 21 last year), "Picture Post" took a series of photographs of him, two of which we reproduce here, together with a passage from his own "Studies in Literature." It was written during the last European war, and is of special interest at the present stage of a longer (and in some respects more terrible) struggle.

IT may seem a long way—even a longer way than to Tipperary—from the polite irony of Menexenus [a dialogue purporting to be a true account, by Socrates, of a funeral oration composed to be recited over certain of the Athenian dead who fell in the Peloponnesian war] to the cheerful irony of the English private soldier, now fighting for us on the Belgian border. But I suggest to you that his

irony, too, plays with patriotism, just because he is at home with that holy spirit; so much at home that he may be called at any hour of the day or night to die for it. Precisely because he lives in this intimacy, he is shy of revealing it, and from shy turns to scornful when the glib uninitiate would vulgarise the mystery:

*Send for the army and the navy,  
Send for the rank and file—  
(Have a banana!)*

A well-meaning scholar, having written, the other day, for the British infantryman a number of ditties to which he will never march, protested that if he preferred to march to this sort of thing, his laureate should be the village idiot; which pleased me, who have always contended that the village idiot has his uses, and that Mr. McKenna was far too hasty with his Mental Deficiency Act.

There is a real mental deficiency—and most of us who work on recruiting committees have bitter experience of it—in well-intentioned superior persons who, with no prospect of dying for their country, are calling on others to make that sacrifice. On platform after platform since August I have sat and seen



Eighty last November

the ardour of young men chilled by exhortations from intellectual speakers who lacked understanding, by middle-aged people—sentimental or patronising—who schooled their hearers in what they ought to feel. To the British soldier Tipperary was, if you will, just Tipperary: to some of us who heard him singing and know what he went forth to find, it remains a city celestial.

(continued on next page)

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