

# ... With ... BOOK and VERSE

By "John O'Dreams"

## Our Fortnightly Book Review

### AN ANTHOLOGY OF WAR POEMS

Compiled by Frederick Brereton

ON the eve of the sacred anniversary of Anzac, when long thoughts go back in pride and sorrow to beloved and gallant dead, it is fitting to read, mark and study an Anthology of War Poems, recently compiled by Frederick Brereton, with a wise and illuminating introduction by Edmund Blunden, himself a poet and litterateur of note.

A large number of the poems presented were written in the trenches and in the war zone, and many of the authors literally "sang their song and died," thus leaving behind them imperishable testimony to the horror, stark cruelty and soaring heroism which were accompaniments of the Golgotha into which they were hurled. These vivid, virile verses of those who, being dead, yet speak, are an overwhelming indictment of the barbarism, inhumanity and awfulness of war between nations; and if for that reason alone should be widely read and pondered over. The majority of the men whose work is chosen were soldiers, "straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow"; although a few older writers are included, among them the veteran Thomas Hardy, Ford Madox Hueffer, and John Galsworthy, the latter being represented by a very beautiful poem which is new to me.

Much of the work of Siegfried Sassoon is in this discriminating collection; terrible impressions of those horrors of sight and sound that etched themselves into consciousness of his sensitive poet-mind. In the words of the introduction: "Siegfried Sassoon contrived to draw a sword for a greater ideal than the colours of a regiment, by recording what war does to youth and laughter in poignant epithet and striking verb, in various rhythm and dramatic narration."

Also, there are the well-known and most moving "Into Battle" by Julian Grenfell and "Before Action" by W. N. Hodgson, two of those to whom fame was bestowed after death. There are five poems by the brilliant Wilfred Owen, who survived those catastrophic years until the war was almost over. One of the greatest of that great galaxy, he was convinced by Mr. Sassoon's example that poetry could do much to bring us back to normal, and found in "the pity of war, the pity war distilled" his inspiration and spiritual despair. "He perpetuated the general

wilderness," says Mr. Blunden, "the charged atmosphere, the hardly sane constancy of the soldier, the pity which he desired above all to interpret."

Wilfred Wilson Gibson's beautiful "Lament" is included, and will bear re-quoting:—

*We who are left, how shall we look again*

*Happily on the sun or feel the rain*  
*Without remembering how they who went*

*Ungrudgingly and spent*  
*Their lives for us loved, too, the sun and rain?*

*A bird among the rain-wet lilacs sings—*  
*But we, how shall we turn to little things*  
*And listen to the birds and winds and streams*

*Made holy by their dreams,*  
*Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things?*

There is so much that is poignant and brilliant and notable in the anthology that, if one begins to quote what is outstanding, this review would run to inordinate length. Suffice to say that, apart from the historic significance of the poems, there is evidence of great talent, in some cases amounting to genius. A touch of humour is apparent in "Il est Cocu-Le Chef de Gare":—

*When I am tired of Gertrude Stein*  
*She said she said that she said she. . . .*  
*When the expressionistic line*  
*Has palled, and Sitwells weary me. . . .*

Two of the poems of C. H. Sorley are wonderful examples of the genius of this young soldier, who, had he lived, instead of died for England, would have won lasting fame for himself and shed lustre upon our literature.

We look back into dim retrospect and sigh to realise how far the world still is from that haven of peace and beauty these young men hoped to encompass by nobility of self-immolation. In conclusion I quote the last lines of

ANOTHER arresting story of a single evening is "An Angel in the Room," by Mr. Gerald Hopkins. At a small dinner party there are three guests—Mr. Lothbury, home from the East; a reticent Major, and the blonde Mrs. Daggenham. Superficially a party that is ordinary enough, but subtle drama has been present, albeit unknown at least to one of the few guests. A domestic problem is presented and solved in entirely charming fashion, and Mr. Hopkins has shown admirable skill and imagination in his subtle setting forth of his motif.

TO many the name of Mary Baker Eddy has spelt inspiration and a new lease of the life spiritual, while others have not hesitated to dub the establisher of "The Christian Science Monitor" a clever charlatan, much controversy raging for and against the self-elected missionary and the enormous influence she wielded over her following. Another biography of this intrepid lady has now been published by Fleta Campbell Springer, who sets out to give impartial life-story of the Founder of the First Church of Christ. According to Miss Springer's testimony, Mrs. Eddy was a remarkable personality, quite above logic or consistency, and capable of bluffing a large section of the community into accepting her as a prophetess. A delicate woman in her earlier years, and mundane enough to contract three matrimonial alliances, Mrs. Eddy's life would appear to have been somewhat difficult until fate brought into her ken Dr. Phineas Quimby, a faith-healer, and a person of importance in his day. Him she accepted at his own valuation, and through his influence discovered health of body and spirit, and the kernel of that creed which later she expounded to her listening coterie with such triumphant success. Mrs. Eddy's interpretation of the message of the Prince of Christianity has become one of the religious forces of the world, and whatever individual opinion may be, there is no doubt that for thousands it has solved the paradox of orthodox religion.

Mr. Galsworthy's "Bells of Peace," which seem peculiarly applicable:—

*Ring out the Past, and let not Hate*  
*berave*  
*Our dreaming dead of all they died to win!*

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