

Let Wellington's Carillon Stand For Ever Silent

Written for the "Radio Record" by BERTRAM POTTS.

SOMETIMES, in the quiet of the evening, when all alone, I switch off the light and sit before the fire, gazing into the flickering flames, and watching the fitful shadows that play across the walls. Sometimes they merrily play at hide and seek—sometimes they form into strange shapes, like the shadows that used to creep in No Man's Land . . . and I start thinking of the days that are gone, when nations went mad with lust for blood and conquest, and the bodies and souls of men were cruelly tortured in the name of Freedom!

And my eyes well with tears as I think of those pals—our cobbers-in-arms whom we left behind, wrapped in their blanket, or collected in a sandbag, nevermore to laugh and talk of happy times behind the line.

We were just boys, filled with a child-like faith—but proud of our responsibilities and of the history that we were making. We were standing on the threshold of life, trusting in those who sent us forth to fight. High-sounding phrases stirred our emotions from press, and platform, and pulpit. But that is a long, long time ago.

I look into the glowing embers and live again with those pals of mine, who failed to return and participate in the wonderful blessings so glibly promised when we went away! And the venerable gentlemen, who promised to do so much for the boys when they came back forgot to give us bread, but gave us a stone—a carillon in honour of the dead!

I do not wish to slight in any way the memory of my cobbers who gave their lives to usher in a better world for the rising generation. I have too keen a recollection of those harrowing times in the trenches of France and Belgium . . . but we hear too much of the remembrance due to the noble dead from vote-catching politicians, from preachers, from civic grandfathers and Rattling Sabres Associations, and not enough of the remembrance due to the unfortunate Digger who, having borne the shock of battle, now finds himself the victim of that same un-economic system for which he suffered so much.

No bands are playing now, no martial strains stir the emotions.

To-day the proud carillon stands alongside its poor and not-so-distant relation—the humble Unemployment Bureau! O tempora, o mores; Such is the irony of Fate.

The digger to-day must rest content with three hearty cheers at patriotic functions. If he has fallen by the wayside due to physical and nervous disabilities acquired on active service; if his family suffers for lack of sufficient food and warmth, he has the satisfaction at least of knowing that the graves of his cobbers are fondly tended under alien skies and that jingle-bells, jangle-bells ring out their paeans of praise in honour of the sacrifice. The dead may have no voice except the carillon, but the living will not be silenced. You cannot fool the people all the time!

And a thoughtless, sentimental minority are pitifully crying that the bells just now are silent because the funds have all gone with which to pay someone to play! Nero fiddled while Rome burned, and we must raise a metallic din while diggers starve! Let the carillon stand for ever silent. Let its light continue to shine by day and by night as a silent reminder to us all to continue steadfastly in the building up of the new world of which the noble dead have laid the foundations!

So long as any returned man is unable to afford the ordinary necessities of life for himself and those he loves, it is a better expression of thanksgiving for charitably-minded citizens to divert their money toward the several hard-

working organisations, which are caring for and honouring the wrecked bodies and minds of those who were once so loudly acclaimed as "the flower of our manhood."

That would be a practical gesture of remembrance, which would in no wise reflect on the supreme sacrifice paid by the unreturned soldier, once our comrade-in-arms. Better for the bells to remain mute than to voice aloud again to high heaven that it matters not if the living soldier miserably perish.

Marching along the muddy roads of Flanders, we used to sing:

"Old soldiers never die,
They only fade away!"

Alas, how prophetically true!

