

# ARMS AND THE MAN WHO WRITES

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THIS article concerns itself not generally with books produced during war time, but specifically with books produced by the war, books that owe their inspiration and appearance to the war, books that would not have been written except for the war.



We know that some moral and spiritual gain rises amid the awful loss; it is also clear that the world of art has some enrichment to show against fearful destruction. It will not do to overestimate this. The world war has lasted about as long as the American Civil War, and although probably many works then produced seemed like additions to literature, we know now that very few productions that owed their origin to that contest have any permanent artistic value. Some of Walt Whitman's best poems, notably "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," Lowell's "Commemoration Ode," Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic"—these about exhaust the list. Curiously enough, the best poem about the Confederate soldiers was written by an Englishman, William Ernest Henley.

No great novel came out of the Civil War except "The Red Badge of Courage," produced in 1895 by a young man who had never seen that or any other war. It bore to 1860-'65 a time relation analogous to that between "War and Peace" and 1812.

## The "Great" Novel

And Devouring Time  
Yet, despite this meagre residuum, I suppose that fifty years ago readers estimated their war poems and stories more highly than we regard them now. Indeed, I can remember when "A Fool's Errand" was heralded on all sides as a great novel; people spoke of it with awe. This fact should lead us to be rather cautious in assigning permanent fame to this or that new book. A work may have particular interest in its own day and generation, give pleasure and even inspiration to many, and yet lose the fight against devouring time.

## The Position of "Mr. Britling"

The best novel in the English language thus far produced by the war is "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," by H. G. Wells. Here is a book that owes its plot, characters, style and spirit to the war. To see the profound change that has come over our author one has only to remember "Marriage," "Ann Veronica," "Tono-Bungay," "The New Machiavelli," and others. These stories had almost every quality except charm. They were busy, noisy, talkative, restless; they indicated clearly enough a desire to reform society, but the reforms were to come through quasi-scientific or quasi-socialistic legislation, rather than through the religious regeneration of the individual man. Despite his zeal for radical improvement all along the line, I should never have applied to him or to his books the adjective spiritual.

The war was the means of his conversion, as an orthodox evangelist might put it. Without losing any of his zeal for Parliamentary and social reform, and fortunately without losing any of his great literary ability, religion moved up from last to first place in his heart. In "Mr. Britling" we have a powerful realistic novel, one of the best of our time; the social life in England, as affected by the war, is reported with extraordinary skill; even the hockey game is indelibly impressed on the reader's memory. The Englishman, the American, and the German characters are all presented truthfully and sympathetically, except that Mr. Wells makes his American use un-American language; and some of the scenes in the latter part of the story, like the return of one who had been given up as dead, are dramatic in the extreme. But the superiority of "Mr. Britling" over all the other novels by its author consists not in brilliant descriptions or dramatic incidents, but in the sense

may relieve the author's mind, but as a rule they have small objective and less literary value. Among the mass of books that are neither novels nor poems two stand out conspicuously for their artistic quality. A deep impression was made by "The Pentecost of Calamity," which came from one of the ablest writers in America, Owen Wister. The contrast between the first and second half of this tiny book is amazingly dramatic. Mr. Wister's expert skill in composition was reinforced by inspiration when he wrote that little masterpiece. The other is "The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me," which appeared in 1918 from the hand of William Allen White. It is a remarkable tragi-comedy, realistic, farcical and spiritual, the most original of all reports from the scene of battle. It is glorified journalism, and something more.

## The Soldier

By Rupert Brooke

**I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.**

**And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.**

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## Two American Books Rated Among Best by Leading Critic, While "Mr. Britling" Is Called Finest War Novel—Poetry Has Gained and Drama Has Not Suffered Seriously

August 1914

By John Masefield

**How still this quiet cornfield is to-night!  
By an intenser glow the evening falls,  
Bringing, not darkness, but a deeper light;  
Among the stalks a partridge covey calls.**

**The windows glitter on the distant hill;  
Beyond the hedge the sheep bells in the fold  
Stumble on sudden music and are still;  
The forlorn pinewoods droop above the world.**

**An endless quiet valley reaches out  
Past the blue hills into the evening sky;  
Over the stubble, cawing, goes a root  
Of rooks from harvest, flapping as they fly.**

**So beautiful it is, I never saw  
So great a beauty on these English fields,  
Touched by the twilight's coming into awe,  
Ripe to the soul and rich with summer's yields.**

**These homes, this valley spread below me here,  
The rooks, the tilted stacks, the beasts in pen,  
Have been the heartfelt things, past speaking dear  
To unknown generations of dead men,**

**Who, century after century, held these farms,  
And, looking out to watch the changing sky,  
Heard, as we hear, the rumours and the alarms  
Of war at hand and danger pressing nigh.**

**And know, as we know, that the message meant  
The breaking off of ties, the loss of friends,  
Death, like a miser getting in his rent,  
And no new stones laid where the trackway ends.**

**The harvest not yet won, the empty bin,  
The friendly horses taken from the stalls,  
The fallow on the hill not yet brought in,  
The cracks unplastered in the leaking walls.**

**Yet heard the news, and went discouraged home,  
And brooded by the fire with heavy mind,  
With such dumb loving of the Berkshire loam  
As breaks the dumb hearts of the English kind,**

**Then sadly rose and left the well-loved Downs,  
And so by ship to sea, and knew no more  
The fields of home, the byres, the market towns,  
Nor the dear outline of the English shore,**

**But knew the misery of the soaking trench,  
The freezing in the rigging, the despair  
In the revolting second of the wrench  
When the blind soul is flung upon the air.**

**And died (uncouthly, most) in foreign lands  
For some idea but dimly understood  
Of an English city never built by hands  
Which love of England prompted and made good.**

**If there be any life beyond the grave,  
It must be near the men and things we love,  
Some power of quick suggestion how to save,  
Touching the living soul as from above.**

**An influence from the Earth from those dead hearts  
So passionate once, so deep, so truly kind,  
That in the living child the spirit starts,  
Feeling companioned still, not left behind.**

**Surely above these fields a spirit broods  
A sense of many watchers muttering near  
Of the lone Downland with the forlorn woods  
Loved to the death, instinctively dear.**

**A muttering from beyond the veils of Death  
From long-dead men, to whom this quiet scene  
Came among blinding tears with the last breath,  
The dying soldier's vision of his queen.**

**All the unspoken worship of those lives  
Spent in forgotten wars at other calls  
Glimmers upon these fields where evening drives  
Beauty like breath, so gently darkness falls.**

**Darkness that makes the meadows holler still,  
The elm trees sadden in the hedge, a sigh  
Moves in the beech clump on the haunted hill,  
The rising planets deepen in the sky.**

**And silence broods like spirit on the brae,  
A glimmering moon begins, the moonlight runs  
Over the grasses of the ancient way  
Rutted this morning by the passing guns.**

—From "Philip the King, and Other Poems,"  
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of spiritual values which is the core of the book. The other works came from his head. This came from his heart. The religious consciousness, which is after all the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon temperament—as shown in the instant response awakened years ago by Kipling's "Recessional"—was stirred in thousands of readers by the experiences and reflections of Mr. Britling.

## And Then Came

### "The Invisible King"

Personally I regard it as unfortunate that Mr. Wells felt it necessary to follow up the triumph of this tale with a treatise on theology called "God the Invisible King," and with a propagandist, sectarian novel called "The Soul of a Bishop." The Invisible King of Kings seemed so similar to the founder of the Christian religion that it needed a specific disclaimer from Mr. Wells to convince us otherwise. He said his last word on religion in "Mr. Britling," when he made the point that Jesus Christ and not Jehovah was the true God of Christian people. He assuredly is; and it is worth noting that the German Emperor, who is forever talking about the Lord of Hosts, whom he calls Gott, has so far as I know made no reference to the Christian God, who is as unlike Gott as charity is unlike cruelty. The effect on agnostics made by "God the Invisible King" is shown in William Archer's ironical yet reverent rejoinder; while as for Christians, why on earth should they go about trying to discover an Invisible King when they have one who was visible?

The latest work by Mr. Wells dealing with the war is "In the Fourth Year," published in May, 1918. Many pages in it will arouse sharp dissent, yet no one, I think, can fail to be touched by the last paragraph, in which he bears renewed and eloquent testimony to his religious faith and to his optimistic belief that after German militarism is crushed the Kingdom of God will rule the earth. "I am a man who looks now toward the end of life; fifty-one years have I scratched off from my calendar, another slips by, and I cannot tell how many more of the sparse remainder of possible years are really mine. I live in days of hardship and privation, when it seems more natural to feel ill than well; without holidays or rest or peace; friends and the sons of my friends have been killed; the newspapers that come in to my house tell mostly of blood and disaster, of drownings and slaughters, or of cruelties and base intrigues. Yet never have I been so sure that there is a divinity in man and that a great order of human life, a reign of justice and world-wide happiness, of plenty, power, hope, and gigantic creative effort, lies close at hand. Even now we have the science and the ability available for a universal welfare, though it is scattered about the world like a handful of money dropped by a child; even now there exists all the knowledge that is needed to make mankind universally free and human life sweet and noble. We need but the faith for it, and it is at hand; we need but the courage to lay our hands upon it, and in a little space of years it can be ours."

### "Changing Winds" and "The Tree of Heaven"

No other English-written novel produced by the war is so deeply impressive as "Mr. Britling"; but a number of important works of fiction have appeared from other authors, all of whom, however, were writers of reputation before 1914. I know of no book by a previously unknown novelist that has commanded the attention of the public, which seems rather strange. St. John Ervine, who had produced one sombre and one hilarious story, achieved something well above the general average in "Changing Winds," which showed how a group of quite different young men were affected by the war, and incidentally threw a strong light on the Sinn Féin rebellion. May Sinclair was forced to give an unnatural twist to her story, "The Belfry," to make it come within the category of war books; but in her novel, "The Tree of Heaven," the war is the dominating factor. It is a commentary on how speedily some books are forgotten that, so far as I know, not a single critic or reviewer has remembered that this striking title was chosen by Robert W. Chambers for a book of short stories which he produced in 1907. The earlier scenes in Miss Sinclair's "Tree" exhibit some of the best work she has ever done, and one is made to feel amid the brightness the shadow of the approaching world-tragedy. The way it takes son after son, the way women are

affected, and the extraordinary diversity of human beings presented in this story are matters for high praise; to me the book is marred by the young woman who sees things; she sees altogether too much for my credulity. Perhaps, however, this is a part of the book's realism, for people are never so credulous as in time of war.

One of the cleverest, though not one of the greatest war novels, is "Christine," which purports to be actual letters written by a young English girl from Germany to her mother in the days preceding the war; the correspondence abruptly ceases, owing to the heroine's death from pneumonia. "The New York Nation" was taken by this book, as well as many other journals, both in America and in England. The publishers themselves do not know

the name of the author, nor anything about the circumstances under which the manuscript was written; but I imagine that it has been pretty well established that it came from the same hand that produced "Elizabeth and her German Garden."

Eden Phillpotts, Hugh Walpole and W. J. Locke have each and all written novels dealing with the war, but in no case have surpassed their best previous effort. The effect of the outbreak of the war in 1914 on rank and riches has been admirably portrayed in Archibald Marshall's charming story, "The Old Order Changeth," the fourth in his series dealing with the Clinton family. When the aristocratic old squire bursts into denunciation of the multi-millionaire, Armitage Brown, who at first thought his duty would

## Checking Brains

### With Coats and Hats

Since Anglo-Saxons have for many years been in the habit of checking their brains with their coats as they enter the auditorium, they logically suppose such a habit ought to prevail in an even more universal fashion in war time. And while everything is being done to keep the recruits straight morally in the camps, and the soldiers free from vice at the front, it does not seem to occur to the caterers to public theatrical taste that the exhibitions of allurements skilfully provided for the soldiers on leave can be anything but cheerily helpful. In London, it was neither a clergyman nor a dramatic critic who condemned the standard of contemporary "shows," but a military officer, General Smith-Dorrien, who declared that the "revues" and "musical comedies" were just the things soldiers ought not to see. William Archer, who said there was "much more imbecility than vice in the matter," gave in the autumn of 1916 a select list of plays then running at the London theatres: "High Jinks," "Pell Mell," "This and That," "A Little Bit of Pluff," "Woman and Wine," "Ye Gods," "Some," "The Bing Boys are Here," "Look Who's Here," "Razzle Dazzle," "The Girl from Cairo." He can hardly be blamed for characterizing these as mainly idiotic. In August, 1917, the London "Athenaeum" commented on the dramatic season as follows: "Triviality remains its characteristic note, with overtones of the lighter pornography." "The London Times" in 1917, speaking of the year just closed, said, "It would almost seem as if the war had had a stultifying effect on the playwright's imagination."

It is true that Pinero, Jones, Shaw, Yeats, Galsworthy, Barker, Bennett, Masefield, have written no play inspired by the war that can possibly be counted a notable achievement. It is also true that the large number of war propaganda plays produced in London and in New York are innocent of art. The one exception to the general depression is fortunately the greatest living British dramatist, Sir James Barrie. And the curious thing is that his first two attempts were so bad that many of us thought his genius had been temporarily eclipsed by the war. His short play, "Der Tag," first published in "The New York Times," was simply negligible. It seemed incredible that Barrie could be flat, but flat he assuredly was. Then he wrote a "revue" for Gaby Deslys that caused "The Athenaeum" almost a fainting fit. But since then he has restored faith to his followers and life to the stage by producing three masterpieces, the first of which is partly concerned with the war, while the second and third are direct representatives of it. I refer, of course, to the beautiful and charming "Kiss of Cinderella," admirably acted in America by Maude Adams; to "The New Word," a subtle study of the relations between father and son, and to the almost intolerably impressive drama, "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals." This last is altogether the greatest play produced by the war. It is an impeccable work of genius.

On the whole, poetry has gained more by the war than any other form of literature. This may be partly

owing to the fact that a renaissance of poetry had set in, both in Great Britain and America, before the war started. Poets of established reputation have made notable additions to their fame, and a host of hitherto unheard of writers have acquired reputation. One reason for this is that youth takes to writing rhymes as a duck to water; think of the vast number of staid business men of middle age who have been guilty of adolescent odes! Amid the millions of young men in the trenches it is not surprising that so many have produced poems. And there is another reason. These boys are all under the shadow of death. No one likes to be entirely forgotten. They all know the time may be short, and that their one chance for remembrance is through the printed word. Living in the midst of burning experience, inspired by the ardor of youth, and dreading dumb forgetfulness—it is no wonder that they write verse with such eagerness. In the last letter from that gallant soldier-poet, Alan Seeger, he said, "I will write you soon if I get through all right. If not, my only earthly care is for my poems."

Some of the most original poems of the present war have been written by W. W. Gibson, in the collection called "Battle." These illustrate the immense difference between the poetry produced by this war and that which rose from nineteenth century struggles. The very fact that the modern soldier is not regarded merely as a fighting machine, but as a complex mentality, as shown by the variety of ministering services performed by the Y. M. C. A. huts—books, music, motion pictures, literary lectures—is also plainly revealed in the tone of the war poetry of the day. Instead of being sentimental or tromboney, it is analytical and psychological. Here verse has followed the lead of the realistic novel. When I was a small boy I supposed the ideal war novels had appeared in Oliver Optic's "Army and Navy Series"—don't you remember Tom Somers and Jack Somers? But the true novels of war had already been written by Tolstoy and Zola, the former of whom was followed by Stephen Crane and the latter by Henri Barbusse. Personally, however, Barbusse did not affect me so deeply as a little poem written by a Frenchman in the trenches, "La Passion de mon frère le Poilu." For Barbusse deals mainly with the body, while "La Passion" analyzes the soul.

England's foremost living poet, Rudyard Kipling, has thus far not appeared at his best in any of the numerous poems he has written about the war, but to counterbalance this several young poets, hitherto unheard of, have produced memorable verse. Rupert Brooke's fame has overflowed the world; though being dead, he yet speaketh. His is a precious legacy to English literature.

In the early days of the European war Vachel Lindsay wrote his solemn and stately poem, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight." This is original verse of distinction; and the tragedy is made more real by the touches of homeliness befitting the gaunt figure.

## From Masefield

### To Thomas Hardy

Among the many poems produced by Englishmen in the summer of 1914, I then thought that "August, 1914," by John Masefield, was altogether the best; and after four years I see no reason to change my mind. That particular summer was one of the loveliest men remember to have ever graced the island; the countryside seemed to breathe out calm and peace. Then came the terrible change, sudden, overwhelming. This dramatic contrast is expressed in language worthy of the occasion by the English poet, whose elegiac verse harmonizes the summer evening and in its restrained dignity glorifies the thousands of English rustics who have left scenes inexpressibly dear to fight for England in foreign fields.

Thomas Hardy was not nearly so fortunate in his poem "Men Who March Away," which was editorially parodied by "The New York Sun." In his latest volume, however, "Moods of Vision," the war has inspired a number of lyrics that must take rank among his best. The one with the title taken from the Book of Jeremiah, "In Time of the Breaking of Nations," has the touch of permanence, the last stanza reminding one of the conclusion of Browning's "Love Among the Ruins."

William Watson achieved his best not in his Kaiser curse but in the little poem "There's panzies—that's for thoughts." His patriotic poetry, however, which appeared in the two volumes published in 1917, is strong and glowing.

Alfred Noyes, who had prophesied in 1911 that England, who hated war, would surely fight for a great idea, has written much admirable verse during the last four years. The first stanza of his fine poem "The

## I Have a Rendezvous With Death

By Alan Seeger

**I HAVE a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple blossoms fill the air—  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.**

**It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath—  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow flowers appear.**

**God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.**

—From "Poems of Alan Seeger," Copyright by Charles Scribner's Sons