

Feb. - March, 1943.

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# The Abinger Chronicle

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appears eight times a year. While many of the Contributors are local to the Abinger district, or frequent visitors to it, many come from far afield.

MSS. (which are voluntary) are welcomed by

THE EDITOR

CHERRY COTTAGE

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## POETRY IN WARTIME AMERICA

This time we have a pre-war generation of poets. This war has for ten years been the subject of poetry in England and the United States. In England the poetry of the nineteen-thirties filled its intimations of mortality with terrible prophecy, often with nightmare. The approach of war shook the lines of many such verses as Louis MacNiece wrote:

Our prerogatives as men  
Will be cancelled who knows when,  
So I drink your health before  
The gun-butt raps upon the door.

And it sounded in this poem by a great American, Robert Frost:

We saw leaves go to glory,  
Then almost migratory  
Go part way down the lane,  
And then to end the story  
Get beaten down and pasted  
In one wild day of rain.  
We heard " 'Tis over " roaring.  
A year of leaves was wasted.  
Oh, we make a boast of storing,  
Of saving and of keeping,  
But only by ignoring  
The waste of moments sleeping,  
The waste of pleasure weeping,  
By denying and ignoring  
The waste of nations warring.

While some poets have been expressing what is after all a universal experience, the impending sense of the waste of nations warring, others have turned with love to speak of the things war might harm. In a

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crescendo of new appreciation of this country, its places, its ways of life, its very names, the poets of the United States have greatly enriched our poetry. Carl Sandburg's book, "The People, Yes," spread its pages far and wide to catch the songs, proverbs, work, and hopes of the great mass of people. An important and very recent contribution to our available literature is an album of recordings from that book which Mr. Sandburg himself has made. The love of the people for their land is heard in poems like Ferril's "Harper's Ferry Floating Away," in Chapin's "Plain Chant for America," in MacLeish's "Colloquy for the States," and in Corning's "Oregon Prologue." Last year a young American poet of Belgian ancestry, May Sarton, travelled up and down and across the country, bringing back poetry from its farthest ends. Her poem on Texas begins,

In Texas the lid blew off the sky a long time ago,  
So there's nothing to keep the wind from blowing  
And it blows all the time. Everywhere is far to go,  
So there's no hurry at all, and no reason for going.

Everywhere in the forty-eight states our poets have been listening and looking, and writing their reports to posterity. This aspect of pre-war poetry becomes clearer to us now, as we look back and see the whole of the development. It has been a natural and a spontaneous feeling. It reaches back into experience that is ripe enough for good poetry, and it represents, in one sense, a poetic preparation for war. One must know well and love deeply the thing he fights for.

The common feeling of all the American people is summed up in a poem by Stephen Vincent Benet\* called "If This Should Change."

If this should change, remember the tree and the brook,  
The long day's summer, the voices clever and kind,  
The true verse that burned on the page of the book,  
The true love, body and mind.

---

\*Stephen Vincent Benet died on March 13th, 1943.

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Remember the tulip in the pinched backyard,  
And how it asked for nothing except to grow  
And that was enough to do. Remember the hard  
Country earth, under snow.

All tastes of food and water, of salt and grass,  
A bird flying, a cat asleep in the sun,  
The hard-paved street where the faces pass and pass  
And never get done.

Huge-flowing Mississippi, under full moon,  
The giant landscape where the great rivers crawl,  
And the shabby apartment, and last year's tune.  
Remember, remember all.

They all made something, from the wine drunk with  
friends  
In gaiety, without care, without hurt or shame,  
To the faces of the dead that a strangeness attends,  
The same, not the same.

They all made something. They made eyes and ears,  
A country, a time, work, all that is hard to say,  
And behind them were many bodies and many years  
And night and day.

There was the sight from sea of the straight-backed,  
And the old graves deep in the grass, where the grass  
is wet.

Though the wind blow and the stone walls fall down,  
Remember, do not forget.

Though the sky crack and the heart crack under the sky,  
There was all we know. It is not to be finished yet.  
There was good bread, well eaten, in company.  
Remember, maintain, remember, never forget.

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Not in the great inscriptions but in the blood.  
Not in the able words but under the hat.  
Those things are freedom. That is why they are good.  
Remember that.

And nowadays we are beginning to hear American readers ask, "Where is the poetry of this war?" They mean poems written about events of this year. Recalling certain widely popular poems of the last war, they expect another Rupert Brooke, another Joyce Kilmer. The poetry we have in wartime America is that of premonition, of early sympathy with other countries attacked and taken, and of deepening awareness of the beauty threatened. In a letter a young poet recently wrote: "I don't think poetry divides into a classification to coincide with Pearl Harbour. People go on writing, affected of course by the war, but mostly I imagine they are continuing currents that were there before the war."

Speculation is interesting, and a ready answer is not easily given, but it is possible to guess where the current may suddenly deepen and swirl into the poetry we are later to call the poetry of this war. In American colleges we read the work of the English soldier-poets of the last war, Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg, Edmund Blunden, and Charles Hamilton Sorley. In 1914 the youngest of those men was 19 years old and the oldest 29.

One imagines further that war poetry from American poets will express a new sort of idealism. It will arise from their lifelong awareness of the horror and waste of war, and from a quietly fierce determination to bring this one to an emphatically victorious end. This idealism will be no less high because it is hard and clear-eyed. Some of the most exalted war-poetry may be expected from fliers. But one great difference may be even more certainly expected: there will be less said about the particular ugliness of war, and more about

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the people's hopes for a world after the war. The people anywhere dream more nobly than their governments, and the poets dream earlier and are more articulate than the people. The poetry of wartime America is most likely to be written by men who have the people's dream in them. Walt Whitman would like the poetry that Americans will be writing in the next few years. Indeed, he foretold it. It is still too early to look now for the great poetry of this war in this country, but it will come. It is being written now. And when it does come the literature of the English-speaking people and the world will be greater.

JOHN HOLMES

## CROCUSES

Wherever I go,  
Over weird pine mountains,  
In desperate tropic seas;  
Always I shall know  
I have lived in the green city  
Once, with the crocuses.

In March, on the green-sward  
Where the elegant, lovely spire  
Casts its long shadow,  
Bursts the reward  
Of all winters, an orange fire  
Clambering up the meadow;

Running down to the river  
Between old old houses.  
Turbulent, impudent, witty  
Are crocuses. Wherever  
I go, I shall remember  
I have lived in the green city.

CARLA LANYON LANYON

## MAN-WOMAN, YOU AND I

Here by the river side we stand  
 Alone, you and I  
 Woman and man, our feet upon the land.  
 Here by the river side we lie,  
 The trees, the moving water and the sky  
 Asleep on either hand;  
 A man and woman, you and I.

But there is neither sleep nor rest  
 Nor shall there be.  
 The river, striving at a law's behest  
 Down, forever down demands the sea.  
 The sun, the power of God made manifest  
 Thunders upon the earth  
 And she, the mother, upward thrusts to birth  
 And feeds upon the mountains of her breast  
 All manifold diversity.

Yet we, man-woman, naked we  
 Weighed in the scales of cosmic worth  
 Are older than the sun and earth  
 More splendid than the sea.

The littlest living thing may kill  
 Kill and destroy,  
 Yet man's enthroned sovereign will  
 Can build and know the joy  
 Of building, laugh and weep and fill  
 The abounding borders of the mind  
 With rich imagining and find  
 New splendour still.

*Man-Woman, You and I*

And you and I, man-woman, wise  
 With grown imagining  
 With mighty hands might sudden rise  
 And insolent of purpose fling  
 The sleepy hills asunder, grow  
 On the level field of our devising  
 Trees, a thousand years arising  
 Wait, and lay them low  
 And ant-like of endeavour, grain by grain  
 For joy of building raise the hills again.

In lowly life each living thing  
 Wheel upon wheel in gear  
 Unwitting turns from spring to spring  
 The cycle of the slow revolving year.  
 But man, though fleshly bound  
 By law has joyous found  
 Unrhythmed enterprise, and heart awing,  
 New vision rising on the steeps of fear,  
 Breaks from the still enchaned ground  
 And moves awake, new wondering  
 A wanderer, but master of his wandering.

And I am a man, tremendous, free  
 Foe to the blind  
 Revolving law, foe to a heart confined  
 Foe to the stars, foe to the sullen sea;  
 I am a man, a God to be.

I am Lord of a thousand ways  
 With tools at my command.  
 Here is a hand that hunts and slays  
 Yet God-like carves the spinning earth,  
 Makes beauty visible from soil and sand  
 Knows healing and finds truth, yet prays  
 To none but holds all final worth  
 Locked in a hollow hand.

*Man-Woman, You and I*

Here is an older instrument  
 Unending, strong  
 A fount of self-begetting, innocent  
 Of time, of right or wrong.  
 And you, the furrow, builder of the seed  
 Made one with me forever breed  
 The products of our linked will,  
 And feed new cradles of old life  
 With earthen understanding.

    Woman, wife  
 Mother and mate, man's only need  
 In you I am, omnipotent.

\*        \*        \*

Here by the river side we stand  
 You and I  
 Woman and man, our feet upon the land.  
 Here by the river side we lie,  
 The trees the moving water and the sky  
 On either hand;  
 Man-woman, you and I.  
 Yet we, man-woman, naked we  
 Weighed in the scales of cosmic worth  
 Are older than the sun and earth,  
 More splendid than the sun and earth  
 More splendid than the sea.

CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS

## TO MEMORY

Thou lovely child of time, now grave now gay,  
 Revealing yet in every line and grace  
 The half-hid beauty of thy mother's face  
 Caught as she fled; for she hath fled away  
 Unheeding of entreaties "Stay, oh stay;  
 Abide with us." She might not; but in place  
 Hath left us thee to love and to embrace  
 For ever; thee, the lantern of our way.

*To Memory*

Thy lightest laughter, quick to come and go,  
 Brings back what joys, what hopes—and oh thy kiss  
 Breathes of the lips, whose touch is yet aglow  
 With happy happy things, a dream of bliss  
 That was and is to be; while in thy tears  
 We sorrow sorrows soothed by balm of years.

GEOFFERY BOSANQUET

Sept. 1942.

## FROM A LONDON DIARY

### *Winter mornings*

For me the sun rises just across the Thames. I often stand on my balcony opposite the old shot tower and the lion-topped brewery to watch it. This morning, before the mist lifted, regiments of small pink clouds in a most pale blue sky led the eye to a point where the sun was preparing to rise. About an hour later the sun's a pale gold disc in the rising mist.

And so to work which, being temporarily with the Civil Service, implies that long wrestle with the stilted, written Minute, an unequal struggle into which, it seems, more and more people and things are to be drawn, when the war's over.

Across the Thames my galleon came at dawn  
 laden with gifts, touched by the rising sun:  
 its cargo, loves, delights of every kind;  
 designs for this and that, moods for the mind;  
 music in fragments, colours pale and bold,  
 a glint of poetry touching life with gold;  
 reminders of things past, and things so new  
 undreamed they were, curious, rare and few.

Sail on, my galleon. I'll not unload,  
 for I must take the city's dismal road.

*From a London Diary*

## Applause

Find the unmitigated clapping accorded to all musical performance in England, whether at the National Gallery concerts or in the provinces (heard through the wireless) disheartening. It means either that all this music is equally engaging, or that discrimination is dead. Neither is true. Everyone goes to the concerts now, and Everyone claps. Everyone's an awful chap. Someone might give an honest groan or a sharp hiss.

One slender and subtle indication alone is left of favour and disfavour: a friend drew my wandering attention to it at one of the very rare *bad* mid-day concerts at the Gallery to-day. In between the movements of a quartet that was pursuing its weary academic way—in between, in one of those three gaps—my friend leant over to say, "Notice the dull silence? People aren't coughing or moving as they habitually do, for they haven't been silent and intent during the playing. There's nothing to relax from." I noticed and agreed. In the next gap, before the allegro finale, I felt prepared to bet my friend that the clapping at the end would nevertheless be terrific. And sure enough it was, a veritable storm. Will the critics tell? Maybe, maybe not.

*Mass feeding*

London now lunches en masse. The Cafeteria. A dreadful word denoting a dreadful thing: a vast hell-hall with endless glass-topped tables surrounded by leather and steel chairs, between which mortals errant wander, carrying their share of indelicate food, in search of a vacant chair.

Will this institution grow? Surely, and multiply until the day when private kitchens in the cities will have become a quaintness of the past, not even to be used on some rare occasion for the guests, whose luncheon

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will doubtless consist of highly concentrated tablet provided for just such an emergency by an all-loving and thoughtful post-war government.

*Exiles*

In the evening to the V——s, who have their children home from boarding schools for the holidays. Both children appear to be liked at school and speak English without an accent already. C., aged 13, was fingering out the sad story of the cockles and mussels in Dublin's fair city and humming to the notes. I suggested, "They won't jab you any more at school prayers now for singing the high notes flat," a defect she had had.

"I don't sing any more at school prayers." This was rather final—evidently a violent attack of doubt. I ventured, "Why not?" and she explained that Jesus had arrived in the world in exactly the same way as other children, that any other explanation would not satisfy and that since the hymns supposed a different kind of birth it was better not to sing them. "What about the other girls?" "O they," she said, "believe what they are told about everything, history, literature and religion. We have long discussions at night in the dormitory, but they go on believing, especially when they're quoting their favourite mistress." I decided that little foreign girls, especially Latin ones, are good for English boarding schools. Then I asked her the old, old question about the future. "I want to go back to Italy," she said, "and I want to marry and have fifteen children, eight boys and seven girls." "I want to go back too," I said, and she gave me a tremendous hug.

S.S.

## FIRST LIGHT

A knife-edge of light  
Cuts away darkness  
Suddenly slithering  
Water-like  
Out of night mist:  
With a surgeon's craft  
Exposing internal forms;  
Paring the dark rind  
That has grown  
Over yesterday's shapes,  
Severing adhesions  
Between tree and sky,  
Branch and leaf,  
Between house and house.  
Sulkily the stark profiles  
Seep into the round  
Of day shadows  
And light is accepted  
Without wonder.

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