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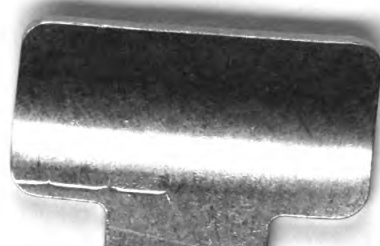
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THE SAGA OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION

THE SAGA
OF THE
SEVENTH DIVISION
BY
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TO
LORD FRENCH'S
CONTEMPTIBLE LITTLE ARMY
AND ITS COMMANDER

FOREWORD

MEN's memories being short, it is advisable, if they condescend to read my Saga and are to understand the allusions, to recall to them what was this Seventh Division—which some have called Immortal—and what it did to earn the epithet.

It was formed at Lyndhurst in the New Forest in the September of 1914, composed of regiments from the garrisons of the Mediterranean, the Channel Islands, Egypt and South Africa, besides one battalion from Dublin and two battalions of the Guards. Being garrison regiments from foreign service, nearly up to war strength, so not stiffened to any extent by reservists, and the men being all of three to seven years' service, they were the flower of the old British Army—"General French's contemptible little army," as the now historic phrase had it.

The Division's total strength was about 18,500. It consisted of the 20th Brigade (1st Grenadier Guards, 2nd Scots Guards, 2nd Gordon Highlanders and 2nd Border Regiment); the 21st Brigade (2nd Scots Fusiliers, 2nd Wiltshire Regiment, 2nd Yorkshire Green Howards and 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment); the 22nd Brigade (1st Welsh Fusiliers, 1st South Staffordshire Regiment, 2nd Warwickshire Regiment and 2nd Queen's West Surrey Regiment); the Northumberland Hussars, Yeomanry; a Brigade Division Royal Field Artillery; four 4.7 guns; and detachments of Royal Engineers and R.A.M. Corps.

After the sea voyage, which for some of the regiments had been a long one, the Division marched and manœuvred for about three weeks in the New Forest, covering a distance of some 200 miles, and by Sunday, October the 4th, fit, hard and trained to the minute, it was ready and waiting for its orders. They came unexpectedly, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after the men and officers had been given leave for the day. They were scattered all over the Forest, but returned or were collected in time, and the Division moved off from 7 o'clock onwards and marched to Southampton, where it embarked for an unknown destination at 6 o'clock on the Monday morning.

Submarines were lurking about the Channel, and it was not till 4 a.m. on the 7th of October that the British transports put into Zeebrugge and disembarked the Division under the eye of German airplanes. The Division was designed to relieve Antwerp, but owing to this delay was too late, and was employed instead to cover the retirement of the Belgian Army.

During this the Division covered some 160 miles in North Flanders ; it was a floating Division, without a base, facing, though the regimental officers and the rank and file knew nothing of it at the time, the German Army from before Antwerp. It was the first of the British troops to enter Ypres—this on the 14th of October. It was then ordered to hold the line before Ypres until Sir John French could bring up the other six Divisions and deploy them from the Aisne to the sea. Ordered to hold on at all costs, the

Seventh Division was continually in action from the 15th to the 31st of October.

It had no supports, no reserves ; there was a single line, covering some 8 miles of front, with only eighteen field pieces and four 4.7's and a minimum of ammunition. But it held on according to orders against some 340,000 Germans, with guns in proportion.

The Division which went into action on the 15th of October 18,000 strong was withdrawn on the 31st 2000 strong—practically only the transport and supply—having ceased to exist as a fighting unit.

“ Such a gallant feat of arms was never seen before.”

HATCH HOUSE, BRENTWOOD
November 1919

THIS is a plain straight tale of Arms and Men,
As noble as the immortal singers of old
Could find to tune their harps to ; and if you,
Who deign to pause and read, make plaint the words
I write in are not winged, nor glow with fires
Of Homer or of Virgil or the sweet
Voices that sang in the Augustan age,
Blame not the theme ; blame her, my earth-bound
Muse,
That limps and cannot soar, that burns within,
But cannot show her light unto the world.
It should not have been mine to touch the lyre
With my slow blundering hands ; it should have been
Some strong son of Calliope, whose note
Would ring from sphere to sphere and call the stars
To witness Britain's glory. But none such
Was there to see and mark. It was mine eyes
That did behold this immortality.
And what I saw and heard, I strive with hands
I know are weak to set up like an arch
Triumphal, or build as a column of stone,
Even as built the ancients to their dead,
To the immortal memory of men
Who trod the great road to the stars and gave
The Ultimate Gift for hearth and home. On such
The blessing and pardon of God rests—doubt it not.





PART I

BOOK I

IN the dead days of old, when kings were kings,
Not the pale figurehead of the Ship of State,
Swayed by the wind, ruled by the waves, and turned
To every blast of crude opinion that
Utters the mob in ignorance, but men
And warriors that led their shouting legions on
To gather in the harvest of red Death,
There lived a king ; and in his veins the wild
Blood of the North that will not rest, the breath
Of the North-east Wind which blows across the sea
Those that shall conquer England. As of old
Did the great Cæsar, this king came and saw,
And there lay England bleeding at his feet.
In those days kings were kings. Their word went forth
And all men hastened to obey. None asked :
“ Hath the king right to do this thing or that ? ”
All was the king’s ; he took but of his own.

’Tis God that loves a garden ; but the kings,
The stark kings that came out of Normandie
To rule the foolish English for their good,
Loved best the echoing glades of the deep woods,
The dewy brakes whence crash the noble deer,
The whispering voices of a thousand trees,
And leaves that start at music of the chase.
They loved the crash of battle, but better far
The cadences of the hunting horn and cry
Of hounds as they break covert.]

Said the king :

“ In this new country which is mine, I make
A forest far transcending all I had
In Normandie of old : a forest where I,
Wearied with my high state and worldly cares,
With holding my fierce war-hounds in a leash,
And guarding what I have won, may come for rest ;
Where I may mount my favourite horse and ride
Swift as the wind which whistles in my hair
After the swifter deer, and so forget
That I am not a hunter, but a king.”
England was his, a country of deep woods,
And tinkling streams that mirrored the bowering leaves
Of age-old trees, and brakes of fruitful briars,
And hills that marched rank after rank, all green
With cover for the game he loved—all his,
Spreading before him, the great Saxon Wealds.
Here was the Andredsweald, that clothes the slopes
Where the doomed Roman port withstood her foes,
The pirates of the sea, till all her streets
Ran with the blood of loyal citizens,
Deserted in their hour of utmost need
By their imperial Mother. Here the Weald
Of Kent flower-strewed the upland to the cliffs
That stretch their chalk-white lips to France, once
friend
And sister, but now conqueror and foe,
And to be foe for nigh a thousand years.
And, further north, the Forest of Arderne,
Swathed the great heart of England ; a wood indeed

So vast there seemed no boundary to it ; so old
Its oaks already were of stalwart girth
When the first Druids came to shear away
The mistletoe that crowned them ; in their turn
These oaks the saplings were of noble trees
Which sank into the earth so long ago
That their incalcined branches lapped the bones
Of beasts no eye of man has seen in flesh ;
The Mastodon and Tiger sabre-toothed,
And the great hideous Lizards, born of slime,
That reared their heads to nip the bursting buds
Through the long silent days ere Man was born
To sharpen his flint arrows and look forth
From his rude-fashioned dwellings by the lake shore
On all the wonders of the new-born world.
Nor were these all the forests of England. Wealds
Of the East Saxons from the singing Thames
Up to the borders of the North Folk's fens
Spread their wide arms ; and further north again,
The tossing firs that grew on Deira's hills
Stood sentinels to the ravagers that lurked
Behind the Roman wall. Aye, wealds there were,
Mile beyond mile, to shelter the king's deer,
And guard the breeding-places of the wolves,
And the lush bogs where wallowed the wild pig,
Meet for the pleasure of the king. He saw
And noted, but he turned away.

He took
No pleasure in that which was. To suit his will,
His forest must be his and his alone,

Not haunted by memories of other kings.
England was his to choose from, and he chose
A shire of gentle hills and rushing streams
That bit deep inlets from the heath-clad shore
And brought the sea far up into the land.
England was his, and this the shire he chose.
Soft Devon breeds the rover of the seas.
The Sussex men are men of iron indeed,
But Hampshire ? what did Hampshire breed but deer ?
True that men lived among the echoing hills
And speared the fish in the deep sea-going streams ;
But what were they but villeins, hearts of deer ?
What place had they in the Elysian fields
Made consecrate to the king's sport ? Such men,
If men they might be called, that could not fight
For their own country and their home-bred king.
What were their homes to them, that would not shed
One drop of blood to keep them theirs ? For such
In days of old, when men were men, there was
No pity. Though our softer age would cry
That the poor worm has right to crawl upon
The earth he calls his own, the noisome fly
A title to his dunghill—so much more
A man. The Norman William never heard
Such tales as this, and would have laughed aloud
To hear a race of men should rise who thought
That aught should win rights but the sword. He took
What was his own and made of it forthwith
A lordly pleasance for a king of old :
No garden of pleasure and soft luxury,

Such as an eastern monarch would have planned
To lie in, listening to the fountain's splash
And the voluptuous voices of singing slaves ;
But a free hunting ground, a space the winds
Of heaven had leave to blow on and where men
And noble beasts strove for the mastery
Of beasts no jot less noble than themselves,
And swifter and more cunning ; sport for men
And kings that in those days were men indeed.
And at its boundaries, like the flaming sword
That guarded Eden's tree, he set stern laws
To hinder those that would have preyed upon
His beasts, from princely hart to timid hare.
Laws that were needed, for the Saxon hinds
Believed the creatures of the wild their own ;
Nothing they knew of " thine," but much of " mine."
They trapped for food, but did not chase for sport,
And the red deer against their gins and snares
Had no more chance than any meaner beast.
But William loved the red deer and the free
Life of the wild that is all speed and storm.
So the New Forest was. And to this day
Is the New Forest.

League on wind-swept league,
It lies four-square to all the vagrant winds,
And still some ancient oaks spread their green arms
That, tender saplings, saw the echoing chase
Of the fierce Norman kings sweep lordly by,
And caught the gleam of sunset on their trunks
The day Red William died. So gnarled are they,

And stout of girth, and bossed, and rude, they seem
Like some old village crone, from toothless gums
Mumbling her tales of long ago, the while
She knits with knotted fingers like a Fate.

The kings have gone the road of kings. The deer
No more are sacred, and the forest laws
The pale dim shadow of what they used to be.
But still the mighty ghosts sweep through the glades,
And the old storm-worn oaks know them again
And toss their moaning arms to welcome them.
The passer-by believes he hears the wind,
That sets those boughs a-creaking, and his hair
Rises not bristling on his scalp, as when
Men see the supernatural clothed in flesh,
Or semblance of the flesh, and trembling quake
To the marrow of their bones. Ghosts pass us by
Each hour of the day, nor win their meed of fear.
The world is full of ghosts, the earth-bound thoughts
Of saints and sinners alike, returning as
In dreams to a spot that they once loved—so far
As they may be away, past all our ken,
Beyond the utmost star—remembering still.
And we may stand alone and longing stretch
Our hands out to that other world, but hear
No echo of its life, nor for all our tears
Pierce through the veil. For what indeed are we :
An evil generation seeking signs ?

But here's a sight to give our spirit wings.

Stand in the heart of the Forest, and look forth
Across its leagues of loneliness, and see
The white moon rising through the billowing mists,
As though the Huntress mufflings cast away
And stood close-girt to chase the flying roe.
The swelling spaces fragrant in the gloom,
That range between the pine-woods, are all still
Of bees that hung among the purple bells
All the hot day ; a coronet of pines
Stabs with its blacker points the horizon sky,
And the wind, like a harpist, draws long notes
Out of the branches thrilling to his touch.
Far off a wild mare whinnies to her foal.
Comes the long cry, like minute guns at sea,
Of mournful owls. Near by a nightingale
Flutes to the silent stars. The world's asleep
But for these sentinels. On such a night
Slip by us time and space, as the cleft waves
Slip by the hissing prow of the swift ship.
What have we here to mark the flight of years ?
Dead ages roll before us, as the heavens
And earth, they say, will roll on Judgment Day,
And what we see Red William may have seen,
And stood where we stand ; though it scarce may be
His wild soul knew our modern melancholy,
The spirit of the world no longer young,
That sighs and doubts and looks to a dim past
As to a golden time gone by and not
To dawn again. But in that simpler past
Men lived from day to day, and trusted God.

The Forest ! the New Forest ! new even now,
Born fresh again with every spring that comes
To wake its silences with life and youth !
Here is a place to dream a life away,
And to forget the world of living men,
A sad world and a sordid at its best.
This is the kingdom of God's creatures ; here
The brothers of sweet Saint Francis live their lives
Innocently to the glory of God ; and if
At times blows coldly Brother North-east Wind
And whirls in choking clouds white Sister Snow,
And wild birds scream and little soft beasts lie dead,
And it would seem the skies in anger frown
And would o'erwhelm the breathless world, 'tis still
All to the glory of God and of His saints.
For even the wild things in the world He made,
And the stern and what seem the cruel things,
Sing with the soft, the gentle and the fair,
The self-same *Benedicite*.

See here

Britain compressed in little, for the soil
Is England, and the free air and singing brooks ;
But the long stretches of heather and the slim
Silver-stemmed birches and dark tossing pines
Are Scotland ; and the stormy hills that spurned
By flying hoofs of the wild ponies seem
To echo with clamour as of elfin horns
Are Wales. So may we dream we find in these
Few miles what we love best in all our land
And feel ourselves at home though exiles. Free

As the wild souls that planned it for their sport,
Fanned by the wind that sings up-Channel and tells
Strange stirring stories of sea-dogs such as roamed
The pathless waters in those strong young days
When all the world lay open like a book,
Unread save by the brave ; here can we rove
And dream, and sing ourselves the wanderers' song
Which all the gentlemen-adventurers knew.
What more would we ? and what more gifts has life ?
Only a soul of mud could ask for more.
The Forest, the New Forest ? Visions of nymphs
And dryads peeping from the trees arise
Before our dreaming eyes, and a young world,
As fresh as dew-drenched roses and as fair
As aught the morning summer sunshine gilds.
But this is England, and the sportive nymphs
And fauns and hamadryads are of the South,
And danced the panting sunshot summer through
In groves of olives and of orange-trees
On marble islands in the Ægean Sea.
Not here, among our English oaks and thorns,
And under our cloud-speckled sky, shall we
Catch echoes of Pan's flute nor hear the chant
Of witching Orpheus. But on nights when high
Over the pine-trees, riding the wine-dark skies
Like a slim barque that breasts calm seas, the moon
Turns all our heather to silver bells, the trunks
Of all our trees to silver pillars, our roads
To silver serpents winding through the night,
And flings black gulfs of shadow from every bush,

Then we might see, circling a patch of sward,
The delicate fairies of our northern clime,
That feast all night and leave behind at dawn
Their esculent tables for poor mortals' fare.
At times amid these spaces and the tense
Yet living silence which no voice of man
Breaks hour by hour, the soaring spirit longs
For but a moment's glimpse of the unseen world,
Which yet these bodily eyes and ears are all
Too gross to see and hear.

“Visions of night

The old men see, and the young men dream dreams.”
And this the Forest is—a place of dreams,
Now that the kings are dead and the wild deer,
The poor and park-fed shadow of lordly beasts,
Carrying their branching tines swift as the wind
Before the Norman's hounds. The ancient word :
Seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, and night
And day, shall not, the world enduring, cease :
Holds as it did of yore. And here we mark
The vernal paces of the year, that seem
To follow with unceasing tread the more
In their own ordered solitudes than in
A haunt of men. The opening buds of spring :
First the pale snowdrop and the aconite
With golden cups that star the wintry ground,
Then the close clustering primrose and the blue
Wild hyacinth that mirrors the sky above
Or might be ravellings from our Lady's robe
Cast on the favoured earth, a sight to make

One that beholds it sing for joy—tell tales
 Of a new birth and rising up again
 Of the Earth Mother lying fast in sleep
 Like the enchanted maid of the fairy tale,
 Waiting the kiss that breaks the frozen charm.
 (Oh, stories of old that have their deeper note !)
 And the old voices call and our hearts bound
 To hear them once again, and all the world
 Is young once more. The long days deepen down
 Into the gold of summer, and the heath
 Spreads out its carpet of purple as if a king
 Should pass that way, and the young green of the leaves
 Deepens to stronger tints. Wild roses blush
 On wayside bushes and the birds fall mute.
 To its fruition comes the youth of the year,
 And summer, like a bride, shines forth in gems
 And pearl-white splendours. Then the north wind
 blows ;
 The many-coloured pageant of decay
 Marches across the woods and leaves a trail
 Of crimson and of gold. The bramble brakes
 Show forth their blue-black fruit, the nuts hang down
 In clusters and the bracken lies in sheets
 Of red gold as from mines of Ophir. Next
 The tracing finger of winter outlines trees,
 Heath, bushes all in a diamond glory. Deep
 In hollows lie the drifts that the pale sun
 Makes sparkling with untold riches. So Time
 Turns in his hands the crystal ball with tints
 As of a broken rainbow in its heart ;

And lo ! another year is gone, and we
Stand once again as many times before
We stood—in the New Forest, place of dreams !
And in the heart of its deep peace, give ear
Unto the silence, for a thousand years
Unbroken by the voices of the world.

THE HUNTING SONG OF WILLIAM RUFUS

Blow horns, and loose my leaping hounds
To chase the deer with me,
And all the long day will I ride
Like Jehu, furiously.

Away, away ! my hounds and I
To burst through copse and briar,
And find at last in speed and storm
The haven I desire.

My fathers loved their dragon-ships
That cleft the roaring seas ;
But better love I a fleet steed
And my hounds' harmonies.

My fathers hunted men and gold,
Their raven flags spelt fear ;
But through the sounding forest glades
I hunt the flying deer.

My fathers in the battle slain
Valhalla longed to see ;
But in the chase it loved, my soul
Shall speed to Purgatory.

BOOK II

Keep silence ! Hark ! I hear the drums of war

Who that has heard the muttering roll and sprung
Alert at that dread sound with spirit tense,
Hands clenched and lips hard set, remembers not
The thrill of the heart uplifted by a cause
He deemed a holy one, and felt himself
One of St Michael's legionaries, called up
To fight with the great Dragon ? Even so,
When sounded the stern call to arms at last,
We that had watched and waited for so long—
A few, a very few among the many—
Girt on our spiritual sword and raised
Rejoicing hearts, like Nero's martyrs, called
To face the stake, the sword or the wild beasts.
For this, for this, the mothers bore their sons,
That they might carry on the torch, and that
The lustre of our England's glory and
Our England's dead might not be dimmed. What
then,
If, like the greatest of all Mothers, a sword
Should also pierce their souls ? Had they not that
To give which is than gems more precious ? Men
Give rubies, women pearls ; the one their blood,
The other their tears. Of these the diadem
Of Britain is made. More rubies and more pearls !
That it may be the richer ! What of us,
And of our petty pains and griefs ? Beyond

This world and out in the courts of heaven, what reck
The blessed spirits how they left the flesh,
Or how they mourned before they left it ? What
Does a man remember of his childish woes
And of his childish scars ? Even so the soul,
Grown to its fullest stature, will forget
The grief and only bear in mind the glory.
Go out, my soul, to meet thy God, and know
He reigneth, not another, and from the fire
Shall bring forth gold purer than eye hath seen ;
Go praise Him in the furnace, like the Three ;
It is not we that perish, for we fight
By Michael's side.

So long we dreamt, the half
In faith, the half in fear, this day had come.
Now in our dreams we live.

And so it came
To the New Forest—place of dreams—where long
The echoes had not heard a sterner note
Than sounds the hunting horn. Where yesterday
The fairy revellers left their traces, rose
A new gigantic mushroom. The iron veins
Of the country-side throbbed with new life ; all night
The loaded trucks clanked past, and faces of strange
And weather-beaten men dawned on our roads,
Clad in the tint of Mother Earth, and urged
With shout and whip their slow strong horses on
To drag great roaring waggons through our lanes ;
And we that had dreamt our lives away, beheld
An army moving like a serpent, slow

And certain with fixed eyes on the one end,
While we looked on and wondered. Till that day,
Though they had told us that the hunt was up
And the dread dogs of war unleashed, we heard
As those that hear not, having ears ; for here
There was no war, but peace, and summer waned
As gently as in years gone by, and we
Heard not the thundering of the guns nor saw
The flames that lighted up the midnight sky
With pyre funereal of villages.
Surely it was a tale and not the truth ?
Another of our dreams from far away
Past the dim bourne of space and time ? not we
That lived, but some pale shadow of ourselves,
In such an hour, when all the Seals of Heaven
Seemed to be broken, and the Vials of Wrath
Poured out. Not ours the bodily eyes that saw
Streets surging with dust-tinted multitudes
That might have been the warriors born of earth
That Jason slew. Yet many years we had heard
The voices crying in the wilderness
And seen the cloud on the horizon, small
As a man's hand, but threatening dark, and knew
It should one day o'ershadow all our sky.
It should not, like a thief in dead of night,
Have overtaken us that read the signs
Written in the stars. At last the hunt is up,
And what we waited for is on us. Still,
It seemed a mere intangible dream, until
We saw those white tents on our heather rise

And heard the thundering transport wheels. Then
passed
All that had made our life, and lo ! we stood
Upon the threshold of new worlds. And thus
To the New Forest—home of dreams—there came
A new thing, yet an old, a call across
The sleeping ages. Clio stalked anew
Across our uplands, unseen, wonderful,
And so the stage was set that had stood bare
Since the King's men gave their view-halloo and
charged
The snuffing ranks of the psalm-singers. So
In ages far to come the books shall tell
Our children's children history was made
Once more in the New Forest : tell them how
Men mustered for the greatest of all wars,
And thinking of nothing but that plain straight thing,
Their duty, all unwittingly built up
A monument immortal that might stand
With the triumphal Roman arches, lone
In the fallen ruins of the world. But we,
The people of the New Forest—home of dreams—
Scarce knew it, and looked on like children, caught
By some new thing. We walked about our roads ;
And if we had to stand aside while passed
Rank behind rank a regiment marching, or
The guns that looked such little innocent things
Swaying behind their horses and all splashed
With strange bright colours, we like children smiled
And thought it a brave sight. One day we'd pass

A wayside blacksmith's, thronged as ne'er before
With horses—sure he'd never handled such.
And ever the daylight hours would be alive
With the clear music of the bugle calls,
Which woke strange echoes in our souls. And slow
Like an awakening sleeper we roused up
Out of our dreams, and lo ! it was day, and true
The tale they told us, that the hounds of War
Had slipped the leash, and that the Eldest Child
Of Europe stood at bay ; and now the two
Great sleeping Giants that never knew their strength
Were stirring in their sleep at last, while men
Whose thoughts had outrun action, wrung their hands
And cried it was too late. Already crept
The shadow across the dial, menacing.
It was the Day they toasted, they whom years
Had nurtured in thoughts of warfare, they whom fate
Had of the nations brought to Europe last,
Last to be Christian, last to see the light,
And first to cast adrift the Christian's God.
Their hour had struck, their fiat had gone forth,
And all their manhood was a marching horde,
That as the sands of the sea-shore was like
To engulf the long-doomed land. Three months,
they said,
Would crown their enterprise. And one was past.

But what of all this recked our regiments
Encamped in the New Forest ? Plain their path
Lay through the days. Old soldiers all, as years

Our forest capital's once quiet streets
Alive as never before, for life moves not,
In lesser times, at this dread lightning speed,
When it is not seen standing at grips with Death.
And this was life, but yet it seemed unreal
And the mere setting of a puppet show.
The church that overhangs the street seemed like
A stage scene with the entrances and exits,
An amphitheatre as at Amergau,
And all the passing figures that climbed up
And down the steep steps no mere flesh and blood,
But mummers in a melodrama. Once
I saw the steps white with confetti and
A group of kilted men with the wild pipes
Of a long-gone barbaric age a-slung
Upon their stalwart shoulders. Passers-by
Told me it was a Highland officer
That made his bridal in haste, one foot, to speak
In figures, in the stirrup. Many times
When I passed by the church bells called to prayer
(And much men need to pray), yet still they seemed
Not men and women, but mummers playing their
parts,
And set like boxes and stalls to view the play.
Over against the church the balcony
Of an old inn, where at all hours of the day
There sat the officers' women-folk, half dazed
With the crowding happenings of times
When Life at grips with Death moved fast,
And they had blindly come at call, nor recked

Where the call led them, knowing not if this
Should be the ultimate act of love to those
That were their lives—the husbands, brothers, sons.
I saw their faces.

Yet I scarcely think
Half of them knew that they were smitten by
The sword that pierced the holiest Mother's soul.
The English spirit is not a harp that thrills
To every wayward blast of fancy that
Like the wind sweeps a more self-conscious soul.
Thank God for it, ye martyr women ! this
Is no love gift of the gods, but rather a scourge.
To see with the eyes of the spirit, to hear sounds
No mortal ear can catch, to overleap
The bounds of space and time, and race the stars
Down their long path towards eternity,
Is but to suffer all sorrows, taste the cup
Of all humanity tenfold more full
Of gall, and die a thousand times for once.
And what avail ? Oh, better far to be
A little slow, a little blind, to hear
Only the sounds of earth within the range
Of our material ears, and from one day
Unto the next to live, not dreaming dreams.
To see the play and think it but a play.
To those I love, oh Lords of Life and Death,
Bestow this gift and not the other ; and
Let me be their Cyrenian.

I too watched
The play that seemed to stage itself within

This little citadel of ours, but I
Could not watch patiently from a fixed seat.
The wind called and I followed, for my heart
Was in my feet, and rest was not for them.
My place was not in the stalls and boxes, but
Along the alley way, and what I saw
Was glimpses only of the main set scene.
I roved the Forest, climbed the hills, and dipped
Into the sudden valley, following
The wind's course and the streams. At early morn
I'd hear the sound of marching feet and look
Forth from my rose-wreathed window eagerly
And through the holly-hedge see moving forms,
Earth-tinted, passing as a stream—I thought
Fantastically, the yellow stream that lapped
The seven hills that once o'erruled the world.
I closed the pane, and later in the day,
Far out across the Forest, I would come
On traces of that stream, as through the moss
A hidden rivulet bubbles up—a line
Of wire beside the roadway, further on
A single horseman riding slow, and round
A wooded corner, hiding them until
I reached it unsuspectingly, the guns.
Sure in those russet days, our home of dreams
Hummed with the dreams come true, the grim stern
stuff
That what we dream so fair is made of. Once
I stood beside the roadway on a mound
And all the pageant unrolled itself to me.

There with my eyes I saw pass by me one
Of the Divisions of our little force
Which our foes thought they branded. But they made
Their epithet for ever noble. Thus
God turns mean things to gold ; even as He made
The Roman gibbet to all time the sign
Of all the world's salvation.

As I stood

An old man came out of the Forest and
Stood by my side. A little while he gazed
In silence down the sunlit road, then turned
And spoke to me, a stranger, falteringly,
But driven by the heart within him hot.
“ They say it is the Seventh Division,” he said.
“ That tells not much to me, a poor old man.
What does it mean ? A hundred thousand men
Already gone to their deaths ? The foe, I hear,
Counts his men by the million. Would that I
Had died a thousand times, nor lived to see
This bitter day.”

“ Might is not right,” I said,
“ And these are British soldiers—leave it there.
They'll do their duty.”

“ Far be it from me,”
He said, “ to doubt it. But why must they die,
These fine young men, and leave a cumberer
Like me upon the earth ? ”

“ I envy them,”
I said, “ for that they are so young, so strong,
And have such riches in their hands to give

For her that gave them birth—not the mere shreds
 Of a life lived and wearied of, but all
 Their golden future and what it held for them.
 Away with pity ! Envy them, and most
 The spirit in which they make their sacrifice,
 That knows not it is gold beyond all price.
 Pity ? what pity for them ? But pity us,
 Who, left behind, lose all our world. For us
 What is there if the one light in our sky
 Be darkened ? all that's left to us to know
 It set in honour. Save your pity for us.
 Theirs is the glory, ours the price to pay.
 Yet pity us not, in that we too may share
 In this, the greatest gift a man can give
 To his loved country, and his king, and God.”
 He scarcely seemed to listen, and his face
 Brightened as down the winding road there came
 The sound of stamping horses and the clash
 Of their champed bits, while floating through the dust
 There seemed to swim the fabric of a dream
 Of the past ages—such a marching host
 As the old Forest has seen full many a time,
 Though new to us. The thought was in his mind,
 Even as 'twas in mine. He turned to me :
 “ I like the red upon their caps,” he said,
 “ But I would rather see the tossing plumes
 That the great Duke wore. Where is now the pomp
 And pageantry of war ? ”

“ Is it not here ? ”

I said, “ and if Red William could but rise

And stand with us, to him would this not seem
As brave a show as his mailed knights to us ?
Is war a matter of garments or the soul ? ”
“ Ah, true,” he said, “ and I am but an old
And foolish man that cannot comprehend
How immortality can come to earth,
Not as it came before, but in new guise.
Worthy indeed are these to follow in
The footsteps of our English redcoats, who
Nigh on a hundred years ago passed down
This road to fight at Waterloo.”

And now
Came down the winding road the sound of drums,
Like the strong pulsing throb of brave men’s hearts,
And then, before they choked us with the sound,
The shrilling fifes that danced above them, light
As shrieking winds above the thundering waves ;
And that wild spirit in me that laughs aloud
For the pure joy of living when it hears
A stirring strain of music or the roll
Of noble poetry, awoke and blazed,
Shaking my soul with visions half glimpsed at, sights
Of worlds of light and glory, never seen
On sea or land. Yet no great music this,
Shaped by a master of melody—a mere
Light marching tune to keep the feet in time
And the hearts cheered of weary men—no more.
What was it ? “ Tipperary ? ” or “ The Black Bear ? ”
Yet had it been sad Chopin’s great dead March,
Or the wild lilt of the *Götterdämmerung*,

It had not brought that spirit to my lips
That is one with the wind and immortal stars,
So readily as this jingle.

“Hark!” I cried,
And to my mind the very age-old oaks
Were listening with me.

And that aged man,
Himself as gnarled as the Forest oaks, turned, smiled,
And seemed to beat the time. So they came on,
Those earth-clad regiments, rank on rank, at times
Singing or whistling to their marching tune,
Or shouting jests such as their souls loved, crude
But brimming with the spirit of their age.
Such young, such brave-eyed faces, and such forms
As the Greek sculptors would have gloated on,
Not for their beauty but their young trained strength,
The fineness of the straight and tempered sword.
Men of the English counties first there came,
From “Surrey’s pleasant hills,” or from the black
Plains of the Midlands, or the northernmost
Marches whose very name spells history
And high romance. Then, tripping like Agag, next
Came Capricornus, silky white, with bland
Bewildered countenance, but at the head
As ever of his regiment. Then came on
Men of the heart of England, of Arderne,
A Forest once as famous as our own. Then shrilled
A new note on our ears—the Highland pipes—
And to our eyes the rhythmic swing of kilts
Kept time to that incarnate spirit in sound

Of all we mean by war ; and had it been
That we had flagged in fervour as we watched,
That sound must sure once more have whipped us on
To lift rejoicing hearts for Britain's glory and
Thank God she stood upgirt for the good fight.
The wailing pipes had passed away, once more
The lighter music of the fifes rang out,
And, following them, the sons of Anak marched.
The old man at my side, who stood till then
Wiping the simple tears from his old eyes,
Seemed to spring suddenly erect, with breath
Bated he said to me : " And what are these ?
Am I mistaken ? Is it not the Guards ?
The King's Guards ? "

And, not waiting for reply,
He bared his head. " The King," he breathed, " the
King

Of England, and these are his men." Then I,
A little jealous for the rest : " But all
Are soldiers of the King. Why not for them
Did you with bare head stand ? "

" But these," he said,
Are more the King's than all. They are the first
That served him, and on many a bloody field
Have borne his colour. And to me my king
Is next my God. I know that in these days
The ancient love and loyalty are dead.
A new creed has been preached, and hearts are cold,
And faith is dim, and hope evanished.
But all this is to me an empty tale ;

I am not of this time, but of the old,
The better way. Nay more, this is my faith.
How could I love the God I have not seen
If I loved not and clave not to my King ?
So waste no breath rebuking me. I stand
And pay my homage to my English King,
As through his symbol."

And now, down the road,
Again came English county regiments ; first
The Down-bred men, in whose eyes is the light
Born of wide spaces ; then the men of the Dales,
Slow, sturdy and staunch ; the children of the Ouse
That Cowper loved ; and then again there smote
Upon our ears the thrilling of the pipes.
Visions arose before me : heather hills
And tawny streams, and crystal silences,
And of a past that throbbed with life
And the great deeds of greater men. I saw
An answering light within the old man's eye.
" Scotland again ! " he said, " that valiant land,
That ever bred true warriors. Hail to them ! "
And as the pipes died down to distance, I
Looked up as one that wakens from a dream.
The road was empty now, and all the still
Deep silence of the Forest closed again
About me, as though that had never been
Which I had gazed on—and those marching hosts
Passed like the kings that chased the deer of old
Into the land of shadows. From my side
The old companion of an hour was gone,

As if the Forest swallowed him. All round
The twilight fell, and softly through the trees
Sighed the sad evening wind. A single star
Looked like an eye between the branches. Soft
A skimming bat swept by me. Night had fallen.
So I went home, and with me marched the pipes,
The ghostly pipes no ear but mine could hear,
That played a ghostly regiment through the gloom.

THE MARCHING SONG OF THE SCOTS FUSILIERS

Our fathers fought for Scotland, a hardy race were they,
On oatmeal and in homespun reared, they broke the
stubborn clay;
Their path they never wavered from for favour or for
fear,

And such as were our fathers is the Scottish Fusilier.

What if winter winds blow cold ?
Where's the soldier heeds their blowing ?
Somewhere there's a land of gold,
Lilies blooming, neap-tides flowing.
What if suns all blinding scorch ?
Think of that old hero-story
Of the handing on the Torch :
Men of Ayrshire, death or glory !

Far down the fighting ages the tale is still the same,
Our fathers fought for Scotland, for altar, hearth and
hame ;

Alone stood little Scotland then, and never blenched
for fear,
And as she stood till death now stands the Scottish
Fusilier.

Hear the pipes that play us by.
(Where's the heart that is not leaping ?)
See the feet that never fly.
(Who will not abide the Reaping ?)
When one day our fights are all
Tales to tell when we are hoary,
Still shall rise our slogan call :
Men of Ayrshire, death or glory !

BOOK III

EACH life, like every century, must hold
Its halcyon hour ; and those that have not lived
In vain, look back across the gulf of years
And know what was their hour, although it seemed,
When they were living it, the very same
As any other hour, filled with the same
Dull duties, petty cares and transient joys.
So I look back and know that in a life
Lived in seclusion and illumined with
No light of high adventure or romance
I too have had my halcyon hour. For three
Short weeks which passed before I knew them gone,
'Twas given to me at least to catch a glimpse
Of all that makes up Life, the rosy skirts
Of the high gods ; to live as it were like one
Who sits beside a roaring cataract,
And hear the tide—in which I had no part—
Sweep by me like a flood. I did not know
How great was what I heard and saw, nor how
Through unborn ages should its echo ring,
Even as ring the magic names of old—
Senlac—Culloden—Flodden—Waterloo—
The Lines of Torres Vedras—the Retreat
That cost us our great soldier—names they are
Of causes all but lost, yet more than won,
And England, greatest in adversity.
I could not peer into the future nor
Discern the signs even of the present. Drawn

I knew not by what force to follow them,
Those marching multitudes, and when the eve
Came floating down the west wind, like a bird
With dusky pinions spread, I would stand by
And watch dark roads, until the distant drums
Made all the dimness throb expectantly ;
And when the regiments passed me by, my feet
Bore me in time to the music, and their step,
A little way—(it was not given to me
To follow to the end).

There was a church
In a back street, as if it hid from sight,
And many an evening I knelt there in the gloom,
Which the slight flickering sanctuary lamp
Seemed but to make the deeper. And I prayed
As never before to the Lord God of Hosts,
And to the Captain of the Angels, and
To all the soldier saints. And I rose up,
Sure of their aid for England.

Every day
I passed along the road—I knew it well—
That winds through pine-woods from the town towards
The port where the great liners lie before
They set forth, like the buccanneers of old,
Seeking the golden West, the Spanish Main,
The names that sing, the thoughts that flame, the quest
That changes with the ages, but is still
The same to-day and always. Down this road,
On either side, among the heather, lay
The camp that mushroom-like rose in a night.

And there I stood afar off, and I watched
As one that, save in the spirit, had no part.
And there, amid the heather, trampled black,
Men went about their business, as in the days
Of Noe, recking not at all of what
So swiftly was to come. To them all this,
That was to me a drama moving fast
From scene to scene towards the fitting end,
Was but their own familiar task, devoid
Of all the glittering hues of that romance
Which in my eyes it wore. All day the camp
Lay quiet in the sunshine: rows of tents
Empty and as deserted, while the men
That slept in them were out in the Forest, far
Flinging their mimic battle line. The few
That moved across the dusty heather between
The pine-woods and the road passed the long day
In trivial duties, seeming like those that stand
And wait, yet serving still. One day I saw,
Tripping amidst the tents on hasty feet,
Come Capricornus, all his calm dispelled
By the ill-thought-of homage of one that passed
And plucked a handful from his snowy beard.

I paused and asked the warrior who led
The patriarch by a halter if it were
His destiny to front the German fire
And fall as would become a mountain goat
From gallant Wales; but learnt 'twas also his

To serve by standing fast and waiting, not
Leading his regiment as in happier times.

So passed the days, until it seemed to me
That all my life I had been wandering
In the wake of an army, heeding nothing else.
Then the play closed. It was a Sabbath day,
First of the Hunter's Moon. I went to mass
And passed the hours as I was wont, until
Late in the afternoon I started on
My daily pilgrimage to Lyndhurst. Then
First dawned upon me a strange thing. The streets
Lay empty, save for peaceful citizens
Out for an idle Sunday stroll ; no more
They surged with those earth-tinted multitudes
That woke their dullness to new life. A hand
Seemed to have closed upon my heart. I sprang
With quickened step to meet what might betide :
And all the while a voice sang in my ear
And told me that I knew. Beyond the town,
Gone were the loiterers, and choked the road
With those that pressed towards the camp. Great
wains
Came swaying across my path, and motor cars,
With panting breath, sought passage, whilst between
The hasting figures of men wound in and out.
Who said to me " The regiments will parade
Before an hour is over, for the Front ? "
I could not tell, but suddenly I knew ;
And I too hastened on to see the end.

Up on the heather, trampled into dust,
The camp hummed like a swarming hive. Between
The rows of tents men hastened to and fro,
With no heed to a stranger stumbling past.
The call had come even as the Trump of Doom,
When none awaited it. Not even those
In high command had thought it was so near.
Full half the men were in the woods, or gone
Their comrades knew not whither. None had time
To go and seek them. In this hour no man
His brother could deliver, nor to God
Make his agreement. Each was for himself,
And for the duty that lay nearest, and
Behind it all for the regiment, and still more,
Although he knew it not, for England and
Her honour and her Empire. 'Twas not this
They thought of as they girded up their loins
For their first step upon the road of honour,
But of the waiting that was over, and
The sweetheart or the wife that in an hour
Should bid them her God-speed. But as I passed
Across the track I thought of the deep things
Behind the trivial act, the common word ;
My spirit soared on wings and I forgot
The clogging burden of the flesh. The hours
Fled past me like a shadow, yet they seemed
To hold the heart's core of a lifetime. Thus
A moment of eternity will seem
When it is ours.

“ The regiments will parade

Within one short hour for the Front." So speaks
The voice of Fate, in no beguiling words
But in the accent of our every day.
The autumn evening faded into dusk,
And mist rose from the heather like a sea
That with soft waves would overwhelm the host.
Now rose the Hunter's Moon, and rode above
The tree-tops like a barque in a calm sea,
The dead world looking down on our unrest
That to its secular peace must seem to be
The turmoil of some scurrying insect life.
To look up lifted up the soul to all
That spells eternity ; to hear no more
The cry of earth. But on this night of nights
Earth held me and not heaven. This was no time
To dream, even in the home of dreams ; for life
Surged round us like a flood, and on its tide
My spirit floated out beyond my ken,
Reaching stretched hands to the eternal things,
And knew its own mortality no more.
As hung the Veil before the holiest shrine,
The grey mist billowed for a while, then rose
And vanished, ghost-like 'mid the serried trunks
Of the red pine-woods, and instead the smoke
Arose from countless fires, a holocaust
Of useless lumber, nothing more, but still
They seemed the sacrificial flames that rose
From the altars of the grim War-god—he
That was awake after long sleep, and drove
Once more his iron chariot over the necks

Of men and hearts of women, as of old.
And through the mist and smoke and brooding gloom
The voices rose of men that sang, the choir
Of that same War-god's temple. Songs they sang
Of vulgar import, all but meaningless.
But none the less they were their battle chant,
And in the dimness sounded strangely sweet,
With haunting sadness, as of minor chords,
Although it was rejoicing lifted up
The hearts of those that sang, the long stern joy
Of all their Berserk forefathers in fight.
And ever and anon rang bugle-calls
That made the night air wonderful, or shrill
A breath of Scotland floated through the tents
With the high distant calling of the pipes.
And faintly from the distance came that sound
That grips the heart, the sound of English cheers,
As one by one the regiments moved forth
Across the heather to the road that wound
Like a white serpent to the clustering woods.
And closer by, within a long stone's-throw
Of where I stood, spell-bound and living æons
In one short mortal hour, dark masses of men
Were forming on parade, as every day
They formed, and nothing thought of it. But this
Was sure the mustering supreme of all their lives.

And I looked on beneath the Hunter's Moon.

Close to me stamped an officer's charger, roused

To some dim dreaming sense, such as beasts have,
Of what concerns their masters, and ears cocked,
Seeming to listen for a voice it knew.
And further, nearly as dumb, between the woods
And the first row of tents, a little knot
Of women hung, hovering like homing birds,
Too timid to draw nigher—for this was
Man's business and not theirs. For him the stern
And long-awaited joy of the fight, the day
So long prepared for, when vain words should cease
And there be room in the world for naught but deeds :
For them the vigil, the long prayers, the watch
On the unopened door, the empty arms. . . .
Yet they wept not, but watched in silence whence
No sound arose to turn the hearts of men
To water. Not one of that little band,
Even had she known what should befall, one word
Would have permitted her white lips to cross
That should have held him back who was her all.
Thus speak again the Berserk forefathers,
Whose dread was to be "niddering," and more,
The foremothers that stood on barren shores
And watched the ships hull under that for them
Bore the world's treasure, knowing not how long,
Nor if again they saw those dragon prow.
(Mary ! from the safe heaven where all the griefs
That pierced thy soul are dreams of the long past,
Look down on women.)

So 'neath the Hunter's Moon,
And the calm sky, stood in their ranks the men

Whose breasts were Britain's bulwark, each his pack
Before him on the ground, and for a while
Waited, not silent, but with laugh and jest.
So all true warriors laugh in the face of the foe.
And as I heard them laugh it seemed to me
But that mine eyes were holden I might see
Standing by every man the shade of one
That also trod the road on which he set
His foot now, leading to the stars—such men
And warriors ! Rome's legionaries, that bore
The Eagles to the confines of the world—
The Knights of the Cross that stormed Jerusalem—
The Cavaliers around their martyr king—
The redcoats on the road to Waterloo—
These, brothers-in-arms of those I saw that night,
Must sure have risen from their unknown graves
And mustered with rejoicing hearts once more
At sound of the clash of battle, eager yet
To strike a blow once more with hands long stilled,
It must have been so. Would I could have seen
Those shadowy hosts, and Michael at their head,
And known (but sure I knew ?) the Dragon's time
On earth was but a short one, great although
His fury be, and blasted lie the paths
By which he passes.

Now the word rang out
That moved that thousand men as one, and I
Followed ; me too it called down the broad track,
Across the heather, as if with feet on wings ;
And shoulder to shoulder with the regiment, reached

The road that lay in the moonlight silver-white.
Thence could I follow no more save in the spirit,
And with a little silent remnant stood
To watch the troops go by. And never in
The history of wars was there a march
So silent, as of ghosts, no braying band
To play them on their way, no cheering crowd—
No sound, but through the ranks from man to man
There swept a gale of laughter, high but hushed
And half beneath the voice, as ghosts might laugh.
So passed they from my ken into the woods
That swallowed them up in blackness ; and I stood—
How long I know not, time was not for me—
My spirit was among the stars, for I
Knew 'twas immortal what I saw and praised
With all my heart the God that let me see.
And regiment after regiment passed me by,
In all its pride and proud humility,
All state and panoply laid by, upgirt
For the stern work before them, nothing here
Of music or of colours heavy with gold,
Their battle honours written on their hearts,
Their marching tune unheard, yet keeping feet
In time to its well-known music—so they passed.

Nameless are they ? What signify the names
Of those that held Thermopylæ ? And sad
To think of the passing of brave men ? Not so.
The best that God has in His gift is theirs,
And in the Courts above be sure there was

A stir among the soldier-saints when first
Word came of their approach, those war-worn men,
With bearded lips and in their blood-stained rags,
Fresh from their hour, when they made of their breasts
A barrier unpassable between
The hordes of the obscene locust and their land
And all that they held sacred. Let the tears
That rain upon their nameless graves be tears
Of pride and not of pain, for that our stock
Still bred such valour and such steadfastness.

THE LITANY OF THE SOLDIER SAINTS

As we believe in Christ our God, we know our cause is
just ;
We know we fight with the good knights whose good
broadwords are rust,
And what we fight for will not die when we like them
are dust.

Michael, lead us ;
George, defend us ;
Martin, speed us ;
Soldier saints, your good swords lend us.

The trumpet blast that blew of old has echoed once
again,
The blast that all good warriors have never heard in
vain ;

And "God defend the right!" is still its confident
refrain.

Ignace, call us ;
Louis, uphold us ;
Oswald, forestall us ;
Soldier saints, your prayers enfold us.

The Son of God goes forth to war, and with Him all
His host ;
Those fight with us that will not see our righteous
cause be lost ;
And he that shall stand highest is the one that giveth
most.

Ferdinand, hear us ;
Constantine, light us ;
Wenceslaus, cheer us ;
Soldier saints, your spirits delight us.

And if in fight we fall, it shall be ours to see the
Graal ;
Before the Gate that Peter guards our plea shall sure
prevail ;
And we in heaven shall tell the soldier saints our battle
tale.

Bastian, steel us ;
Joan, relieve us ;
Edmund, heal us ;
Soldier saints, your arms receive us.

PART II

BOOK I

WHAT I have told I saw, yea, with the eyes
Of the finite mortal body. But the rest
I knew but in the spirit, heard as it were in dreams,
When men spoke in short sentences and few
By their own fireside, after the storm was stilled.
A word here or a look ; it is enough.
The eyes of the immortal spirit see.
The heart knows more than its own bitterness
When all that makes its life is passing through
The fires of Moloch.

Down the iron-grey tide,
And in the pearl-grey dawn, the steel-grey ships
Slid like their own grey ghosts ; and far inland,
Their long-drawn note in parting, like the sound
Of some grave trumpet at low knell-like pitch,
Reached to unsleeping ears. Not thus the ships,
That buzzed out like a nest of wasps disturbed,
To hang upon King Philip's flanks ; not thus
The wooden walls the one-armed Admiral led
To Victory or Valhalla ; but the quest
Is still the same, and the spirit of that quest.
As little knew the fathers of our race
As did their sons that they would sound a note
Upon the immortal bugle that should call
To unborn ages, and not call in vain.
But though the spirit is the same, the times
Are not the valiant days of old, when yet
The shadow lay upon our path that cast

The sun of chivalry. Not now for us
Waited a noble enemy, a foe
A brave man, having vanquished, may well grasp
And call his brother-in-arms. But now beyond
The blue line of the offing there lurked one
That smites but in the dark at men unarmed.
As waits the hawk for the defenceless chick,
Hanging unseen above until he strikes, so he
Made all our gallant seas that once bore up
The hulls of Collingwood and Frobisher,
A death-trap. So in silence stole our ships,
Not like our fathers' flying their brave flags,
But as ashamed—though theirs is not the shame.
A night and day they floated on the deep,
While that which we set forth to save was lost,
And on the third day glided into port.
So from the Norman William's Forest, hoar
With phantoms of the past, landed our men
On ground whose glory is to come, the strip
That, back to the sea and face to the foe, was all
The undaunted kingdom yet might call its own ;
And there saw first their enemy, for high
Above them, even as they disembarked,
Solitary floated on grey wings a Dove,
But not of Peace. A symbol of what lurked
Behind the horizon not so many miles.
None told our men then or thereafter what
Awaited them, as with light hearts they stepped
Into the Belgian trains. For what knew they
Of hordes let loose once in a thousand years,

Like the sea-sand for numbers, and borne on
The wings of the east wind to overwhelm
All Europe like a sandstorm ? What knew they
Of Attila and of his yellow-faced
And slant-eyed followers, and of the slim
Sword that Saint Genevieve in their despite
Wielded before her Paris that she loved,
Sword of her prayers ? Or if they had but heard
The name of Hun, knew they its portent ? or
What had they heard of hammering Charles and of
The fierce sons of the desert, hot with faith
And reckless of their own as others' blood ?
Or of the pouring infidels that tore
The ancient sceptre from the nerveless hand
Of the last Constantine ? So oft unchained
Hell's legions, lest we lull ourselves to sleep
And think our times secure, or, worse, forget
It is not we that reign, but the Lord God.
Have we not learned the lesson ? must it still
Be read us, like slow stumbling scholars that
Cannot or will not heed except it be
Enforced by pain and sorrow ? True it is
The People are but children, nor will learn
Save as a child learns. (How long, holy God,
Holy and Mighty, will Thy patience hold ?)

At noon the City that was once called dead—
And better were it if long since she had
Been laid to honourable rest—received

Those whom she hailed as saviours, dreaming not
It was but for a season—and with pomp
Of drums and fifes they marched across the streets,
And marked, perhaps, her ancient monuments,
And that night rested in her ancient peace.
The morrow came. Rest was for them no more
For many an aching morrow, save alone
The rest eternal some attained. For first
Each day the order came to march, and when
A long day's march was over, came again :
“ March,” and still “ March,” and “ March,” once
more. The miles
Piled themselves on each other, till the souls
Of all the men waxed sick as bodies tired.
No foe they saw, and half they disbelieved
There was a foe at hand. Yet they could hear
The distant thunder, muttering of the storm
That yet should burst upon them. And they
saw
The piteous flotsam that choked up the roads
When rich and poor forlornly blent, with lives.
And little else preserved them, fled, as Lot
Fled from the accursed cities of the plain,
Before the belching fire that overwhelmed
The fallen city on the Scheldt. At sight
So pitiful the very skies appeared
Constrained to weep, and the artillery
Of heaven to add its rolling to the sound
Of the still distant Krupp-forged guns. The miles
Piled themselves on each other, and the word

Was " March " again, and still " March," and once
more,
And weary men, that knew not why, marched on.

So they returned to Bruges, and there beheld
The indomitable army which had held,
As hold the dykes against the angry sea,
That flooding host, not long enough to save
Their land from conquest, but yet long enough
To write their own name on the immortal roll
Which only a soul of mud can read without
A quickening of the heart. They marched by, horse,
Foot and artillery, in ordered ranks,
As if it were a mere parade, a thing
Of every day, nor knew themselves to be
Immortal, nor as they passed, recognized
Immortal brothers-in-arms. Yet so it was,
And lesser ages, reading reverently,
In a day of far smaller things, shall say :
" In those days there were giants in the land."
So pass us by the moments of the world
Which never die, as little marked as if
They should not stand for evermore, sign-posts
Pointing the way on honour's road.

But still
The order came to march, and " March " again,
To weary men that knew not why. And still
Nearer and nearer yet the tide flowed on
Of that devouring sea, as pitiless
As that which, year by year, eats into coasts

And covers houses that have sheltered men,
And fields that have fed cattle, till they seem
Like a lost dream of the far past, which lived
In a tale only, nor was seen of man.
And still the order came to march, and still
The weary men marched on and knew not why.

The days shall come, perhaps far distant yet,
When men in the safe haven of their desire
Shall sit in firelit rooms in the deep peace
That those mud-stained and wayworn men preserved—
Unwittingly, but not unwillingly—
For them and for their women-folk; and write
With pens dipped in the liquid fire of the gods
Of the great past and of the mighty dead
And as they write the weariness and toil
Of those long rain-swept days shall be forgot
And the march back and forth across the field,
Where Europe ever sought the quest of war,
Seem not the irksome task of weary men,
But the parade triumphal of such troops
As Hannibal, Leonidas, or one
Of the great captains of the days when wars
Was the sole enterprise deemed worthy of men
Might have led down a road—not mud-stained,
Bleak with the autumn rain and wind, but paved
With gold and brighter than gold.

So that small force,

A sole Division in all, with guns that seem
Like toys a child that ran along the sands

Might shoot into the oncoming waves and think
Such trifles the resistless deeps would heed,
Passed back and forth across the Belgian plains
In face of that devouring sea of men.
Sure even now, when faith lies dead, a thing
Men laugh at, yet sometimes the Arm of God
Is stretched out as of yore and still can smite
With blindness. And thus far the hungry sea
Comes, and no further. For no arm of man
It was that wielded the invincible sword
That thus withstood the foe.

On the eighth day

Those weary men attained a city, once
A household word to English ears, and now
To echo through the ringing ages with
A voice of trumpets. Martyred, torn with shells,
Blackened with fire, its age-old glories all
Swept from the ken of man, its storied streets
And time-defying houses but a heap
Of crumbling stones and dust, and all that once
Its pious citizens looked on and loved
Through years six hundred, vanished like a dream,
She yet stands crowned among her peers, and dead
To the gross visible world, to glory lives.
When on the eighth day of their purgatory
Those weary men marched through her storied streets,
She yet stood, breathing of the giant past,
When faith inspired the hands of builders and
Stone lost beneath the master's chisel its grey
Solidity and was transformed to lace,

And men still gave the best and nothing but
The best to grace the glory of God.

And so
The long march ended which had sickened souls
And wearied bodies, for the force had reached
The goal that was to make its name and theirs
Ring with a clarion voice for ever. None
Knew it ; but who of all our fathers knew
Their halcyon hour when it was with them ? Who
Knew themselves numbered with the immortal band
And heard their names called on the immortal roll,
Until the hour was past and the call mute ?
And so, not many miles beyond the gates
Of the devoted city, our men stood,
As it were children on a sandy shore,
And faced the hungry sea. So far it came,
Wave upon wave, resistless, but to break
On a thin barrier which yet was rock
And stood, when as it seemed the world itself
Must fall before that overwhelming tide.

Will this not turn the peoples of the world
From the mean thoughts and earth-bound ways that
hold
Their souls in bondage, though they boast them free ?
Are they so dull of hearing that the call
Cannot pierce through their slumbers ? and so blind
They cannot see the light even when it shines
From east to west across the wondering sky ?
Can they pass by once more, and is the cross
66

Nothing to them, and dross the crown ? For such
Should be the pity, not for those that fell
Nor those that made the offering of all
That life held of the dearest and that knew
Their offering was accepted by their God.

BATTLE SONG OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION

England, my mother, the arms that have cradled me,
Is it a great thing that I should give back to thee,
That which thou gavest, a life that was sorrow-free ?

The best I can give for thee, how shall I grudge it thee ?
So thy green lanes and lush fields should inviolate be ?
So that thy little ones sleep sound and peacefully ?

What is the sorrow at this mowing down of us
Weighed in the balance against the renown of us ?
Warriors unborn yet shall envy the crown of us.

Oh, we held high and untarnished the light of us !
What had our numbers to do with the might of us ?
Happy they count themselves who had a sight of us.

Those who have held us desire of their eyes to them,
Now will they hold us their glory and prize to them ;
Seeing the heights that we scaled, they will rise to them.

BOOK II

Oh, that I had the silver tongue of one
Of the great bards of olden time ! that I,
Like Taliessin, could with trumpet notes
Awaken in my countrymen that high
And fiery spirit which makes nations great
And plain men martyrs ! For no lesser note
Can fitly sing of such great things as I
Have set myself to sing of, great indeed
Beyond what we that saw them can conceive.
Our children be the judge, as in our turn
We judge our fathers ; and we bow our heads
Before their greatness, yet can say that once
At least we touched the hem of the high gods' skirts
And with our eyes beheld a band of men
Worthy to be those fathers' sons. What more
Do we ask of our lives ? For we have lived.
Yet still the crowd is deaf and blind, and hearts
Faint at their want of faith. Once, long ago
(And still His Promise holds), the Lord declared
Unto His Faithful One that ten just men
Should save the cities justly doomed to fire.
Far distant be the day when even His Eye
No more can see the remnant in our land
To whom He makes that promise. But ten men
Amid a city are so few, so few !
Yet it would seem that even in our time,
An age no more of Faith, God as of old,
When He commanded Gideon, sent a few

Against a host that all the world should give
To Him the glory. Did it so ? Alas !
What is the world ?

The tale is yet to tell
Of how the rock withstood the hungry sea,
And the thin line of England, as of yore,
Held back a swarming enemy, and died,
But did not let him pass. What of all this
Knew those mud-stained and travel-weary men,
When the low muttering thunder they had heard
Rolling along the distance broke in peals
Above their heads ? and at long last they saw
Their foe, the grey man, pitiless as a wolf,
And hunting like a wolf in packs, afraid
To stand in his iniquity alone.
Beyond the martyr city a few miles
The battle-shock came on them and the fight,
Which down the ringing centuries shall wing
Far worthier pens than mine, began. And thence
Their nights were days, and days were nights, nor
ceased
The crash, not even for a breathing space,
Of the oncoming hungry sea against
The barrier which looked so frail, but was
Invincible. Now broke at last the storm ;
Day after day and all the long night through
Roared on the guns, and wave on wave flowed on
The grey devouring sea, to break and melt
And leave upon the shore its broken waves.
And the fair features of that once beloved

And happy land were blotted out, and passed
Into the realm of That which Was, as one
By one trees, houses, gardens, all that made
An Eden, where men dwelt in peace, and loved,
And gathered round them families and friends
And all the happiness of life—all met
The blasting breath of murderous guns. And this
Is Science, Culture, all the finest flower
Of that which man calls Progress—this the best
That he can do, to measure himself against
The Infinite, and claim that it is he
Who reigns on earth. The trees and flowers, the brooks
That tinkle through the mosses, and the birds
That make the woods melodious, these are but
The handiwork of an Almighty God.
Man cannot make them, he can but destroy.
How strange the destiny of which he is
So arrogant ! which does but even him
To the degraded insects, that pass o'er
The land of milk and honey, and transform
Its fruitful pasturage to dust and stones.
The Breath of God is life ; the breath of man
Death and obliteration. In these days
Man thinks himself a god. Behold and see,
Oh, thou that passest by.

Hour after hour,
Day after day, and lighting all the night
With the bale-fires of hell, still it roared on,
That cataract, and thin and thinner yet
Grew the thin line of men that held it back.

And when men fell, as fall they must before
The unloosed death if 'tis their destined hour,
Here were there none to step into their place.
And to reply to all the rending guns,
That made the night one hideous din, a blot
Upon the world, an insult to the stars,
Only those few field pieces that I saw,
Swaying along the by-ways in the home
Of dreams. It was as if men should oppose
Their naked hands and nothing else against
Civilization's youngest children, pale
With all the power she has—the piteous power
Which only can destroy and bring to naught.
But still the thin line held. And though men died,
They did not yield. And every foot of that
Once happy land was bought and bought again
At such a price that not the high-heaped gold
That Ophir poured before the wisest king
Could count a tittle of it. Oh, such crown
It is not given to many to wear as won
That band of brothers that of late had passed
Across the home of dreams, to add one more
To all its crowding memories. And then
It seemed the end was come at last. No more
The hungry sea could be held back ; no more
The miracle be wrought that made so few
Withstand so many ; and from the foemen's eyes
The scales at last must fall and they discern
What slender weapon barred their ravening path.
Swift through the thin ranks, thinning every hour,

But still indomitable—like the cross
Of fire that woke the bare-legged mountain men
To muster for their tribal war—there ran
The message, thunderous as a trumpet call :
“ Hold on and quit yourselves like men. Help comes.”
And even deafened ears could hear, and eyes
Blinded with weariness grew clear again ;
Almost the dead rose up, and the thin line,
Which would not bend nor break, was iron again.

This was the epic fight that waged the men
Whom we, secure in the home of dreams, thought on
As our defenders, specially our own,
Because our eyes had seen them march away
And our hearts went with them. Even so they died.
They passed as 'thwart the heavens a meteor shower
Lights up the wide arc with such searing blaze,
Seen but an instant, but upon our minds
Branded as such a vision of glory as
The door of heaven stood ajar. Such death
Their Berserk fathers prayed to die, yet dreamt
But dimly what such death might mean
For men secure of immortality,
Whether their mortal bodies lived or died.
So passed our Seventh Division, which so short
A while before was making all the roads
Of Norman William's Forest musical
More with the ordered tramping of their feet
Than with their fifes and drums and Highland pipes.
Our own Division let us count it, and

Bless God that we had even so little a part
In its immortal story that we stood
By the roadside and cheered it passing by.
Had we known then what we were gazing on
As if it were a show, beguiling hours
That otherwise were empty, would we not
Have stood as in a royal presence, bare
Of head, with reverence in our mien ?

What more

Can I tell of their passing ? Can I choose
One deed to tell of ? when at every hour
Men warred like Titans, and no age surpassed
The great deeds that they did, nor thought them great,
Nor anything beyond their duty. Yet
The greatest of our sea-kings, as he died,
Blessed God that he had done his duty. So
Might they. And in the presence of things so high
As these, our lips fall dumb.

When they came up,
The bearded men, fresh from their own great hour
Of the Homeric conflict on the banks
Of the two Rivers, there they found the line,
Unbroken yet, but ah ! how thin ! Perhaps
One boyish officer in sole command
Of tens where late a thousand marched
Under some honoured name. Yet even so,
The set task was accomplished and that which
England demanded of them done. And thus
The red sun set upon that redder field.

CORONACH



THE mountains shall know them no more and the
streams shall run swollen with tears ;

The light from their thresholds shall wane and grow
grey with the passing of years ;

A place at the fireside is void, hushed in silence a voice
that was known ;

The sickle has gathered the ear, ere ripe was the seed
that was sown.

The sapling has fallen to the axe, while the old fir
stands straight by the shore ;

Like a dream of the night they have passed, and the
mountains shall know them no more.

Yet the golden-winged hour that they lived shall out-
weigh our inglorious years ;

For them all the trumpets shall sound, for us are the
sighs and the tears ;

For us are the dreams of the night, for them the glad
warmth of the day ;

For us is the black winter frost, for them all the promise
of May.

The Threshing of God shall abide, when the wheat
from the false grain is sieved ;

And what count the days of the years to the glorious
hour that they lived ?

