

# POETS IN THEIR GLORY, DEAD

**T**HE LATEST CASUALTY among poets—Francis Ledwidge, the young Irish peasant—has brought up again the tale of our sacrifices in this war. A list compiled by Walter Graham, instructor in contemporary poetry in Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, is given in the *Boston Transcript*, where the literary editor, Mr. E. F. Edgett, points out that most of these young men “were made poets by the physical and spiritual exigencies of the war.” Nearly all, it is further added, were university men and had training in expression. “The burning emotions of war gave them something to express.” Mr. Edgett adds a noble plea which critics will do well to heed in estimating their value to the world of letters:

“Could they have lived to recollect in tranquillity the feelings produced by the peril and enthusiasm of combat, some of them at least might have been numbered with the great. But they had to speak quickly and often incoherently. They were denied the perspective of the years. It is natural and right for us to honor them beyond the merit of their work. For they cast aside any possible poetic immortality they might have earned for . . . ‘work to be done, and the righting of terrible wrongs.’”

Of course only poets using the English speech are here included. European nations, especially France, have paid a heavy toll in their young men of genius. France, never backward in remembering the services rendered her, has published four pathetic little volumes, “*Anthologie des Écrivains Français Morts pour la Patrie*” (Anthology of French Writers Dead in Their Country’s Cause). Professor Graham, in starting something of the same sort, prefaces by the remark that he “should be glad to know of any others who have died fighting for the liberty of the world”:

“Rupert Brooke, who died on a hospital-ship in the Ægean Sea, gave better expression than any other to the bracing effect of the great conflict on English song. He passed away April 23, 1915, and, dying, made us ‘a rarer gift than gold.’ None of the young poets who have gone has received more attention. His works and the facts of his life are now familiar to the readers of contemporary poetry.

“The Hon. Julian Grenfell, who died from wounds at a hospital near Boulogne on May 26, 1915, was a captain in the Royal Dragoons. About his life, as well as his poetry, there is something of the spiritual Titan. Before the Great War he saw service in India, and much of his interesting work was sent home from there. His friends attest his prowess as a boxer, and hunter, and all-around sportsman. And poems like ‘Into Battle’—written just before his death—are evidence that this young Englishman, schooled in the classic tradition of Eton and Oxford, might have gone on to greater things in poetry.

“Viscount Andrew John Stewart was killed in action in France between September 25 and 27, 1915. Little had been known of him outside family and academic circles when the war inspired him to clearer utterance. At the time of his death he was holding the rank of lieutenant in the Sixth Royal Scots Fusiliers. His best known poem is ‘Sailor, What of the Debt We Owe You?’

“Charles Hamilton Sorley’s death in action occurred a month

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later than Stewart's. He is one of the youngest and most interesting of these soldier-poets, and his precocity is witnessed by the fact that he was only twenty-one years of age and a captain when he died. The lean volume, 'Marlborough, and Other Poems,' which contains all we shall ever have of him, is too meager a monument for one who could write 'All the Hills and Vales Along.'

"Robert Sterling, a young poet of Pembroke College, Oxford, who won the Newdigate prize in 1914, was, like Stewart, unknown to the world until the circumstances of his untimely death brought him a measure of fame he might have labored long to secure. His poems have now reached a second edition.

"Lieutenant H. Rex Freston, of Exeter College, who was killed in battle, January 24, 1916, was another Oxford-trained youthful poet. His volume, 'The Quest of Truth,' has many admirers, and his poems from 'somewhere in Flanders' are especially striking as examples of the kind of verse engendered by the stimulating atmosphere of war.

"Alan Seeger was the next to lay down his life. 'I Have a Rendezvous with Death,' which curiously foreshadows his passing, is the best known of his works. On July 4 or 5, 1916, he died by his own hand, after being terribly wounded by a German shell. Before his death, at the age of twenty-eight, little had been heard of him. But when, early this year, his poems were published, and later, his diaries and letters, he had achieved a popularity hardly second to that of Rupert Brooke in England.

"Alexander Gordon Cowie, son of a brigadier-general and himself a captain in the Seaforth Highlanders, died of wounds on April 6, 1916, fighting for the relief of Kut, in Mesopotamia. He was educated at Charterhouse School and Caius College, Cambridge. In choice and treatment of themes he had decided classical leanings, altho the tenor of his work is modified in some cases by an Elizabethan richness that cloyes. The

poetic accomplishment of Cowie has been overlauded, perhaps, but we must remember it is the work of a boy of twenty-two.

"Second Lieutenant Alfred Victor Ratcliffe, killed in action near Fricourt, July 1, 1916, at the age of twenty-nine, is another young poet of Cambridge, who was a critic as well. At university he was a friend of Rupert Brooke's. 'A Broken Friendship, and Other Verses,' reveals his love of nature, delicate fancy, and vigor. 'In Memoriam' is one of the most successful recent attempts to write in the elegiac form.

"Brian Brooke, who fell in the first day's advance in the battle of the Somme, had previously seen service in British East Africa. . . .

"Lieutenant W. N. Hodgson ('Edward Melbourne') is another and much better poet, who fell in the Somme advance. He is classed with Rupert Brooke and Grenfell as one of the three best poets directly produced by the war. His resolute 'Before Action' is probably his best-known poem.

"Leslie Coulson, sergeant in the city of London regiment, the Royal Fusileers, published several excellent poems in English periodicals. Before meeting his death, while leading a charge against the Germans last October, he served in Gallipoli, Egypt, Malta, and France. 'But a Short Time to Live' is the most rememberable of his works. Like the others, he left us rather a promise of good things to come than an actual achievement."

To the foregoing we may add from our gleanings the name of the sailor-poet, Arthur Waldene St. Clair Tisdall. He was honored after death by the Victoria Cross for saving wounded



LESLIE COULSON.



A. W. TISDALL, V.C.

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J. GRENFELL, D.S.O.



BRIAN BROOKE.

men at the landing in Gallipoli in April, 1915. An officer writes: "I sincerely assure you that I have never seen more daring and gallant deeds performed by any man." Also we may add Lieut. Wyndham Tennant, son of Lord and Lady Glenconner, who on the eve of the battle in which he lost his life corrected the proofs of a volume of verse to bear the title "Worple Flit, and Other Poems."



RUPERT BROOKE.

AMERICA'S GIFT FROM  
AMONG HER POETS.

Alan Seeger, who answered the earliest call for service for France, and died at the age of 28, before America had caught up with him.