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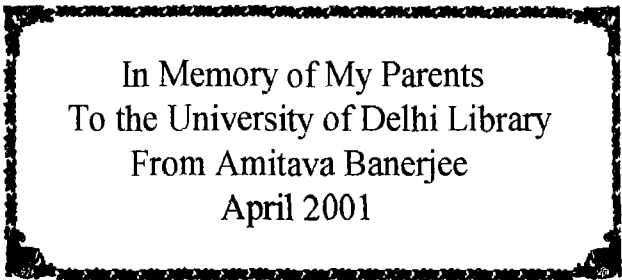
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POEMS FROM ITALY

POEMS FROM ITALY

*Verses written by Members of the
Eighth Army in Sicily and Italy
July 1943—March 1944*

With a Foreword by
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR OLIVER LEESE, BART.
K.C.B. C.B.E. D.S.O.
Formerly Commander of the Eighth Army

And an Introduction by
SIEGFRIED SASSOON

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COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

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FOREWORD

HAVING served for two years in the Eighth Army, I should like to introduce these poems by men who, in the Prime Minister's phrase, have "marched and fought with the Eighth Army."

It is for the expert to assess their quality as poetry. To me, and perhaps to many, the fact that they were written by men of a fighting army during one of the decisive phases of the war gives them a special interest.

They seem to me to reflect something of the high spirit which has inspired all who serve in the Eighth Army. You may feel in these poems that special quality of comradeship in which Divisions from every part of the Empire fought and endured throughout its campaigns. And you may picture the surroundings in which they were written—the glimmer of camp fires in the desert, the dust and heat of the long convoy drives in North Africa, the bitter cold and mud of some staging-camp in Italy.

Those who buy this book may like, also, to feel that they are contributing to the welfare funds of the Eighth Army and towards a lasting memorial to those who fought and died in its ranks.

Lieutenant-General

Advanced Headquarters
Allied Land Forces
South-east Asia
December 3, 1944

NOTE

THE 72 poems in this volume, as in its predecessor, *Poems from the Desert*, were submitted in poetry competitions organized in the Eighth Army by the Army Educational Corps.

They were selected from a total of 596 entries, all written in Italy, including Sicily, during the first nine months of the Italian campaign.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION BY SIEGFRIED SASOON	10
1. SCORN	<i>Juan Almendre</i> 13
2. SORRENTO: ITALY	<i>Juan Almendre</i> 13
3. ENCOUNTER	<i>Sergeant T. I. F. Armstrong</i> 14
4. THE ENGLISH: JULY 1940	<i>Sergeant T. I. F. Armstrong</i> 15
5. LETTERS HOME	<i>Lieutenant W. A. Armstrong</i> 16
6. WHEN I RETURN	<i>Lieutenant W. A. Armstrong</i> 17
7. SPRING 1944	<i>Corporal A. Bailey</i> 17
8. ULYSSES	<i>Volunteer O. M. Barres</i> 19
9. WHAT OF ALAMEIN?	<i>Volunteer O. M. Barres</i> 20
10. THE DEAD VILLAGE	<i>Sergeant N. A. Brown</i> 20
11. ARTILLERY RANGE, ITALY	
	<i>Battery Quartermaster-sergeant F. Clarke</i> 22
12. DAYDREAMS	<i>Trooper L. E. S. Cotterell</i> 23
13. SONG FOR THE DAWN	<i>Trooper L. E. S. Cotterell</i> 24
14. SONNETS FROM ITALY	<i>Trooper L. E. S. Cotterell</i> 25
15. THE MARCH	<i>Trooper L. E. S. Cotterell</i> 27
16. PRELUDE TO INVASION	<i>Lieutenant A. W. Crowther</i> 28
17. BUT THIS IS SICILY	<i>Sergeant D. L. Dee</i> 29
18. IT WILL COME BACK	<i>Sergeant D. L. Dee</i> 31
19. TO AN UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER	<i>Lieutenant M. J. Disney</i> 32
20. IMPRESARIO	<i>Private A. Dove</i> 32
21. ASH WEDNESDAY AND ST MATHIAS' EVE	<i>K. G. Harvey</i> 34
22. ADRIATIC SEA-SHORE	<i>Leading Aircraftman L. J. Hatt</i> 35
23. INDIAN TROOPS	<i>Lieutenant F. I. Hauser</i> 35
24. NEW MUSIC	<i>Lieutenant F. I. Hauser</i> 36

POEMS FROM ITALY

		PAGE
25. THE SENTINELS	<i>Lieutenant F. I. Hauser</i>	37
26. A MORNING AFTER THE STORM	<i>Signalman J. Henry</i>	37
27. THE ANGELS OF SYRACUSE	<i>Signalman J. Henry</i>	38
28. IN STINGING SAND	<i>Flying Officer W. E. Hutchinson</i>	39
29. LA CONTADINA	<i>Signalman W. F. M. Hyde</i>	40
30. RIVER TRIGNO—ITALY 1943	<i>Quartermaster-sergeant R. G. Jolly</i>	41
31. LET ME NOT REMEMBER	<i>Leading Aircraftman A. Jones</i>	42
32. BLUE MOOD—ON GUARD	<i>Lance-corporal W. Edgerton Jones</i>	43
33. THEN . . . AND NOW	<i>Lance-corporal H. G. Knight</i>	44
34. KIWI GRAVES	<i>Staff-sergeant I. Konigsberg</i>	46
35. HOME	<i>Warrant Officer L. Lilenstein</i>	46
36. ESSEX	<i>Sergeant N. Longhurst</i>	48
37. LOST APRIL	<i>Sergeant N. Longhurst</i>	49
38. SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON	<i>Sergeant N. Longhurst</i>	49
39. SONG	<i>Sergeant N. Longhurst</i>	51
40. ITALIAN SPRING	<i>Corporal S. F. Lott</i>	52
41. REMEMBRANCE	<i>Corporal M. P. McDiarmid</i>	54
42. SICILIAN MOOD	<i>Corporal M. P. McDiarmid</i>	56
43. REVERIE	<i>Private P. B. McGuire</i>	58
44. DUST STORM	<i>Sergeant P. H. Marriott</i>	59
45. WHY DID WE MEET?	<i>Lieutenant P. S. Millar</i>	60
46. TO "J. M."	<i>Lieutenant C. A. Morris</i>	61
47. MOLISE 1943	<i>Trooper N. T. Morris</i>	62
48. MOUNT ÆTNA	<i>Trooper N. T. Morris</i>	63
49. SCENIC	<i>Trooper N. T. Morris</i>	66
50. SICILIAN TOWN	<i>Trooper N. T. Morris</i>	67
51. A REMEMBRANCE: NEW YEAR 1944	<i>Regimental Sergeant-major J. Nichol</i>	68

CONTENTS

	PAGE
52. THE ENDLESS JOURNEY	<i>Regimental Sergeant-major J. Nichol</i> 69
53. PROSPECTUS	<i>Sergeant H. V. S. Page</i> 70
54. PSALM	<i>Sergeant H. V. S. Page</i> 72
55. AS STARS GLEAM	<i>Private F. Petheram</i> 73
56. NOSTALGIA	<i>Gunner E. G. Porter</i> 75
57. AFTER ORTONA	<i>Sergeant John Porter</i> 77
58. SONNET: TO A PHOTOGRAPH	<i>Flight Sergeant R. Pride</i> 78
59. SOLDIER-POET	<i>Private D. Rossitter</i> 79
60. SONNET	<i>Sergeant J. Segal</i> 79
61. ITALY	<i>Corporal S. Segal</i> 80
62. LA PRIMAVERA	<i>Corporal S. Segal</i> 82
63. THE DISTANT LIGHT	<i>Corporal A. E. Simmonds</i> 83
64. RELICS OF WAR	<i>A. Sinclair</i> 84
65. FIRST LIGHT	<i>Rev. J. P. Stevenson, Chaplain</i> 85
66. THE BOND	<i>Rev. J. P. Stevenson, Chaplain</i> 86
67. ASSAULT CRAFT	<i>Corporal J. Sully</i> 87
68. MESSENGERS	<i>Corporal S. G. Watts</i> 87
69. "REGALBUTO"	<i>Private N. Wilkinson</i> 88
70. REVERIE	<i>Gunner C. B. Wilson</i> 89
71. SICILIAN SHADOWS	<i>Gunner C. B. Wilson</i> 90
72. AFRICAN WAYSIDE GLORY	<i>Flight Lieutenant Paul de Wye</i> 91

INTRODUCTION

WHEN requested to supply a critical recommendation of seventy-two poems by forty-seven writers I am, inevitably, more conscious of them than of the audience for which my remarks are intended. Uneasily I ask myself how I am to avoid being blandishly urbane, patronizingly pontifical, or—worse still—chattily chummy. I am also aware of the genial presence of Sir Oliver Leese, whose motor-bus headquarters sometimes graced my ground in the now distant-seeming days of 1942, when he was commanding the Guards Armoured Division on Salisbury Plain. Somewhat apologetically, therefore, I approach the poets with a declaration that I have read them all with sympathetic consideration of their varying qualities and productions, and that I am able to congratulate them on their achievement as a whole. That so much good verse should have been produced by the Eighth Army while it was making history in Sicily and Southern Italy is more than creditable to those concerned. It is an impressive gesture of spirit and sensitive intelligence. And it emphasizes our indebtedness to those who, while enduring hardships beyond our faculties of imagination, have travelled so far on roads of liberation and achievement. Here, then, is a collection of wholly authentic soldier poetry which would be significant even if its accomplishment were inferior to what it is.

It will be observed that the poets are both ancient and modern in their technique. The traditional manner predominates ; but where a modernist idiom is adopted the subject-matter suits it.

The surgeon waits, and time has no pity.
Time saws the nerves and the sinews
Like a shell's sharp-edged scream,

INTRODUCTION

And in the distance, on the responsive mountains,
The white snow shines, like the thought of freedom.

Simplicity and directness are, however, the natural medium for thoughts of home, memories of happier days, and all such reflections which ease the minds of men on active service.

By all our hopes of Summers yet to be,
When from the drooping haywain we'll grasp leaves
From straggling lane-boughs. . . .

Who can doubt that the sonnet beginning thus came straight from the heart? Another writer very properly remembers how

A South wind whispers, and the scent comes back
Of roses after rain . . .

and in another poem he tells how

. . . the mind, untrammelled, floats away
To wander beneath the trees
Where apple blossoms drench an English way.

Among these "home thoughts from abroad" I am particularly charmed by E. G. Porter's *Nostalgia*, with its clear and evocative touches.

There, work begins at dawn,
When shadowed is the corn.
My Uncle George's morning track
Across the meadow shows up black.

In contrast to this we find the unrhymed, irregular method, photographically descriptive of battle and its after-effects.

Here a wrecked tank leans perilously awry,
With drooping gun submissive to the ground
And smashed-in turret.
The German cross is growing faint in rust,
And on the ground lie helmets, mess tins, shells,

POEMS FROM ITALY

Heaps of slim, stream-lined, reddened mortar bombs,
And a limp letter,
Sodden,
Trampled underfoot,
Addressed to Marlene in the Austrian hills.

It can therefore be claimed that this collection contains a valuable report of experience from the Eighth Army. In various styles the writers give us what they have felt and seen. Their sincerity is everywhere apparent. The words of one apply to all, when he affirms that

So, from the burning ruin of the arch
Of sheltered years, bright brands we pluck.
The soul of man once more is on the march.

I

Scorn

I LAUGH at death, accuse her whore,
for she seduced, while in the mirth
of life, my comrades, when she tore
their fragile plants from out the earth.
So, if her finger beckons me,
enticing, luring me to go
in meekness to her skirts and be
enfolded in their pleats, I know
my parting will be well-content,
since neither rot nor all decay
erases those few moments lent
by many years to one who spent
his life compiling just one perfect day.

JUAN ALMENDRE

II

Sorrento : Italy

I WALK
in consort with the hushed hour of a dim dusk,
where the orange blooms exude a musk,
while the warm waves splash and break,
and the dark cliffs with a sombre frown
rise, as rugged guardians of the town;
where a full sail on the sighing bay
parts the water curtains with a spray,
leaving an entrancing, dancing wake.

I walk
 as robust clouds so shyly show the faintest flush,
 stolen from an artist's soulful brush,
 and the silence like a drape,
 floating fleecy from Vesuvius' side,
 softens all the grumbling of his pride.
 Peace is only broken by the shrill
 of a late gull diving to the kill,
 till he wheels up to the pitted cape.
 Small before such beauty, I, in deep despair,
 conscious of so much I do not understand,
 call now to the timeless, spaceless, ageless air,
 while the shadows cluster closer round the land;
 while these breathless visions slowly blurr, then fade:
 left in darkness, I am lonely and afraid.

JUAN ALMENDRE

III

Encounter

WHAT do you do here, soldier?
 It seems I know your face;
 On the pampas you were with me:
 I was well served by your race.
 Who am I, my bronzen stripling?
 Well, your grandfather would know.
 I am the shade of Garibaldi.
 I was a soldier long ago.

I fought once upon this island,
 Calatafimi was my field.
 Then, as now, the sabred Austrians
 Held Italy, and would not yield.

THE ENGLISH: JULY 1940

I am the shade of Garibaldi:
Before my blows they reeled.

Ah, by old Ætna, there above us,
Those were such days as the gods send:
Poncho-warmed nights and frays to prove us,
And with Freedom our aimed end!
I, the grey shade of Garibaldi,
Wish you no worse, my friend.

Victory, peace, and ease to limber
War-taut thighs before your hearth
When oppression has fled blanching
Before your ever-advancing path:
These I wish, too, who was farmer.
Fight for the soil that you would till!
Says an old eagle, Garibaldi,
With whose shadow you now kill.

T. I. F. ARMSTRONG
Sergeant

IV

The English: July 1940

By all our hopes of Summers yet to be,
When from the drooping haywain we'll grasp leaves
From straggling lane-boughs until suddenly
The drooping dark impetuously heaves
Its weight against the sunset and sets free
The dormant stars to struggle through the sieve's
Dark meshing of the sky, we swear to see
Our perils through, with faith that still believes.

For, like the day-obliterated star,
We shine in night and have our glory then;

However fiercely powerful the sun's heat,
It cannot take that from us which we are;
And, if to our clear candle he burns ten,
Whoever heard of suns, stars learn Defeat!

T. I. F. ARMSTRONG

Sergeant

V

Letters Home

FORGIVE me, dear, my manifold mistakes. . . .
I have not been, nor could be, just
An ordinary lover. God makes
Not all alike, but weighs a finer dust
In brittler urns for some: 'mong these we find
The lonely, wayward minstrels of Mankind.

Of such am I: a thing of ganglions
Too delicately tuned; a spirit tossed
Upon that inner sea where ever dawns
Now, now, the Light! and is for ever lost.
No tangent ray your share, but grace to meet
The elfin malice of a fine conceit.

Could I recall the blossoms of the past,
Yet crush my tythe of nettles from the years,
Then with a worthy coronet at last,
To banish those inhospitable tears,
I'd crown the crowding glory of your hair
With voiceless praise: nor make it thus more fair.

W. A. ARMSTRONG

Lieutenant

VI

When I Return

WHEN I return the golden gorse will be
Bannered in festival to welcome me.
The valley spread with comfort, fresh-bedewed,
Will quicken early from Night's quietude
To matin with the laverock. Soft falls
Of gossamer fine-spun on mossy walls
And woven in the leaves of every tree
Shall Nature's bunting make for jubilee.

When I return. . . . O vision nebulous!
O question in my spirit tremulous!
Shall I return? Shall I mayhap incite
Compassion in the gods, survive the fight,
While thousands of my kin go down to death,
A fugitive farewell upon their breath?
Whate'er betide, may heaven grant me this:
Just one more hour with you, just one more kiss.

W. A. ARMSTRONG
Lieutenant

VII

Spring 1944

ONCE more the dappled birch-trees
That stand upon the lawn
Are bright with early sunshine
And gay with song at dawn;
The wispy clouds in sky of blue
By April breezes blown

POLMS FROM ITALY

Are signals of surrender
To show that Winter's flown;
On mossy banks the primrose sweet
Now lifts her smiling face;
The celandines like cups of gold
Proclaim Dame Nature's grace.

In England now with you I could
Have watched the morning sun;
Instead I watch at crack of dawn
Beside my reeking gun.
Instead of birds' song in my ears
I hear the cannons' roar,
And overhead the aeroplanes
Instead of skylarks soar,
No flowers of Spring, so bright with dew,
Delight us as we pass,
But treacherous mines and U.X.B.'s
Abound the shell-torn grass.

You don't remember, I suppose,
When we picked the daffodils
And chased the early butterflies
Across the sunlit hills.
Five long years have sped away
Since last we shared that fun.
We've said good-bye to things like that
Until the war is done.
The crocus and the violet sweet
Have bloomed and passed away,
But in my heart I still recall
A happier, sweeter day.

But Spring once more across the hills
Has sent her clarion call;

ULYSSES

The tired soldier far from home
Can hear the echoes fall;
He can see again the meadow sweet
And the sun on the tall birch-trees,
The song of the thrush and the blackbird too
Comes floating on the breeze,
And so again as the larks fly high
His hopes soar to heav'n's bright dome,
As he prays that ere the Spring be gone
He will be again at home.

A. BAILEY
Corporal

VIII

Ulysses

WHAT use is wisdom to the palsied hand,
Or judgment to the mind that learns too late?
The man who does not early counter fate
And force submission to his just demand
Is lost, nor can the learned fool withstand
The siren cries that never once abate,
Deny destruction's nymphs that lie in wait
On many a languid strip of yellow sand.
Then bind me now by reason's strongest cord
And pay no heed to my most longing plea:
Oh, let the ship be swift and surely oared
And run up all the canvas full and free:
For we must sail through water unexplored
And journey past the perils of the sea.

O. M. BAILES
Volunteer

IX

What of Alamein?

I TRAVEL where the littered sage begins
 To tell of swift retreats and battles lost,
 Of shrapnel-shattered hopes and all the host
 That fleeing cast aside half-emptied tins
 To rot and be a home for things that crawl,
 To rust with dew beneath the early sun,
 To lie for ever by a ghostly gun
 Behind the ruins of a riddled wall.

I lived and fought with them, those lads who bed
 Secure from sudden steel: I heard their cries;
 I shared their thoughts of long-forsaken lands.

My heart is where that desert rock is red:
 There like an unexploded mine it lies
 Entombed with death beneath uncertain sands.

O. M. BARRES
Volunteer

X

The Dead Village

It was dawn when we came,
 The cold, thin dawn of November,
 And the yellow mud of the broken road
 Gave a stifled sob as it sucked in wet boots
 And was cold.
 There was quiet—but not Peace,
 For Peace is warm as the gay laugh of a child,

THE DEAD VILLAGE

Knows colour and hums with the sweet breath of life—
But this quiet was cold,
Like the grave with its mould.
Torn, blackened walls rose out of their shroud
Of grey mist and dripped into twisted earth
That had once been homes.
We knew this was true.
We saw a bed in a shattered room that lay bare
To the grey leadened sky. A crucified man
On an ebony cross swung from the wall.
A child's rag doll, pink-painted face, stubbed in the mud
As it caught my foot in the hole in the road.
And a boy with no face stretched out a stiff hand
But found nothing but mud.
There was "Caffe Italia," and its cheap swinging sign
Creaked like a groan.
We started—and threw a brick at the board
And shuddered at the noise as it crashed to the ground.
And then hated the silence.
The silence.
Pregnant.
Stifling, stinking, clammy breath of countless unseen ghosts
Penetrates the bones—naked, fleshless, and cold.
See the staring old woman with gaping toothless jaws,
Lying under charred beam, her scraggy knees drawn.
Stride past, avoid that arm stretched from the debris
That was a barber's shop. My God, the stench!
And the silence—and the cold.
The road is blocked, high with the vomit of war
And death.
We scramble up. The air seems clearer.
A pale, heatless sun streaks in the morning
And lights the snow-capped mountain like an altar flame.
But brief. The shroud is drawing. Ice chastity remains.
The searching mist bears down. Noiseless folds

Embrace dead wounds, brush cold wet tongues
 On living faces, frightened, chilled and loathing.
 We wriggle in coats for a warmth that's passed. But vain.
 We start, plunge forward in the mud, and strain
 On to the hungry guns that clamour to be fed.
 War's appetite, enormous yet, demands and once unleashed
 We puny men must serve it still.

N. A. BROWN
Sergeant

XI

Artillery Range, Italy

THE rain-wet rocks throw back the light and I
 again in thought feel rain on Mendip's slope.
 Through the white windows of reflected sky
 the heart leaps with its pebble-burnished hope—
 the dull insistence of remembered things,
 the dim corrosion of the days that pass.
 But look! The sun, and see—the outlined wings,
 the shadow of a bomber on the grass!

Thus in two worlds we live; this interlude
 when traitor memory throws its net around
 dissolving to a pictured yesterday
 until the guns' remonstrances intrude.
 The valleys toss the shuttlecock of sound
 from rock to rock. The echoes die away.

F. CLARKE
Battery Quartermaster-sergeant

XII

Daydreams

IN my nostalgic dreams, I see
A field of wheaten cavalry
When, at the mid-time of the day,
The breezes sleep from wanton play
And let the yellow squadrons rest
While they recuperate their zest.

At length a most reluctant breeze,
Scarce stirring tops of slend'rest trees,
Breathes drowsily upon the field:
Uneasily, a few heads yield
And faintly nod before the sigh
That brushes them in passing by.

The summer wind, late afternoon,
Still half asleep, begins to croon,
And all the wheat takes up the sound—
The secrets of the pregnant ground—
Which blends in one symphonic flow
With Nature's score of wax and woe.

A million plumes now plunge and heave
In endless, broken waves: they weave
Formations in their wild career.
And thus there rides, year after year,
A field of wheaten cavalry
Which in nostalgic dreams I see.

L. E. S. COTTERELL
Trooper

XIII

Song for the Dawn

THE laughing trumpets of the dawn
 Cry the retreating purple scorn
 And, where the first red sun-spears lay,
 The frosted grasses mutter, " Day! "
 Of beauty, soldier, drink your fill
 And greet the light that aids the kill;
 Glad-eyed behold this spreading morn—
 Mayhap your last, your setting dawn.

The mountains change from white to green,
 Hemming the lowlands' brighter sheen
 Where silvered snakes of water crawl
 Over the lushly verdant pall;
 Then: " Comrade, comrade! " shout the dead,
 " Could you not rest in such a bed? "
 So, front the hour with blithesome scorn
 For what it harbours yet unborn.

Beneath this bearded face of earth
 A million warriors of worth
 Blend thirty centuries of strife
 In soil that nurtures thrusting life.
 If here be your last bivouac
 Good company you shall not lack,
 Or music from the singing rain
 To lift your dreams in soft refrain

Wherefore, you exile, raise your head:
 If here you join the merry dead
 Each stretching thread was thus inclined
 Through generations of your kind,

SONNETS FROM ITALY

Nor shall the fury break your spar
Unless it be the woven plan;
Yet if so be your act is done
Be sure this full earth will not shun
The richness of your manhood's might
Which, for a space held from the light,
Shall wax anew in brighter guise
To joy men's weary, downcast eyes.

L. E. S. COTTERELL
Trooper

XIV

Sonnets from Italy

I. WAYSIDE CRUCIFIX

A TANK lies gutted in the ditch beneath. . . .
English or German? That's no matter now;
The pinioned Man with thorns upon His brow
Looks down upon a grave that bears no wreath,
Beside the wrecked and blackened iron sheath.
The toil-bent peasant leaves his healing plough
To gaze upon the Sacrifice and bow
His head, pond'ring the gift that guns bequeath
Unto his ravaged soil: the human clay
Moulded from other dust—and hither brought
To jest and suffer for a space, to slay
And mingle with an alien earth, blood-bought.
The slain will guard the slain till Rising Day
When he shall know the End for which he fought.

II. TOWN

Less than a month ago who lived had fled
Before the efflorescent pods of steel

POEMS FROM ITALY

Whose sudden bloom set ancient walls a-reel,
Lurching in fragments down to vault the dead.
Amid the rubble, now, neat women tread
To gain familiar doors or set a meal;
The gossips cluster at the evening peal
(As crows will when the sky is dappled red)
While urchins clutch the skirts of smiling monk
Who lays on gentle hands to bless them home.
And when beneath night's quilt the town is sunk,
The truck-borne soldier, patched in up-flung loam,
Glimpses a cheerful room in hovelled shell,
Children and wives and ease—and that's his hell.

III. MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

A corselet of snow, a scarf of cloud,
Enwrap the rugged pile; a cap of fleece
Clings to the lofty head, enduring, proud.
Here on the heights the meek have dwelt in peace,
With fortunate obscurity endowed,
While war-floods swirl and sweep the plain's increase.
Comes now no swart condottiere with fire
Of rich, dull colour and with blazing spears
To hold the pinnacle against his peers,
Loosing his followers in wild desire
Of wine, of maiden torn from shrinking sire
For quick delight amid the helpless tears.
To-day's drab victor stirs no dormant fears—
Only his swift wheels, passing, whirl the mire.

L. E. S. COTTERELL

Trooper

THE MARCH

XV

The March

THE soul of man once more is on the march;
The tents of pillowed ease are struck,
The slow, soft days behind us in the arch
Of sheltered years amid the ruck.

Hard days, dark nights ahead, no lotus hours
To sap the muscle of the will
In cheerful halls, cool rooms, and whispered bowers,
In scented gardens warm and still.

Do we regret our own short, shadowed youth—
That fitful gap 'twixt rage and rage?
Would we have lived in time of golden ruth—
The valley of a peaceful age?

No! We regret not even our own past,
Nor envy those who fought no fights—
They never knew our depths, gloom-overcast,
But yet they never knew our heights;

They never stood upon the topmost peak
Where thunder threatens, lightning strikes,
The future's stinging wind upon their cheek,
Before their feet Fate's gleaming spikes;

They never felt within themselves the fire
Of danger and of agony,
To carry forward, upward, ever higher,
The spirit of humanity.

*Therefore we deem their placid lot the worse;
Hard is the road but, in our tread,
We feel the rhythm of a universe
Urging us through the mists of dread.

At once our privilege and our ordeal,
The age requires of us high deeds
To match the temper of the blazing steel
Which builds and smashes surging creeds.

To the tradition of great glory by
Is linked reality to be—
Such thoughts, such hopes, once born, can never die
While lives but one whose soul can see.

So, from the burning ruin of the arch
Of sheltered years, bright brands we pluck.
The soul of man once more is on the march;
The tents of pillowed ease are struck.

L. E. S. COTTERELL
Trooper

XVI

Prelude to Invasion

Sicily, September 2, 1943

PUFFED, troubled clouds hug Ætna's peak,
Whilst all day long the bombers roar
Northward—patterns geometrical,
Designed to pound the crumbling Roman shore.

Within the Mount Hephæstus cowers—
His glory gone, his forge fires spent;
Stillbound and workless, Titan Cyclops peers,
Startled, through the black-grimed, failing vent

BUT THIS IS SICILY

Which serves each for an eye. Typhoon,
Once overproud with fury, boasts
Of aged powers, vainly to summon up
A courage shattered by those airborne hosts.

So have the gods been overreached,
And so will man's usurping pride
O'erreach itself. Man's death alone brings peace,
When clouds round Ætna's peak, serene, can ride.

There'll be no guns, no aeroplanes,
No fear, no mock heroics, strife;
Only a quiet, still emptiness, where we
Can comprehend what little worth has life.

A. W. CROWTHER
Lieutenant

XVII

But This is Sicily

WHAT if the sun's rim dips
And leaves the distant sea
Rose-flushed? This is Sicily,
And the sunset's serenade
Is music bitter-sweet,
And poignant,
For the mind's escape to fleet
Nostalgia;
Sharp is the blade
And so the knife strikes deep!

Twilight falls, and a little breeze
Tremors the tattered olives; and Sleep
Drifts to the crouching hills on seas

Of palest, dew-spun light. . . .
 Yet the magic is but transient:
 Soon the soft-footed dusk is put to flight,
 Swift-outpaced by the urgent,
 Leaping stride of the night—
 Night with its vibrant symphonies,
 The chirping of the crickets,
 And the distant, cadenced melodies
 Of Morse, all under the olives. . . .

The sky is too full of stars
 And the wide-eyed moon
 Bars
 No secrets from the nosing planes;
 Watching remote awhile
 The spangled Bofors chains,
 The tracers
 In their eerie Indian file
 Slow-moving over Augusta,
 So we slept but fitfully.

The flares,
 Bright chandeliers white-gleaming,
 Slow drift with naked menace,
 Streaming
 Over the harbour; while huddled forms
 Stretched out beneath the trees
 Reach for steel helmets. . . .

All this the eye sees,
 But the mind, unshackled, wanders back
 To trellised garden gates
 Where green shoots leap in ecstasy;
 Where love awaits
 With every burst of lilac. . . .

IT WILL COME BACK

Yes, this the eye sees,
But the mind, untrammelled, floats away
To wander beneath the trees
Where apple blossoms drench an English way
With perfumed purity. . . .

But this is Sicily, and the heart
Swells,
To be crushed at the very start,
Even as the giant thistles
'Neath the creaking wheels of the ox-cart
Into the grey, cracked clay!

D. L. DFE
Sergeant

XVIII

It will Come Back

A SOUTH wind whispers, and the scent comes back
Of roses after rain—sweet fragrance fraught
With glowing memories: the brookside track
That stayed our wandering feet, as hushed we caught
The thrill of that June day. The setting sun,
That shone, dream-radianced, but swift-spiced on
And all too soon came twilight, and the cries
Of blackbirds through the dusk. Time yet was sweet—
Too deep in love we were even to care
That War across the threshold of our street
Had fixed the warning sign “No thoroughfare.”
Yet still the South wind whispers from the track,
“The thrill of that June day—it will come back.”

D. L. DFE
Sergeant

XIX

To an Unknown British Soldier

WE shall not stay to see the peace we won,
 Nor watch the world grow clean again from war;
 Find no forgetfulness of things we saw,
 In careless freedom under England's sun.
 Let not the living mock the price we paid,
 Or bring dishonour on our half-done task;
 Hold not from us the only gift we ask—
 Assurance that the dead be not betrayed.
 When others feel the joy of lover's kiss
 Or gaze in gladness on the springtime flowers,
 Or hear the children laugh in playtime hours,
 We shall not grudge the happiness we miss.
 But let no hatred wake us from our peace,
 Who gave our lives that enmity might cease.

M. J. DISNEY
Lieutenant

XX

Impresario

South of Syracuse—July 10, 1943

OFF the barge—Hurry! Hurry!
 Into clear water three feet deep.
 Paddling to shore, memories
 Of childhood days flood my mind
 Unconsciously.
 On to the golden sands, peacefully mocking
 The intruder,
 Whilst death lurks underneath.

IMPRESARIO

On, on, laden with kit,
Our nostrils twitch with the scent
Of wild mint and thyme.
Past olive groves, with trees in rows
Looking serenely on,
Tossing their heads, as a faint wind
Sets them chattering
On the follies of man.
Grey hills on the left
Combine with the waking sun
And cast shadows over all.
Nature is truly an audience
This eventful morn.

I look back
To the silver sheen of the sea.
Big ships' silhouettes stand out
Like paintings on a backcloth.
Little boats dot the shore
Like black teeth
In the mouth of the bay.
The sky is
Too blue, too clear.

I return to the land again
With a start,
Amazed by the silence
That is shattered by the music
Of many crickets,
And the stuttering speech of machine-guns
With the bullets' answering whine.

A. DOVE
Private

XXI

Ash Wednesday and St Mathias' Eve

February 23, 1944

WHEN through the warp of sin the golden shred of Thy
redemption shot,
New cloth begot,
An everlasting stuff, the bright brocade,
Whose faultless rich design
Is Love Divine:
Among the shredded sackcloth there displayed
The sinews of my lust,
Falling to dust,
Were gathered and with glory interlaid;
And grey, ciliciate grief
New seamed with life.

The twelfth Apostle's cloak, Apostacy,
Redeemed from all defect,
Draped Thine elect
In brave repentance; girded, yet more free,
Encircled with the cord
Of Thy strait word,
Than in the full robes of loose liberty.
Yet close beneath I bear
This early year
My vest of sack; and shall till, Lord, I see
The Easter sun uprise
Through griefless skies.

K. G. HARVEY

INDIAN TROOPS

XXII

Adriatic Sea-shore

I STOOD on the sea-shore
Where idle lovers throw pebbles
Into the green pools.
Gentle, childish fools—
They cannot feel the sun's warmth
Or drain the colours from the sea
With eyes that dream.

Sometimes I seem
To see neither sea nor sky,
But only one whole blue blur
Of indefinite shape and size,
Until I move my eyes
Westward, where the sun's now sinking
In a cloud bright with blood,
Until it disappears;
And then my shadow hears
The last pebble shatter
The lovers' pool of this afternoon.
They did not know
I saw them go.

L. J. HATT
Leading Aircraftman

XXIII

Indian Troops

Do not ask their land!
What but the swinging sun could interpose

Such fear between the world and their dark eyes?
Standing along the road-edge, one brown hand
Grown into a mud-blown spade.
Theirs is the sun-land!

As we passed them, rain
Between their lives and us, green coats, brown heads
Stood like strange trees. Across the crumbling roads
Their gaze involved a firm, unbreaking pain,
Averting for one pulse the mud,
The rain, the ruin.

F. I. HAUSER

Lieutenant

XXIV

New Music

HERE is new music made!
No music-master's heart,
Beating a metronomic homage,
Not the slow, softly mad
Dancing music of the savage;
This is no music heard

But words and attitudes,
Observed, recorded,
Dripping, lacerated roads,
And lorries, herded
Like men, in the sun's blood.

And all the jubilation of the mind
Is counterpoint. This music makes no sound.

F. I. HAUSER

Lieutenant

XXV

The Sentinels

He stands about the gun all day
And follows with his mood its stern, steel finger
Forcing the sullen sky.
Out of their forced companionship it seems
Almost a fellowship is forged,
A strange sympathy, urged
From the steel shaft and the warm man's hunger
For waiting forms and waking dreams.

Often, watching them on the shore,
The yearning man who tends the unturning gun,
Have they seemed a pair
Of endless sentinels against the sea. . . .
The sea, that never has touched
Man nor gun, has matched
Their stature in its depth, resolved them, one,
Awaiting their creating destiny.

F. I. HAUSER
Lieutenant

XXVI

A Morning after the Storm

THE waves, smooth, polished mounds, slid ceaselessly
Towards the rocky shore. Ferocity,
Inexorable power, had died within the night
And left the sea without an appetite
For aught save gentleness. The storm was past;
Soft shades of grey, too delicate to last,

Or linger longer than their friend, the dawn,
 Slept humbly there a moment, then were gone,
 Leaving the mellow, golden sun to paint
 In oils pale rainbow lights without restraint.
 The air was calm, pervaded with a strange,
 Sweet, spirit balm that made the subtle change
 From restlessness to peace the loveliest gift
 The world might have from out the wild sea-drift:

J. HENRY
Signalman

XXVII

The Angels of Syracuse

WHITEWASHED walls gleam on every side—
 Cold, gleaming walls which do not hide
 But throw in grim relief
 Long tiers of bodies; some have died;
 Others twitch soundlessly, denied
 Even the solace of grief.

Some have fevers biting through
 Like cancers to the brain; a few
 Are dying in a drowse;
 Innumerable have limbs askew—
 Crushed, broken, gashed. The dew
 Of pain is on their brows.

Against the gleaming white like snow
 Great sores are blotched with indigo
 Or sickly iodine.
 To Syracuse the wild winds blow
 The tares that lust and battles sow
 In youth's sweet fields of green.

IN STINGING SAND

Unto this brimming holocaust
Of human debris from war's blast
The blessed angels came.
They did not stare in horror, aghast;
They did not stop and then move past;
They hallowed Woman's name.

Amid the filth and stench and sweat
They laboured hour by hour, and yet
Would not retire for rest.
They smiled when lips were wont to fret
And soothed when brows with pain were wet.
They prayed when one confessed.

As sunlight turns the world to gold
They flitted here and there to hold
A hand—never to refuse
The merest whim. Miracles of old
Were done each hour by these dauntless, bold
White Angels of Syracuse.

J. HENRY
Signalman

XXVIII

In Stinging Sand

IN stinging sand,
And sun on the hot tents,
The daily dice, the peaceful spirit crushed,
The glamour goes; in silent wells of thought,
To-day? to-morrow?—drowns.
Spun fabrics of desire,
Loves, hopes, the maps for peace

Are shred in swift sky winds.
Gear brain and cunning hand
And unrelenting eye.
Death puffs.

But, killing done,
Round the sharp rocks of Question once again
Floods the dammed life
—No glamour, drowned.
Only steel hooks of duty,
Pride in the trust, and mastery
Of a learnt thing
Keep silence
And the strong will unbent.

W. E. HUTCHINSON
Flying Officer

XXIX

La Contadina

I SAW a woman dressed Vermilion
Hard by her limestone cottage, winking white:
I saw black olives dimly drooping, caught
In earth-brown hands from silver sleeping trees:
And as she picked those olives she was singing,
Outmatching mellow tolling of the bells:
To mock December's dun in sombre mountains,
To mock and mock the earthquake of the shells.

W. F. M. HYDE
Signalman

XXX

River Trigno—Italy 1943

I

THINKING of those who, in other wars,
Flaunted their flesh against steel,
Watched bullets stitching skeins of blood
And the calm faces torn with horror;
Thinking of those, the designers of history
(Madrid, Jarama, our Mother, our Father),
I feel beside me in their power and their pride
And the wanton, savage smell of death.

II

The root grows; the assembled means
Congeal like blood at the river's edge
(To-morrow's headlines hang like blackened figs
On ageless trees, ignoring the root of their being).
The guns, the tanks, the men, are there;
And in the little houses where they wait
Photographs are touched and the heart smiles—
To-morrow is attack, and the root of my political obligation.
To-day's movements ripen
In the foul and hideous whine of war;
To-morrow's death is packed away in boxes.

III

The surgeon waits, and time has no pity.
Time saws the nerves and the sinews
Like a shell's sharp-edged scream,
And in the distance, on the responsive mountains,
The white snow shines, like the thought of freedom.

R. G. JOLLY
Quartermaster-sergeant

XXXI

Let Me not Remember

LET me not remember,
 Of you that should be dead,
 Who writhe behind the senile sigh,
 Where sensual hunger flutters
 As the firm flesh fades,
 Ethereally futile within the mind,
 Let me not recall
 Shapes that mould the inward smile,
 Tapering age with rounded thighs,
 The chiselled deeds of kind forethought
 Cutting the edges of a border plain
 To match the furtive retrospect
Of joyful symphonies.
 Let me not remember
 The backward path ill-trod;
 Spending sunlight on a thorn
 To catch the colour of the point,
 And fleeing when the shadow
 Moves upon the prick,
 Avoiding the dull grey substance
 When coarser pain obtrudes.
 Let me not remember
 The creaking door behind the flame,
 Which violates the being of the whole.
 Throughout I strive to see
 The Youth, elusive, in the smoke,
 Clutching fugitive strength in prisms
 Resurrected by a thousand dreams.
 Recall me not again,
 To pull the weaning Now,

BLUE MOOD—ON GUARD

Gasping with unsuckled mood,
The whining echoes of a filtered breeze
Which curdles in neglected pools
The moments while I'm sitting still.

A. JONES

Leading Aircraftman

XXXII

Blue Mood—On Guard

WHERE moonbeams on the whisp'ring sheen
Of hidden pools at midnight
Tremble in ling'ring ecstasy,
And the grotesque olive-trees lean
Closer in sibilant conspiracy
With the grey shadows of half-light;
Softly the breeze like whispered love
On lips that wait the kiss
Sighs through the trellis'd leaves,
And the first violet peeps above
The rain-drenched grass, weaves
Dreams of the unborn Spring's promise.

Here can I stand and scorn this brute tranquillity
Of things that exist yet cannot feel
Nor Pain nor Joy, nor e'en the placid serenity
Of their own crabbed Destiny's implacable wheel
Revolving seasonal with mechanic monotony,
Sharing not the whelming impulse of the storm
In all its wild, libertine majesty,
Nor yet this hushed peace of th' enchanted night.

I suffer, and in my own suffering make all things
Live within this clay-bound cosmic scheme.
Into the night I brood my own imaginings,

Suffuse my sorrow into all, till every moonbeam
 Brims with tremulous sympathy, till the breeze
 Murmurs melodies of haunting melancholy,
 Whispers my heart to the listening trees,
 Makes of the night a living rhapsody of pain.

Live now, enchanted night.
 Weep. The mood
 Is Minor, and my tryst
 With Sorrow.
 In the cherished Solitude
 Of Memories and Dreams
 I would borrow
 A syllable of three lost years
 To live what might have been.
 Moonbeams,
 Like angels' tears,
 Tremble on the glistening sheen
 Of weeping waters—shadows brood
 Midst the sighing trees
 — And the breeze
 Whispers melodies
 Of exiled love. . . .

W. EDGERTON JONES
Lance-corporal

XXXIII

Then . . . and Now

Mud,
 Vile, abhorrent;
 Boots, battledress, bodies,
 Slimed in the same drab hue.
 We slither, wallowing,
 And as we do

THEN . . . AND NOW

Our thoughts go backward winging,
Back through the intervening years. . . .

France,
And our fathers grappling
With the same twin-treacherous foes—
The Boche and the vile,
Abhorrent mud.
Amiens, Mons, the Somme—each mile
Of churned-up slime where heroes
Fought and fell
In the viscous, soul-destroying hell
Of oozing mud. . . .

Across the years
At last stabs grim enlightenment;
Their now-remembered cry,
“If you break faith with us who die . . .”
Shrills to our dormant ears.
In startled consciousness we realize
Their pledge is ours, their fears—
We on the Sangro.

France,
Those men who fell,
Tortured, torn by battle's hell . . .
Those men who fell
Into oblivious mud, unhonoured and unsung—
They do not sleep in foreign field;
They fight with us,
They bear our shield
Who fight in the Sangro mud!

H. G. KNIGHT
Lance-corporal

XXXIV

Kiwi Graves

GUARD e'ermore
This sad stranger's rest,
Maiella, as you mighty soar.
Let us consecrate their limbs' gallant pain.

See their sign,
Wooden humble cross,
Sacrifice in a lonely line.
Names and numbers won the Orsogna road.

Won! fought clear
For a heavy price.
Disaster, with its death's-head leer,
Counts the losses where the young blood has flowed.

Look! look down
On these Kiwi graves,
Maiella of the snowy frown,
Sneering majesty in a squall of rain.

I. KÖNIGSBERG
Staff-sergeant

XXXV

Home

A LITTLE white house on the forest fringe,
Red-roofed and green of lawn;
A brown-wood gate with a creaking hinge
And a gravelled path well-worn;

HOME

Clean-swept steps to the open door;
The homely smells within;
Sun-mirrored space on the waxen floor
Bright as the shining pin;
Cool, crisp sheets astride the bed;
The curtain's billowed pout;
The drowsy nod of Summer's head—
A distant muffled shout;
Lazy streamers of drifting smoke
The busy chimney sows;
The garden-corner's gnarled old oak
With moss between its toes;
The shady glen's unruffled calm;
Deep-delved, dappled bowers;
Woodland music; the scented charm—
Bursts of coloured flowers.
The heady wine of earth and air,
Fresh mists beyond the pale;
The startled squirrel's wide-eyed stare
And whisk of furry tail;
The gurgle and gush of silvered stream—
The waving weeds' wet shroud;
The far-off mountain's jutting edge
And crest of creamy cloud;
The hill-top's vast and rugged view—
The sweep of beach and bay;
Huddle and height; the old, the new;
The city's bustling way;
The mournful hoot of straining ship
Trailing its frothy tape;
The sea-gull's salutary dip
In greeting from the cape . . .

L. LILENSTEIN
Warrant Officer

XXXVI

Essex

THIS is the land that the sea mists muffle,
This is the land where the marsh-creeks fill,
Green-lit dawns that the black wings ruffle,
Smoke-red tides where the sunsets spill.

This is the land where the farmsteads muster,
Field on field till the sky sweeps down,
Where the earth lies bare to the bold winds' bluster
And the trees sing shrill on the hills' low crown.

These are the names for the tongue's rich savour—
Stapleford Tawney and Tolleshunt Knights,
Margaret Roding and Magdalen Laver,
High Easter and Hainault and such delights.

This is the land where the old lanes ramble,
Cloudy with dust in the heat of June,
Where September's hedgerows are brave with bramble
And the grasses sing to the streams' thin tune.

This is the land where London's river
Breaks from its channel to seek the sea,
Where the flat fields fade and the first waves quiver,
And the wide skies light and the winds fly free.

This is the land that my eyes are seeing,
Fair though the sunlight of Italy falls:
For the years are few and the few are fleeing,
And my home is there and my loved one calls.

N. LONGHURST
Sergeant

SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON

XXXVII

Lost April

It will be April when you read these lines—
The fourth lost April that our love must know—
And Spring will light the woods with rich designs
Where once we walked, so many Springs ago.

Four Aprils gone: four months of joyous wind
And sudden showers with rainbows painted through;
Sharp-coloured skies where racing clouds have thinned,
And young leaves' laughter in the lanes we knew.

Once more the gardens flame to eager flower
And bluebell mist in forest byway brims,
Once more the air is magic with the power
Of life unfolding . . . glad with Easter hymns. . . .

Once more . . .

But must they fade for ever, cast behind
To burn their beauty out in heedless war?
Or may not we, in years long-awaited, find
Four Springs regained the richer for their store?

N. LONGHURST
Sergeant

XXXVIII

September Afternoon

HERE in this hot Sicilian valley,
Where orange orchards gather in the sun,
I lie at ease and count the endless tally
Of beauty seen in years so quickly run. . . .

POEMS FROM ITALY

Long, lazy days of sailing, ever southward,
Pale, wind-fresh mornings, flushed with sunrise red,
Star-covered nights and sentimental singing,
And Southern Cross slow-swaying overhead.

The Pyramids in glow of Summer moonlight,
And warm Nile darkness, velvet-soft and still,
White robes a-glimmer through deep-shadowed palm-trees
And silent gardens where night perfumes spill.

Mount Carmel in the Springtime, when the blossoms
Of half the world in coloured riot run,
With Kershon silver-threaded through the levels
And Acre flaming in a setting sun.

Jerusalem in snowfall, and the splendour
Of Winter's touch on steep Gethsemane;
The rough road that Samaritan made holy,
And Jericho beside its tideless sea.

Long miles where every turn lights up Man's story,
Hot Galilee among blue-distant hills,
White Nazareth cool-clustered in the mountains,
And royal woods where cedar scent distils.

A tented camp in last light of the evening,^o
And ragged wheatlands rolling to the sea,
Valetta with its great Crusader castles,
And Tripoli in skyline memory. . . .

But back in England morning mists are rising,
And Autumn flames across the forest floor,
And chestnuts stud the lanes for children's prizing,
And blackberries are gathered in once more—

SONG

Such simple things, yet how shall we forget them
Who see them still beyond the years of war?

N. LONGHURST

Sergeant

XXXIX

Song

OH, give me England once again,
And give me English folk—
Her tidy slopès, her patterned plain,
Her many-coloured cloak;
Red Devon and the Sussex Downs,
And poppies by the sea—
Her golden shires, her blackened towns,
Her skies in company.

Soon may I hear the river's song
Through many a meadow mile,
And feel the sea-wind, salt and strong,
On Beachy's chalky pile;
And sprawl once more on Goodwood turf,
The white dust on my shoes,
While summer woodlands sigh like surf
By the ways the shepherds use.

Then let me see the English hills
All misty-grey in rain,
And be where hasty Autumn spills
The red leaves in her train;
And let me smell blue bonfire smoke
Across the fields' last light
While hedge and ridge and thorn and oak
Slip softly into night.

And let me stand for Essex claims
Against all others' pride—
For lazy lanes and country names
And farmlands rolling wide;
For marshes by the lonely shore
Where sea-birds sweep and cry,
And forest rides by London's door
Where sun-starred shadows lie.

N. LONGHURST
Sergeant

XL

Italian Spring

I

AND then I found that I was tired,
Too tired for love,
Too tired for death.
And all my dreams lay scattered round
Like dead shells in the cold dawn.

The road I came is covered now
By gun-smoke
And the vivid glare.
Africa wastes of heat and death,
Clogging memory.

And then I saw the sun come up.
I felt the Spring chill in the air,
And sensed the scattered fragments join
To reap the harvest of the blood.

And so I'll come with one bright dawn
Shorn clean of memories' sentiment,

ITALIAN SPRING

Singing—eager to live;
And bearing a token
Signed with the blood's heritage.

II

The spring sun dancing,
Pink on the mountain snows
And crocuses deep into the valley.
There, stark up to the sky,
Man shouting
For help to explode the last bomb.
Keep the barrage tight
On one object
Grown hazy in the smoke
Of 25-pounders—
Bring up more noise.
Keep me awake this night,
For I must be ready
To receive the blood-bought bride
I had forgotten in the smoke.
Bought dim—ago of an age—
And now it's nearly done.
Christ
Stuff the spring sunshine into my arteries.
Let me feel the earth and air
And in their quality remember
The road I came
And that which I must follow.

S. F. LOTT
Corporal

XLI

Remembrance

BEAUTY we packed away
at the approach of battle,
for fear it might breed weakness
where ugliness seemed strength;
we kept our eyes earthward
and chewed the graceless pasture—
yes, and were slain like cattle,
as we elected to.

We ceased to speak the gentle
speech moulded by our fathers,
among whom were great artists,
and some of these great men.
It seemed honest to speak rudely
and briefly on all matters,
for bullets spoke as briefly
whene'er they spoke to us.

We did not do much dreaming,
though many bade us to,
who preached the end of battle
and glorious things to do,
when we'd have left our comrades
like idle, empty rattles,
bones dreamless in the desert
'neath some superstitious sand.

How many of these crosses
I've seen in lonely wadis:
the unconsoling Christ
who died just like my pals,

no better man than they,
and He the last to say it;
though lesser men than He
affront His fellows so.

Good fools from England new-come
speak lightly of a future
fit for us skin-safe heroes—
and little of the past.
But we have sworn a future
with no man to forget
one single, painful wadi
from Halfyah to Akharit.

If we distrusted beauty,
eschewed its chosen speech,
~~and put aside weak dreaming;~~
we kept our memory strong—
the learning of the desert
that is not soon forgotten;
the meaning of a man
in peace as well as war;

That men must fight for Justice,
that rights are battles won,
that men fetch from the desert
only the thing they bring;
freedom means many campaigns,
and first and last are fought
between embattled forces
in peace as well as war.

It is no equal thing
that men bring in to battle,

POEMS FROM ITALY

it is no equal thing
we ask by formal measure;
but there's a world we share,
whether as son or father,
and lose with wife or mother:
that common thing—a life.

What is the stake of dead men
within the living city?
“ Let the dead bury their dead—”
oh, words more harsh than winds
that sweep indifferent
above Saharan graves!
It was they who took the city
and we who enter it;

And oh, remembered wadi
where only blood once flowed,
if all was shed in vain
my comrades will not know;
and if the waters fail us,
and desert wins our souls,
my comrades will be sleeping,
my comrades will not know.

M. P. MCDIARMID
Corporal

XLII

Sicilian Mood

HELEN, the green days dance,
processional and gay,
through the Sicilian fields
to Ætna their glad way,

SICILIAN MOOD

Where Zeus, snow-browed and splendid,
applauds their holiday.

Pan pipes the ancient music
beneath the sun-spared tree—
the antique, simple music
of shepherd Sicily—
piping shut-eyed to his world,
heedless of you or me.

But, when all grows sleepy,
my heart still holds from sleep,
here in this world Sicilian
beside the silly sheep,
and goats with tufted foreheads
about the rocks that leap.

Love, will you understand
if now I tell the thought
that fills me where I go
to sleep where you are not?
Better, perhaps, unknown
by you, by me forgot.

You have no starry blanket
at dark to wrap you round;
not by the sun at morning
in fields your couch is found;
you leave no last night's comrade
with cross and helmet crowned.

You cannot see by night
fires of retreating foes
along the shadowed height,
nor hear how swift death goes

POEMS FROM ITALY

among them on loud wings,
nor his return more light.

You cannot cheer that life
remains with you each dawn,
or joy the more you sadden
for better chaps who've gone,
and got them final crosses
the way you'll travel on.

Oh, love, you have not reached
the weary edge of things
to know the price of life,
and why the victor sings,
and what sweet thing the morning
more than the sunshine brings.

So do not grieve that now
death sets me thinking of
a sober, a sweet lover
that stays the heart above,
the dear embrace of life
- that comes more close than love.

M. P. McDIARMID
Corporal

XLIII

Reverie

*To those English Springtimes we, who represent our Country abroad
during these War years, have missed*

ANOTHER Spring is here, another year
Has passed since I beheld the golden spray
Of daffodils, or king-cups growing in the pool beneath the
weir;

DUST STORM

Another Spring is here, and who can say
When next these eyes of mine will rest content
Upon a dew-besprinkled lawn at early morn,
Or in enraptured bliss, to catch the scent
Of meadowsweet and early thyme, or watch the dawn
Break freshly o'er the softly misted hill.
I wonder when again I'll hear the cuckoo cry,
Or watch the nesting swallows in the old windmill
Or search for early violets, their petals fragile as a sigh,
In the little wood I know so well.
Oh, Spring, such thoughts exquisite come to me,
As on those bygone happy days I dwell;
The sky at night, a flowering chestnut-tree;
The flash of blue, down by the tinkling stream,
That marks kingfisher's erstwhile flight.
Oft-times these days I love to sit and dream
Of days and hours spent in lovely places. At night
My thoughts must always turn beyond the legacy of sorrow
that is war,
To happier times, precious moments taken from the very
core
Of those faery days. My thoughts sweep on to days that
must return,
When Nature with her vassal birds must sing,
When life begins again—as mine did in the Spring.

P. B. MCGUIRE

Private

XLIV

Dust Storm

ALL day the sun has kept his bed,
the earth lies blanketed with dust
and the weaving shallows of the air
are permeate with a foetid rust.

POEMS FROM ITALY

The whip-wind swirls to insinuate
dust into bivouac and tent,
driving the swift rain in its spate
with joyless merriment.

The tent-poles snapping, the snarling tear
of canvas in this careless hand
contrives to strip us, to lay us bare
as the peaks that southward stand.

The coated meat or gritted bread
are sick with power that clogs the brain,
in which a coverlet of lead
weighs coldly on the warmth of pain.

These few short steps into the gloom—
Time, in this biting whirl, remains
past, only, with its marionettes,
its ghostly figures, and ghostly stains!

P. H. MARRIOTT
Sergeant

XLV

Why did We Meet?

WHY did we meet, beside
the quivering fern? Outside
I heard the pounding sea's
æonic whisperings.

A glimmering presence stood
where there had only been
the void of lonely years.
You filled the sunlit years.

TO "J. M."

You filled the sunlit hours.
Yet when I looked, you smiled
as though you loved me then,
but slowly shook your head
and turned away.

And then the void seeped back;
yet not the empty void,
but like the pounding sea's
æonic surging cold. . . .
Why did we meet?

P. S. MILLAR
Lieutenant

XLVI

To "J. M."

If, beloved, Summer bring,
To one you loved in May,
A green and early harvesting,
And nothing sown when it was Spring,
Weep for one day.

Weep, beloved, one day weep,
No more, no less, his plea,
And after, nothing of him keep,
But leave him—leave him to his sleep,
Deep as the sea.

If another Summer bring
Fresh flowers for your store,
Take these and far the others fling,
That once you found when it was Spring,
And weep no more.

C. A. MORRIS
Lieutenant

XLVII

Molise 1943

THE abbot speaks: the painter hears his task.
 The Virgin is adoring, posture so:
 The Infant earthly, as a human child,
 Some common touch, but always, always God.
 Composition . . . well, I leave to you;
 A triangle is sound, so strong, so good,
 Solid like our holy Catholic Church.
 The background? Not important; what you will;
 Something that's you, your village, if you wish.
 Yes. True. The plain is washed in wat'rish light.
 Oh, colours? Spare no cost. And time? Two months?

Through airless room the heavy footsteps pad:
 The guide takes up the theme. And now this next,
 The Virgin and the Child, in normal pose.
 Please note the birds: robin and chaffinch, wren—
 A human touch—the Infant Christ at play
 With homely creatures; that is something new.
 Another point: the background, to the right,
 Is mediæval—some Italian town
 Posed on a hill-top. Note the cypress-trees,
 The artist painting what he sees and loves.
 The light is exquisite, so wet, so fresh,
 And yet the piece is near six centuries old.
 And here we have another. . . .

We breast the top and gain another view.
 The lorries turn and twine their falling way,
 And we can scan the pattern of the land.
 I've seen the village on that hill before,

MOUNT ÆTNA

The wall about it, and its very towers,
The way it hangs upon its beetling slope.
Oh, where? Not here. The first time sounds a chord.
Another life, incarnate in far time?
But, no. . . . That picture, whose? By Perugin?
I know not, but my mind can see it now;
What gallery? The Louvre? That placid light
Pours on the banks to silhouette the trees,
Cypress, and guardians of the plain. The painter?
My brain will fidget till I call his name,
Some limb of the Renaissance. . . .

The front rolls on. The gunners and the tanks
Have all passed through. The hill-top town is dead.
Its wall is pock-marked: there a door is smeared
By flame-thrower. The houses naked lie,
Truncated by the artifice of war;
The towers I knew, unpinned and like to fall.
This place is dead, save for a dozen birds
Picking for bits amid a ruined house:
Robin and chaffinch, wren. This ancient quiet
Is full of ghosts. . . .

N. T. MORRIS

Trooper

XLVIII

Mount Ætna

COKE MOUNTAIN,
Belched from the earth's bowels,
Your steaming steepes
Remind me of Wednesbury, Wigan,
And slag
On the South Yorkshire heaps.

POEMS FROM ITALY

No dainty plant,
No sentimental alp
Softens your slope;
The path is cinders, cinders,
Cinders.
How can I cope
With this toiling, coiling track?
Fifty paces, then count a hundred.
Glad I brought no pack.
I must stop again. Is it my mind,
Or the altitude?
Crater 1872. I can
See where it spewed.
The second observatory. Oh, stop.
Count a hundred and then fifty paces.

Another toil: self-punishment
To reach the second observatory:
Then ten minutes' rest.
I can read a name:
"Osservatore Vulcano."
Oh, help! What use, why not return?
Oh, spare me from this panico.
To sit at last and view the stragglers
Straggling up
Is some content,
But the urge is there to be on again—
To tackle the summit
With grim intent.

Steeper still: too steep,
With seldom rock to give a stand.
On crumbling cinder, cinder, cinder
I crab-like crawl on toe and hand.

MOUNT ÆTNA

Breath poor: head faint: limbs ache:
Hot sun: chill air: warm ground.

The men like ants above
Are clinging on the smouldering mound.
That board is the top.
A good rest and a rush.
Fifty, a hundred and off.
No good. I slip back. Enough.
And so on; five times; ten times; twenty.

The lads on top call
And wave.
Another go, another.
Hard rock at the top.
Thank God. I've made it.

Oh, precious breath. Yes, the fumes
Steam, and are slightly sulphurous.
Men have scribbled their names
On the board,
South Shields, Paignton, and Gillingham.
The crater there—
Is that the womb of Mother Earth
From which the protoplasm crept?
Is that the first link in the chain
Forged by God,
And biochemist's brain?

The air's too chill.
Time to go down;
With a swish and a swoosh
We're off.
No effort at all; but thoughts of a meal
Fill the mind,

POEMS FROM ITALY

And smug satisfaction
At climbing the mountain
We've left behind.

Coke mountain,
Your steaming steeps
Still remind me
Of the Welsh coalfield
Or Lancashire tips.

N. T. MORRIS

Two per

XLIX

Scenic

WITHOUT your eyes
 it cannot be the same;
Without your mind
 the land is foreign still, detached, objective.
I can but observe.
 The scenery is backcloth, hard and real.

The land may blush with crimson sunset'glow;
For me it counts but proof of physics' laws,
Or maybe starts a sweet nostalgic urge
To harp on twilight grace of Alpine days:

Of wheeling, squealing bat,
Of winking fire on homely mountain.
How the air went chill at dark,
The valley things at night were friends:
Moon shadows round the kirchlein dimly reeled.

SICILIAN TOWN

Back to the misty mansions of the mind
Real, nay, surreal, the varied image fades.
The landscape yawns, a thing of yards and miles;
Without your eyes
it cannot be the same.

N. T. MORRIS
Trooper

L

Sicilian Town

August 1943

WHAT was your crime, you little mountain town?
Why is that mother picking through those stones?
The entrails of the church stare to the sky:
The Military Police say "Out of Bounds."

"No Halting on the Road." The people stare
Blank-eyed and vacant, hollow-eyed and numb.
You do not seem to hate us: we are they
Who blew your town to dust with shell and bomb.

"Water not Drinkable;" "One Way Street;"
The road machine runs rubble from the track.
Was this a house, home of two lovers' joys,
Reduced by chemists' blast to pristine rock?

The moody mountain frowns, aloof, detached;
What was your crime, you little mountain town?
Just that you lay upon the armies' route;
Two tracks met here by whim in ancient time.

N. T. MORRIS
Trooper

LI

A Remembrance : New Year 1944

THE green waves surged here once,
But now the tides have left the sea-bed bare;
Only the cold retina of the moon
Reflects the image of the desert's death.

The human tide that flowed and ebbd
Across these sands is gone; alone remains
The wrack and debris of the final storm;
The sea-mark of the Tide that burst the Wall.

The Dead.

" Friends, you press on to other lands
Upon whose mountains you behold
The trees that spend their autumn gold:
The seasons pass us by.
The voices of our children come
Like swallows from our northern land:
Our bones are clogged with desert sand.
They cannot call us home.

" When you shall build, as you have fought,
Beware you of the Crafty Men
Lest they should build their Wall again
And bring your work to nought.
Let them decry your toil and pain
And mock your plans ere they mature:
Build in our memory, and ensure
We have not died in vain."

The little signposts to Eternity
Are silhouettes against the dying moon.

THE ENDLESS JOURNEY

Shadows within the hollows of the sand
Reach out long fingers to encompass them. . . .
Shall these our dead for ever lie in darkness
And be denied the glory of To-morrow?

J. NICHOL

Regimental Sergeant-major

LII

The Endless Journey

THE bay is still with heat, there is no wind
To stir its flat blue floor; the sea and sky
Have melted in a passionate embrace,
And distant vessels seem to sail in air.
The brown-sailed fishing-boats are dreaming o'er
Their long reflections, and the languid waves
Can scarcely roll ashore before they die.
As cattle stand knee-deep within a pool,
Twitching their flanks, so do the brown rocks stand
With golden ripples running on their sides;
Old Neptune's herd, long dead this thousand years.

Suddenly into the quiet afternoon
The seagulls swarm along the drowsy beach
With harsh threatenings, flappings of their wings,
Pursuits along the water's tranquil edge
And the sudden criss-cross flight of panic.

Against the headwind and the flying spray
They brave the peril of the grey North Sea;
Or slow and tireless beat along the trail
Of the Cape rollers; or in Eastern ports
Circle the minarets: they have no peace.
From where the Hebridean cliffs defy

POEMS FROM ITALY

The Atlantic, to the squally Caribbean
They drift, knowing no rest, thieving their food,
Dying by storm, or shot, or tanker oil.

So when they come, these gypsies of the air,
Bringing disturbance where this quiet sea
Lies dreaming like a lover by the land,
The soul awakes: this languor is not life:
We must be on our journey, through the storm,
By the rough ways and stony tracks that lead
To all the market-places in the world.
And let us bear in mind the wandering seagulls
With their sad cry of pity for humanity
And strong wings for the path that never ends.

J. NICHOL

Regimental Sergeant-major

LIII

Prospectus

THERE will be talk
Of monuments,
And for generals
Titles:
Perhaps on some future anniversary
They will pin paper flags on their coats,
And put pennies in tins,
For remembrance.

And we shall be separate,
Each one of us domestic, civilian,
Home-bound and self-thinking;
Perhaps, on certain days,

PROSPECTUS

The talk will be of the past,
And we shall remember, dimly,
Places and names, and the feel of war :
But not accurately, and not for long ;
We shall be sentimental
In retrospect.

Oh, the good days, the hard days.
We were men then, we were young,
Peril came upon us and we stood firm,
Sorrow was ours, and we did not weep ;
And cold, and wet, and the long empty hours,
The fatigue, and the ache of exile—
We trod them into the ground ; we were triumphant—
It was our moment, held on a call from a bugle,
Announced by cannonade.

Where the army paused, where the boats grated on
the beach,
At the ford, on the verge of the road,
We left our comrades with a wooden cross
To mark our progress and to show its cost ;
And it may be no more than writing on the sand,
The dead return to dust, and the bones encumber
A foreign graveyard, and the world forgets
(Save for a penny rattling in a tin).
We who survive think of the quiet graves
And sigh, perhaps, wistfully, for with the dead
Was buried all the fever of our days
And the strong purpose of our burdened youth.

We shall put off our armour, we shall be
Engulfed in hubbub, we shall strive for gain,
Shall toss our wisdom in the whirling pool
Of folly that men drown in. Age will come

By stealth, as an insidious patrol,
 Until we are surrounded by our heirs,
 All lusty, young, and greedy for account
 Of battles long ago and heroes dead;
 Till all our strength is gone and nought remains
 But an old greyhead mumbling by the fire
 A bedtime story for the innocent.

H. V. S. PAGE

Sergeant

LIV

Psalm

I WALKED by the sea, and the wind hurled itself at me,
 lashing at my body with its wet fingers the rain,
 And I cursed the cold wind, I looked at the angry sea and
 defied the grey cavalry of waves:
 I said, I am greater than the rain and more strong than the
 long arm of the wind, and my spirit is greater than the
 spirit of the wild water;
 Because I shall tread the rain into the earth and drive over
 the fallen rain with the pressure of tyres;
 And because I have a shield of bricks that is my sure defence
 against the terror of the wind;
 And because I can break the proud onslaught of the waves
 with ships my hand erected:

For I am man, and I have dominion over all created things.
 For me the hot blood coursing, travail, conquest, power,
 supremacy,
 For me beauty and for me love:

Thus shall I praise God who created me:
 Glory be to the Master who gave mastery!

Glory be to Him who breathed His spirit into this clay!—
Making the spirit a greater thing than the clay!
The Spirit of God is sorrow, and compassion, and love, and
justice, and mercy;
Laughter and tears are God, and children are God:

I shall be stalwart through God who made me:
Oh, God, rebuke within me this sullen clay!
The voice of the clay is the voice of the wild weather,
Speaking Destroy, kill, hate, seek comfort, live in lust:
Free me, God, from the corruption of clay and the evil
thereof.

Breathe into my body the fire of Thy Divine presence,
That I may calm the turbulence of unreason,
That I may destroy with the flame of truth the sin and the
temptation,
The pride and the vainglory and the doubt of virtue:
Fill my heart with the strength of Thy presence:

Then shall I rise in might and defy the tempest,
Say to the wind: Be still, and to the wild waters: Be still;

For the winter and the cold days shall pass from me,
And the limbs of my youth shall shine in the grace of summer,
And my lips shall be merry with song,
And in the darkness there shall be music.

H. V. S. PAGE
Sergeant

LV

As Stars Gleam

As stars gleam coldly down,
Through the eerie blackness of the night,
Shorn of its radiance, London sleeps,

In death-like stillness,
With but a feeble flicker of shrouded light,
To guide her weary children,
Silently, soft-footed home.

Then softly from afar
The macabre howl of distant sirens
Gathers tumultuous force, and then,
Unashamed and boldly,
Disturbed are slumbers, rest forgotten;
The boldest only still sleep on,
Defiant of the braying blast.

Small, hampered forms,
With bundled blankets and blinking babes,
Make urgent haste to seek their haven—
Dank and dismal caverns,
'Neath dirty piles of deserted buildings—
Listening intently, waiting,
For the winged, hostile Hun.

Then all is still until,
Heralded by rumbling distant guns,
'Death wings its way o'er heavy blackness,
Muttering angrily anon.
Now night is day, Defence's sword
Divides the heav'ns and betrays
The silver-winged fury.

And now the crunch of guns
Increases to summer thunder's din,
As downward swoop, with sickening squeal,
Death's messengers, to meet
With tremb'ling thud the earth, to spread
Death and destruction,
Remorseless and unheeding.

NOSTALGIA

A breathless hush once more,
While silent waiting figures crouch in fear
And wait for fury's final parting fling,
In stilly silence.
And then the doleful siren's moan,
Calls them, wide-eyed, wearily,
From blackened depths, to seek elusive slumber.

F. PETHERAM

Private

LVI

Nostalgia

THERE is a shady lane
Where peace and quiet reign;
Where none pass by I do not know
And love; where gentle is the flow
Of life, and all the cares of men are brief,
Discarded with the shedding of the leaf.

There, people are content;
There, life is heaven-sent,
The oak-trees' sigh is music, there,
And pigeons lull the soft night air
With sleep-persuading sound. And still the owl
Hoots weirdly from his deep nocturnal prow.

There, work begins at dawn,
When shadowed is the corn.
My Uncle George's morning track
Across the meadow shows up black
Against the sodden, dew-bespeckled grass,
And cattle lift their heads to watch him pass.

POEMS FROM ITALY

Our sharing of its fruits and benefit;
Our constant realization of the ultimate
Increasing the value of it;

Each with our own awareness of the danger
And private undefinable explanation of duty
Can understand the fineness of your sacrifice.

You of our comrades, passed in the haste of the moment,
Will have life always
In memory's fire—and not forgotten
When we have left.

JOHN PORTER
Sergeant

LVIII

Sonnet : to a Photograph

You smile: replace in melancholy space
New-pleasured mood for measured air of sad
Contempt: bring merry gleams and glints of glad
Relenting image to this soul-destroying place;
Freshen the very breath, whose tautened trace
Slides in the blood to every cell: then clad
In new-found happy heart, not now part mad
With solitude, I take this instant-given grace.
No miracle has made this wondrous change;
No act of genius; no sudden witch-spell
Trespassing the flat-tuned modern mind;
No act that may be called beyond the range
Of easy recognition; for I can tell
How I alone new life in you may find.

R. PRIDE
Flight Sergeant

SONNET

LIX

Soldier-poet

SING to me, Muse, these lonely days,
The far departed, across the sea,
Journeyman in a mental maze,
And held by solitude in fee.

Sing to me, Muse, and lighten my heart,
For my heart cries out for song,
And conjure up with wonderful art
That land not seen for long.

Sing to me, Muse, sweet pleasure,
For my soul is famished for joy.
And reveal once more that treasure
Which gladdened the heart of a boy.

Sing to me, Muse, to the wanderer sing,
Sing as you sang for the poets of old.
Sing of the seasons, the autumn and spring,
Sing to me, Muse, or my soul will grow old.

D. ROSSITZER

Private

LX

Sonnet

I DREAMT last night that I was home with you,
And in my dreams the brutish carnival
Of war was gone. Yet once again I knew
The civil joys of life: the gentle fall

Of soft light on to polished wood; the kiss
 Of smoothest linen sheets; the flickering gleam
 Of firelight on cut crystal. And in all this
 You smiled. . . . I kissed you in my dream . . .
 But as I kissed you, somewhere in my brain,
 In some dark waking depth, scarce half begun,
 I felt, saw mirrored in your eyes, sharp pain,
 Something, somewhere, I had left undone.

My dream dissolved: I woke again to war,
 And, waking, knew that secret pain no more.

J. SEGAL

Sergeant

LXI

Italy

AND shall I rest!
 And are my eyes so blind, my ears so blest
 That I can silent be?
 Italy. . . .

I saw those hungry babes at half-starved breasts—
 The hopeful mothers raise imploring eyes—
 The prosp'rous baker shrugs and mops his brow. . . .
 The bread is sold,
 How can he heed these cries!
 And all around the Fascist slogans mock.
 And up on high the Fascist symbols stare.
 The mansions—shops—as silent as the grave
 Show sightless eyes, to breasts almost as bare.
 Mock, mock, ye statues proud, ye slogans brave!
 Then look down . . .
 Upon your self-dug grave.

ITALY

I saw new slogans whitewashed on the walls.
"Peace, bread, and work" replace the pompous boast.
The Statesmen nod profoundly. Glasses clink.
A scapegoat flees. The others change their toast!
Oho! oho! What Diplomats are they!
To-morrow with what they're against to-day!

I stroll the streets—a soldier-tourist, I,
From London's slums,
Come here newly to see
What is not new to me—
And cannot pass them by—
Nor throw them crumbs.

The naked truth lies raped before my eyes.
You Statesmen played your gambling game too well;
But still you hear the clear consistent cries
For "bread and work" grow louder, rise, and swell!
You see hopes fade and girls turn prostitute
And new-made beggars verge on suicide,
Whilst London's urchins roam around near-destitute,
And workless, hopeless, here are multiplied.
You see this, aye! and shout with greater glee
"Peace with Badoglio!"

Oh, what a victory!
And are your eyes so blind, your ears so blest,
You think at words the cry for bread will rest?
Shall living men behold the deadly schism
And shout "Hurrah! The world is saved . . .

For Cap'talism!"

Yes, seek, babe, seek and suck that half-starved breast:
'Tis true—like mother—Finance, too, can't rest!

The men grown grim, in clothes Blackshirts begat,
Black mourning-clothes even to tie and hat!

POEMS FROM ITALY

See now, black markets—future—blacker more
The open profiteering
Backed by Law!
And as I walk with mothers, talk with men,
A sound disturbs the air and moves this pen.
I hear a rumble groan across the earth
As of some mighty monster giving birth.
I see New Europe's builders rising up
With new-found strength from Disillusion's cup

I see them hitch their anger to a star
And Matteotti rise to show the way!
And Lenin's finger, pointing from afar,
From where "the dawn brings in a brighter day!"
Then wake then, starvelings, does it seem so strange
That time is ripe "and rotten ripe for change!"

I stroll the streets—a soldier-tourist, I,
From London's slums—
And shall not pass them by,
Nor throw them crumbs.

S. SEGAL
Corporal

LXII

La Primavera

THRUSTING through the swift passing days—
Struggling strongly, blindly, to the Sun;
Shall this plant—this growth which Time displays—
Destroy itself
Ere History has begun?

Mastery of, or ministry to, Man?
Bow before, or spurn, Man's offshoot, Law?

THE DISTANT LIGHT

Heavens earth or earth the heavens scan?
Is war to end,
Or to the end is war?

Thrusting through—up-throwing Reason's rays:
Groping, grouping, flow'ring from new light:
Man from men—as tribes to better days—
From nations, World:
A unity from Night:

From World to what?
A unity to Light!

S. SEGAL
Corporal

LXIII

The Distant Light

IN the too sensate, final word
We may not speak of what we know,
Only, because of what we've heard,
Some colours in our writings show.
And if we let the prisms grow
In beauty as they grow more blurred
Suffice it that, where'er they glow,
Some half-believing heart is stirred.

There is no truth in written things,
Or but half-measure at the best—
Yet the half-song the poet sings
May seek until it find the rest.
So none may ever seek to test
The message that the poem brings,
The Muse remains a welcome guest
For the vague carillon she rings.

And if some secret, sleeping soul
In questing carol find the key
That turns the lock upon the whole
And makes secure eternity—
Then shall the singer's striving be
Engraven on the wondrous scroll
Of those who set a brother free,
And, winning, never saw the goal.

A. E. SIMMONDS
Corporal

LXIV

Relics of War

In this valley there was fought a battle.
That was some months ago.
But still the stench of death pervades the hollows,
Odour of decayed matter wrinkles the nostrils;
The earth is pocked with shell-holes
Littered with mud-grimed carcasses of mules—
Twisted and swoln poor leather bags of guts.
More fortunate are the bodies of the men;
They have had earth thrown o'er their shrivelled forms.
True, rain has washed their covering somewhat thin
And here a leg and there an arm protrude;
And that hair-plastered boulder was a skull.
But time and heat and rot will decompose
These cast-off remnants of the spirit's case;
And Nature will forget and fling their dust
To fertilize the vineyards on the slopes,
Those gnarled black roots
Soon to take blossom for a vintage year.
"A costly wine," they'll say, "is that of '44."
Here a wrecked tank leans perilously awry,

FIRST LIGHT

With drooping gun submissive to the ground
And smashed-in turret.
The German cross is growing faint in rust,
And on the ground lie helmets, mess tins, shells,
Heaps of slim, stream-lined, reddened mortar bombs,
And a limp letter,
Sodden,
Trampled underfoot,
Addressed to Marlene in the Austrian hills.

A. SINCLAIR

LXV

First Light

O HEAVY-LADEN man, whoe'er thou art,
Know that thy sufferings are but a part
Of all creation's travail; for to see
November's wet, dead leaves where Arcady
With cherry-blossom and the wild dog-rose
But now made glad the exulting heart of those
Who in their long sleep will to-morrow lie—
Here is the argument of tragedy.
Aye, in the year's decay our fortunes limned
Record frustrated hopes and glory dimmed,
Endeavour unachieved, achievement crumbled,
Man's beauty on a wintry gallows humbled—
But not for long; for that same bitter wind
That blows the last post for what lies behind
Sounds a reveille to the risen year,
From frozen fields and naked woodlands drear,
With verdured triumph in due time to appear.
So, by a changeless, timeless interdict,
Alone, alone the Christ hung derelict

(Transfigured once, disfigured now and marred),
While the high noonday failed, and mourned its Lord,
Till He, in death triumphant over night,
Drew tribute first from first-created light.

REV. J. P. STEVENSON

Chaplain

LXVI

The Bond

“OH, is it a strand o’ the scarlet silk;
Oh, is it a hempen tether;
Or an iron chain that binds ye twain
And haulds ye fast thegither?

And will it break for a word o’ thine,
How sharp soe’er it be?”
My words like a dart can pierce her heart,
But they winna cut us free.

“And will it break for a muckle hammer,
How heavy soe’er it fa’?”
Let the hammer bruise my life and hers;
It winna free us at a’.

“And will it break for the warst wae
That thrawn mischance can send?”
It will surely hauld till our hearts grow cauld—
And then ’twill never mend.

ENVOI

Oh, moths hae gotten the scarlet strand,
And rats the hempen tether,
And rust the chain, for it bound in vain:
We walk nae mair thegither.

REV. J. P. STEVENSON

Chaplain

MESSENGERS

LXVII

Assault Craft

WE sit in silence. Overhead the sky
Is dark, and meets the darkness of the sea
In a dim distant circle. Moments fly
Winging to meet the morrow's dawn, when we
Shall make the landing. Some of us will die
And roll in pink-tipped surf, and there will be
Sweating and shouts, and spirits will run high.
We wait, and finger guns expectantly.
Beneath the stern I watch the subtle play
Of stars that rise and burst into my hand
In a green fire of phosphorescent spray.
Lulled by the barge's slow, insistent sway,
I cease to wonder. For a while I stand—
A lone god, riding on the milky way.

J. SULLY
Corporal

LXVIII

Messengers

With apologies to John Masefield

MERCURY of winged feet, from starlit heaven,
Gliding down to earth past the mountains of the moon,
With a satchel of star-dust, Sybil-songs, Odysseys,
Rainbows, moonbeams, and an Empire's doom.

Courier of Richelieu, from sleeping Paris,
Gallopings to Toulon down deserted poplar aisles,
With a packet of dossiers, death warrants, love sonnets,
Billets-doux, flatteries, and poison phials.

Weary British Don-R with dust-stained motor-bike,
Jolting over pot-holes in the heat of the day,
With a pannier of documents, messages, acquittance rolls,
Indents, orders, and remittances of pay.

S. G. WATTS

Corporal

LXIX

“ *Regalbuto* ”

FOR all the days that sorrow walks the street
And putrefaction creeps amidst the stones,
And smoking havoc crushes children's bones,
There is a swiftness on to-morrow's feet;

And all the torment of impartial death
Stands as the price against the lust for gain,
And written up for these forgotten slain,
The only judgment to requite their breath—

“ One hour amidst the banners and arrays,
One boastful stride on frenzy's downward road,
One empty dream which half the world bestrode—
These things, like you, have gone their bitter ways,

“ Have gone out sorrowing where the time goes dark
With shattered empires and the muted lyre,
And nothing save old hands, and severed love, and fire,
Remain to give the world your blighted mark.”

And every sainted image on your walls
Is the tribunal of your errant creeds,
And every shrine by which a body bleeds
Entombs the lust of madmen's seneschals.

REVERIE

And so the world has honour gilded thin
Upon the walls of domination's power,
And as disaster chars away the flower,
Out of disaster comes forgiven sin,

That men be free again, while beauty grows
Once more in dire places, and the dawn
Lights on a world whose trumpetings and scorn
Lie in the ground below the wind-kissed rose.

And time shall pass with healing down the ways
Of all our Regalbutos, unafraid,
Through churches where the vesper-hymn is prayed,
And hearts give truth to willing words of praise.

And all the marches on the war-scorched hill
Shall be of feet returning to their rest,
And all the servants, then, of war's behest
Shall heed the voice of Christ, that they be still.

N. WILKINSON

Private

LXX

Reverie

IF when we wander through the fields
We find that every pasture yields
Cowslip and ladysmock,
Would we not search all day
To add to our bouquet
Daisy and buttercup?

If none but bright kingfishers gleam
Among the willows by the stream

POEMS FROM ITALY

And only thrushes sing,
How we should ache to hear
The cuckoo calling clear,
Or see a lark take wing.

And if the sun blazed all the day
While every night the moon held sway
And there was never rain,
One star would captivate
A single cloud elate
And storms be praised again.

C. B. WILSON
Gunner

LXXI

Sicilian Shadows

THIS shadow of a spire of grass
trembling along my naked arm
is lovelier, as the clouds that pass
not in the sky
but in the lake's green calm.

Sometimes tired wantons look
in an old glass
and mirrored see untroubled eyes;
and for a while forget the farce
that love spins out of smiling lies.

It may be that the hours I nurse
(borrowed or stolen, never given)

AFRICAN WAYSIDE GLORY

are better, or at least not worse,
than those that happier lovers
think are heaven.

C. B. WILSON

Gunner

LXXII

African Wayside Glory

WE saw them—from Tobruk to Tripoli,
From Algiers to Tunis, past Madjez-al-Bab.
Through these campaigns they stand so lonely,
For they are foreign souls, in a foreign land:
Their loves in that magic word—"Homeland."

Their wayside grave is a dusty mound,
For dust and sand respect no man,
Or hero either: though he fought till Death
Took him from the fighting line to rest,
And laid him gently—facing the West.

We passed them—and in our passing
How few of us took a second look,
At white crosses, with tin hats hanging,
Except to say, "Thank God it wasn't me.
I wonder if he's English, or from Germany?"

Ah—weary soldier laid by those paths,
Of desolation, strife, and raging fury,
How could you know that friends would pass
Where you had given life itself, for them,
And all they give, perhaps, is one "Amen"?

POEMS FROM ITALY

We avenge them—if that is their wish—
With greater fighting, slaughter, and fire
Against the vandals. This we relish,
And thus the debt at last is paid,
For those many nations still enslaved.

If only all this strife could end
Without the loss of such courageous men:
Ah—then indeed our knees would bend,
To give eternal thanks, for making free
Those lonely souls in their wayside glory.

PAUL DE WYE
Flight Lieutenant

