

'Valcartier' and 'Langemarck' – War Poems by William Pike Osborne

Valcartier

Again the white tents glisten against the glorious dawn,
Again the bugles echo across the woodland lawn;
The startled foals cease romping, the wild life hides in fear —
But my heart is sad and lonesome for the Men of Yesteryear.

They gathered in their thousands, a goodly, valiant host,
From the shoreland of Cape Breton, from the far-flung western coast:
From the highways and the byways, busy mart and lonely mere,
Came that band of brave crusaders, came the Men of Yesteryear.

They awoke this sleepy hollow where the searching feet of change
Had found their way but seldom. As they gathered to the range,
They sang of Tipperary, and with hearts that knew no fear
They yearned for coming battles, did the Men of Yesteryear.

They disturbed the solemn mountains with the thunder of their guns;
We heard the tramp of marching feet on every road that runs
Along this beautiful valley. By the river winding clear
They laughed and learned and laboured, did the Men of Yesterday.

The tents were struck ere dawning; beneath a rainy sky
They marched away to Old Quebec to hear their last goodbye.
The streets were filled with khaki and on the crowded pier
Were tear-wet eyes and breaking hearts, O Men of Yesteryear!

O sacred soil of Flanders, red altar of our pride,
Historic field of Langemarck where on they fought and died!
There were none that fought more bravely or their honour held more dear
Than the men who lit their campfires in this valley Yesteryear.

They have writ another chapter on our envied scroll of Fame.
They have set the Empire ringing with our proud Dominion's name;
But they paid a costly quittance. And we, with sigh and tear,
We, too, must pay our reckoning, O Men of Yesteryear!

Once more the heavy lorries plough up Valcartier hill,
Once more within the dusty lines the troop-horse whinnies shrill;
And khaki figures come and go, their sharp commands I hear,
But I see a phantom army — 'Tis the Men of Yesteryear!

O men who left Valcartier, God rest your valiant shades
That walk amid the ghostly tents and haunt the lonely glades!
When the last, loud trump is sounding and the Warrior Hosts appear,
He shall number you among them, O Men of Yesteryear!

Langemarck

On Flanders Plain in summer-time the blood-red poppy waves:
More brightly now its torch is blown above Canadian graves.
On Flanders Plain when guns are hushed, pledge of our mindful grief
And emblem of the land they loved, shall flame the Maple Leaf.

O Hero Souls, Beloved Dead, yours was the Spartan mould
Wherein were shaped those valiant men that fought in days of old:
Such men as sailed the Argo forth to win the Golden Fleece,
As gave to Rome her ancient name, her Glory unto Greece!

O Hero Souls, 'twas men like you — who smile at death and fate —
That beat the proud Etruscans down before the Roman gate:
That stood in strait Thermopylae with thrice a hundred spears,
And, holding back the Persian hordes, provoked the tyrant's tears!

O Hero Souls, 'neath Flanders Plain, of spirit such as this
Were those who sped the triremes on at sea-born Salamis;
Were these that died with Winkelried or Drake's wild sails unfurled
To mock the Grand Armada's might and dare the whole, wide world.

Such men as died when Grenville did upon a wreck- strewn sea,
Or followed Richard Lion-Heart in Christian chivalry,
To fight in Holy Palestine; such men as fought and fell
In Balaclava's famous charge against a very hell.

O Hero Souls, the men that charged in Scarlett's famed brigade,
Were heroes, yet they never faced such murderous fusillade
As swept our ranks! Leonidas died dauntless and unbowed,
God-like in valour, yet he knew no deadly poison cloud.

O ye that sleep on Flanders Plain, we search the scrolls of Time
Where lettered in memorial gold, shine forth all deeds sublime,
And none are writ more bright than yours, our own Beloved Dead,
Before whose tomb in grief and pride your country bows its head!

Alone, afar on Langemarck's field where desolation swirled
Through crowded, desperate days ye fought the Battle of the World;
Yea, where the Hunnish cohorts swarmed in rage and fury blind,
Lit with the flame of God ye fought the Fight of all Mankind.

O ye whom we have loved and lost, that sleep on alien strand,
As years go by, and on the guns Peace lays her holding hand,
The shell-torn trenches where ye fell, in bitter, glorious hours,
The trenches sown by savage Mars, shall fill with beauteous flowers.

And then when joyous lark shall sing above the hallowed tomb,
And scenes of carnage are forgot 'neath nature's glad- some bloom,
There shall our branching Maple spread, as sign we ne'er forget,
O'er those for whom the radiant sun shall rise no more nor set.

O Hero Souls, that crimson leaf a wondering world shall teach
How in a day of furious stress, Canadians filled the breach,
And all who pass thereby shall step with hushed and reverent tread
The where their native Maple marks the bivouac of our dead.