

Duration, R.I.P. and The Lark – war poems by Ward Holmes

Duration

[A Select Committee has recently been formed to decide on the meaning of the term “duration of the war” in legal documents. Perchance the verses below may aid them in coming to a decision.]

When there's no more rolls of honour, and an end to all C.B.s.,
And we talk not of tock emmas, and no more emma gees,
And we're all rigged out in civvies, and saluting isn't done,
And we buy our pork and hair cuts from an unassuming Hun,
And four ale costs but fourpence, and a shilling lunch a bob,
And we bask beside the fire with the kettle on the hob,
And we've bid our meat and sugar cards a sorrowing farewell,
And again we'll tell the grocer we'll see him first in Hell,
And there's talk no more of "wind up" or "further British gains,"
And we don't get "M & D" when we tell the doc. our pains,
And we've filled the trenches and the shell-holes with perfect jubilation,
Then I guess we've earned our tickets and we've "done duration."

R.I.P.

But yestermorn he marched away,
Hopeful and bold, who now is dead,
A khaki vestment is his shroud;
The Flanders mud his only bed.

The red bricked street seems hushed and still,
Sadly the leafless elm trees sigh,
The blinds are drawn in someone's home,
Half mast the school flag waves on high.

A home is wrecked - a love knot broke –
Lost is a widow's only son,
No more he'll lead the cricket team;
His last ling race alas! is run.

And yet such must always be,
Just for our England's honoured fame;
And men must fight, and men must die,
To guard this dead, dear, England's name.

The Lark

I came to Devon, and I saw
A smiling land, untouched by war,
Where pink cheeked orchards, blushing in the vale,
Curtstied to purple woodlands, waving o'er the dale,
And bejewelled trout, shunning the sun's gay beam,
Basked lazy in the dark eyed whisp'ring stream;

And lowing kine wandered the chequered landscape o'er,
And laughing wavelets kissed the wrinkled shore;
Sinous lanes, with floral pageants blest,
Where sturdy ploughmen homeward toiled to rest,
When lo! Through all the carolling that reached the ear,
I heard a song that roused a mem'ry dear,
And singing, as if in thanks for mercies given,
I saw a skylark soaring high to heaven.

I went to Flanders, and I saw
A shambles – yea and nothing more.
Hamlets and cities, crushed by War's red hand,
Mile upon mile of stricken, tear soaked land,
Pitted with shell holes, red with blood,
Wide eyed corpses grinning in a sea of mud,
Gardens of crosses, where Europe's pride lay dead,
Briton and Prussian in their lowly bed.
And I heard the gun's inferno torturing the air,
Riot and desolation everywhere!
When lo! Through all the bloodmist of that foreign hell,
I heard a song methought I minded well,
And singing, as if in thanks for mercies given,
I saw a sky lark soaring high to heaven.