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The Red Flower Poems Written in War Time

Henry Van Dyke

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THE RED FLOWER

POEMS WRITTEN IN WAR TIME

BY HENRY VAN DYKE D.O.L. (OXON.)

1919

PREFACE

These are verses that came to me in this dreadful war time amid the cares and labors of a heavy task.

Two of the poems, "A Scrap of Paper" and "Stand Fast," were written in 1914 and bore the signature *Civis Americanus*—the use of my own name at the time being impossible. Two others, "Lights Out" and "Remarks about Kings," were read for me by Robert Underwood Johnson at the meeting of the American Academy in Boston, November, 1915, at which I was unable to be present.

The rest of the verses were printed after I had resigned my diplomatic post and was free to say what I thought and felt, without reserve.

The "Interludes in Holland" are thoughts of the peaceful things that will abide for all the world after we have won this war against war.

SYLVANORA, October 1, 1917.

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PREMONITION

THE RED FLOWER

June 1914

In the pleasant time of Pentecost,
By the little river Kyll,
I followed the angler's winding path
Or waded the stream at will.
And the friendly fertile German land
Lay round me green and still.

But all day long on the eastern bank
Of the river cool and clear,
Where the curving track of the double rails
Was hardly seen though near,
The endless trains of German troops
Went rolling down to Trier.

They packed the windows with bullet heads
And caps of hodden gray;
They laughed and sang and shouted loud
When the trains were brought to a stay;
They waved their hands and sang again
As they went on their iron way.

No shadow fell on the smiling land,
No cloud arose in the sky;

I could hear the river's quiet tune
When the trains had rattled by;
But my heart sank low with a heavy sense
Of trouble, — I knew not why.

Then came I into a certain field
Where the devil's paint-brush spread
'Mid the gray and green of the rolling hills
A flaring splotch of red,
An evil omen, a bloody sign,
And a token of many dead.

I saw in a vision the field-gray horde
Break forth at the devil's hour,
And trample the earth into crimson mud
In the rage of the Will to Power, —
All this I dreamed in the valley of Kyll,
At the sign of the blood-red flower.

A SCRAP OF PAPER

"Will you go to war just for a scrap of paper?" — *Question of the German Chancellor to the British Ambassador, August 3, 1914.*

A mocking question! Britain's answer came
Swift as the light and searching as the flame.

"Yes, for a scrap of paper we will fight
Till our last breath, and God defend the right!

"A scrap of paper where a name is set
Is strong as duty's pledge and honor's debt.

"A scrap of paper holds for man and wife
The sacrament of love, the bound of life.

"A scrap of paper may be Holy Writ
With God's eternal word to hallow it.

"A scrap of paper binds us both to stand
Defenders of a neutral neighbor land.

"By God, by faith, by honor, yes! We fight
To keep our name upon that paper white."

September, 1914

STAND FAST

Stand fast, Great Britain!
Together England, Scotland, Ireland stand
One in the faith that makes a mighty land,
True to the bond you gave and will not break
And fearless in the fight for conscience' sake!
Against Giant Robber clad in steel,
With blood of trampled Belgium on his heel,
Striding through France to strike you down at last,
 Britain, stand fast!

Stand fast, brave land!
The Huns are thundering toward the citadel;
They prate of Culture but their path is Hell;
Their light is darkness, and the bloody sword
They wield and worship is their only Lord.
O land where reason stands secure on right,
O land where freedom is the source of light,
Against the mailed Barbarians' deadly blast,
 Britain, stand fast!

Stand fast, dear land!
Thou island mother of a world-wide race,
Whose children speak thy tongue and love thy face,
Their hearts and hopes are with thee in the strife,
Their hands will break the sword that seeks thy life;
Fight on until the Teuton madness cease;
Fight bravely on, until the word of peace
Is spoken in the English tongue at last,
 Britain, stand fast!

September, 1914.

LIGHTS OUT

(1915)

"Lights out" along the land,
"Lights out" upon the sea.
The night must put her hiding hand
O'er peaceful towns where children sleep,
And peaceful ships that darkly creep
Across the waves, as if they were not free.

The dragons of the air,
The hell-hounds of the deep,
Lurking and prowling everywhere,
Go forth to seek their helpless prey,
Not knowing whom they maim or slay —
Mad harvesters, who care not what they reap.

Out with the tranquil lights,
Out with the lights that burn
For love and law and human rights!
Set back the clock a thousand years:
All they have gained now disappears,
And the dark ages suddenly return.

Kaiser who loosed wild death
And terror in the night
God grant you draw no quiet breath,
Until the madness you began
Is ended, and long-suffering man,
Set free from war lords, cries, "Let there be Light."

October, 1915.

Read at the meeting of the American Academy, Boston,
November, 1915.

REMARKS ABOUT KINGS

God said, "I am tired of kings." —EMERSON.

God said, "I am tired of kings," —
But that was a long time ago!
And meantime man said, "No,
I like their looks in their robes and rings."
So he crowned a few more,
And they went on playing the game as before
Fighting and spoiling things.

Man said, "I am tired of kings!
Sons of the robber-chiefs of yore,
They make me pay for their lust and their war;
I am the puppet, they pull the strings;
The blood of my heart is the wine they drink.
I will govern myself for while I think,
And see what that brings!"

Then God, who made the first remark,
Smiled in the dark.

Read at the meeting of the American Academy, Boston.
November, 1915.

