

1: The Guards Came Through

The Guards Came Through. And other Poems. The Guards Came Through. MEN of the Twenty-first, Up by the Chalk Pit Wood, Weak from our wounds and our thirst.

Wanting our sleep and our food After a day and a night. Beaten and broke in the fight, But sticking it, sticking it yet. Always the yell of the Hun. But sticking it, sticking it yet. Never a message of hope. Always the roar of the burst. Always the tortures of Hell, As waiting and wincing we cursed Our luck, the guns, and the Boche. When our Corporal shouted " Stand to! Our throats they were parched and hot, But, Lord! Dressing as straight as a hem. We, we were down on our knees. Praying for us and for them. Praying with tear-wet cheek. Praying with outstretched hand. I could speak for a week. But how could you understand? How could your cheeks be wet? And line after line, with never a bend, And a touch of the London swank. A trifle of swank and dash. Cool as a home parade. Twinkle, glitter and flash. Flinching never a shade. With the shrapnel right in their face, Doing their Hyde Park stunt, Swinging along at an easy pace. Arms at the trail, eyes front. Victrix HOW was it then with England? How was it then with England? Her soul was wrung with loss and pain. But her falcon eyes were hard and bright. Little she said to foe or friend, True, heart true, to the uttermost end. Her passion cry was the scathe she wrought, In flame and steel she voiced her thought " And all was well with England. With drooping sword and bended head, She turned apart and mourned her dead, Sad sky above, sad earth beneath, She walked with God in the Vale of Death " Ah, woe the day for England! How is it now with England? She sees upon her mist-girt path Dim drifting shapes of fear and wrath. Hold high the heart! Bend low the knee! She has been guided, and will be " And all is well with England. Where are those others who fought and fell, Outmanned, outgunned and scant of shell, On the deadly curve of the Ypres hell, Barring the coast to the last? Where are our laddies who died out there, From Poelcapelle to Festubert, When the days grew short and the poplars bare In the cold November blast? For us their toil and for us their pain. The sordid ditch in the sodden plain. The Flemish fog and the driving rain. Where are those others in this glad time, When the standards wave and the joybells chime. And London stands with outstretched hands Waving her children in? To each his dreams, and mine to me. But as the shadows fall I see That ever-glorious company " The men who bide out there. Rifleman, Highlander, Fusilier, Airman and Sapper and Grenadier, With flaunting banner and wave and cheer, They flow through the darkening air. And yours are there, and so are mine, Rank upon rank and line on line, With smiling lips and eyes that shine, And bearing proud and high. Past they go with their measured tread, These are the victors, these " the dead! Ah, sink the knee and bare the head As the hallowed host goes by! Three plain words are all that matter, Mid the gossip and the chatter, Hopes in speeches, fears in papers. Pessimistic froth and vapours " Haig is moving! We can turn from German scheming, From humanitarian dreaming. Twisted facts and solemn fictions " Haig is moving! All the weary idle phrases. Empty blamings, empty praises. There is only one thing vital " Haig is moving 1 Haig is moving! He is moving, he is gaining, And the whole hushed world is straining, Straining, yearning, for the vision Of the doom and the decision " Haig is moving! And yet the hush Shivers and trembles with some subtle stir, Some far-off throbbing like a muffled drum, Beaten in broken rhythm oversea, To play the last funereal march of some Who die to-day that Europe may be free. The deep-blue heaven, curving from the green. And yet I hear that awesome monotone. And as I listen, all the garden fair Darkens to plains of misery and death, And, looking past the roses, I see there Those sordid furrows with the rising breath Of all things foul and black. But still I gaze afar, and at the sight My whole soul softens to its heart-felt prayer, " Spirit of Justice, Thou for whom they fight. Ah, turn in mercy to our lads out there! But if they wandered from the hallowed path Yet is their retribution manifold. Behold all Europe writhing on the rack, The sins of fathers grinding down the sons! But still I hear the mutter of the guns. See where the lure of Ypres calls you! Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls you! Perhaps you scarce remember The far-off early days of that resistance. Was it in October last? Or was it in November? And now the leaves are turning and you stand in mid- September Still staring at the Belfry in the distance. Can you recall the fateful day " a day of drifting skies, When you started on the famous Calais onset? Can it be the War-Lord blundered when he urged the

enterprise? You held council at your quarters when the budding Alexanders And the Pickel-haubed Caesars gave their reasons. Was there one amongst that bristle-headed circle of commanders Ever ventured the opinion that a little town of Flanders Would hold you pounded here through all the seasons? You all clasped hands upon it. You would break the British line, You would smash a road to westward with your host, The howitzers should thunder and the Uhlan lances shine Till Calais heard the blaring of the distant " Wacht am Rhein," As you topped the grassy uplands of the coast. There is valour in the French, there is patience in the Russian, But blend all war-like virtues and you get the lordly Prussian," And the bristle-headed murmured, " Das ist so. You broke him, and you broke him, but you broke him all in vain. For he and his contemptibles kept closing up again, And the khaki bar was still across your path. And on the day when Gheluvelt lay smoking in the sun. When Von Deimling stormed so hotly in the van, You smiled as Haig reeled backwards and you thought him on the run. But, alas for dreams that vanish, for before the day was done It was you, my Lord of Wiirtemberg, that ran. A dreary day was that " but another came, more dreary, When the Guard from Arras led your fierce attacks, Spruce and splendid in the morning were the Potsdam Grenadiere, But not so spruce that evening when they staggered spent and weary. With those cursed British storming at their backs. Haste, my Lord, and enter in, Or the War-Lord may have telegrams for you. Then came the rainy winter, when the price was ever dearer. Every time you neared the prize of which you dreamed, Each day the Belfry faced you but you never brought it nearer. Each night you saw it clearly but you never saw it clearer. Ah, what a weary time it must have seemed! At last there came the Easter when you loosed the coward gases. Surely you have got the rascals now! Yes, they choke, but never waver, and again the moment passes Without one leaf of laurel for your brow. Then at Hooge you had them helpless, for their guns were one to ten. And you blasted trench and traverse at your will, You had them dead and buried " but they still sprang up again. A year, my Lord of Wiirtemberg " a year, or nearly so, Since first you faced the British vis-d-vis! Your learned Commandanten are the men who ought to know. But to ordinary mortals it would seem a trifle slow, If you really mean to travel to the sea.

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I hope presently to combine whatever is worth preserving in my three volumes of verse, so as to make a single collection. Beaten and broke in the fight, But sticking it, sticking it yet, Trying to hold the line, Fainting and spent and done ; Always the thud and the whine, Always the yell of the Hun. When our Corporal shouted " Stand to! Our throats they were parched and hot, But, Lord! We, we were down on our knees, Praying for us and for them, Praying with tear-wet cheek, Praying with outstretched hand. I could speak for a week, But how could you understand? How could your cheeks be wet? How was it then with England? Little she said to foe or friend, True, heart true, to the uttermost end, Her passion cry was the scathe she wrought, In flame and steel she voiced her thought And all was well with England. With drooping sword and bended head, She turned apart and mourned her dead, Sad sky above, sad earth beneath, She walked with God in the Vale of Death Ah, woe the day for England! How is it now with England? She sees upon her mist-girt path Dun drifting shapes of fear and wrath. Bend low the knee! She has been guided, and will be And all is well with England. Where are those others who fought and fell, Outmanned, outgunned and scant of shell, On the deadly curve of the Ypres hell, Barring the coast to the last? Where are those others hi this glad tune, When the standards wave and the joy- bells chime, And London stands with outstretched hands Waving her children in? To each his dreams, and mine to me, But as the shadows fall I see That ever-glorious company The men who bide out there. Rifleman, Highlander, Fusilier, Airman and Sapper and Grenadier, With flaunting banner and wave and cheer, They flow through the darkening air. And yours are there, and so are mine, Rank upon rank and line on line, With smiling lips and eyes that shine. And bearing proud and high. Three plain words are all that matter, Mid the gossip and the chatter, Hopes in speeches, fears in papers, Pessimistic froth and vapours Haig is moving! We can turn from German scheming, From humanitarian dreaming, From assertions, contradictions, Twisted facts and solemn fictions Haig is moving! He is moving, he is gaining, And the whole hushed world is straining, Straining, yearning, for the vision Of the doom and the decision Haig is moving! And yet the hush Shivers and trembles with some subtle stir, Some far-off throbbing like a muffled drum, Beaten in broken rhythm oversea, To play the last funereal march of some Who die to-day that Europe may be free. And as I listen, all the garden fair Darkens to plains of misery and death, And, looking past the roses, I see there Those sordid furrows with the rising breath Of all things foul and black. But still I gaze afar, and at the sight My whole soul softens to its heart-felt prayer, " Spirit of Justice, Thou for whom they fight, Ah, turn in mercy to our lads out there! How long, O Lord? See where the lure of Ypres calls you! Perhaps you scarce remember The far-off early days of that resistance. Or was it in November? And now the leaves are turning and you stand in mid-September Still staring at the Belfry in the distance. Can you recall the fateful day a day of drifting skies, When you started on the famous Calais onset? Can it be the War-Lord blundered when he urged the enterprise? Was there one amongst that bristle-headed circle of commanders Ever ventured the opinion that a little town of Flanders Would hold you pounded here through all the seasons? You all clasped hands upon it. There is valour in the French, there is patience in the Russian, But blend all war-like virtues and you get the lordly Prussian," And the bristle-headed murmured, " Das ist so. Degenerate and drunken ; if the dollars chink and rattle, 3 o YPRES Tis the only sort of music that will call thenj to the battle. You broke him, and you broke him, but you broke him all hi vain, For he and his contemptibles kept closing up: And on the day when Gheluvelt lay smoking in the sun, When Von Deimling stormed so hotly in the van, YPRES 31 You smiled as Haig reeled backwards and you thought him on the run, But, alas for dreams that vanish, for before the day was done It was you, my Lord of Wiirtemberg, that ran. A dreary day was that but another came, more dreary, When the Guard from Arras led your fierce attacks, Spruce and splendid in the morning were the Potsdam Grenadiere, But not so spruce that evening when they staggered spent and weary, With those cursed British storming at their backs. Haste, my Lord, and enter in, Or the War-Lord may have telegrams for you. Then came the rainy winter, when the price was ever dearer, Every time you neared the prize of which you

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Drills in hall, and drills outdoors, And drills of every type, Till we wore our boots with forming fours, And our coats with " Shoulder hipe! Not bad for the old brigade! A good two hundred thousand came, On the chance of that east coast fight ; They may have been old and stiff and lame, But, by George, their hearts were right! Fall out, the guard! The old home guard! Carry on, old Sport, carry on! There where the in-turned lantern gleams It shines on khaki and on brass ; Across its yellow slanting beams The arm-locked lovers slowly pass. Creeping shadows blur the gloom, Thicken and darken, pass and fade ; Again and yet again they loom, One ruby spark above each shade Twelve ships in all! They glide so near, One hears the wave the fore-foot curled, And yet to those upon the pier They seem some other sterner world. The coon-song whimpers to a wail, The treble laughter sinks and dies, The lovers cluster on the rail, i With whispered words and straining eyes. And silent duty on the sea. Pent in by frowning mountains high, It stretches silent as the tomb, Turbid and thick its waters lie, No eye can pierce their yellow gloom. Twas here that on a summer day Four tourists hired a crazy wherry. No warning voices bade them stay, As they pushed out on Loch McGarry. Bob Ainslie, late of London Town, A spruce young butterfly of fashion, A wrinkle hi his dressing-gown Would rouse an apoplectic passion. John Waters, John the self-absorbed, With thoughts for ever inward bent, Complacent, self-contained, self -orbed, Wrapped in eternal self-content. Drifting they watched the heather hue, The waters and the Jiffs that bound them ; The air was still, the sky was blue, Deceitful peace lay all around them. When sudden oh, that dreadful scream! That cry from panic fear begotten! The boat is gaping in each seam, The worn-out planks are old and rotten. The yellow water, thick as pap, Is crawling, crawling to the thwarts, And as they mark its upward lap, So fear goes crawling up their hearts. Slowly, slowly, thick as pap, The creeping yellow waters rise ; Like drowning mice within a trap, They stare around with frantic eyes. Ah, how clearly they could see Every sin and shame and error! How they shouted for assistance! How they fruitlessly appealed To the shepherds in the distance! How they sobbed and how they moaned, As the waters kept encroaching! How they wept and stormed and groaned, As they saw their fate approaching! And they vowed each good resolve Should be permanent as granite, Never, never, to dissolve, Firm and lasting like our planet See them sit, aghast and shrinking! Surely it could not be true! See the crazy wherry reel! Downward to the rocks she flounders Just one foot beneath her keel! In the shallow, turbid water Lay the saving reef below. Oh, the waste of high emotion! Oh, the useless fear and woe! And with half-amused compassion They were viewed from the hotel, From the pulp-clad beau of fashion, To the saturated belle. So misfortunes of to-day Are the blessings of to-morrow, And the wisest cannot say What is joy and what is sorrow. The vision of a jealous Jove Was far above their feeble ken ; They had no Lord who gave them love, But scowled upon all other men. But in our dispensation bright, What noble progress have we made! We know that we are in the light, i And outer races in the shade. With tender guides the soul would go And there, in some Elysian bower, The tiny bud plucked here below Would ripen to the perfect flower. Our faith makes plain That, if no blest baptismal word Has cleared the babe, it bears the stain Which faithless Adam had incurred. How wise and well-conceived a plan Which holds the new-born babe to blame For all the sins of early man! Nay, speak not of its tender grace, But hearken to our dogma wise: Guilt lies behind that dimpled face, And sin looks out from gentle eyes. Quick, quick, the water and the bow! Quick with the words that lift the load! Oh, hasten, ere that tiny soul Shall pay the debt old Adam owed! The Roman thought the souls that erred Would linger in some nether gloom, But somewhere, sometime, would be spared To find some peace beyond the tomb.

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