

Classic Poetry Series

Herbert Asquith

- poems -

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The Fallen Subaltern

The starshells float above, the bayonets glisten;
We bear our fallen friend without a sound;
Below the waiting legions lie and listen
To us, who march upon their burial-ground.

Wound in the flag of England, here we lay him;
The guns will flash and thunder o'er the grave;
What other winding sheet should now array him,
What other music should salute the brave?

As goes the Sun-god in his chariot glorious,
When all his golden banners are unfurled,
So goes the soldier, fallen but victorious,
And leaves behind a twilight in the world.

And those who come this way, in days hereafter,
Will know that here a boy for England fell,
Who looked at danger with the eyes of laughter,
And on the charge his days were ended well.

One last salute; the bayonets clash and glisten;
With arms reversed we go without a sound:
One more has joined the men who lie and listen
To us, who march upon their burial-ground.

Herbert Asquith

The Volunteer

Here lies a clerk who half his life had spent
Toiling at ledgers in a city grey,
Thinking that so his days would drift away
With no lance broken in life's tournament:
Yet ever 'twixt the books and his bright eyes
The gleaming eagles of the legions came,
And horsemen, charging under phantom skies,
Went thundering past beneath the oriflamme.

And now those waiting dreams are satisfied;
From twilight to the halls of dawn he went;
His lance is broken; but he lies content
With that high hour, in which he lived and died.
And falling thus he wants no recompense,
Who found his battle in the last resort;
Nor needs he any hearse to bear him hence,
Who goes to join the men of Agincourt.

Herbert Asquith