

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Vance Palmer**

**- poems -**

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## **The Farmer remembers the Somme**

Will they never fade or pass!  
The mud, and the misty figures endlessly coming  
In file through the foul morass,  
And the grey flood-water ripping the reeds and grass,  
And the steel wings drumming.

The hills are bright in the sun:  
There's nothing changed or marred in the well-known places;  
When work for the day is done  
There's talk, and quiet laughter, and gleams of fun  
On the old folks' faces.

I have returned to these:  
The farm, and the kindly Bush, and the young calves lowing;  
But all that my mind sees  
Is a quaking bog in a mist - stark, snapped trees,  
And the dark Somme flowing.

Vance Palmer

## **The Pathfinders**

NIGHT, and a bitter sky, and strange birds crying,  
The wan trees whisper and the winds make moan,  
Here where in ultimate peace their bones are lying  
In gaunt waste places that they made their own,  
Beyond the ploughed lands where the corn is sown.

Death, and untrodden ways, and night before them,  
From sheltering homes and friendly hearths they came;  
Far from the mouldering dust of those that bore them  
They rest in silence now and know no fame,  
No proud stone speaks, no waters lip the name.

Brave and undaunted hearts, eyes lit with laughter,  
Minds that outran the ancient doubts and fears,  
They blazed the track for legions following after,  
And bared new treasure to the hungry years,  
Till spent with strife they sank amongst the spears.

Slow sinks the glowing flame and fades the ember,  
No bright star flickers and the woods are stark,  
But still our children's children will remember  
The swift forerunners, bearers of the ark,  
Who lit the beacons in the uncharted dark.

Rich towns shall flourish on the hills that hold them,  
Bright dreams shall quicken from their wandering dust,  
And till the end our reverent minds shall fold them  
In storied chambers free from moth and rust:  
The fealty pledged, the kingdom given in trust.

Vance Palmer

## Youth and Age

Youth that rides the wildest horse,  
Youth that throws the deadliest steer,  
Spending strength without remorse,  
Grappling with the ghosts of fear,  
Knows it only holds to-day  
All it freely flings away.

Youth that rides a race with Death  
When the frightened cattle break,  
Living in the moment's breath,  
Risking all for honour's sake,  
Lightly knows it holds in fee  
Life and immortality.

Age that rides the spavined grey,  
Age that seeks the safest track,  
Scenting perils by the way,  
Dreaming of the journey back,  
Leaves behind it all the truth  
Known to the wild heart of youth.

Vance Palmer