

Classic Poetry Series

Leslie Coulson
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Leslie Coulson(1889 - 1916)

Leslie Coulson was a journalist and poet. He served in Gallipoli and on the Western Front during the First World War, until his death during fighting on the Somme in October 1916.

Born in Kilburn Coulson's early career saw him become a well-known pre-war journalist, eventually attaining a position as assistant editor of the Morning Post.

With the arrival of war in Europe in August 1914 Coulson was prompt in volunteering to serve as a ranker with the Royal Fusiliers within the space of a month. He set sail on Christmas Eve 1914 for Malta. He was never to return.

He became ill with mumps before he saw active service.

Coulson penned his first war poem while in hospital - appropriately named A Soldier in Hospital. He served in Gallipoli during 1915, during which time he was wounded, Coulson received a posting to France he was recently promoted to Sergeant following the Allied evacuation of the peninsula.

His best-known poem - Who Made the Law - was written while serving and trying to survive in the trenches of the Western Front, he wrote of his disdain and lack of confidence in the politicians and military authorities who determined that war should exist and be continued.

He was killed - a bullet in the chest - during a British attack upon the German stronghold position of Dewdrop Trench during the Somme Offensive on 8 October 1916 aged 27.

Coulson's father Frederick edited a bestselling collection of his son's poems and published them as From an Outpost and Other Poems in 1917. The collection sold 10,000 copies during 1917.

..But A Short Time To Live

Our little hour,—how swift it flies
When poppies flare and lilies smile;
How soon the fleeting minute dies,
Leaving us but a little while
To dream our dream, to sing our song,
To pick the fruit, to pluck the flower,
The Gods—They do not give us long,—
One little hour.

Our little hour,—how short it is
When Love with dew-eyed loveliness
Raises her lips for ours to kiss
And dies within our first caress.
Youth flickers out like wind-blown flame,
Sweets of to-day to-morrow sour,
For Time and Death, relentless, claim
Our little hour.

Our little hour,—how short a time
To wage our wars, to fan our hates,
To take our fill of armoured crime,
To troop our banners, storm the gates.
Blood on the sword, our eyes blood-red,
Blind in our puny reign of power,
Do we forget how soon is sped
Our little hour?

Our little hour,—how soon it dies:
How short a time to tell our beads,
To chant our feeble Litanies,
To think sweet thoughts, to do good deeds.
The altar lights grow pale and dim,
The bells hang silent in the tower—
So passes with the dying hymn
Our little hour.

Leslie Coulson

From An Outpost

I've tramped South England up and down
Down Dorset way, down Devon way,
Through every little ancient town
Down Dorset way, down Devon way.
I mind the old stone churches there,
The taverns round the market square,
The cobbled streets, the garden flowers,
The sundials telling peaceful hours
Down Dorset way, down Devon way.

The Meadowlands are green and fair
Down Somerset and Sussex way,
The clover scent is in the air
Down Somerset and Sussex way.
I mind the deep-thatched homesteads there
The noble downlands, clean and bare.
The sheepfolds and the cattle byres,
The blue wood-smoke from shepherd's fires
Down Dorset way, down Devon way.

Mayhap I shall not walk again
Down Dorset way, down Devon way,
Nor pick a posy in a lane
Down Somerset and Sussex way.
But though my bones, unshriven, rot
In some far distant alien spot,
what soul I have shall rest from care
To know that meadows still are fair
Down Dorset way, down Devon way.

Leslie Coulson

From The Somme

In other days I sang of simple things,
Of summer dawn, and summer noon and night,
The dewy grass, the dew wet fairy rings,
The larks long golden flight.

Deep in the forest I made melody
While squirrels cracked their hazel nuts on high,
Or I would cross the wet sand to the sea
And sing to sea and sky.

When came the silvered silence of the night
I stole to casements over scented lawns,
And softly sang of love and love's delight
To mute white marble fauns.

Oft in the tavern parlour I would sing
Of morning sun upon the mountain vine,
And, calling for a chorus, sweep the string
In praise of good red wine.

I played with all the toys the gods provide,
I sang my songs and made glad holiday
Now I have cast my broken toys aside
And flung my lute away.

A singer once, I now am fain to weep,
Within my soul I feel strange music swell,
Vast chants of tragedy too deep - too deep
For my poor lips to tell.

Leslie Coulson

Judgment

So be it, God, I take what Thou dost give,
And gladly give what Thou dost take away.
For me Thy choice is barren days and grey.
Unquestioning Thy ordered days I live,
I do not seek to sift in Reason's sieve -
Thou rangest far beyond our Reason's sway.
We are but poor, uncomprehending clay,
For Thou to mould as Thou dost well conceive.

But when my blanched days of sorrow end,
And this poor clay for funeral is drest,
Then shall my soul to Thy Gold Gate ascend,
Then shall my soul soar up and summon Thee
To tell me why. And as Thou answerest,
So shall I judge Thee, God, not Thou judge me.

Leslie Coulson

The God Who Waits

The old men in the olden days,
Who thought and worked in simple ways,
Believed in God and sought His praise.

They looked to God in daily need,
He shone in simple, homely deed;
They prayed to Him to raise their seed.

He sowed on mountain side and weald,
He steered the plough across the field,
He garnered in their harvest yield.

And if He gave them barren sod,
Or smote them with His lightning rod,
They yielded humbly to their God.

They searched the record of their days
To find and mend their evil ways,
Which made the wrath of God to blaze.

And if no evil they could find,
They did not say, 'Our God is blind,'
'God's will be done,' they said, resigned.

So played the old their humble part,
And lived in peace of soul and heart,
Without pretence of Reason's art.

But we have lost their simple creed
Of simple aim and simple need,
Of simple thought and simple deed.

Their creed has crumbled as their dust,
We do not yield their God as just,
Now question holds the place of trust.

Faith blossomed like the Holy Rod,
So grew the old men's faith in God.
We cannot tread the path they trod.

We were not born to anchored creed
That measures good and evil deed -
A guide to those who guidance need.

The God the old men hearkened to
We left, and in our image drew
And fashioned out a God anew.

That iron God, who still unfed,
Sits throned with lips that dribble red
Among the sacrificial dead.

Belching their flames between the bars,
Our fires sweep out like scimitars
Across the Eden of the stars.

And souls are sold and souls are bought,
And souls in hellish tortures wrought
To feed the mighty juggernaut.

The dripping wheels go roaring by
And crush and kill us where we lie
Blaspheming God with our last cry.

Man's cry to man the heaven fills;
We hear not in our marts and mills
The silent voices of the hills

The message of the breathing clay,
Calling us through the night and day
To come away, to come away!

For though old creeds, had we the will,
We cannot, lacking faith, fulfil,
The God above all creed waits still.

For still beyond the city gate,
The fallow fields eternal wait
For us to drive our furrow straight.

The Rainbow

Watch the white dawn gleam,
To the thunder of hidden guns.
I hear the hot shells scream
Through skies as sweet as a dream
Where the silver dawn-break runs.
And stabbing of light
Scorches the virginal white.
But I feel in my being the old, high, sanctified thrill,
And I thank the gods that the dawn is beautiful still.

From death that hurtles by
I crouch in the trench day-long,
But up to a cloudless sky
From the ground where our dead men lie
A brown lark soars in song.
Through the tortured air,
Rent by the shrapnel's flare,
Over the troubleless dead he carols his fill,
And I thank the gods that the birds are beautiful still.

Where the parapet is low
And level with the eye
Poppies and cornflowers glow
And the corn sways to and fro
In a pattern against the sky.
The gold stalks hide
Bodies of men who died
Charging at dawn through the dew to be killed or to kill.
I thank the gods that the flowers are beautiful still.

When night falls dark we creep
In silence to our dead.
We dig a few feet deep
And leave them there to sleep -
But blood at night is red,
Yea, even at night,
And a dead man's face is white.
And I dry my hands, that are also trained to kill,
And I look at the stars - for the stars are beautiful still.

Leslie Coulson

Who Made The Law ?

Who made the Law that men should die in shadows ?
Who spake the word that blood should splash in lanes ?
Who gave it forth that gardens should be bone-yards ?
Who spread the hills with flesh, and blood, and brains ?
Who made the Law ?

Who made the Law that Death should stalk the village ?
Who spake the word to kill among the sheaves,
Who gave it forth that death should lurk in hedgerows,
Who flung the dead among the fallen leaves ?
Who made the Law ?

But who made the Law ? the Trees shall whisper to him:
'See, see the blood - the splashes on our bark !'
Walking the meadows, he shall hear bones crackle,
And fleshless mouths shall gibber in silent lanes at dark.
Who made the Law ? At noon upon the hillside
His ears shall hear a moan, his cheeks shall feel a breath,
And all along the valleys, past gardens, croft, and homesteads,
HE who made the Law,
He who made the Law,
He who made the Law
shall walk along with Death.
WHO made the Law ?

Leslie Coulson