

Doyle Arthur Conan

The Guards Came Through, and Other Poems



Arthur Doyle

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PREFACE

I must apologize for the size of this booklet, which can only be justified on the grounds that there is some demand for the contents as recitations. I hope presently to combine whatever is worth preserving in my three volumes of verse, so as to make a single collection.

Arthur Conan Doyle.

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.
God! shall I ever forget?
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.
Northumberland, Lancaster, York,
Durham and Somerset,
Fighting alone, worn to the bone,
But sticking it, sticking it yet.

Never a message of hope,
Never a word of cheer,
Fronting Hill 70's shell-swept slope,
With the dull, dead plain in our rear;
Always the shriek of the shell,
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!"
And I hear some one cry, "Clear the front for the Guards!" —
And the Guards came through.

Our throats they were parched and hot,
But, Lord! if you'd heard the cheer,
Irish, Welsh and Scot,
Coldstream and Grenadier —
Two Brigades, if you please,
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.
Lord! I could speak for a week,
But how could you understand?
How could your cheeks be wet?
Such feelin's don't come to you;
But how can me or my mates forget

How the Guards came through?

“Five yards left extend!”
It passed from rank to rank,
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.
Man! it was great to see!
Man! it was great to do!
It's a cot, and a hospital ward for me,
But I'll tell them in Blighty wherever I be,
How the Guards came through.

VICTRIX

How was it then with England?
Her faith was true to her plighted word,
Her strong hand closed on her blunted sword,
Her heart rose high to the foeman's hate,
She walked with God on the hills of Fate —
And all was well with England.

How was it then with England?
Her soul was wrung with loss and pain,
Her face was grey with her heart's-blood drain,
But her falcon eyes were hard and bright,
Austere and cold as an ice-cave's light —
And all was well with England.

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.

How was it then 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.

THOSE OTHERS

Where are those others? – the men who stood
In the first wild spate of the German flood,
And paid full price with their heart's best blood
For the saving of you and me:
French's Contemptibles, haggard and lean,
Allenby's lads of the cavalry screen,
Gunnery who fell in Battery L,
And Guardsmen of Landrecies?

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,
The cold that cramped and froze;
The weary night, the chill bleak day,
When earth was dark and sky was grey,
And the ragged weeds in the dripping clay
Were all God's world to those.

Where are those others in this glad time,
When the standards wave and the joy-bells chime,
And London stands with outstretched hands
Waving her children in?
Athwart our joy still comes the thought
Of the dear dead boys, whose lives have bought
All that sweet victory has brought
To us who lived to win.

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!

HAIG IS MOVING

August 1918

Haig is moving!
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!

Haig is moving!
We can turn from German scheming,
From humanitarian dreaming,
From assertions, contradictions,
Twisted facts and solemn fictions —
Haig is moving!

Haig is moving!
All the weary idle phrases,
Empty blamings, empty praises,
Here's an end to their recital,
There is only one thing vital —
Haig is moving!

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!

THE GUNS IN SUSSEX

Light green of grass and richer green of bush
Slope upwards to the darkest green of fir.
How still! How deathly still! 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,
Spans with its shimmering arch the flowery zone;
In all God's earth there is no gentler scene,
And yet I hear that awesome monotone.
Above the circling midge's piping shrill,
And the long droning of the questing bee,
Above all sultry summer sounds, it still
Mutters its ceaseless menaces to me.

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. My heart is hot
Within me as I view it, and I cry,
“Better the misery of these men's lot
Than all the peace that comes to such as I!”

And strange that in the pauses of the sound
I hear the children's laughter as they roam,
And then their mother calls, and all around
Rise up the gentle murmurs of a home.
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!”

“The froward peoples have deserved Thy wrath,
And on them is the Judgment as of old,
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!
How long, O Lord?” He sends no answer back,
But still I hear the mutter of the guns.

YPRES

September, 1915

Push on, my Lord of Württemberg, across the Flemish Fen!
See where the lure of Ypres calls you!
There's just one ragged British line of Plumer's weary men;
It's true they held you off before, but venture it again,
Come, try your luck, whatever fate befalls you!

You've been some little time, my Lord. 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?
For surely it's a weary while since first before your eyes

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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