

**OXFORD  
POETRY 1920**

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# OXFORD POETRY

1920

EDITED BY

V. M. B., C. H. B. K., A. P.

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
EDMUND BLUNDEN (QUEEN'S)	
SHEET LIGHTNING - - - - -	1
FOREFATHERS - - - - -	3
G. H. BONNER (MAGDALEN)	
SONNET - - - - -	5
VERA M. BRITAIN (SOMERVILLE)	
BOAR'S HILL, OCTOBER, 1919 - - - - -	6
THE LAMENT OF THE DEMOBILIZED - - - - -	7
DAPHNE - - - - -	8
G. A. FIELDING BUCKNALL (EXETER)	
UNTO DUST - - - - -	9
ROY CAMPBELL (MERTON)	
THE PORPOISE - - - - -	10
BONGWI'S THEOLOGY - - - - -	11
ERIC DICKINSON (EXETER)	
THREE SONNETS - - - - -	12
LOUIS GOLDING (QUEEN'S)	
THE MOON-CLOCK - - - - -	14
COLD BRANCH IN THE BLACK AIR - - - - -	15
I SEEK A WILD STAR - - - - -	16
ROBERT GRAVES (ST. JOHN'S)	
MORNING PHOENIX - - - - -	17
L. P. HARTLEY (BALLIOL)	
CANDLEMAS - - - - -	18
B. HIGGINS (B.N.C.)	
ONE SOLDIER - - - - -	21
WINIFRED HOLTBY (SOMERVILLE)	
THE DEAD MAN - - - - -	22

## Contents

	PAGE
R. W. HUGHES (ORIEL)	
THE ROLLING SAINT - - - - -	23
THE SONG OF PROUD JAMES - - - - -	25
E. W. JACOT (QUEEN'S)	
HERE'S A DAFFODIL - - - - -	26
NURSERY RHYMES - - - - -	26
G. H. JOHNSTONE (MERTON)	
SUMMER - - - - -	27
"IPSE EGO . . . ." - - - - -	28
C. H. D. KITCHIN (EXETER)	
OPENING SCENE FROM "AMPHITRYON" - - - - -	29
V. DE S. PINTO (CHRIST CHURCH)	
ART - - - - -	38
ALAN PORTER (QUEEN'S)	
LIFE AND LUXURY - - - - -	39
A FAR COUNTRY - - - - -	44
HILDA REID (SOMERVILLE)	
THE MAGNANIMITY OF BEASTS - - - - -	45
EDGELL RICKWORD (PEMBROKE)	
INTIMACY - - - - -	46
GRAVE JOYS - - - - -	47
ADVICE TO A GIRL FROM THE WARS - - - - -	48
YEGOR - - - - -	49
STRANGE ELEMENTS - - - - -	50
W. FORCE STEAD (QUEEN'S)	
THE BURDEN OF BABEL - - - - -	51
L. A. G. STRONG (WADHAM)	
FROST - - - - -	55
VERA VENUSTAS - - - - -	55
A BABY - - - - -	56
FROM THE GREEK - - - - -	56
A DEVON RHYME - - - - -	56
THE BIRD MAN - - - - -	57
CHRISTOPHER MARLYE - - - - -	58



EDMUND BLUNDEN  
(QUEEN'S)

## SHEET LIGHTNING

WHEN on the green the rag-lag game had stopt,  
And red the lights through alehouse curtains glowed,  
The clambering brake drove out and took the road.  
Then on the stern moors all the babble dropt  
Among those merry men, who felt the dew  
Sweet to the soul and saw the southern blue  
Thronged with heat lightning leagues and leagues abroad,  
Working and whickering; snake-like; winged and clawed;  
Or like old carp lazily rising and shouldering.  
Long the slate cloud flank shook with the death-white smouldering;  
Yet not a voice:

The night drooped oven-hot;  
Then where the turnpike pierced the black wood plot,  
Tongues wagged again and each man felt the grim  
Destiny of the hour speaking through him;  
And then tales came of dwarfs on Starling Hill,  
And those young swimmers drowned at the roller mill,  
Where on the drowsiest noon the undertow  
Famishing for life boiled like a pot below:  
And how two higglers at the "Walnut Tree"  
Had curst the Lord in thunderstorm and He  
Had struck them into soot with lightning then—  
It left the pitchers whole, it killed the men.  
Many a lad and many a lass was named  
Who once stept bold and proud—but death had tamed  
Their revel on the eve of May: cut short  
The primrosing and promise of good sport,  
Shut up the score book, laid the ribbands by:  
Such bodings mustered from the fevered sky;  
But now the spring well through the honeycomb  
Of scored stone rumbling tokened them near home,

## Sheet Lightning

The whip lash clacked, the jog-trot sharpened, all  
Sang "Farmer's Boy" as loud as they could bawl,  
Till at the "Walnut Tree" the homeward brake  
Stopt for hoarse ribaldry to brag and slake.

The weary wildfire faded from the dark  
While this one damned the parson, that the clerk;  
And anger's balefire forked from the unbarred blade  
At word of notches missed or stakes not paid:  
While Joe the driver stooped with oath to find  
A young jack rabbit in the roadway, blind  
Or dazzled by the lamps, as stiff as steel  
With fear. Joe beat its brain out on the wheel.

## FOREFATHERS

HERE they went with smock and crook,  
Toiled in the sun, lolled in the shade,  
Here they mudded out the brook  
And here their hatchet cleared the glade:  
Harvest-supper woke their wit,  
Huntsman's moon their wooings lit.

From this church they led their brides;  
From this church themselves were led  
Shoulder-high; on these waysides  
Sat to take their beer and bread:  
Names are gone—what men they were  
These their cottages declare.

Names are vanished, save the few  
In the old brown Bible scrawled,  
These were men of pith and thew,  
Whom the city never called;  
Scarce could read or hold a quill:  
Built the barn, the forge, the mill.

On the green they watched their sons  
Playing till too dark to see,  
As their fathers watched them once,  
As my father once watched me;  
While the bat and beetle flew  
On the warm air webbed with dew.

Unrecorded, unrenowned,  
Men from whom my ways begin,  
Here I know you by your ground,  
But I know you not within—  
All is mist, and there survives  
Not one moment of your lives.