

LETTERS AND DIARY

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Letters and diary by Alan Seeger

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ALAN SEEGER

**LETTERS
AND DIARY**

Fourth Printing

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"The quality that most strikes the reader is his notable facility in visualizing both material beauty and human emotion and clothing them in sumptuous and opulent language."—*New York Times*.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

LETTERS AND DIARY
OF
ALAN SEEGER



Alan Seeger

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ALAN SEEGER

Jeune légionnaire, enthousiaste et énergique, aimant passionnément la France. Engagé volontaire au début des hostilités, a fait preuve au cours de la campagne d'un entrain et d'un courage admirables.—Glorieusement tombé le 4 juillet 1916.

(Citation à l'ordre du jour de la Division du Maroc,
26 décembre 1916.)

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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PREFATORY NOTE

THOSE who have read the published poems of Alan Seeger and the sympathetic sketch of his life by Mr. William Archer, in his introduction, cannot have failed to appreciate the motives that led the young American, in his great love for France and her cause, to take up arms in her behalf as a common soldier in the ranks of the Foreign Legion. But it is one thing to yield to a generous impulse and quite another to adhere faithfully to a high resolve through wretched and tiresome hours of unaccustomed hardship and distasteful surroundings. In these pages, written from day to day and from week to week, unchanged and unpolished by afterthought, in the endeavor to make them appear nobler and more consistent than they were when first set down in diary or intimate letter,—no word will be found, either of complaint, of wavering or of discouragement. The miseries of life in the trenches, the exhaustion from long marches, the ennui of inaction, are related simply and faithfully, but, at the same time, they are accepted as the inevitable lot of the soldier and borne with patience pending the arrival of the

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hour of battle, for which he longs. Even when cramped in the trenches, this lover of beauty can take keen pleasure in an occasional glimpse of a picturesque vista through the *créneaux*; nor, when his endurance is taxed to the utmost to hold out until the end of a march that lays low many a stronger man among his comrades, does he fail to remember and record the sunlit verdure of the meadows bordering the dusty road along which he toils, with heavy burden, weary almost to the point of dropping. In the lonely vigils of sentry duty, during the hours between night and dawn, when the most courageous feel spirit and hope at the lowest ebb, he can find consolation in "a kind of comradeship with the stars."

So a knowledge of the character and life of Alan Seeger would not be complete without the revelation of patient endurance and steadfast devotion to an ideal contained in this volume. While they lend a confirmatory value to his later poems, written during the same period, they enhance, by contrast, the beauty of his earlier verse, the product of years when the pleasures of life were his goal, and danger and self-sacrifice unthought of. One has only to turn from almost any page of this book, chosen at random, to the sonnets of "Juvenilia," to discover a new pathos in the lines and to feel more

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keenly the extent and nobility of the renouncement.

But these pages tell not merely of strain and trial. There are glorious moments of exultation in taking part in the mightiest struggle of history. There is the thrill of the "Marseillaise" and the weird martial music of the *Tirailleurs*. There is rejoicing in the contact with other brave and strong men. There is the pride of surmounting toil and hardship, which outlasts the suffering. And in spite of the love of life which endured to the last,—inferior only to his conviction that a life could only be worth living when filled with the most vivid emotions,—we know that the manner of Alan Seeger's death was that which he himself had chosen. It threw a brighter and clearer light upon his word and deed and so dignified both that they will live the longer for the years that were cut off from his life on earth. There is solace, too, in the remembrance of what he had written, when the sight of death had become familiar and the peril of it imminent:

"Death is nothing terrible after all. It may mean something more wonderful than life. It cannot possibly mean anything worse to the good soldier."