

SONGS OF PEACE

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Songs of peace by Francis Ledwidge & Edward Dunsany

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FRANCIS LEDWIDGE & EDWARD DUNSANY

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BY
FRANCIS LEDWIDGE
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY LORD DUNSANY



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September, 1916.

IN this selection that Corporal Ledwidge has asked me to make from his poems I have included "A Dream of Artemis," though it was incomplete and has been hurriedly finished. Were it not included on that account many lines of extraordinary beauty would remain unseen. He asked me if I did not think that it ended too abruptly, but so many pleasant things ended abruptly in the summer of 1914, when this poem was being written, that the blame for that may rest on a meaner, though more exalted, head than that of the poet.

In this poem, as in the other one that has a classical theme, "The Departure of Proserpine," those who remember their classics may find faults, but I read the "Dream of Artemis" merely as an expression of things that the poet has seen and dreamed in Meath, including a most beautiful description of a fox-hunt in

the north of the county, in which he has probably taken part on foot; and in "The Departure of Proserpine," whether conscious or not, a crystallization in verse of an autumnal mood induced by falling leaves and exile and the possible nearness of death.

The second poem in the book was written about a little boy who used to drive cows for some farmer past the poet's door very early every morning, whistling as he went, and who died just before the war. I think that its beautiful and spontaneous simplicity would cost some of our writers gallons of midnight oil.

Of the next, "To a Distant One," who will not hope that when "Fame and other little things are won" its clear and confident prophecy will be happily fulfilled?

Quite perfect, if my judgment is of any value, is the little poem on page 53, "In the Mediterranean—Going to the War."

Another beautiful thing is "Homecoming" on page 70.

"The sheep are coming home in Greece,
Hark the bells on every hill,
Flock by flock and fleece by fleece."

One feels that the Greeks are of some use, after all, to have inspired—with the help of their sheep—so lovely a poem.

“The Shadow People” on page 83 seems to me another perfect poem. Written in Serbia and Egypt, it shows the poet still looking steadfastly at those fields, though so far distant then, of which he was surely born to be the singer. And this devotion to the fields of Meath that, in nearly all his songs, from such far places brings his spirit home, like the instinct that has been given to the swallows, seems to be the key-note of the book. For this reason I have named it *Songs of Peace*, in spite of the circumstances under which they were written.

There follow poems at which some may wonder: “To Thomas McDonagh,” “The Blackbirds,” “The Wedding Morning”; but rather than attribute curious sympathies to this brave young Irish soldier I would ask his readers to consider the irresistible attraction that a lost cause has for almost any Irishman.

Once the swallow instinct appears again—in the poem called “The Lure”—and a longing

for the South, and again in the poem called "Song": and then the Irish fields content him again, and we find him on the last page but one in the book making a poem for a little place called Faughan, because he finds that its hills and woods and streams are unsung. Surely for this if there be, as many believed, gods lesser than Those whose business is with destiny, thunder and war, small gods that haunt the groves, seen only at times by few, and then indistinctly at evening, surely from gratitude they will give him peace.

DUNSANY

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