

**SONNETS FROM
THE PATAGONIAN**

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Sonnets from the Patagonian by Donald Evans

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DONALD EVANS

**SONNETS FROM
THE PATAGONIAN**

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DISCORDS

TWO DEATHS IN THE BRONX

NINE POEMS FROM A VALETUDINARIUM

SONNETS FROM THE PATAGONIAN

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Sonnets from the Patagonian

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(Donald E Evans)

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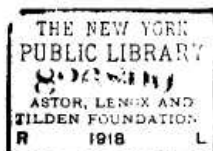
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My dear Cornwall Hollis:

With the Allied cause crumbling away it is high time we thought of aesthetics. As a triste jest I said that to you the other day, and your reply was a plea to let you write a preface for a new edition of my forgotten Sonnets from the Patagonian. I am at last persuaded, and who but you should do the preface?

With Mitteleuropa a fact it should be apparent to any honest, thinking man that we are losing the War. Perhaps, in a larger sense, we have already lost the War and the dusk of the Anglo-Saxon is come. Then we are at last joined with the Hellenes and Latins in the descending scale, and it is the Teuton now approaching the perihelion, with the Slav, yet to conquer, in the far distance. But that is an eye-survey for eternity, and we have merely to do with the finite present. So we may still think of resistance, and not yet abandon hope of postponing defeat.

It is now the hour for the supreme test of America, and she too must fail, as our Allies have failed, before the Huns unless somewhere she can find the beauty and the strength of the human soul with which to give battle. For the first time in history it is souls, not guns, that will win the War, and remember, my dear friend, that Beauty is more necessary than food that the soul may live.

We are all but engulfed in error. We say that we do not hate the German people; it is the Kaiser we are fighting. A pitiful self-delusion! It must be the German people we hate as an overshadowing race, if our fight is to have even the excuse of the inflamed passion of the survival of the fittest. We must acknowledge the Kaiser as the symbol of the best organized form of government, unless we are frankly anarchists; the most efficient, the most powerful, the most nearly approaching a practical socialism. Let us, therefore, start afresh. We hate the German people, for they have threatened our complacent supremacy as lords of the world. Now we are at least truthful.

Thus far, the Allies have failed signally as a military force. The Europeans have forgotten how to fight, and we in America have never learned. We have put too much faith in materialism, and betrayed the Soul and Beauty. There is more to life than living, and more to an army than arms. The moment is here that demands we scrap the military leaders, as such, and seek stronger. Why not then turn to the Poets to direct the War, for, lo! it was the Poets who in seven days won the Irish Revolution. None knows better than you how I begrudge giving the ever-turbulent West Britons any praise, any glory, but there is the simple truth. They vanquished the foe because they first had conquered fear, and then nought could stand against them.

If we could purge ourselves of our fear of Germany we should capture Berlin. Could I enlist a Battalion of Irreproachables, whose uniforms should be walking suit, top hat and pumps, and their only weapon an ebony stick, and sail tomorrow, we should march down Unter den Linden in a month, provided wrapped in our kerchiefs we carried the Gospel of Beauty, and a nonchalance in the knot of our cravats.

Verily, verily, men are killed solely because they fear death, and turn their backs on Beauty, for only ugliness and error can destroy, and ugliness in the end destroys itself.

There is really no horror in the War. Even in the ridiculous way we are now fighting it is all a shabby, stupid sham. That chap Griffith gave us a more realistic spectacle in "The Birth of a Nation." Far too few men are actually killed and wounded, and the job is much too large for the materialists. They do not know how to employ effectively the huge forces they have raised into being.

If somehow we can grope our way back to the springs of Beauty all may yet be saved, but it will require the sacrifice of everything we have. For myriads it will mean the offering of their lives, for that is all they possess, and it must be done freely, gladly, with their souls purified, if it is to avail anything. Pride, ambition, selfishness, self-will must go, or we perish blind miserables.

For myself, you know I am willingly in service as a common soldier, although some years beyond conscription age. Ungrudgingly I gave up alcohol—almost a lifelong necessity—and for months I, the Epicurean, have been dispassionately measuring the supposed hardships of war that I might truly understand what a soldier has to undergo. With Beauty in the bloodbeat privation is nothing. What can touch me now except the amusing joy of giving up for the common good? Yet who actually loves humankind less than I? But the subordination idea intrigues me, possesses me, satisfies me. How better can I prove my patent of snobbery and my innate right cordially to dislike my fellowmen?

The social degradation involved in functioning as an enlisted man was and, of course, is the worst of the annoyances. I am neither young enough nor sufficiently demo-

cratic to enjoy day after day a below-stairs status. It is a trial, I confess, but I venture to persuade myself that I do all that is required of me with admirable abasement and detachment. Occasionally, indeed, it is capital fun to play the anonymous cipher. I am often urged to obtain a commission. But I cannot quite do that, for would not that be a confession that I hadn't the pluck to stick it out? I must remain as I am. Many of my contemporaries are finding the khaki an easy means of increasing their literary reputations. Wise brothers, ye have chosen your rôles. I prefer mine.

Before you have seen my book through the press I may be dead. With all my heart I hope I shall not come back, for then impersonally I shall have fallen for a cause in which I have no faith. What more distinguished end for an incurable poseur? Have I not been called that? Plant, I beg you, mignonette to encircle my arrowroot fields.

What has all this to do with the Sonnets from the Patagonian? If you will read my words aright they will give the key to my poems, should you, my beloved Hollis, still lack a key. The volume when it first appeared was not liked by divers nice people—it was thought nasty—but none put it down till he had finished it; a terror was on him lest he miss a word. And the terror was the Sword of Beauty which slayeth all. Intrepidity . . .

But you shall interpret the poems yourself.

DONALD EVANS.

I have broken my engagement to write a preface, but have given you, gentle Reader, the Poet's letter instead.

CORNWALL HOLLIS.