

# **ABOVE THE BATTLE**

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Above the Battle by Romain Rolland & C. K. Ogden

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**ROMAIN ROLLAND & C. K. OGDEN**

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"The fire smouldering in the forest of Europe was beginning to burst into flames. In vain did they try to put it out in one place; it only broke out in another. With gusts of smoke and a shower of sparks it swept from one point to another, burning the dry brushwood. Already in the East there were skirmishes as the prelude to the great war of the nations. All Europe, Europe that only yesterday was sceptical and apathetic, like a dead wood, was swept by the flames. All men were possessed by the desire for battle. War was ever on the point of breaking out. It was stamped out, but it sprang to life again. The world felt that it was at the mercy of an accident that might let loose the dogs of war. The world lay in wait. The feeling of inevitability weighed heavily even upon the most pacifically minded. And ideologues, sheltered beneath the massive shadows of the cyclops, Proudhon, hymned in war man's fairest title of nobility. . . ."

*"This, then, was to be the end of the physical and moral resurrection of the races of the West! To such butchery they were to be borne along by the currents of action and passionate faith! Only a Napoleonic genius could have marked out a chosen, deliberate aim for this blind, onward rush. But nowhere in Europe was there any genius for action. It was as though the world had chosen the most mediocre to be its governors. The force of the human mind was in other things—so there was nothing to be done but to trust to the declivity down which they were moving. This both the governing and the governed classes were doing. Europe looked like a vast armed camp."*

*Jean-Christophe, vol. x (1912).*

[English translation by Gilbert Cannan, vol. iv, p. 504.]

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BY  
ROMAIN ROLLAND

TRANSLATED BY  
C. K. OGDEN, M. A.  
(*Editor of The Cambridge Magazine*)

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,  
Be not dishearten'd, affection shall solve the problem of  
freedom yet.*

*(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?  
Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?  
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so  
cohere.)"*

THESE lines of Walt Whitman will be recalled by many who read the following pages: for not only does Rolland himself refer to Whitman in his brief Introduction, but, were it not for a certain *bizarrierie* apart from their context, the words "Over the Carnage" might perhaps have stood on the cover of this volume as a striking variant on *Au-dessus de la Mêlée*.

Yet though the voice comes to us over the carnage, its message is not marred by the passions of the moment. After eighteen months of war we are learn-

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ing to look about us more calmly, and to distinguish amid the ruins those of Europe's intellectual leaders who have not been swept off their feet by the fury of the tempest. Almost alone Romain Rolland has stood the test. The two main characteristics which strike us in all that he writes are lucidity and common sense—the qualities most needed by every one in thought upon the war. But there is another feature of Rolland's work which contributes to its universal appeal. He describes our feelings and sensations in the presence of a given situation, not what actually passes before our eyes: he describes the effects and causes of things, but not the things themselves. Through his work for the *Agence internationale des prisonniers de guerre*, to which one of the articles now collected is largely devoted, he is, moreover, in a position to observe every phase of the great battle between ideals and between nations which fills him with such anguish and indignation. And with his matchless insight and sympathy he gives permanent form to our vague feelings in these noble and inspiring essays.

It will not, however, surprise the vast public who have read *Jean-Christophe* to find that while so many have capitulated to the madness of the terrible

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year through which we have passed, Rolland has remained firm, and has surpassed himself. He was prepared. As the extract placed at the beginning of this volume shows, he was one of the few who realized only too well the horror he was powerless to prevent. Yet he made every effort to open the eyes of Europe and especially of the young, so many of whom had learned to look up to him as a leader. To these young men, one of the finest essays in the present collection is primarily addressed—*O jeunesse héroïque du monde.....*

Eighteen months have passed and they still endure the terrible ordeal, the young men of Germany and France, whom he had striven so hard to bring together; on whose aspirations and failings *Jean-Christophe* is a critical commentary. The movements and tendencies of society were there given a dramatic embodiment, permeated for Rolland by the Life Force—that struggle between Good and Bad, Love and Hatred, which makes life worth living. All is set down with the clear analysis of feeling natural to a musical critic. But in spite of his burning words on the destruction of Rheims, Rolland, as is clear from his other critical and biographical writings, is more interested in men than