

Poems 1917 – 1918

By

Gnr Andrew Lane
43rd Battery
Canadian Field Artillery

Here on the top of Vimy Ridge I stand
And looking out behold so vast a land
Still dear to France though mauled by alien hand
So long a time.

What wreckage here, where once was landscape fair
What woeful damage done beyond compare
To this broad plain below, so rare so rare
Which once did smile.

There in the valley lies the village torn
By German shell and rendered quite forlorn
Where not long since youth wandered night and morn
And breathed its love.

What is that grey streak in the distance far?
A chalky trench which Germans try to mar
And rob therefrom the flower of the war
With cruel shell.

Here is some lonely but triumphant grave
Of some much loved unknown Canadian brave
Who gave his life, freedom and truth to save
For all mankind.

There, there and there wherever one may look
One sees that Death has swung his reaping hook
And then *swift winged forsook, in faith forsook*
The noble dead.

Is this the end, the end of godly fight?
Or is there something still more radiant bright?
Can not it be that upward into Light
Their souls have flown?

When shall it end, when all this torture cease?
When liberty can get an age long lease
To unmolested roam where'er she please
In this wide world.

So there is something greater than to breathe
It is to keep alive life's verities
To keep Light's flickering torch aglow and leave
The rest to God

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

An orchard this or what was known as such
Before fierce War caught men within his clutch
But now a mass of broken trunk and bough
As though rough demons there had made a row.
And row it was and demons fierce they were
Which spread such havoc and made trees so bare
Which took fair land and cast it into gloom
Where yesterday there was so rich a bloom
But Nature comes and on this orchard bare
Pours healing balm of soil and sun and air
And nurtures it and clothes it with fair leaves
And heals the scars with every passing breeze
Until at last once more bare barren gloom
Is covered o'er with verdure and a bloom
So is it with life's smoking flax and reeds
Crushed by the weight of their own wayward deeds
And demons strong of generations past
Whose blood is in their veins and travels fast.
To them may come the healing balm of God
If they respond unto His magic rod
If from Himself they sip some essence fine
Which stirs them at the core, making sublime
Once more, that which should ever have been so

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

"What right have I to life?" the young man cried
As he looked down and on the grass espied
The prostrate form and youthful face of him
Who not long since with life had bubbled to the brim.

What right have I to life and him laid low?
Except that God has still for me another show
In this great cause to which we pledged our name
From which we can't withdraw without disgrace and shame.

"What right to life have you and I?" I plead
As long as Liberty is made to bleed and bleed
No right at all except to use that life
To free her for mankind from brutal mangling strife

And if perchance we see her freed from strife
'Twill ours be, afresh, to consecrate our life
To guard that gift obtained by many a grave
The glorious heritage given us by men so brave.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

"A close one that". "Yes rather adjacent"
"Here comes another". "Here's where we duck",
Thus spoke two linesmen out on a hunt
For a break in their wire on the Western front.
"There's a good deep one", the leader said.
Each jumped to a shell hole to save his head
Both held their breath and hugged the ground
While over their heads passed the projectile.

"God what a crash"! "Beat it, beat it
Out to a flank, out of this hell".
They leapt from their shelter and ran apace
Then flopped themselves down flat on their face
Their heart in their mouth. A moments wait
And they sped away with a shuffling gait
Another roar and another crash
But farther away, thank God for that.

Taut nerves lose their grip
But still they are calm
Except for that sweat all over their frame.
The work of the demons of German fame.
Along they walk with leisurely stride
Silently, silently side by side
They looked at each other and pantingly said
God what a life but saved again.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

Sitting by a ruined wall
In Northern France one day
I beheld a pear tree tall
Just across the way.

Its limbs were torn and tattered
By shell, brick and mortar
The trunk was badly battered
By a hell called war.

And yet its leaves were healthy
And blossoms rare it bore
Which made it look quite wealthy
Beside comrades sore.

Deep down its roots were intact
From earth it sipped its food
And kept a point of contact
With the source of good.

So may we when misfortune
*O'*ertakes us on Life's sea
Learn a great mighty lesson
From the old pear tree.

We may be greatly shaken
In body or in soul
But life we'll greatly sweeten
And play a goodly role;

If we keep the roots of life
Fixed firmly and aright
In a greater grander Life
Known as God or Light.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

"Tis June, my lad, 'tis June
We'll have a stroll today.
The month will pass too soon
Let's use it while we may.

Thus spoke a khaki boy
In sunny France one day
We'll all the day employ
To show we're more than clay.

Roses - and beauties too
Grown wild from lack of care
Oh! - every kind of hue
Look there and there and there.

My God that's just like home
Except for grass and weed
I'm glad I took this roam
It is just what I need.

Bluebells and poppies too -
Poppies so brilliant red
Bluebells of such a blue
Yes, everywhere we tread.

Thoughtful pansies velvet
Banked up against that wall
My God it makes me sweat
When I think of it all;

The lives that have been spent
The homes that are destroyed
The land that has been rent
By the means employed.

In slaughtering mankind
C-rump - Bingo - Wh-irr
By Jove, I've changed my mind
We'll not wander farther.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

He was my friend was Hugh,
A man both staunch and true.
One who was always there
When he must dare

*He heard the call of God
Upon Canadian sod
And shaped his life aright
With all his might.*

*His friends were proud of him
He was so full of vim
And he used it for good
Where'er he could*

He heard the call anew.
And so he crossed the blue
To fight for Liberty
And right; and he

Died there, at Passchendaele
Amidst a storm and gale
Of shell and bullets fierce
That maul and pierce

He paid the mighty price –
A life of sacrifice
For *Something to him dear* –
’Twas God was near.

He’s yonder on the crest.
No, no! he’s with the blessed
In full activity.
What else can be!

He’s the eternal goal!
He played the selfsame role
As Christ of Galilee
In less degree.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

'Tis evening and a stillness holds the air
No sound of gun is heard along the front
Uncanny quiet the passing soldiers grunt
And shuffle on to their respective care

'Tis evening and the breezes softly blow
They waft my way a fragrance quite divine
Of roses rare on which the sun did shine
Maturing them by subtle process slow.

'Tis evening, quiet, in the battle zone
The yellow beams of setting sun reach out
Across the dreary ruined scene about
Which once did ring with more melodious tone.

'Tis evening and I'm steeped in reverie
Of glorious beauty in this grand old world
Which into war by guilty hoards are hurled
Because one race said, "All must be like Me".

'Tis evening but my reverie has ceased
The guns spit out once more an awful roar
My God! My God! but war's an awful bore
In truth, it is the world's most hideous beast.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

There's a bonnie bonnie lassie living far across the sea
I love her more than ever, because she writes to me
When I come home at night in my mud stained clothes
She's always there to greet me in spite of foes.

I've been running running places since I came out to France
But she always turns up to sustain me with her glance
When the shells come very fast, and everything's hot
She's always there, By Jove, right on the spot.

Last night Fritz bowled some minenwurfers out over No Mans Land
My God there were some crashes close to our little band.
Parted in the traverse we met in the bay
She laughed in my face in a pleasant way.

She's a treasure in the trenches there can be no doubt of that
She's a mighty presence when one hears the rat-tat-tat.
She's an angel guarding places dull and drear
She looks and smiles and banishes my fear.

I would not lose my bonnie girl for a thousand pound a year
She's worth more than many millions; she's a perfect dear
Although she follows me where'er I may roam
I wish I were with her in our own home.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

The morn had come, the morn fixed for the strafe
The gunners all were up at peep of day.
All bustled round with mild but careless laugh
Which ever was, and is, the British way

The tension grew as minutes lagged or flew
The dawn showed up the cheerless Flanders scene
The hour arrived; the major said, "stand to"
And every man 'stood to' with wondering mien.

One minute more to go! A breathless pause
Then from the guns there poured a ceaseless roar
And men across the way, in Death's grim jaws
Were grasped and crushed because they willed such gore

Flash here, flash there, from all that fiery brood
Was evidence of the mighty power of man
To save himself from odious servitude
To those whose only God is ruthless Caliban.

Such men as these are any nation's pride
Men who hold life in utter disregard
While Tyranny across their path does stride
With pompous strut, as though we were his ward.

Let's hope the time will come when men shall learn
That world dominion is a hopeless dream
Then shall the age for which we all do yearn
Be ushered in, with all increasing stream.

Andrew Lane
1917 - 1918

ANDREW LANE

Andrew Lane was born in 1886 in Kinloss Township, Bruce County, the second youngest of a family of five boys and one girl.

After teaching for a number of years, in the spring of 1916, he interrupted his studies at the University of Toronto, along with great number of his classmates to join the 43rd Battery of the Field Artillery of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. This Battery was commissioned by Col David MacRae in Guelph. He was a gunner with the Battery and after the war resumed his studies at U of T. After graduation he became a minister in Drumbo ON where he also met his wife Jessie Mitchell.

In 1926 he assumed the role of school superintendent at the Georgetown Boys Farm near Georgetown ON. This farm was organized around 1923 to accept one hundred orphaned boys from Armenia and to integrate them into Canadian society. After a year in this post he recommended that the boys be billeted with local farmers so that they could work and learn the Canadian way of life. A few years later this recommendation was followed. However the Georgetown Boys kept in close contact with each other over the coming half century and celebrated with their new wives and families at their annual reunion in Georgetown.

In 1927 Andrew and Jessie went to New York for a year where Andrew earned a Bachelor of Divinity from Columbia University.

In the years that followed he served United Church of Canada congregations in Petrolia, Forest, Clinton, Brussels and Lakeside before retiring in Thamesford. He died in 1978 in Goderich.

