

OUT IN THE DARK

Poetry of the First World War

in context and with basic notes

Edited by David Roberts



This war engendered an intensity of emotion and a poetic outpouring which included the finest war poetry ever written. The changing feelings - from early excitement and patriotism or doubt, through bewilderment, grief, compassion, anger and bitter regret - are all here in this compelling and informative collection.

Saxon Books

scene in R C Sherriff's play, *Journey's End* shows how a would-be deserter might have been dealt with.

MORAL CONFLICT

R E Vernède, having been wounded in 1916 was offered a safe job working in the War Office, but believed so strongly in the need to oppose the Germans that he insisted on returning to the front line. For Vernède, whilst believing in the rightness of his cause, there was bewilderment at the contrast between his actions and his moral principles.

A LISTENING POST

The sun's a red ball in the oak
And all the grass is grey with dew,
A while ago a blackbird spoke -
He didn't know the world's askew.¹

And yonder rifleman and I
Wait here behind the misty trees
To shoot the first man that goes by,
Our rifles ready on our knees.

How could he know that if we fail
The world may lie in chains² for years
And England be a bygone tale
And right be wrong, and laughter tears?

Strange that this bird sits there and sings
While we must only sit and plan -
Who are so much the higher things -
The murder of our fellow man . . .

But maybe God will cause to be -
Who brought forth sweetness from the strong³
Out of our discords harmony
Sweeter than that bird's song.

R E Vernède, 1917

¹ twisted, in a mess ² *world may lie in chains* - countries may come under German control
³ *sweetness from the strong* - reference to the Bible story (Judges, chapter 14) of honey made by bees in the body of a dead lion.