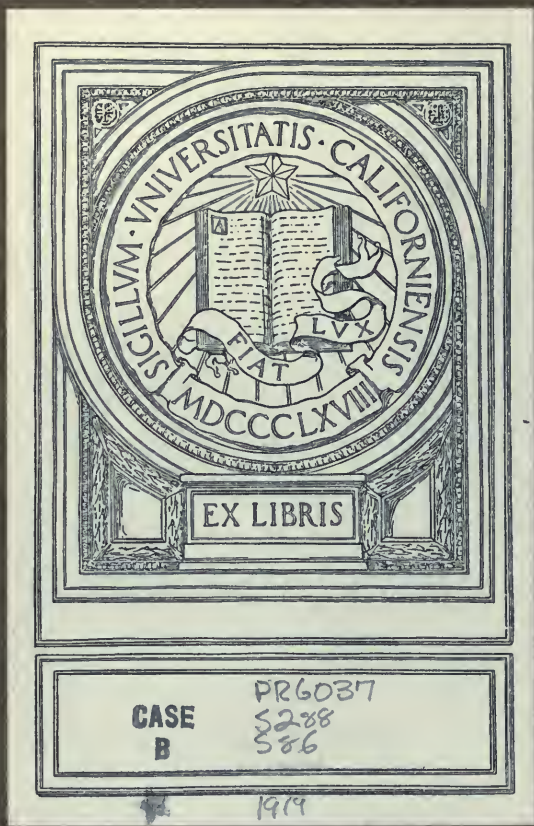


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1979

A SUPPRESSED POEM

by

Sassoon
SIEGFRIED SASSOON

Saul Kain says . . . Good-bye to all that . . . gravely



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The Unknown Press

A 1919 D

..... Siegfried had been shot through the head while making a daylight patrol through long grass in No Man's Land. And he wrote me a verse letter It is the most terrible of his war-poems:

American Red Cross Hospital, No. 22,
98-99 Lancaster Gate, W. 2.

Dear Roberto,
I'd timed my death in action to the minute—
(The *Nation* with my deathly verses in it)—
The day told off—13—(the month July)—
The picture planned— O Threshold of the dark!
And then, the quivering songster failed to die
Because the bloody bullet missed its mark.

Here I am; they *would* send me back—
Kind M.O. at Base 1; Sassoon's morale grown slack;
Swallowed all his proud high thoughts and acquiesced.
O Gate of Lancaster, O Blightyland the Blessed . . .

No visitors allowed
Since friends arrived in crowd. . . .
Jabber—Gesture—Jabber—Gesture—Nerves went fut
and failed
After the first afternoon when
MarshMoonStreetMeiklejohnArdoursandenduranSitwell
itis prevailed,¹
Caused complications and set my brain a-hop;
Sleeplessexasperuicide, O Jesu make it stop!

But yesterday afternoon my reasoning Rivers ran
Solemnly in. With peace in the pools of his
Spectacled eyes and a wisely omnipotent grin;
And I fished in that steady grey stream and
Decided that I, After all am no longer
The worm that refuses to die. But,
A gallant and glorious lyrical soldier;
Bolder and bolder; as he gets older;
Shouting, 'Back to the Front. . . .
For a scrimmaging Stunt. . . .
(I wish the weather wouldn't keep on getting colder.)

.1 Visits from Edward Marsh, Robert Ross, Roderick Meiklejohn, Robert Nichols, Osbert Sitwell.

Oh yes, he's doing very well and sleeps from two till four
And there was jolly Thingumbob a-knocking at the door—
But Matron says she mustn't, not however loud she knocks
(Though she's bags of golden daisies and some raspberries,
in a box),
Be admitted, To the wild and wobbly-witted
Soldier-poet with a plaster on his crown. . . .

My God, my God, I'm so excited; I've just had a letter
From Stable who's commanding the Twenty-fifth
Battalion.

And my company, he tells me, doing better and better,
Pinched six Saxons after lunch, And bagged
Machine-guns by the bunch—

But I—wasn't there—
O blast, it isn't fair—
Because they'll all be wondering why
Captain Sassons wasn't standing by
When they came marching home.

But I don't care; I made them love me although
They didn't want to do it, and I've sent them a
Glorious gramophone and God send you back to me
Over the green eviscerating sea—And I'm
Ill and afraid to go back to them because those
Five-nines are so damned awful.
When you think of them all bursting and you're
Lying on your bed, With the books you loved and
Longed for on the table; and your head, All
Crammed with village verses about daffodils and geese
. . . . O Jesu make it cease. . . .



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