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“A Fight to a Finish”  
& other Songs of Peace  
Sung in War Time

*By S. Gertrude Ford*  
*Author of “Lyric Leaves,” &c.*

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Sung in War Time.**

By S. Gertrude Ford, Author of “Lyric Leaves,” &c.



London : C. W. Daniel, Ltd.,  
Graham House, Tudor St., E.C.  
1917.

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To  
THEODORA WILSON WILSON,

In gratitude for her two books,  
"The Last Weapon" and "The Weapon Unsheathed,"  
I dedicate my own.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE.

These poems have appeared in the *Millgate Monthly*, the *Daily News*, the *Co-operative News*, the *Herald*, the *Graphic*, the *Woman at Home*, and the *Missionary Echo*. To the editors of these periodicals my thanks are due for their courtesy in permitting republication.

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**“A Fight to a Finish,”  
and Other Songs of Peace.**

**ERRATA.**

*P. 10.* “THE POET IN WAR TIME.”

*Line 2 :* “Discern” should read Discerns.

*Line 4 :* “Saddest Septembers” should read  
Saddest of Septembers.

~~Now should he fear the fear that paisteth,~~  
That can the light of all things shadow and blur?

They bound him, mocked, maltreated; wounded sore  
They left him, crying “Coward.” So once the rude  
Cries of the crowd rang round the Tree that bore  
Leaves for the healing of the nations strewed.  
Few then His followers; now, the wide world o’er,  
Behold them as the stars for multitude.

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9. The Legacy of the Book

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**“A Fight to a Finish,”  
and Other Songs of Peace.**

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A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR.

*(Founded on Fact.)*

His crime was that he loved Peace; followed her  
For Christ's sake, in His name, even to the death  
Faithful; and felt in war red murder's breath  
Volleying the flames of hell, the blasts that stir  
Bedrock of world-foundations. Messenger  
Of Truth, and hearing what the Spirit saith,  
How should he fear the Fear that palsieth,  
That can the light of all things shadow and blur?

They bound him, mocked, maltreated; wounded sore  
They left him, crying “Coward.” So once the rude  
Cries of the crowd rang round the Tree that bore  
Leaves for the healing of the nations strewed.  
Few then His followers; now, the wide world o'er,  
Behold them as the stars for multitude.

## THE WAR AGAINST WAR.

They bid us fight each other,—they who hold  
The sceptre of rule; the Powers who have controlled  
The peoples from the first, our work and will  
To their own idols sacrificing still,  
War-gods of iron, market-gods of gold.

And still to holier warfare, as of old,  
Peace calls, and Freedom: foes of hunger and cold,  
Oppression, ignorance, they would have us kill,  
They bid us fight.

Hear we and heed! Under one flag enrolled,  
As many flocks seeking the common fold,  
Join we the nobler army Peace shall drill  
For bloodless battle, armed with strength and skill  
By Freedom wrought. They lead us forth: behold!  
They bid us fight.

## “C’EST LA GUERRE.”

The race depleted, dwindling; whole lands lying  
’Twixt agony and torpor; fields untilled  
And homes unbuilt; none left to plough or build;  
The widowed wife, the child unfathered crying;  
And, all night long, a deeper, sadder sighing,  
Desecrate maidenhood’s; the green bud killed  
Ere it could open; all earth’s sunshine chilled,  
A carnival of death, a world-wide dying!

This monster ravening on our best, this dragon  
Slain, yet, by no St. George; this ghastly scar  
On life’s fair face; this over-foaming flagon  
Filled with heart’s blood for wine; this Juggernaut  
car,  
Suffer we yet? God! Man! dethrone the Dagon  
Licensed to kill because his name is War!

“ MEN OF SEVENTEEN.”

“ Men of seventeen may be called up should the war continue.”—

*Vide Press.*

“ Several lads of seventeen have volunteered here ; some are already  
in the trenches. Midshipmen of seventeen have often ‘ seen fire.’ ”

—*Extract from a Letter.*

They had not played their play-time out ; wide wonder  
Looked from their eyes ; Life seemed a goodly ship  
Bound for the Happy Isles—a prosperous trip,  
Clear skies above, the seas unruffled under.  
How should they dream of gale and fire and thunder,  
The red gulf eddying near, the rude wind’s whip ?  
Hardly the golden dawn was on their lip  
When their blithe world and they were rent asunder.

“ Men of seventeen must go ! ” Men ! These were  
playing,

Not twelve years back, as merry infants play.  
They knew but April dreams of Love a-maying  
With Life ; of woods where June kept holiday.  
These do we slay and make no end of slaying ?  
Dear Christ ! when shall we learn Thy wiser way ?

A MOTHER’S HEART.

It was but a mother’s heart  
Caught in the wheels of war :  
The war-lords knew, from the start,  
That the wheels went far.

Knew they would grind and crush ;  
Knew, but what cared they ?  
War-lords have means to hush  
What their women say !

So the boys went, nor cursed  
This that the kings had done :  
Seven brave boys, at first.  
Now, not one.

Long did the mother weep?  
Frenzied she died instead.  
What then? “Women are cheap”  
The war-lords said.

Did *they* reel and smart  
Under the sevenfold stroke?  
It was but a woman’s heart  
That they took and broke.

### THE POET IN WAR-TIME.

One who, in war,  
Discern Peace as a fixed, not fallen star;  
Regards, remembers  
What May was, in the saddest Septembers;  
Whose voice has notes  
Of Nature’s; in whose life her fragrance floats,  
And yet whom Art  
Chastens; who has her loveliness by heart;  
Whose eyes have seen  
Always behind the yellow leaf the green;  
Whose ears, when dim  
Defeat is rumoured, hear the conqueror’s hymn,  
And in whose soul,  
Ever, its everlasting keynotes roll;  
Who, though all ill  
Conspire to mock at song, goes singing still,  
Interpreting,  
As robins do, to winter’s world the spring;  
Who, when to dust  
The whole world crumbles, in the Unseen can trust,  
And look above,  
And hope on, and inveterately love;—  
Let the world know it  
Or not, that man, that woman is a Poet.

### THE FOES.

They had fought, fought hard, with each other,  
Brother with brother.  
Foes were they? So men say.  
They are friends to-day.

Never they saw each other.  
Brother slew brother  
Unhating . . . why, they forget,  
Now they have met.

Each laughs out to the other,  
Brother to brother,  
“Friend I sought through the world! you—you  
Are the man I slew!”

They have made a league with each other,  
Brother with brother:  
Foes, dead on the gun-swept sod;  
Friends, alive in God.

### A WAR WIDOW.

*(Of a Gordon Highlander.)*

Twa years, nae mair, I'd been his wife,  
Twa months he'd been my bairnie's daddy,  
When, near and far, the cry was “War!”  
An' he maun gang, my soldier laddie!

There's mony a Jock maun lea' his Jean,  
An' mony a bairn maun miss its daddy.  
Sae I an' mine were left lang syne,  
An' noo he's deid, my soldier laddie!

Wha cares when wives an' mither's greet?  
(Whist, whist, puir bairn without a daddy!)  
Ther's Ane above; His name is love,  
An' He kens fine my soldier laddie!

AN UNGARDENED CITY.

(April, 1916.)

“ The black-robed city, widowed mother of men.”

—From a poem in the *Saturday Westminster*.

While young leaves laugh on every thorn  
Even in this year of war's red blight,  
Why does she sit alone, forlorn,  
Under the April light?

A widow indeed, in mourning yet,  
Shut from the sun, her kindly lord,  
The Eden-land can she forget,  
Seeing the flaming sword?

Smoke from the pyre whereon she wastes  
Goes up to heaven and blots its blue ;  
Ashes and acrid flame she tastes  
For pleasant air and dew.

A widow indeed ! she mourns the mirth  
Seared in her little children even :  
Dark, dark to her the joy of earth,  
The very light of heaven !

Here, like a lamb without a fold,  
Strays still the flock that no man keeps.  
One wept above a City of old,  
To-day the City weeps.

O, when peace comes, will men set free  
Her slaves, her stones with roses strew,  
Give back her sun, and let her be  
Garden and City too?



THE DARKEST HOUR.

Dim shapes that lurk and lour,  
Dim veils close-drawn :  
It is that darkest hour  
Before the dawn.

No voice from earth or heaven !  
Nor breeze, nor bird ;  
No little whisper, even,  
From leaves scarce stirred.

. . . The night grows less opaque,  
Grows grey and strange.  
Does the thick darkness break,  
Cleft with a change?

Morning, though red clouds lour !  
The veil's withdrawn.  
Knew'st thou, O darkest hour,  
Thy child was Dawn?

AT NIGHT (1915).

Night was driving her purple car—  
Wheels of wind, and a tethered star.

Over the ways with dead men strewn  
Calm she went as the calm, white moon.

Fields she saw that were slumber-sealed,  
And, unsleeping, the battle-field.

Peace she saw not, the world's desire ;  
Storm she saw, and a spreading fire ;

Fierce hands grasping a reddened blade,  
A woman that wept, and a child that prayed.

Did she see, as the world rolled round  
Into the dawn, that the lost was found?

See at last, by serener stars  
Vanquished, the wane and the fall of Mars?

Haply, at end of the way she trod,  
Man's red way, she had sight of God.

Wheels of wind and a tethered star—  
Night, bring light, to a world at war !

### THE THIRD RED CHRISTMAS (1916).

A dark day, a dread day  
To hearts that craved its cheer,  
A wild day, a red day,  
Is Christmas Day this year !

The lads fight, the men fight  
(Who talks of man's good-will?)  
The sea yawns, the grave yawns,  
Full-fed but hungry still.

The wind weeps, the world weeps—  
Lost lamb with crimsoned fleece !  
And sin reigns, and woe reigns,  
And death reigns—where is Peace?

Yet yearn we, yet turn we  
To keep the ancient tryst :  
The Star shines, the Way shines,  
The End, in Jesus Christ.

For life lasts, for love lasts  
As where the shepherds met.  
The Day's born, the Child's born,  
For there are children yet.

Go seek Him, go find Him  
By hearths and tables bare !  
The tryst-day, the Christ-day,  
The Christ Himself is there.

#### A NEW YEAR VISION (1917).

No truce, no token  
That daylight broke !  
The guns had spoken,  
And still they spoke.  
Yet wintry starkness  
As spring grew bright :  
*The People that have walked in darkness  
Saw a great light.*

“No peace that could be”  
Was man's harsh word.  
The Peace that should be  
Yet woke, yet stirred.  
“Rejoice, rejoice !” said  
Winds south and north :  
“*Shall I bring to the birth,*” a Voice said,  
“*And not bring forth ?*”

On earth hope dieth,  
But not above.  
All with God lieth,  
And God is love.  
From what far fountains  
Does Light increase?  
—*Come, beautiful upon the mountains,  
The feet of Peace.*

### WHO IS THE ENEMY?

“Ask any German wife or mother if she loves War!”  
—*The Crown Princess of Germany.*

Fight we a People? Past the men who fought us,  
Men drilled to come whenever tyrants call,  
Behold the many who no ill have wrought us,  
Mothers and maids and children small!

Blinded their warriors, bound with spells fast-woven  
By haters of their freedom; yet shall these,  
Heirs still of Goethe, Heine and Beethoven,  
Be Truth's once more, and Liberty's.

Who lifts the sword? Not nation against nation,  
But rulers against rulers; war-lords here  
With war-lords there, lest world-wide federation  
The world should weld, the way should clear.

O woman, maker of man! you wrest from no man  
Life, for life's cost by you is paid and priced—  
Teach men to see a friend in every foeman,  
For Cain, World-Mother, give us Christ!

THE FIRST SNOWDROP.

(*A Parable of the War.*)

An icy crest on every hill ;  
No bird would sing, no rill would run.  
The snow was lord and master still  
Of fields forsaken of the sun.

Would any think that life could lurk  
In scenes so dumb and deaf and dead,  
That Spring would do her perfect work,  
And woods be clothed and flocks be fed?

Yet in a night the change came : soft  
The veering wind breathed, south by west,  
And great clouds piled themselves aloft,  
And earth and air the change confessed.

Rain and more rain ! then, in between,  
The blue sky peeped, one skylark sang,  
And where the long, last snow had been,  
White, bright, the year's first snowdrop sprang.

Ah, dream of Peace beyond belief !  
Art thou not as the snowdrop is,  
Born in a land without a leaf  
Which yet the sun has sealed as his?

Thy prophecy and promise bring  
Till need of both, at last, shall cease,  
Because Man, too, has found his Spring,  
Because the world has found its peace.

## WAR BETWEEN CHRISTIANS.

The seamless robe of Christ is rent asunder  
Once more; the guns His thrice-reiterant prayer  
    (“That they may all be one”\*) mock everywhere;  
The Cross stands shamed; the very heathen wonder.

Great is our land indeed, our cause yet greater,  
But Law, not War, should right the Christian's wrong!  
Did we but feign to echo Bethlehem's song,  
Or yields the early Gospel to a later?

Is it His own who compass His dethroning?  
To that sharp crown of Christ so meekly worn  
Add we, called Christians, yet another thorn?  
Was then for this, but this, His blood atoning?

O Teuton! hating so thy brother Briton,  
O Briton! hating him, unto the death,  
Forbear! for ye are both of Nazareth;  
For both Love's law was sealed and signed and written.

A great Light bear we to the lands yet darkened:  
Through us, the bearers, shall it flicker and fall  
    “Of one blood have I made the nations all”—  
O Lord! the word is Thine, but who hath hearkened?

\* See John xvii. 11, 21 and 22.

FAITH AND FEAR.

*(A Parable for the Nations.)*

Faith, one day, stood looking  
Toward a distant shore,  
Foes rode hard behind her ;  
Roared the flood before.  
Faith stood panting, trembling,  
Weeping sore.

Louder roared the torrent  
(Was it stream or sea?)  
Bridge, boat, ford had failed her ;  
Helpless waited she.  
Rose a Dragon, crying  
“ Cross by me ! ”

Sword or spear or armour  
Found she, smith or forge?  
Surely—he a Dragon,  
She no mailed St. George—  
Soon would he her whiteness  
Rend and gorge !

Faith looked up ; one moment  
Crossed her hands in prayer ;  
On the black bulk ventured  
With white feet and bare ;  
. . . Safely crossed, and knew not  
Scathe or scare.

Oh, the war-fiend's mighty !  
No mere myth or wraith.  
Life we see him rending,  
Life of life, to death.  
—Would he, were we fearless,  
Had we faith?

“ A FIGHT TO A FINISH. ”

“ Fight the year out ! ” the War-lords said :  
What said the dying among the dead ?

“ To the last man ! ” cried the profiteers :  
What said the poor in the starveling years ?

“ War is good ! ” yelled the Jingo-kind :  
What said the wounded, the maimed and blind ?

“ Fight on ! ” the Armament-kings besought :  
Nobody asked what the women thought.

“ On ! ” echoed Hate where the fiends kept tryst :  
Asked the Church, even, what said Christ ?



TO WOMEN.

*(In the three red years.)*

When, for all flames of this world-reddening fire,  
Ashes alone shall be and cinders charred,  
What shall be chiefly said, by scholar and bard,  
Of you whose deeds shall both alike inspire?  
Not that ye trod the flames and did not tire,  
Nor flinch, nor faint; not that with fixed regard,  
Hands scattering balms, and brows sublimely starred,  
Ye saw your own hearts waste amid the pyre;  
Not that ye laboured long, adventured far,  
Dared the grim sea and won the Golden Fleece,—  
The Right to Work,—through each long-hindering bar;  
Not that your praise did with your works increase,  
But that ye dwelt amid a world at war,  
O great example! as a race at peace.

NATURE IN WAR-TIME.

The banished thrush, the homeless rook  
Share now the human exile's woe.  
Mourns not that forest felled, which took  
Three hundred years to grow?  
Grieve not those meadows scarred and cleft,  
Mined with deep holes and reft of grass,  
Gardens where not a flower is left,  
Fouled streams, once clear as glass?  
And yon green vale where Spring was found  
Laughing among her daffodils . . . .  
Winds weep it now; a battle-ground  
Between two gun-swept hills.

O stars, bright eyes of heaven, grow dim  
Such ruined grace on earth to scan,  
Such works as only God could limn  
Wrecked by thy madness, Man !

TO ONE DISCOURAGED.

You doubt because the way of peace is rougher,  
Hard and still harder, than before?  
You marvel that the sons of peace should suffer?  
Christ suffered more.

The word, His word, you find that none will credit,  
Or but a mocked, a martyred few :  
“ If they have persecuted Me ” (Who said it?)  
“ Will they not you? ”

The grave, men say, the Life of Life has swallowed,  
Laughing to scorn His “ Follow Me ; ”  
And you, you climb a cross because you followed.  
True—did not He?

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