

Ten Years' Remembrance — 11th November 1928

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ARMY'S MUSIC OF MANY MEMORIES

Sad Smiles of the Thousands
Who Waited in Whitehall

PITY AND TEARS

By HENRY WILLIAMSON

(Winner of the Hawthornden Prize)

I am sitting on the smoke-blackened brick parapet of a flat leaden roof, opposite a monument of white stone which rises out of the wide street below.

Even if it rains we will not go away, for the day is the Eleventh of November, and this place is the Cenotaph, and we have come to be purged by pity and tears.

9.30 a.m.—The hats of the people agitating and shuffling just below are like the specks in a shelly beach—red, mussel-blue, black and brown as small pebbles. Two main streams are pressing inwards towards the Cenotaph, whose base is bright with the flowers we have sacrificed for our sentiments.

9.50 a.m.—A forest of wooden tripods has grown along the parapet on either side of me. Band music in the distance, coming from Trafalgar-square. *There's a long, long trail a-winding.* We smile, and each becomes a solitary in the past again.

THE WONDERFUL CROWD

Treble Lines of Police with a Rocklike
Mass Behind

9.51 a.m.—Below me the heads of two girls and a man suddenly droop. The crowd is now enclosed by the railings and treble lines of police before the Cenotaph. The pressure is terrific; no individual movement below the neck is visible. Six ambulance men, perfectly organised, carry them away gently.

9.53 a.m.—Grey coats, bearskins; it is the band of the regiment of the Guards, led by the gorgeous gold and purple figure of the

drum-major. Behind march troops in khaki, some bandoliered and spurred, some with arms sloped and bayonets fixed.

9.59 a.m.—More brazen music approaching. Street sweepers, bemedalled and wearing their wide black slouch hats, earnestly squeegee the footmarks scarcely visible on the immaculate roadway.

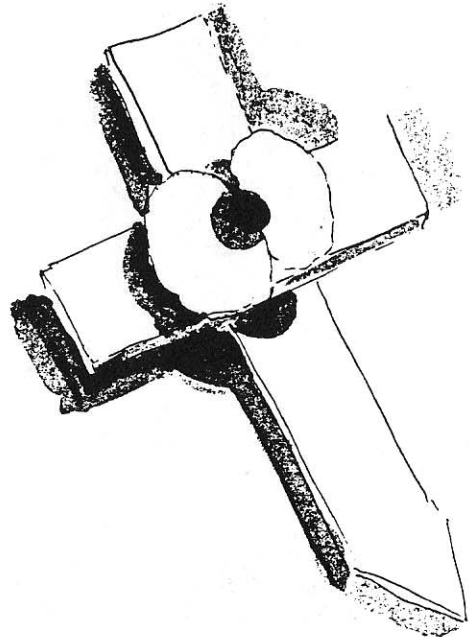
THE BAYONETS

10.1 a.m.—R.A.F. band march by: Lord Byng, the feathers of his new hat lifting in the breeze, walks slowly by, inspecting the cordons of his dutiful policemen.

10.5 a.m.—More martial (or maritime) music, leading a detachment of the Royal Navy with fixed bayonets. These sailors are every bit as smart as the gardees.

10.10 a.m.—Time passes very quickly. Frock coats appear, Flanders-poppy'd, and inspect the

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THE HOMAGE AT THE CENOTAPH

Brilliant Description by Mr. Henry Williamson

VOICE OF THE DEAD

Wreaths That Paid Tribute to Men of All Nations

(Continued from page 3).

Cenotaph. Immediately afterwards a Civil Servant appears with mop, obliterating footmarks.

10.12 a.m.—Royal Marines band arrives—white helmets, followed by bayonets.

Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash; And thinly drawn with jamishing for flesh.

10.14 a.m.—More music. No one fainting now. The music releases nervous (and physical) tension.

10.15 a.m.—A 'snowstorm' among the densely-packed people—the service programmes are being distributed. A battalion of Guards marches up, forming quadruple lines of black bearskins above long grey coats in front of the police cordons.

10.20 a.m.—Another band arrives, playing "Boys of the Old Brigade." We thrill—but 1914-1918 was not this.

10.25 a.m.—The blend of the uniform hues now massed around the Cenotaph is beautiful—hues of smoke, grey, blue, purple merging into the smoky stonework of the Government buildings.

10.25-10.30 a.m.—No music, murmurs of people swaying as one in the massed heat of bodies. Several more faint and are swiftly carried away.

WHITE-SURPLICED MEN

10.40 a.m.—Choir comes slowly from behind the Cenotaph. Gold and scarlet robes of choir-boys, blue and red and black frocks, all white-surpliced, of men. Behind choir walks a chaplain with a cross in front of the Bishop of London in crimson robes.

10.43 a.m.—Mr. Baldwin appears from behind the Cenotaph, followed by Cabinet Ministers and representatives of the British Empire and its friends.

They remove their tall hats, but Winston Churchill adjusts his more firmly, half crosses his legs, and leans on a stick.

10.45 a.m.—A hoarse voice cries, "Parade—Shun!" and echoes faintly away. His Majesty the King appears in khaki, with the Duke of York in Air Force blue, Prince Arthur of Connaught and Indian Princes

10.50 a.m.—The King walks forward and lays a wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph, adjusts it, walks back, turns about, and salutes. There

is a combined whirr from along the parapet of this roof, like machine guns filling the air with phantom hissing—the cinematograph machines.

After the Duke of York, the Prime Minister steps forward with his wreath.

LAUNCHED INTO SILENCE

Big Ben's Deep Notes That Took Thoughts Back to Times Gone By

11 a.m.—A note deep and sonorous, another deep note from Big Ben, and we are launched into silence and olden time.

Whitehall is a chasm, filled with grey silence, and the people are the dead; I am dead, but there is no Valhalla, only a strange immensity of twilight silence.

And I hear the voice of Wilfred Owen, dead in the war, the voice of our greatest, and therefore gentlest, poet, whose few verses, shining with the Christ spirit, have yet to find their home in the hearts and souls of men:—

*Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,
And heaven but as the highway for a shell,
You shall not hear their mirth. . . .*

It is a colossal moment—humanity for these two minutes seems as one—never in the world has this been since those Words that held the multitude on the slopes near the Garden. . . .

For us the wreaths are a symbol laid for all poor men of the Great War; the dead are of no nation.

*Let us lie out and hold the open truth.
Then when their blood hath clogged the chariot
wheels,*

*We will go up and wash them from deep wells.
What though we sink from men as pitchers
falling*

*Many shall raise us up to be their filling.
Even from wells we sunk too deep for war,
Even as One who bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend,*

*I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.*

Let us sleep now. . . .
Somewhere a girl is sobbing; the wings of a London pigeon soug in the air; a bit jingles far away, very distinct.

A solitary cough is loud in the air; but Silence settles as though we are beyond Time, and only the flapping of a leaf on the small plane tree is heard.

The maroons crash; it is finished; and we lift our heads for the "Last Post," the hymn that is sung and the glorious music of the "Reveille."

We hope that we are really awakening; we who are the Posterity of the Lost Generation. "Posterity, posterity, which . . . weeps . . . but never a bone the less dry, for all our tears."
HENRY WILLIAMSON.