

**ESSAYS,
POEMS, LETTERS**

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Essays, poems, letters by Bernard Pitt

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BERNARD PITT

**ESSAYS,
POEMS, LETTERS**



ESSAYS POEMS
LETTERS

BY

BERNARD PITT, M.A.

(ASSISTANT MASTER COOPER'S COMPANY'S SCHOOL),

LIEUT. BORDER REGIMENT,

ATTACHED TRENCH MORTAR BATTERY,

KILLED IN ACTION, APRIL 30TH, 1916.

LONDON :

FRANCIS EDWARDS, 83A, HIGH STREET, MARYLEBONE, W.

1917.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

SEVERAL of the verses included in this Volume appeared originally in the *Westminster Gazette*, and the Sonnet at the foot of the Introduction was first published in the Cooper Company's School Magazine. The Editors of the present Volume tender to the Editors of these Publications their appreciation of their kindness in permitting the reproduction of the Verses in this Volume.

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1917

INTRODUCTION.

I have been asked to select some of Bernard Pitt's poems for inclusion in this little memorial volume, and to write an Introduction.

Bernard Pitt was born in 1881. In April, 1915, he accepted a commission in the army, and in December of that year he was a trench mortar officer in France, obtaining the command of a battery in February, 1916. "He was observing his fire from the front trenches," writes his Brigadier to Mrs. Pitt, "and had just sent the man with him back to his mortars, when the Germans exploded a mine close to the spot, and we have been unable to find a trace of him since. . . . I was going to make him my staff officer. I took him out with me the other evening to make sure that he did not go up to the trenches out of his turn, as he was in the habit of doing. The place he fell is about 200 yards south-west of the five cross roads, half-way between Souchez and Givenchy, at 7 p.m., on 30th April.

"It may be that I can be of some use to you; your husband told me that you had four children. If I can in any way, I hope you will let me know. I have had no officer under me for whom I have had more admiration.

Yours sincerely,
E. W. SPEDDING, Brigadier-General."

The sad occasion is too dear for detailed criticism of Pitt's poetry, and no one will expect it. That he had the heart of a poet is most clearly seen, and enough poems are included to reveal a beautiful character and a fascinating personality. The work of so young a man must contain many echoes: those most plainly heard are echoes of Rosetti—in early poems he has a quaint Rosettilike fancy for strange and curious words; then of Mrs. Meynell, and there are fainter echoes of Keats and Swinburne. He was perhaps too daring in his range of metres, but it is surprising in how many he has not fared amiss. In spite of a

halting line here and there, due probably to hasty revision (the Firing Line last February would not conduce to that), no one will deny his dancing sense of lilt and rhythm. Some of the poems are really fine; let me call the reader's, even the critic's, attention to *Aphrodite in the Cloister*, *The Rosalys* poems, *Ballade of the Joy of Spring*, *February in the Firing Line*, *Kew Gardens* (especially July), the sonnet on *All Souls' Day*, *Nuit Blanche*, *Cophetua* and *the Beggar-Maid*, *The-Meaning of Love*, *Love's Resurrection*.

To return to the man. Some years ago I gave Pitt a little help in reading for his B.A. degree, and later examined him for his M.A. I was so struck and taken with him in these mere glimpses that I asked him to come to Cambridge as my guest for a few days and he helped me to finish off an edition I was preparing of the Old English Riddles; out of this visit grew a more intimate friendship, and a planned and partly carried out collaboration in other pieces of work, including an Old English Reader to be published shortly in our joint names.

When last year he obtained a commission, he asked me to carry on his Tutorial Class in English Literature at the Working Men's College in London. I had had delightful experience of similar work at Wellingborough, but I never got a real hold on Pitt's class and had many a qualm of self-reproach before I discovered the reason: they were still in love with Pitt and hankering after the return of their Lost Leader. As one of them wrote to me at his death: "Never had a class a more devoted teacher, and never had a teacher a more devoted class." The senior-member of the class wrote in the *College Magazine*: "He brought to his work an amazing energy, radiant with enthusiasm, and a most loving regard for his subject, English Literature, which he esteemed the most precious of the gifts that England has showered on her people. He had a rare knowledge of his subject, first hand knowledge, impatient of text-books, which he never used, and a marvellous memory, as his innumerable quotations showed. His students feel that they owe a debt to the College. By coming there they knew Bernard Pitt. They must keep his memory fresh and carry on his work: love for England and for its literature."

There was only one opinion of him: "Go up to the trenches out of his turn, as he was in the habit of doing." And to quote his Brigadier once again: "Little Mr. Pitt, as the men in the trenches called him, was known and loved by them all, and whenever the Germans appeared to be getting particularly annoyed the men would say, "Oh! it's the little trench mortar officer at them with his guns." He was absolutely the embodiment of dash and pluck." His lieutenant wrote: "It would be an impertinence to suggest that we could tell you anything about his gallant, loving, radiant nature; to every one of us his ardent soul was an inspiring thing." What Théophile Gautier wrote of Petrus Borel might have been written of Bernard Pitt: "Petrus Borel était cet astre; nul de nous n'essaya de se soustraire à cette attraction; dès qu'on était entré dans le tourbillon, on tournait avec une satisfaction singulière, comme si on eût accompli une loi de nature. On ressentait un peu de l'enivrement du derviche tourneur.."

Everyone felt the attraction. He was one of the most open-hearted, sincere, winning men I have ever known, and those whom he won he held. He was a good student, a good teacher, a good officer, a good friend, a good husband and father.

Didn't know Flynn,
Flynn, of Virginia,
Look 'ee here, stranger,
 Whar *hev* you been?

Well, sir, when you'll
Hear the next fool
Asking for Flynn,
 Flynn, of Virginia,
Just you chip in,
Say you knew Flynn,
 Say that you've been 'yar.

ALFRED J. WYATT.

Cambridge.
July, 1916.

B. P.

He loved, I think, all fairness, all sweet sound,
All grace of form and thought, all feeling kind,
He loved true learning, ardent thought, high mind,
And over all he loved our English ground.
Most dear was life, and home, the common round
Of simple joys and hopes, which he resigned
For those bare Flemish fields where trenches win
Along the hill-scarp to the fort, wire crowned.
I can not think he rests now, that he sleeps,
Since in our paths no more we see him go,
Since now his hand lies idle, and his sword;
But, rather, I believe his spirit sweeps
Eager, triumphant, quit of human woe,
To join the brave battalions of the Lord.

J. C. A.