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*Donald F. Goold Johnson*

**P O E M S**

BY

**DONALD F. GOOLD JOHNSON**

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE BY

**P. GILES, LITT.D.,**

*Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge*

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## *P R E F A C E*

**T**HE poems in this book are all that remains of one who had hardly begun his work in literature when he had to leave it for the grimmer tasks of the European war. Many of the poems included here were written at the front, some even in the trenches on the battlefield whence the author did not return. Hence there are no doubt some things in these verses which the author, if he had lived longer, would have liked to alter. But there is little either in matter or in manner which he would have been forced to change.

Donald Fredric Goold Johnson was a son of the Manse. Born on March 6th, 1890, he received his school education from twelve to seventeen at Caterham. His home was at Saffron Walden and it is perhaps not too fanciful to detect in his love for describing quiet rural scenes with streams and woodland the influence of the landscape which he knew most intimately, even though the scene professes to be laid in Thessaly or some other classical land which, except in imagination, he was never destined to see.

As he was the youngest of four brothers it was necessary that he should be a teacher for some years before he could proceed to the University. In 1911 he came into residence at Cambridge, having been elected to a sizarship at Emmanuel College, and

read for the Historical Tripos during his first two years. He was musical and was soon elected to a Choral Scholarship. Modest as to his own abilities at first he did not talk much or take any conspicuous part in College life. But by and bye he became better known, spoke at the Union, and took an increasingly important place in College societies. After Part I of the Historical Tripos he elected to read for the English section of the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos. He was not a good examination candidate, though his teachers were sure that he had the root of the matter in him. Literature to him was a part of life, not knowledge to be pursued for gain. But though he took only a low place in the Tripos, he won the Chancellor's Medal for English Verse in 1914. Captain Scott's expedition was then much in men's minds and the poem is that headed *The Southern Pole*.

Johnson wished to make a special study of the text of Chaucer in the year after he graduated and to investigate carefully some of the less well-known manuscripts; and for this purpose his College provided him with the necessary means. But the war was at hand. By the end of the year it was clear to him that the country needed his help and he joined up. Soon he was posted to the Manchester Regiment and in the end of 1915 he went to France. He had previously joined the Roman Catholic Church, and so



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some of the poems show perhaps a clearer understanding than is common of the point of view of the village priest behind the lines and of his congregation. Ever susceptible to the beauty of the quiet countryside, Johnson delighted in the little French villages in which he found himself while he was still far behind the battle line.

In the struggle of 1916 he played his part as a brave soldier and a gallant officer. A trench had to be held at all costs and the Germans prevented from advancing. Johnson without hesitation undertook the task but bade his friends good-bye, fully certain that he should not return.

‘First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’ What harvest Donald Johnson might have reaped in the fulness of time no man can tell; only a tiny sheaf of the firstfruits remains. And yet from this the reader may augur what the full grain would have been.

P. GILES.

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