

## Battle Songs

### A Song Cycle by Philip Napier Miles (1865 - 1935) with poems by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson (1878 - 1962)

Op. 7. S. Acott & Co, 1917.



Above: Philip Napier Miles of Kings Weston House, Composer, 1865-1935.

and beautiful from a situation in which he was otherwise powerless to change.

The song cycle was published during the war, in 1917, and must have proved popular as a second series was produced in 1929, a decade after the Peace had been declared. The poems that Napier Miles chose for his choral works are included here:

#### **The Quiet:**

*From "the Battle" published 1916/5*

I could not understand the sudden quiet  
The sudden darkness in the crash of fight,  
The din and glare of day quenched in a twinkling  
In utter starless night.

I lay an age and idly gazed at nothing,  
Half-puzzled that I could not lift my head ;  
And then I knew somehow that I was lying  
Among the other dead.

In 1917 Philip Napier Miles of Kings Weston House wrote a series of choral pieces of music set for the war poems of Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. The poems had been published the year previous and were very popular at the time. Gibson lived and wrote in Dymock, Gloucestershire, but it isn't known whether Philip Napier Miles knew him as a friend or not.

Napier Miles' work would have been composed at Kings Weston House, which at the time operated as an Auxiliary Hospital and was full of wounded soldiers. He would have seen the injuries and the emotional damage the war had caused, and heard stories from the front line in Europe. Gibson's poems helped express the feelings he must have had, and by setting them to music he created something positive



Above: Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, Poet, 1878 - 1962

## **Hit**

*From "the Battle" published 1916*

Out of the sparkling sea  
I drew my tingling body clear, and lay  
On a low ledge the livelong summer day,  
Basking, and watching lazily  
White sails in Falmouth Bay.

My body seemed to burn Salt  
in the sun that drenched it through and through  
Till every particle glowed clean and new  
And slowly seemed to turn  
To lucent amber in a world of blue

. . . . I felt a sudden wrench A trickle of warm blood  
And found that I was sprawling in the mud  
Among the dead men in the trench.

## **Retreat**

*From "the Battle" published 1916*

Broken, bewildered by the long retreat  
Across the stifling leagues of southern plain,  
Across the scorching leagues of trampled grain,  
Half-stunned, half-blinded, by the trudge of feet  
And dusty smother of the August heat,  
He dreamt of flowers in an English lane,  
Of hedgerow flowers glistening after rain  
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet.

All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet  
The innocent names kept up a cool refrain  
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet,  
Chiming and tinkling in his aching brain,  
Until he babbled like a child again  
"All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet."

## **The Dancers**

*From "the Battle" published 1916*

All day beneath the hurtling shells  
Before my burning eyes  
Hover the dainty demoiselles  
The peacock dragon-flies.

Unceasingly they dart and glance  
Above the stagnant stream  
And I am fighting here in France  
As in a senseless dream.

A dream of shattering black shells  
That hurtle overhead,  
And dainty dancing demoiselles  
Above the dreamless dead.

## **The Lark**

*From "the Battle" published 1916*

A lull in the racket and brattle,  
And a lark soars into the light  
And its song seems the voice of the light  
Quelling the voices of night And the shattering fury of battle.

But again the fury of battle Breaks out,  
and he drops from the height  
Dead as a stone from the height Drops dead,  
and the voice of the light Is drowned  
in the shattering brattle.

## **Battle ... Second Set.**

**A Song Cycle by Philip Napier Miles (1865 - 1935) with poems  
by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson (1878 - 1962)**

Op. 9. J. Curwen & Son, 1929

### **Epilogue / Lament**

*"Lament", from Whin, published 1918)*

We who are left, how shall we look again  
Happily on the sun or feel the rain  
Without remembering how they who  
went Ungrudgingly and spent Their lives for us loved, too,  
the sun and rain? A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings  
-- But we, how shall we turn to little things  
And listen to the birds and winds  
and streams Made holy by their dreams,  
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things?