

The Bishop's Fighting Poet: The Role of Frederick George Scott in World War One

By Alexandre Marceau, Winter 2019

“All night the tall trees overhead
 Are whispering to the stars;
 Their roots are wrapped about the dead
 And hide the hideous scars.
 The tide of war goes rolling by,
 The legions sweep along;
 And daily in the summer sky
 The birds will sing their song.”

(from F. G. Scott's "A Grave in Flanders," 1-8)

INTRODUCTION

It is fair to speculate that, one hundred years ago, when Armistice was declared and both the Allies and German forces laid down their weapons, many people across Canada knew of the fifty-seven-year-old Anglican Chaplain Frederick George Scott. Certainly, for the Canadian soldiers – his “boys” – who had arrived on Salisbury Plain from Val-Cartier October 18, 1914, with the Padre as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), the Canon's kinship was felt from long conversations in the trenches, Sunday church services with the Union Jack laid across his make-shift altar, poems recited under shell-fire, nightly musings, and more than all, his humour. Reading over his own memoir *The Great War As I Saw It*, Scott says, “I am dismayed at finding how feebly it suggests the bitterness and the greatness of the sacrifice of our men” (7). Indeed, the narrative constantly fluctuates between his subjective experience and one wholly understood by the men at the front. This tension is further heightened to suggest a universal understanding of war as it affected every Canadian family, by depersonalizing his account, even though he uses the first personal pronoun. Individuals are referred to by their position rather than name and even his three sons William, Elton, and Henry Hutton, only by “son.” In one of the memoir's most poignant sections, when Scott searches through No-Man's land at night, with a sergeant and assistant, to try and find his son's body (identifiable by a signet ring he gave

Henry on graduation), there is still no mention of his name. When Scott returns to Bishop's University, his Alma Mater, in 1920 to give a lecture, one student recalls in the *Mitre*, "The absence of personal element was noticed in the lecture. Canon Scott spoke to glorify the deeds of heroism of the war alone" (27.2.45). Similarly, in his poems, Scott personifies nature as both the viewer and the backdrop against which the soldiers' individual sacrifices are made to honour not the nature of war, but the men and women who did, what he believed, was their duty.

Scott was born in Montreal in 1861, and when five years old he attended the Dominion Day celebration on July 1, 1867 with his father on the grounds of McGill College. He always believed that this experience planted a strong patriotic seed within him (Scott, 190). He started his undergraduate studies at McGill but quickly moved to Bishop's and received a Bachelor of Arts in 1881. Three years later, after a year in Britain immersing himself in Anglo-Catholic writings, he received his Master's degree from Bishop's (McGowan, xi). Scott remained faithful to his *Alma Mater* until his death in 1944, regularly contributing to the *Mitre*, the school's literary magazine, and endowing the Archdeacon F. G. Scott Creative Writing Prize in 1901, which still exists. His contributions begin in the journal's second issue, where he sends the Editor the very first Alumni letter. The humorous prankster writes, "I could tell of dark and terrible stories of the 'Wild Crowd,' of dining room windows opened by stealth at midnight, and of hair-breadth escapes in stocking feet from Johnson's revolver" (60.3.91). His poems "Blood-Guilt," "The Silent Toast," "Hymn of Humanity," and "On the Rue du Bois" all appeared in the war issues of the *Mitre*. During the war, letters from Bishop's men at the front that were excerpted in the *Mitre*, describe Scott and his services. Senior Arts student James Lobban writes, "It was a most impressive service and, as we knelt in a bed of straw, before the little altar in the barn, the sound of the big guns could be heard plainly... Canon Scott is just as jovial as ever, but has aged considerably" (23.3.4). In his memoir, Scott briefly mentions "having dinner one

night in [his] billet for a number of Bishop's College men" in an almost depersonalized tone (109). However, a letter from Rev. R. J. Shires to Professor Call, excerpted in the *Mitre*, provides a more detailed personal account of the feast: "It was a notable occasion, and expressions of surprise and gladness were heard on all sides... *Mirabile dictu* – we had lobster! Such a treat – Father Scott certainly did us proud!" (23.3.5). It is fair to say that Scott's devotion to the men was keenly felt by everyone who knew him.

While reading through private correspondence between Scott and his family, one is struck by the contrast between the father's desire to be at the line with the soldiers (also conveyed in the memoir), and the family's concerns for the father's health and safety. Before Henry goes to Europe, he writes, "You may be moved to France at anytime, though I believe and hope it will be long before you are sent to the firing line" (Feb.6, 1915). An event that strikes a humorous chord in the memoir, suggests Scott's determination to serve with his boys. I wonder if Henry ever learned how his Father ignored his deployment orders to work at No. 2 General Hospital in London opting instead to accompany the 14th Battalion to France by feigning geographic ignorance as to where the No.2 hospital was located! F. G Scott's desire to help people in desperate circumstances is clear from an incident back in October 10, 1897 when he jumped off the Champlain Wharf in Quebec at the dead of night to save a drowning man, an act for which he was awarded the Stanhope Gold Medal by the Royal Humane Society. Later recognition is evidenced in his election as a fellow of the Royal Society in 1900, being made a companion of the Order of St. Michael and St George in 1916, and received the Distinguished Service Order in 1918, for war service, and later was nominated to be the Honorary President of the Canadian Corps Council. It is not surprising then, when he was injured by shrapnel in Cambrai, he "refused to be put in an ambulance until assured that he was not taking any boy's place" (McCord, 1:7). An account featured in the *Mitre* from "The Machine Gunner" best expresses the view many soldiers held of the

Canon: “Ask any man who is wearing the Red Patch, ‘Who is Canon Scott?’ The universal answer amounts to this: ‘Canon Scott is the morale of the First Canadian Division.’ To see the old Canon, with a tin hat on his head and a cheery smile on his face, jogging along the front line is as good as a rum ration to any of the boys” (26.2.23). After the publication of his memoir, which was initially “priced at three dollars, with royalties donated to veterans,” Scott met thousands of men and women involved in the war effort who signed his own personal copy, making it virtually impossible to read (McGowan, xxx). His memoir, made illegible by the thousands of signatures, is a physical testament of the Canon’s impact on each individual he came across while serving in Europe.

I: THE CHAPLAIN, CIGARETTES, AND HUMOUR

Thirty three Chaplains left Val-Cartier with the 1st Division of the CEF to provide spiritual guidance and comfort to soldiers in the bloodiest and most gruesome period in their lives. Unlike the Officer or the Doctor, who have soldiers under their command, the Chaplain’s “office being a spiritual one ought to be quite outside military rank. To both officers and men, he holds a unique position, enabling him to become the friend and companion of all” (Scott, 95). As the war goes on and his role evolves, Scott’s awareness is continually drawn to the spiritual needs of the soldier that one might not gather from the King’s regulations. Scott embodies his role as a universal companion immediately when a fortnight before they embarked for Europe, he preached to a congregation of fifteen thousand, forming “the most remarkable church parade in the history of the division” (Scott, 16). His comparison of this sermon to one fifteen years earlier at the Quebec Cathedral for the Canadian Contingent leaving for the conflict in South Africa reveals the significant shift in narrative voice. He proudly writes, “On that occasion I used the second personal pronoun ‘you,’ now I was privileged to use the first personal pronoun ‘we’” (Scott, 17). After the service, he looks at the majestic mountains around him that swallow the sound of the soldiers’ worship and conjures up a national identity that will allow

Canadians to stand as an independent nation of the world. The mountains become “monuments of the consecration of Canada to the service of mankind” (17). Although Scott’s vision of a national identity is inseparable from the Church and differs from our modern 21st Century constructs, the reader must always situate themselves back when Canadian identity was still largely conceived in relation to England. Moreover, the Canon constructed his national spirit from the soldiers’ reactions and later affirmations to his conversational cheer. Throughout the entirety of the war, he did what he called “parish visiting. [He] would go round among the tents, and sitting on the ground have a talk with the men” (Scott, 14). “The slightest word or suggestion would often turn a man from a feeling of powerless dejection into one of defiant determination” (Scott, 62).

Although the Canon claims a Universal religiosity that unites all men, his narrative oscillates between a society’s collective hatred of Germany and an affirmation of God, between Germans as a collective and individual soldiers. At the beginning of the memoir while having lunch with a “most gallant” officer, he says, “He told me at luncheon that if he could press a button and blow the whole German nation into the air he would do it. I felt a little bit shocked then, because I did not know the Germans as I afterwards did. I spent nearly four years at the front hunting for that button” (34). Scott’s initial shock is largely governed by his religious ordination. Experience overseas tempers this outlook but he tries to remain open minded. At the Western Front, after a long search, he finds the man who spread the blasphemous story of a highlander being crucified on the door of a barn by German soldiers. He explains to the man, “We have no right to charge the Germans with the crime. They have done so many things equally bad, that we do not need to bring charges against them of which we are not quite sure” (72). However, any neutrality was increasingly difficult to maintain. It seems that the Germans get no break because “while [we] often admired the military efficiency of the Germans, [we] had absolutely no respect for their officers or men, nor could [we] regard them as anything but well-trained

brutes” (Scott, 189). It is only once the Germans are captured and pose no threat to Scott, that he finally acknowledges the individual man on the other side of the line. On two different occasions he gives benediction to German soldiers because “the sign of the cross belongs to the Universal language of men” (138). Ironically, although religious sign language is universal, spoken prayers are not. Scott creates a sense of pathos when he says the Lord’s Prayer in the German language to the unthreatening soldiers, yet he finishes the account by saying, “It was strange to think that an hour before, had we met, we should have been deadly enemies” (Scott, 282). It is at times strange for a humanist, who creates Canadian *esprit-de-corps* and comradeship, to claim a God-given right based on ideology. It can thus be said, that Scott’s open view of humanity and of a universal God is shaped by his Imperialist upbringing and ideology which are supported by Anglican scripture.

Another tension that permeates the memoir is that between the Canon’s heroic ideals of honour and his fear of dying dishonourably. Scott was chaplain of the 8th Royal Rifles in Quebec City prior to 1914 which meant he felt he was obliged to volunteer to join Canada’s forces when war was declared. While standing amongst a crowd of men at the newspaper office in Quebec he realized his duty: “if a chaplain ran away [from fire], about six hundred men would say at once, ‘We have no more use for religion’” (9). Although the Chaplains did not carry any weapons, were meant to remain well back from the line of fire, and were to serve all men, Scott’s memoir expresses his constant anxiety that should he fail in his duties such a failure would undermine peoples belief in the church. At the sound of guns while inspecting his shirt for lice in a trench with a young soldier, he says, “I think I will have to postpone this scientific research... for if I am knocked out... If they hear that I was hunting in a man’s shirt for one of these insects, they will not think it a worthy ending to my life” (Scott, 35). Moreover, when he swings two rifles over his shoulders and imagines them going off for no apparent reason, he says, “there will be a little paragraph in the Canadian paper, ‘Canon Scott accidentally killed

by the discharge of a rifle,’ and my friends will say, ‘What a fool he was to fool with rifles, why didn’t he stick to his own job?’” (58). Ironically, although he did not appear in the Canadian paper for blowing himself up, there was an article titled “Canada’s Beloved Padre Unaware He Saluted Pig,” which describes a group of three soldiers who killed a pig for food and figured out how to sneak it past the chaplain back to their billet. The soldiers find a bloody stretcher in a ditch, cover the pig up with a blanket, and when they approach Scott, he gives it benediction and grants them passage! (McCord, 5:38). However, one cannot dispute the Padre’s unremitting work on the line with the men. He always walked the thin line between life and death, running through muddy No-Man’s land at night with the ambulance bearers, always praising the men around him.

Almost all accounts of F. G Scott include a description of his witty humour and his self-effacing humour to create a friendly supportive atmosphere. Unlike the dark satire employed in much poetry to describe the atrocious nature of war, Scott uses humour to unite the men. He is cognisant of the differing, often critical, views of the Chaplaincy and so works to first connect with the men through humour. One night while walking with the battalion “a sergeant called out to [him], ‘Where are we going sir?’ to which Scott responds ‘That depends upon the lives you have led.’ a roar of laughter went up” (Scott, 56). At other times, Scott’s humour reveals a common anxiety amongst soldiers. Once, while washing the order goes out to take cover. Scott responds, “‘I can’t boys, I have got no clothes on.’ They roared with laughter at my plight. Though clothes are not at all impregnable armour, somehow or other you feel safer when you are dressed” (Scott, 71). Illogically, a naked man without his uniform, however momentarily, feels more vulnerable having shed his national identity. Another instance of his humour to mask serious matters occurs when the debate about national conscription arises. “I told [the boys] that the last thing I wanted to do was influence their vote. All I asked of them when they went to the polls was to make the cross in front of Borden’s name.” Although the men

collectively laughed, a few of the men told him in private “that the thing which made them hesitate to vote for conscription was that they could not bring themselves to do anything which would force others to come and endure the hellish life at the front” (Scott, 233). On another occasion in Ecoivres, after the service, he offered to answer any questions from the men. One note makes its way to the front and Scott is surprised to read “When do you think this God dam war will be over, eh?” Although he was “never so completely taken aback in all [his] life,” the padre heartily joined the men’s laughter and it was “one of the most pleasantest evenings in that old cinema that [they] had ever received,” even though the letter was blasphemous to his enterprise (Scott, 162). Colonel Francis B. Ware describes Scott as “the most undisciplined officer in the Canadian Corps” (20) “who always used to say jokingly, that to enjoy life at the front he was always most careful to avoid generals, for they threatened to send him back to No. 2 General if he disobeyed the stern order, ‘Don’t go near the trenches’” (25). Many times in the work, Scott resembles the “original hitch-hiker” who would always arrive at a town or trench before the Brigade Commander (Ware, 26). When the latter asks him how he will get himself back to rest since he has no horse, Scott replied, “I quoted my favourite text, ‘The Lord will provide.’ It made him quite angry when I quoted the text, and he told me that we were engaged in a big war and could not take things so casually” (40). However, there are so many instances when Scott’s casual demeanour helps him conjure up *esprit-de-corps* and calm the men.

While perusing through photographs of soldiers sitting in trenches during the Great War, it is common to find the majority of the men with cigarettes dangling out of their mouths. Throughout the memoir, Scott constantly emphasises the relationship between five common “C”s: canteen, conversation, comfort, coffee, and cigarette. Scott describes the place at Casualty Corner “just above the ruin of Constalmaison, [where the] engineers put up a little shack” for the Chaplain Service to distribute coffee, cigarettes, biscuits, and many other things (134). Some men stayed there night and

day, boiling water, so that “a hundred and twenty five gallons of coffee were given away every twenty-four hours” (134). Although most men did not stay there long, Scott writes, “The canteen became a most helpful institution... Many a man has told me that that drink of coffee saved his life when he was quite used up” (134). Moreover, when Scott held a service during the Second Battle of Ypres, Canada’s first major battle in the war, he says,

““Boys, the *curé* won’t mind your smoking in the church tonight’ ... Luckily I had a box of five hundred cigarettes which had been sent to me by post... It was really delightful to feel that a moment’s comfort would be given to men in their condition. A man arrived that night with both his eyes gone, and even he asked for a cigarette. I had to put the cigarette into his mouth and light it for him” (67).

Poignant passages like these, in which men are comforted by the simple act of smoking, reminds the reader of the ever present specter of death. One moment a man sits by your side enjoying the calm exhalations of tobacco; the next, he’s gone. The Canon’s most enjoyable meals were those with the men in the dirty cookhouse because “when the meal was over and cigarettes had been lighted, general conversation was indulged in” (Scott, 180). At other times, he gathered a few musicians to play a Waltz and “amid roars of laughter the dancing went on fast and furious” (Scott, 204). The enjoyment derived from the multiple conversations, dances and his generosity was certainly reciprocated by all the Canadian men and never went unnoticed. One night at a concert, near the huts at Bulford Camp, the Canon showed up (as always) well provided with Player’s cigarettes. When he passed his engraved silver cigarette case, which was gifted by the Bishop’s Alumni Association to him and all the school’s fighting men, the soldiers returned it to him “filled with De Reszke’s, [his] favourite brand” (Scott, 92).

II: NARRATIVE STYLE AND THE THEATRICAL METAPHOR OF WAR

Scott’s narrative juxtaposes the immediate personal experience of war with intermittent hindsight and reflection, either of the individual or the collective, to locate the reader within two time frames –

one of reaction and one of reflection. Scott's narrative fluctuation begins towards the end of the first chapter to plant the gloomy cyclical seed of memory that germinates throughout the memoir to blossom into a universal acknowledgement of the soldiers' sacrifice. Of Val-Cartier, Scott writes, "Nearly five years passed since I saw that spot again. It was in August 1919... Little crosses by the highways and byways of France and Belgium now marked the resting-places of thousands of those whose eager hearts took flame among these autumn hills... Here were the worn paths across the fields where the men had gone" (18). His "strange memories and the sense of an abiding presence of something weird and ghostly" are projected onto nature, whose natural cycle defies man and allows the poet to contemplate the war. A similar ghostliness arises in his mind whenever he hears the word Ypres: "I shall always be thankful that I had the opportunity of paying this visit to Ypres while it stilled retained vestiges of its older beauty" (Scott, 44). Contrarily, at other moments, Scott embodies the collective voice and transcribes his musings with other soldiers. He writes, "Our life on the Plain was certainly a puzzle to us. Why were we kept there? When were we going to leave? Were we not wanted in France? These were the questions we asked one another" (Scott, 27). The combination of the memoir's multiple dialogues, "in-action" narratives, and Scott's internal musings about the men, implicitly and explicitly provides some answers. However, an ambivalence arises from Scott's justification of the men's sacrifice because the collective anxiety of death exudes every page. Whenever Scott experiences something for the first time, he immediately juxtaposes his initial sentiment of romance and cavalry with reflective realism. Scott writes, "On the following Sunday, we had our first church parade in the war zone. We were delighted during the service to hear in the distance the sound of guns and shells. As the war went on we preferred church parades when we could not hear guns and shells" (32). Moreover, "the novelty" of such first naive experiences can never be regained because "the human mind had not then made, as it afterward did, the sole object of its energy

the destruction of human life” (Scott, 35). This last reflection conveys the shattered notion that war was a glorious deed. For the Imperial elitists far removed from the front, war has always been about destroying the enemy. However, the soldier, who rushes into battle and rarely hears news from outside of his environment, only realizes the nature of the war once it continued passed Christmas 1914.

Some of the most poignant passages in the memoir occur when Scott invites the reader to listen to a long pleasant anecdote, only to end with that individual’s death. This narrative tactic reveals the painful machinations of a veteran’s memory, whereby one can vividly sense and re-experience war-time without actually being there. For example, when quartered in the neighbourhood of Béthune, Scott organized a recital for his men:

“There, in the chapel, the blind man poured out his soul in the strains of a most beautiful instrument. We sat entranced in the evening light. He transported us into another world. We forgot the shells, the mud, the darkness, the wounded men, the lonely graves, and the hideous fact of war. We wandered free and unanxious down the avenues of thought and emotion which were opened up before us by the genius of him whose eyes were shut to this world... Three years later the organist was killed by a shell while he was sitting at his post in the church he loved so well and had never seen.” (85)

The multiple binary oppositions in this passage illustrate the ever-present tension between seeing the atrocities of war and heroically serving for one’s country, while simultaneously always searching for escapism through another of the senses. Moreover, the reader wonders: “Would I rather be blind and help our soldiers escape the atrocities of war, yet never see the beauty of the world; or would I rather see and fight alongside the brave men, as we destroy nature’s beauty?” It is these very uncertainties articulated in Scott’s fluctuations that give this memoir its unexpected complexity; while they forget everything, the blind man never has a visual world to remember.

Scott's ability to freely navigate along the frontline provides a unique insight into multiple perspectives of the war. When he goes flying with the young pilot Johnny Johnson, Scott's narrative fluctuates between laughter, excitement, fear, and a quick glimpse into his temporary "last thoughts" when the Germans shell the aircraft. After his exhilarating flight, Scott writes, "The following year in London I heard by accident that poor Johnny Johnson had been killed a few weeks after our trip. He was a splendid young fellow and absolutely without fear. May his brave soul rest in peace" (266). His poem "The Airman", from *In the Battle Silences: Poems Written at the Front*, articulates the same tone of eternal gratitude he employs in the memoir. He writes,

"Our comrade rose light-hearted
 With eyes that gazed afar,
 Till the arrow from fate's bow struck him
 And he plunged like a falling star
 Then the victor soul flew upward,
 Buoyant, courageous and strong,
 To the rank of the hosts who have conquered
 And he thrilled at their deathless song-
 The song of the welcome heroes,
 The song of the finished strife,
 The song of the warriors feasting
 Where the wine in their cups is life." (*Poems*, 311)

Although the Canon witnessed many deaths on the battle-field, there is none that has "brought home to [him] so deeply, and with such cutting force, the hideous nature of war and the iron hand of discipline, as did that lonely death" of prisoner executed for desertion (Scott, 215). After an unfortunately failed attempt while travelling for miles overnight to save the prisoner, Scott addresses his readers and the nation directly for the very first time to convey his burning beliefs: "If this book should fall into the

hands of any man who, from cowardice, shirked his duty in the war... he ought to have been sitting that morning... beside the prisoner on the box. HE was one of the original volunteers” (Scott, 266).

One of Scott’s recurring narrative motifs is the theatrical metaphor of war, where both music and flare-lights create the stage whereupon “the world’s greatest drama is being enacted” (Scott, 129). Remembering that Scott’s narrative is a pendulum swinging between two extremities, there is a shift between the unwanted sound of shellfire during church service to the “glorious organ sound of a barrage” when early in the morning, the Allies’ batteries open fired on the Germans for “a fake.” Additionally, Scott notes, “I look back with the greatest pleasure to that early morning ride through the twilight lit up by gun flashes” (105). During the war, dawn and dusk were the theatrical curtains of attacks and raids, whereby either side opened fire at first light, generally ceased for intermission during the day, and prepared for surprise attacks in the remaining fleeting moments of light. When shells did fly during an intermission, Scott remarks that “there was something uncanny about the arrival of shells out of the clear blue sky. They seemed to be things supernatural” (25). His theatrical musings are heightened during the biggest battles. During the Battle of the Somme near Courcelette, while watching a company of Highlanders run from exploding shells, he reflects, “It was one of the most theatrical sights I have ever seen. With the lurid light and the broken road in the foreground, and the hurrying figures carrying their rifles, it was just like a scene on the stage” (140). Moreover, his crisp and sharp reportage describing the anticipation of the capture of Vimy Ridge resembles the excited tone of one who is about to see the premiere of a theatre production, which leads to the biggest sentimental dichotomies of art – pleasure and sadness. Contrary to his previous statements scrutinizing the war, he writes, “The thrill of such a moment is worth years of peace-time existence. To the watcher of a spectacle so awful and sublime, even human companionship struck a jarring note” (166). Three years in the war has either sanitized any fear or anxiety of death to the extent that one would trade

many lives for one more spectacle, or Scott simply embodies the chivalric and romantic notions of war – to justify battle with years of peace-time is quite ironic for the man who cannot himself kill the Germans. However, his description of the taking of Hill 70 reflects his original thought patterns, whereby “nothing but the thought of what it meant to human beings took away from our enjoyment of the mighty spectacle” (Scott, 199). Quite ironically, the war means *everything* to human beings – they are the only fragments, alongside their machinated creations, of battle.

III: THE POEM: THE CHAPLAIN’S WEAPON

One of the memoir’s most distinguishable features is Scott’s unique poetic eye, which manifests itself in humorous, philosophical, or very sombre ways. The novel begins with the poem “The Unbroken Line,” dedicated to the Officers and Men of the 1st Canadian Division. Although the poem does not draw upon nature for inspiration like “Requiescant” (the poem quoted at the beginning of this essay), the last stanza encapsulates the memoir’s binding spirit: “Let us draw closer in these narrower years,/ Before us still the eternal visions spread;/ We who outmastered death and all its fears/ Are one great army still, living and dead” (Scott, 3). The first time we encounter an allusion to poetry in the narrative is in a comical shift from the opening poem that is more significant and humorous upon a second reading, and pertains to Scott’s ideals of a dishonourable death. At Val-Cartier, Scott’s batman, an assistant commissioned to Officers, left a stone water bottle heating on his stove without unscrewing the stopper. Scott says in a fury, “A moment or two more and the bottle would have burst with disastrous consequences. When I told Stephenson... that he might have been the cause of my death, and would have sent me to the grave covered with dishonour... he only smiled faintly and asked me if I should like to hear him recite a poem” (Scott, 13). The Canon was indeed happy to be relieved of Stephenson, for he often cut too deep into the former’s skin and used his own poetic weapon and humour against him. Throughout the memoir, as Scott becomes increasingly aware of people’s

agitation at his recitations, like Stephenson, he uses this knowledge to his advantage. When he found out that Colonel Brutnell possessed a sidecar, rather than hitchhiking and waiting for God to answer his Providential call, he used to say, “Colonel, if you will give me a sidecar I will recite you one of my poems.’... As time went on, I found that the price I offered began to lose its value... so I hit up another device... “Colonel, if you *don’t* give me a side-car I will recite one of my poems” (Scott, 126). There is a constant mixture of antipathetic and appreciative remarks with regard to the Canon’s poetry because it did not always rally the men together, but produced the opposite effect. Scott was indeed adamant about writing and preferred the poem to any other weapon, even the Gospel.

When an officer asked Scott, “How will you protect yourself, sir, if the enemy should get into the trench?” he answered, “I would recite one of my poems. They always put my friends to flight and would probably have the same effect upon my foes” (Scott, 239). One of the most humorous – and ridiculous – scenes in the novel conveys the true poetic zeal that guided the Canon throughout the war. When he comes across an officer he had not seen in a while he is “at once determined to reward him by reciting one of [his] poems.” Scott says, “I got about halfway through when the enemy... began to shell the place... He became more and more restless... and at last left me standing in the road with the last part of the poem... I looked after him for a moment or two, then turned sorrowfully, lamenting the depravity of human nature, and pursued my journey” (Scott, 196). Early examples of this poetic myopia can be traced back to an account of his time at Bishop’s as an undergrad student. Recalling the old days, a student writes in the *Mitre*, “Fred Scott... was fond of spouting his early poetic efforts to a select few of his friends. The writer, although a good deal [Scott’s] senior, was constantly called upon to listen to these, and not being poetical himself, on several occasions threatened to murder him in the college woods if he did not shut up” (26.1.5). It is safe to assume that a large body of the Canadian population is glad the poet was not killed in the back woods of the college or while reciting his poem

under gunfire. Although Scott's poetic persona "arms" him with a fearlessness in the face of those with weapons, it must be noted that he is aware of the dangers of poetry. Faced with the probability of being captured by the Germans, he says, "I suddenly remembered that I had a scathing poem of the Kaiser in my pocket... so I said to the MO, '... Of course you know I don't mind being shot or hanged by the Germans, but, if I am, who will write the poems of the war?'" (Scott, 60). Any student of War and literature knows that thousands of men wrote poems at the front. However, the Padre's sense of his own role as self-appointed poet allowed him to rationalize his own actions. He describes only once destroying his verse for fear he might be shot or hanged for possessing such a "weapon." One would suspect, providing one agrees that poetry is the individual articulation of truth, that a poet's death as a result of his own words would be the most honourable death on the field. However, the Padre wanted to keep writing and did so with great success. A letter from his son Henry before Scott's departure for Europe, highlights a keen sense of humour and poetics between the two: "Well, old man, keep well and write some more poems about the Kaiser" (Jan. 1915, 4:30). I wonder if the Canon ever had the chance to tell him that he was forced to tear up the poem in case he was taken prisoner?

The Canon's poetic eye allows him to temporarily transport both himself and his boys away from the horrors of war to the minutely described beauty of the landscape in Europe and back home. When the brigade was quartered in Steenje in May 1915, Scott's description of the landscape conveys the subdued emotional sensibilities and thoughts caused by the clash between two opposing forces – nature and man. He writes,

"There was something about the exhilarating life we were leading which made one extremely sensitive to the beauties of nature... a wild flower growing in a ditch by the wayside seemed to me to be almost a living thing, and spoke in its mute way of its life of peace and contentment, and mocked, by its very humility, the world of men which was so full of noise and death" (Scott, 72).

The personification of the flower illuminates the Laurentian Poet's thought process of composition, and reveals a continual subconscious connection to the Canadian landscape. At the beginning of the novel during the voyage to England, Scott's contemplation while anchored in the Gaspé Basin late at night embodies the men's collective voice: "What was it going to mean to us? What did fate hold in store? Among those hills... were the lakes and salmon rivers in the heart of the great forests which make our Canadian wild life so fascinating. We were being torn from that life and sent headlong into the seething militarism of a decadent European feudalism" (Scott, 20). The personification of nature and the act of articulating those musings into verse always ties him to his Canadian identity. The contrast between the grand sweeping forests or the solitary flower and human feudalism or death in any geographic space provides an explanation for the poet's recitations despite shell-fire or between tobacco puffs with the men in the trenches. At the end of the memoir, the poet's weapon of poetry shifts to a tool of necessary comfort. In a sandbag house on a sunken road above Inchy, a colonel said to Scott, "Sit down, Canon, and give us some of your nature poems to take our minds off this beastly business" (313). Surprised at the opportunity, he recites his poem "The Unnamed Lake," written among the Laurentian Mountains "in the happy days before [they] ever got to war" (Scott, 314). The passage reminds us of the blind organ player in Béthune:

"Like a gramophone record, it carried our minds away into another world. For myself, who remembered the scenery that surrounded me when I wrote it and who now, in that filthy hole, looked at the faces of young men who in two or three hours were to brave death in one of the biggest tasks that had been laid upon us, the words stirred up all sorts of conflicting emotions... I paused in the middle of a poem... and there to my astonishment, I found that everyone... was sound asleep. It was the best thing that could have happened." (Scott, 315)

It is hard to imagine, one hundred years later, what it must have felt like to listen to Scott's poem with the looming thought of the next offensive. For those men, the circumstance was a relief; a break from

the incessant sound of shells for a momentary mental lull and escape to a familiar scene. As for Scott, he completely embraced the role, for though he was a Chaplain, he was a true-born poet, with a unique ability to blend both the aesthetic and sensible surroundings to provide a linguistic spiritual, mental, and physical salve for those around him.

IV: CONCLUSION

It is no easy task to locate oneself through narratives amidst the roaring sounds of shellfire and trying to imagine one's comrade being blown up five feet away at any given moment. Being a student who shares the same *Alma Mater* as the Canon, perusing his letters, memoir, and anecdotes in the *Mitre* has entirely changed my perspective of the campus and the way I interact with my peers. What if my best friends and I were separated tomorrow in Lennoxville, reunited in Europe, and then separated forever by death? In fact, one hundred years ago, every community was affected by the war and Scott's writings serve as a testament to every individual's sacrifice. The Canon is still regarded today as the jovial father of many men who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, as spokesperson for the Bishop's community, as the university's poet Laureate. Scott's ability to convey the multiple subjective tensions alongside the looming anxious consciousness reveals his ability to understand human behaviour and suffering during a War that shattered all societal understandings of order at that time.

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