

‘THE WORD IS SAID’

Re-reading the poetry of John Drinkwater

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Based on a talk given to the Friends of the Dymock Poets, 5 April 2008.

-to be published in a book by Adrian Barlow, ‘Extramural: Literature & Lifelong Learning’, in March 2012 by the Lutterworth Press

Poets need friends. I think this is particularly true of John Drinkwater, because over the past 60 years, of all the Dymock Poets, Drinkwater is possibly the one who has faded most rapidly from the scene. He now seems to be the least known of the group; in his time, however, he was probably better known than any of them. During the period from 1918 onwards he became one of the leading literary figures of his generation: when Robert Bridges died in 1930, Drinkwater’s name was certainly on the shortlist to succeed him as poet laureate. (The job went to John Masefield.) Clearly, he was a man of some considerable stature in terms of his poetic reputation, and that reputation had been greatly enhanced by his sudden achieving of real fame with the success of his first major play, *Abraham Lincoln*, which opened in 1918.

It’s actually in 1918 that I want to start; not at the theatre, not with *Abraham Lincoln*, but rather less probably in a hut in a large army encampment in a place called Buchy, not far from Rouen in northern France, on January 18th. What was Drinkwater doing there? He was giving a reading of his poems to an audience of British soldiers who had been allowed a few days’ rest and relaxation from the Front, and were spending it at this camp at Buchy. During the First World War, Buchy was one of the major convalescent, rest and recreation centres for the British army. It was safely behind the lines but close enough for soldiers to be brought to and from there in no great time.

John Drinkwater left England on December 23rd, 1917. He spent Christmas in Rouen. It was perishingly cold, possibly the coldest winter of the war. His job, for a month, was to go out and entertain the troops. He went as part of an entertainment unit, accompanying the Lena Ashwell Concert Party, one of the leading entertainment groups during the First World War. He travelled around the different camps, particularly the ones run by the YMCA. The YMCA played a very important part in maintaining troop morale: the ‘huts’ run by the YMCA were major centres in all such camps, and indeed right up to the Front Line itself.

Drinkwater arrived at Buchy on January 17th. He was greeted there by the camp padre, who had never met a poet before, and was rather overwhelmed to encounter somebody as well known as Drinkwater. He took him around and looked after him, and acted as master of ceremonies at his reading on the 18th. The day afterwards, the Lena Ashwell Concert Party had an audience of over 2,000 men. 'Hut' is a bit of a misnomer, for this YMCA hut was a substantial building in a very large camp, where at some events 2,600 soldiers turned up. Drinkwater read his own poems, and among them two which made a particular impact on the YMCA padre at the time. One was called 'A Prayer', and the padre wrote it out afterwards in his notebook; the other, his much anthologised poem 'A Town Window', John Drinkwater wrote out in his own hand as a 'thank-you' to the man who had looked after him at Buchy.

When he got back to England Drinkwater sent the padre a cutting of a newspaper article he had written about the life in these YMCA huts. He summarised his experience thus:

The scene inside one of these huts at night is of a truly heroic poignancy. Certain hours are set apart for the sale of hot drinks and cigarettes and such, and then from every hut comes out from YMCA headquarters each night, someone or other to do what he may towards cheering the evening. Here I have seen a repertory company, led by one of our most distinguished tragic actresses, concert parties; including elegant lights of the music hall stage; a Scotch theologian of European reputation, and with uncommonly pretty wit; the keeper of a great English gallery, showing slides of famous pictures, a professor talking of Whitman and Browning and Dickens, a man just reading the best English poetry, another man with his kinematograph machine. And all this variety, most eagerly received, is not haphazard makeshift under the assumption that the best for a difficult job need not be very good, since allowances will readily be made; it is in each case the best of its kind that can be secured, supplied by wholly admirable organisation The fruits of their work, the glowing activity of the huts in those stark and sullen camps is one of the most excellent decencies of the war. For a man to nourish it in any way, by service or by gift, is to enrich his own stores.

'A man just reading the best English poetry'. We don't know all the poems Drinkwater read, but we know he was a fine performer, as a poet and as a reader of poetry. By the 1930s he had an international reputation and was giving readings and lectures across the United States. A feature article in the *New York Herald Tribune* (6 February 1932) said:

His poetry sells in bulk among the middle classes (the big market for poetry), but it loses something in the printed page. For its full savour you should hear the poet recite the poems himself His personal presence and voice adds to his poetry what staging adds to a play. As a lecturer he's always a big draw. Bill him to appear and the "poetry public" turns out from their houses for miles around. He has a superb manner on the platform, a handsome countenance, eloquent eyes, a fine voice, and the training of an actor to see him through. He never sings above the heads of the bourgeoisie. He always is grave and measured, voicing a fine idealism and an unswerving moral sincerity, and he believes in the grandeur of the simple human heart.

This description reminds us that Drinkwater was not only poet and playwright: he was also actor, stage manager, and theatre manager. He was absolutely a man of the theatre, so it's not surprising that Drinkwater the actor, the performer and the poet are one and the same.

Drinkwater began life as an insurance clerk. Although born in Leytonstone, north London, he spent most of his early childhood in the Oxford area, and it's the Oxfordshire countryside and Cotswolds with which he is most closely associated. He also had a great deal of affection for the Warwickshire countryside, and over and over again his points of reference were Warwick and Warwickshire. That poem 'A Town Window' looks out beyond the Birmingham street where he was lodging:

Beyond my window in the night
Is but a drab inglorious street,
Yet there the frost and clean starlight
As over Warwick woods are sweet.

Under the grey drift of the town
The crocus works among the mould
As eagerly as those that crown
The Warwick spring in flame and gold.

And when the tramway down the hill
Across the cobbles moans and rings,
There is about my window-sill
The tumult of a thousand wings.

Drinkwater had published his first collection of poems privately in 1903, but his first serious attempt at publication for the wider public belongs to 1908.

His reputation grew rapidly: by Christmas 1913, the *Birmingham Mail* was describing him as ‘the only noteworthy poet Birmingham can cherish’. One of his first Dymock poems is ‘Blackbird’:

He comes on chosen evenings,
My blackbird bountiful, and sings
Over the gardens of the town
Just at the hour the sun goes down.
His flight across the chimneys thick,
By some divine arithmetic,
Comes to his customary stack,
And couches there his plumage black,
And there he lifts his yellow bill,
Kindled against the sunset, till
These suburbs are like Dymock woods
Where music has her solitudes,
And while he mocks the winter’s wrong
Rapt on his pinnacle of song,
Figured above our garden plots
Those are celestial chimney-pots.

It’s Drinkwater’s ability to see heaven in the mundane - ‘celestial chimney-pots’ - to make a joke and a serious point at the same time. This is very much a characteristic of his work, it is part of the charm of his writing. I use the word ‘charm’ deliberately, because charm works both for and against him. I think it’s a quality which people both admire and enjoy in his poetry, but which makes it all too easy to disparage, implying there is something superficial about the writing.

At the same time that his career as a poet begins to take off, (while he’s still working as an insurance agent in Birmingham) he becomes very much involved with a group of actors, the Pilgrim Players, whose genesis leads ultimately to the creation of the first Birmingham Repertory Theatre. This leads also to his friendship with Barry Jackson, and ultimately to his being appointed first manager of the theatre.



Drinkwater, Lascelles Abercrombie, Eddie Marsh, Wilfrid Gibson, Geraldine Gibson, and Catherine Abercrombie outside the stage door of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, May 2nd, 1914.

At that point he gives up his career in insurance and devotes himself to a life in the theatre. Not that it was going to be an easy life. Setting up a new venture like a repertory theatre and being responsible for managing it, particularly once the war began, was for him a very demanding and precarious job.

So Drinkwater, as war breaks out, is both poet and man of the theatre. But how did his reputation stand, as a Georgian and as a member of Dymock poets? Edward Thomas, reviewing the early *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, does not mention Drinkwater. Although he is in all the Georgian anthologies and in all issues of *New Numbers*, he is somehow on the edge. When *New Numbers* was still being discussed it was felt by Abercrombie and Gibson that Drinkwater should be excluded: they feared he would only publish the poems that he couldn't get money for elsewhere. So there is a certain sense in which Drinkwater is *in* the group, but not quite *of* the group. After the War, he was notably not in the Golden Room: at that key point in the history of the Dymock poets, Drinkwater is absent.

During the First World War, he became slightly detached from Edward Marsh and the other central figures in the Georgian poetry movement, not least because he didn't join up, and because his life was increasingly tied up with running the Birmingham theatre. So I see Drinkwater as being near the centre but also slightly on the periphery of the poetry scene. Yet his pre-war and

war-time poetry deserves more attention than it has received. 'Dominion' is one of his pre-war poems that I would like to examine.

I went beneath the sunny sky
When all things bowed to June's desire, –
The pansy with its steadfast eye,
The blue shells on the lupin spire,

The swelling fruit along the boughs,
The grass, grown heady in the rain,
Dark roses fitted for the brows
Of queens great kings have sung in vain;

My little cat with tiger bars,
Bright claws all hidden in content;
Swift birds that flashed like darkling stars
Across the cloudy continent;

The wiry-coated fellow curled
Stump-tailed upon the sunny flags;
The bees that sacked a coloured world
Of treasure for their honey-bags.

And all these things seemed very glad,
The sun, the flowers, the birds on wing,
The jolly beasts, the furry-clad
Fat bees, the fruit, and everything.

But gladder than them all was I,
Who, being man, might gather up
The joy of all beneath the sky,
And add their treasure to my cup,

And travel every shining way,
And laugh with God in God's delight,
Create a world for every day,
And store a dream for every night.

One of the criticisms of Drinkwater's poetry, and this applies to the Georgian poets in general, was of the overuse of the word 'little'. It is used here as an affectionate diminutive, 'my little cat'. He also uses that peculiarly poetic word 'darkling'. Mathew Arnold used it in 'Dover Beach', and it goes back via Keats to Milton, who used it 'Paradise Lost', and even before then to

Shakespeare. It's one of those words which almost immediately proclaims itself a word with poetic lineage.

Like his poem 'Blackbird', where in 'celestial chimney-pots' there is a linking with everyday life, the inner life seeming to be at the heart of what Drinkwater is trying to say here. Notice the title, 'Dominion', an echo straight from Genesis and the idea that God gave man dominion over all the animals that walked on dry land. Indeed there is a strong suggestion, in his early poetry particularly, of a Biblical basis for his quasi-theological view of life. That's not to say that Drinkwater would ever have wanted to be thought a specifically Christian poet. I think his own position was broader than that, and anyway his views evolved during his life time. More helpfully, poems like 'Dominion', 'Blackbird', and even 'Cotswold Love' associate him very clearly with a kind of pre-war ruralist aesthetic - one which fits very well with *New Numbers* and indeed the whole Dymock poetry project.

It's interesting, for instance, to notice how often in his early poetry he refers to the plough and the ploughman. These references suggest a clear connection to be made between Drinkwater and Thomas Hardy. I'm thinking particularly of that famous Hardy wartime poem 'In the Time of the Breaking of Nations' ("Only a man harrowing clods / In a slow silent plod"). Here is Drinkwater's poem, 'Plough':

The snows are come in early state,
And love shall now go desolate
If we should keep too close a gate.

Over the woods a splendour falls
Of death, and grey are the Gloucester walls,
And grey the skies for burials.

But secret in the falling snow
I see the patient ploughman go,
And watch the quiet furrows grow.

This poem was written just as the First World War got under way, and the presence of the war is clear, although there is no explicit reference to it. The idea of burials and the gradual accumulation of death becomes a central idea of this very short poem. Notice that, just as with Hardy, the ploughman becomes a symbol of continuity, of survival, of the fact that although there may be a great trauma about to be unleashed, nevertheless the natural cycle of life is the natural cycle of ploughing, harvesting, reaping, and all of that suggests the hope for the future.

I would be wrong to imply, however, that his perception of the First World War was simply one of Hardy-esque detachment; far from it. Drinkwater's poem 'Nineteen-Fifteen' is one of the most interesting and under-read poems of this early phase of the First World War, and again it starts with ploughing:

On a ploughland hill against the sky,
Over the barley, over the rye,
Time, which is now a black pine tree,
Holds out his arms and mocks at me –

'In the year of your Lord Nineteen-fifteen
The acres are ploughed and the acres are green,
And the calves and the lambs and the foals are born,
But man the angel is all forlorn.

'The cropping cattle, the swallow's wing,
The wagon team and the pasture spring,
Move in their seasons and are most wise,
But man, whose image is in the skies,

'Who is master of all, whose hand achieves
The church and the barn and the homestead eaves –
How are the works of his wisdom seen
In the year of your Lord Nineteen-fifteen?'

The tone of serious irony makes this a remarkable poem, written so early in the cycle of the war. It contributes importantly to the evolution of war poetry. But Drinkwater did not enlist and was not conscripted. We do not know exactly why not: he was born in 1882, and by the end of 1915 the regulations for conscription required any unmarried or widowed man between the ages of 19 and 41 to enlist. According to the Conscription Act in January 1916 anyone in this category was 'deemed to have enlisted'; in other words you were *de facto* a soldier, and if you did not enlist you were technically deemed to be a deserter. However, by this stage Drinkwater was married and had a job which he must have regarded as a significant contribution to the war effort at home. What we do know is that, right at the start of the war, in fact three days after the war began, he and Lascelles Abercrombie were speaking to a conference of teachers in Stratford-on-Avon Grammar School. Drinkwater was lecturing on 'The value of poetry in education' and specifically on the importance of Shakespeare now war was beginning. This is what Drinkwater said:

When you have first taught the child that[he had just recited ‘Fear no more the heat of the sun’ from *Cymbeline*], you have done more for his moral sense than will ever be done by the whole maze of text-book information and precept.... We tell people that they must seek beauty, but we take no steps to enable them to recognise it.... I will tell you how the authorities may effect a fundamental rural reform. Let them use some of the money available for the purpose to send companies [of actors] into the villages to play Shakespeare, and the work of our other great and fine dramatists, and in less than a generation the people will require decent conditions, and as soon as they desire them they will have them.... When we have passed through this present calamity, social reorganisation will inevitably begin on a scale hitherto unknown.... We must turn from the enunciation of moral principles to the fostering of man’s spiritual activity.

There are two important things to say about that: first, it exemplifies how important for Drinkwater was the influence of William Morris. Drinkwater actually wrote about Morris: one of his earliest non-poetry projects was to write on Morris and his significance. In a way this idea about the importance of beauty, now seen through drama, echoes precisely the kind of William Morris aesthetic and ethic: “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful”. Secondly, then, there was for Drinkwater, right the way through his life, a profound sense that poetry – all art but particularly the spoken word – could contribute both to the beauty of human life and to its moral value. That description of Drinkwater in the *New York Herald Tribune* had talked about his being a poet of “sincere moral imperative”. Here Drinkwater charts a progression from beauty to moral principles to spiritual activity.

This theme is central to Drinkwater’s short play $x = o$, first performed in April 1917: a one-act play in an age when one-act plays were extremely popular. It formed the middle of an evening of three one-act plays at the Birmingham Rep. The first was a short domestic tragedy, then there was $x = o$, and finally a light comedy to finish off: $x = o$ was the jam in the middle of the sandwich. This play, subtitled ‘A Night of the Trojan War’, caused great controversy when first performed. In it, four characters, two Greek soldiers (Pronax and Salvius) and two Trojan soldiers (Capys and Ilus), debate in alternate scenes the folly of war: how bizarre it is that as young men of action, as would-be politicians, would-be social reformers, or as artists they are trained to do one thing very well, which is to kill. It would have been impossible in 1917 to write a play in which two English soldiers, one a poet and one a budding politician, and then two German soldiers, one a sculptor and

one a man of action, debated in these terms. So the play is deliberately set in the distant past, the Trojan war. At the end, by an irony absolutely central to the moral paradox of $x = o$, Pronax has killed his opposite number Capys, and Ilus has killed his opposite number Salvius. They have cancelled each other out.

When the play first appeared, it was reviewed extensively in the local papers. This is the *Birmingham Post*:

John Drinkwater's short new play stands above all else he has written in its sad, disquieting beauty. It's a story of a night in the Trojan war. Its construction is very simple; a studied parallelism. Salvius, the poet, and his friend Pronax, the man of action, are the Grecian counterparts of the Trojans, Capys the sculptor and Ilus the man of action. In all its essentials Drinkwater's night of the Trojan war is a night of the European war, of any war. Capys and Salvius are eternal types of the artist, the creator whose strength is turned towards destruction; Pronax and Ilus are types of the man of action, the social reformer, whose strength is turned to aggression - and they have in them all the qualities which make a good soldier - daring, resource, and above all workmanlike, orderly precision which distinguishes the professional soldier.... Mr. Drinkwater's play is not, as it may seem to some, a homily against war. But it is an exhortation to those who sit beside their hearths to remember the great renunciation and sacrifice that youth must make in a just cause. Its imagery is English, with the rich peaceful beauty of the English countryside. Its birth is passionate, varied and musical, and the poetry was spoken purely and tenderly by the players.

This reviewer is perfectly clear what the play is saying. Interestingly, he reviews the play again, two months later:

This tragedy $x = o$ is Mr. Drinkwater's masterpiece, which at first seeing we declared not homily against war, but an exhortation to those who sit beside their hearths to remember the great renunciation and sacrifice that youth must make in a just cause. Since then it has received the public and private benediction of pacifists, of anti-militarists, and conscientious objectors. Isolated from the patriotic poems Mr. Drinkwater wrote in the early days, when he was full of fervour in the cause of Belgium, there is enough in the play to justify a recantation, especially remembering the Quakerism of 'The God of Quiet'. Yet perhaps this isolation would be unfair to Mr. Drinkwater. (*Birmingham Post*, 13 June 1917)

It's useful to have those references to other poems by Drinkwater, written at the start of the war. Certainly that reference to Belgium is one that we can pick up, because in his volume *Swords and Ploughshares* there is a poem called 'England to Belgium':

Not lusting for a brief renown
Nor apt in any vain dispute
You throw the scythes of autumn down,
And leave your dues of autumn fruit
Unharvested, and dare the wrong
Of death's immitigable wing,
And on your banners burn a song
That God's unrisen and yet shall sing.

This is hardly the voice of the conscientious objector:

Because your Belgian fields are dear,
And now they suffer black despite
Because your womanhood can hear
The menace on the lips of night,
Because you are a little clan
Of brothers, and because there comes
The thief among you, to a man
You take the challenge of your drums.

Here is the high rhetoric of 1914; and it is as if, by the time he comes to write $x = o$ in 1917, Drinkwater has realised that the language he had been using was inappropriate to his later purpose. But not all the reviewers who saw $x = o$ shared the enthusiastic view of the *Birmingham Post*. Indeed some felt Drinkwater had betrayed his earlier patriotic, nationalistic voice, exemplified in 'England to Belgium'. Here's the *Birmingham Mail*, reviewing the first performance. This reviewer puts the play in the context of what he sees happening to English poetry generally during war:

The growing divorce between our poets and the nation is a very disquieting sign of the times. It's a comparatively modern development. Looking back on history and literature through all our great phases we have generally had a poet, at least, to express our national ideals; to voice the spiritual vicissitudes of his countrymen in the mass, to mirror England's mood of the moment, great or small But today, there seems a gap, a gap all the more incomprehensible because for two and half years the world has been passing through a

period of spiritual surge unequalled since the French Revolution. For two and half years England has been seething with the tremendous emotions which make great poetry, yet our poets seem untouched Even the German poets, however lamentable their output in quality, have been sound nationally. But our singers have failed to produce any considerable work, except Mr. Masfield's prose epic on Gallipoli - inspired by England at war. This divorce was made all the more apparent locally on Saturday night when Mr. Drinkwater produced a war play at the Repertory. "X = 0: a night of the Trojan War" is the best play Mr. Drinkwater has given us yet. The simplicity, the directness, the economy of both verse and action makes the tragedy a little masterpiece, yet this very perfection makes its production all the more deplorable. Mr. Drinkwater has plainly been deeply stirred by the war, but out of all the glories and horrors of the last two-and-a-half years the one impression made upon his mind is that war means that young poets, artists, dreamers, heroes of both sides shall mutually exterminate one another in a conflict in which they have no real interest over a paltry quarrel long since lost sight of. He is apparently oblivious of all that England went to war for; all the great ideals or the great crimes which seem fitting theme for the poet's pen he passes by.

There is much more in the same vein. Finally the reviewer laments:

It only shows that Mr. Drinkwater is not the national poet he might have been had he used the same skill as he deploys here on some theme in tune with the national spirit.

I suspect that for some people this moment marked the turning point in their perception of Drinkwater as a poet: the idea that somehow he had let the national side down. I'm not suggesting this became a universal view, but it's interesting that here in print somebody goes to such lengths to say that Drinkwater has misjudged the national mood. The reviewer concludes:

A visit to the Front, especially the French sector, might convince Mr. Drinkwater that $X \neq 0$, for if the sordidness of war prevented him from seeing the ethical glories he would surely realise it then as a very unpleasant but very necessary sanitary duty. (16 April 1917)

It is fascinating that $x = 0$ is treated by two reviewers in such contrasting ways. One holds it up as a model of a new pacifism, while the other rejects it and Drinkwater for having abandoned the kind of poetic destiny which this reviewer thought he ought to have fulfilled. It seems to me there is an

argument for saying that, from this moment on perhaps, even Drinkwater himself realises poetry is not the direction in which all his energies should be channelled. On the strength of this play he begins writing full-length drama and within a year has completed *Abraham Lincoln*, the success which will elevate his career to a completely different level.

The war, inevitably, remains a theme in his poetry. ‘Inscription for a War Memorial Fountain’ is a touching and neatly epigrammatic piece, in which the fountain itself speaks:

They nothing feared whose names I celebrate.
Greater than death they died; and their estate
Is here on Cotswold comradely to live
Upon your lips in every draught I give.

The next brief poem, ‘To a Poet on His Epitaph for the Fallen’ is a tribute to Lascelles Abercrombie’s ‘Inscriptions’:

Splendidly dying, yet their fame
Had fallen to imperious time,
But for the living lips that came
To save their splendour in a rhyme.

Abercrombie and Drinkwater remained friends throughout their lives, and indeed it was Abercrombie who gave the memorial address when Drinkwater died so unexpectedly in 1937, only in his mid-50s.

Coming back to the subject of war, in his post-war poetry, Drinkwater’s poems refer to the sense of betrayal the dead and their families feel. ‘1914-1918: The Dead Speak’ is an interesting example:

In the earth, in the seas, we remember;
We dead, we are awake;
But bitterness we know not
Who died for beauty's sake;
We have no need of honour,
No quarrel we recall,
The lies, the little angers
We have forgiven all.

In the earth, in the seas, we remember;
We dead, a myriad name;
But not among our legions

Is any word of blame;
We gave, and there an ending
Of covenants gone by,
We ask no funeral splendour
Who were content to die.

In the earth, in the seas, we remember;
We dead, your length of days;
But still the stealth of darkness
Makes one of all delays—
A year, or ten, or twenty,
How little then the cost—
Fear not, we have forgiven
The little years we lost.

In the earth, in the seas, we remember;
We dead, your daily debt;
The old heart-break is over,
But we remember yet—
Is earth a sweeter temple
Because we let you live?
Or do you still betray us,
That we may not forgive?

I have suggested that $x = o$ might have represented a turning point in his career, and interestingly a few months after the reviews recommended that Drinkwater should go to the Front to see the war for himself, there appeared in the *Birmingham Mail* (10 December 1917) the following announcement:

Mr John Drinkwater for France

We do not usually associate the entertainments at the Front with the “highbrow” type. Jollity, and popular and sentimental music, are what the average man enduring the hardships of soldiering wants But as the army now includes in its ranks a fair representation of all classes of mind, it’s only fair that those who like the stimulation of poetry should get it. There is, indeed, a definite demand for this kind of entertainment, and at the request I understand of Miss Lena Ashwell, Mr. John Drinkwater is to go to France on 23rd of December for a month. During that time he has undertaken to read for an hour or so to those who wish it passages of English poetry from its beginning to the “Georgians”, and no doubt he will not disregard the requests which he is sure to receive to read some of his own verse. He’s undertaken a big task, and will need to travel with a very good

representative selection of the poets to meet all demands. But he will go out to France with the knowledge that he will get sympathetic audiences, for many letters have been received by him from men out there expressing their appreciation of his work. This is quite a new venture I believe and Mr. Drinkwater's experiences as a pioneer should be interesting.

And that is how John Drinkwater came to be in Buchy in January 1918. I began by looking at the importance of friends for poets. When his last book, *English Poetry: An Unfinished History* was published shortly after his death, the Irish dramatist St. John Ervine, who had been a close friend of Drinkwater, wrote this in the Preface about friendship and about Drinkwater, which sums up Drinkwater the man:

When I made friendship with him he'd already won great renown and fortune with his play *Abraham Lincoln*, and was beginning to experience the blasts of envy which blow about a man who has committed the crime of success. I came to know him intimately, and I formed a great affection for him which wasn't diminished by the break in our encounters during the last year or two of his life. His detractors said of him that he was pompous, and they lost no opportunity of belittling his work, yet I never heard him say a single bitter word about his most implacable enemy He might complain of a man's criticism but he did not complain of the man himself, nor did he, when angered by those who depreciated his work, attempt to revenge himself by depreciating theirs. He was incapable of anonymous assaults. That he had defects is indisputable, for he was a man and fallible like the rest of us. But meanness was not one of them, nor was spite. He wasn't envious of anyone's good fortune, but was eager to promote it. He leaves in my recollection the memory of a most generous nature and an affectionate and friendly disposition.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to talk about a neglected Dymock poet to the Friends of the Dymock poets. I wanted to make the case for re-reading Drinkwater and to suggest that he deserves to be rediscovered for the pleasure he gave to many readers and audiences. I myself was born in Birmingham, and the first pantomime I ever saw, at the Birmingham Rep, was Drinkwater's *Puss in Boots* (still performed to this day). So in conclusion I will only add that that the padre who looked after John Drinkwater in Buchy, and in whose notebook the poet inscribed one of his best-known poems as a gesture of friendship, was the Rev Edward Barlow, my grandfather.