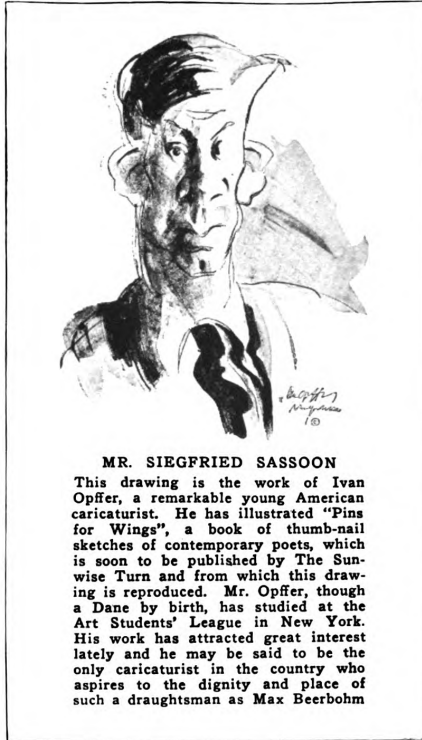


Fireflies

A Set of Parodies of the Work of Some Modern British Poets

By SIEGFRIED SASSOON

NOTE. These poems were written primarily to strengthen the *entente cordiale* between English and American poetry. That group of British poets who are so well known as the "Georgians" have been exceedingly anxious to testify to their affection and respect for America. Hearing by chance that the firefly, an insect not found in England, had never been celebrated in verse (it somehow escaped this honour at the time of the Romantic Revival, when practically every other living thing was made the subject of a poem), they decided that they could not do better than celebrate it themselves and thus secure for it a permanent place in English lyric poetry. Mr.



MR. SIEGFRIED SASSOON
This drawing is the work of Ivan Opffer, a remarkable young American caricaturist. He has illustrated "Pins for Wings", a book of thumb-nail sketches of contemporary poets, which is soon to be published by The Sun-wise Turn and from which this drawing is reproduced. Mr. Opffer, though a Dane by birth, has studied at the Art Students' League in New York. His work has attracted great interest lately and he may be said to be the only caricaturist in the country who aspires to the dignity and place of such a draughtsman as Max Beerbohm

Siegfried Sassoon alone did not care to fall in with this plan; he has preferred to contribute a brief memoir of his recent lectures in America. Mr. W. W. Gibson, however, has made an heroic attempt to introduce fireflies, though they do not quite come within his usual province. We regret that we have not space to print his entire poem, which runs to 588 lines. Mr. Walter de la Mare, of all the poets, who have here attempted to deal with it, has found himself most at home with the subject. The whole little nosegay of song cannot fail to prove a delightful treat to all lovers of what is purest and most lyric in modern English poesy.

I

D. H. Lawrence

I SAY to you, my firefly: Flash around and fill me to the core with power.
You are all ablaze in the resurrection of night:
My body keeps pace with your flight.
I loathe you, my big one, my blasting beloved; O burn
Me as I have burned at the lamp of your beauty in flower.

Do you feel me astounded beneath you? O lovely bonfire of my bliss,
Have you ever dissected the huge exploring prism of my purple kiss?
For the pain of being afraid is more to me, more than ever to you.
And I am a seething shadow, beset with wild-flowers, golden and green with a bitter bloom.
I quiver and flap to the fire that wounds me through and through,—
The necromancy of your heaving flesh.—And I ask, by whom
Shall this hungry bubble of myself be shattered?
Only by the chaos of fireflies, drifting above my tomb.

II

W. H. Davies

SOMETIMES I get delight from beer,
And joke with bloody men in love;
But I have seldom been so gay
As when the fireflies danced above.

Come then, sweet flies, to cheer my dark,
And I'll not ask for tropic shine—
Poor men are richer still when they
Do sup from fire instead of wine.

III

Siegfried Sassoon

"**G**OOD evening; good evening!" The lecturer bowed,
When we heard him last Monday in Carnegie Hall.
Now the charm of his smile has caught on with the crowd,
And he's promised to come here again in the fall.

"I'm afraid he's a Red," whispered Dora to Daisy,
As he cursed the old men who in war-time were lazy.

* * * * *

But the tilt of his eyebrow has sent them both crazy.

IV

Walter de la Mare

IT was the dusk
With elfin glamour spilled,
That caged my spirit
From eve's music stilled.

Thou, with thy gift
Of frail unlatticed fire,
Sighest the mournful
Pleiad of desire.

Tiny the voice,
But fierce the muted sting;
Firefly, mosquito,—
Whatever thou art, take wing!

V

John Drinkwater

THE pilgrim crocuses are gone
From Eden and from Avalon,
And royal Atlantis keeps no fane
Where golden-crested wrens remain.
Yet, for the proudly-pastured mind,
The large delusions of mankind
Endure; and down uncharted years
The profligacy of the spheres
Traffics through primrose fields untrod
The fireflies of adventurous God.

VI

W. W. Gibson

HE must have been asleep. But then the lamp
Had gone out hours ago . . . the wick was damp;
And he'd been scribbling, scribbling, all day long.
(The stuff was stark, industrial, and strong.)
And then he woke; the neighbors were in bed,
And scraps of bygone days were in his head;
Dad with a shovel, scraping muck from pits;
And mother, (as she used to be before
She fell and cut her forehead by the door
And lost the kindly remnant of her wits).
But that was years ago. He liked to think
Of times before the family took to drink,
And in despair he started writing verse,
Until he gave it up, when things got worse.
He'd had an inspiration, though, last week,
And he'd been working ever since; (I think
He'd used nine penny bottles of grey ink).
Fireflies, the book was called. . . .

VII

Robert Graves

Child. "Is that a firefly, uncle?"
Uncle. "No, dear; it's only a match;
And I struck it to kindle my brown briar pipe,
The best of all the batch."
Child. "But, uncle, what queer lights are these
That blossom in the air?"
Uncle. "I'm reading a book of old ballads, child;
Go and comb your hair!"

VIII

John Masefield

FIREFLIES are loveliness; but when they flame
Low down among the hare-bells in the grass,
I know full well that they will be the same
When dogs and daisies into darkness pass.
For they have leapt in laurell'd Caesar's eyes,
And where the Roman fell his sword is rust;
His powers are broken; and these self-same flies
With flickering torches led him down to dust.

So, in the windy watches of my brain,
The lights return, the myriad planets gleam:
The leopards and the lilies and the dream;
The banners and the gold of France and Spain.
O dying fires, O roses, O release,
Mine be your pride, and mine your ultimate peace!