*September 29, 1914*

*To Ellery Sedgwick*

My dear Ellery:*[[1]](#footnote-0)*

I am venturing to send you this poem[[2]](#footnote-1) because I believe in it myself, and I am in hopes that, even through a form[[3]](#footnote-2) which I believe you do not care for, you may see its serious intent. My ideas was to represent the citizen army which France and England have put into the field; an army made up of men of all occupations and all kinds, each one fighting for the peace of the world which he knows and sees to be desirable, for liberty to do and work. And the sum total of all these desires making that necessary security which we call “peace,” as opposed to the devastating militarism of Germany. At the time when I wrote this poem, as you will see by the date,[[4]](#footnote-3) we did not know where the allied armies were, at least we in England did not know. We only knew that they were marching to meet the Germans. It is under this figure that I have portrayed them. The words are crude, often violent. They are intended to represent the unsentimental anger of men who quit all they desire and regard as valuable, in the midst of achievement, to fight a wild animal. The poet’s remarks may appear to you as flippant. They are intended to be merely the careless high spirits of such a character, thinly cloaking an urgent and serious purpose.

The metre is the one in which Paul Fort[[5]](#footnote-4) has been working for so long in France. It has the quality of ruggedness which is so useful for this sort of poem. It should be read exactly as if it were prose, and the unexpected rhymes, and the occasional repetition, somewhat in the manner of a refrain, are what give it its character.

I read this poem to Charlie Fiske[[6]](#footnote-5) on the steamer coming home. You could hardly suppose him to be sympathetic to anything so different from the ordinary rhyme. In fact, before he asked me if I would read it to him, he prefaced his remark by saying that he did not care for the modern method. But while I was reading this poem he burst into tears and told me that he thought if I had never written anything else my reputation would be made by this.

I hope you will feel the same way about it, because I am very anxious to have it appear in the pages of “The Atlantic.” It is too serious for a pictorial paper like “The Century” or “Scribners,” and “Poetry” and “The Little Review” have not a large enough circulation. Of course I know you will do as you think best. I only hope that you may find something in the poem which you consider worth while.

It is too bad you have had such a nasty time. I believe that I am to have the pleasure of dining with you on Sunday next. I do hope the cool weather will bring back your strength.

Sincerely yours,

Amy Lowell

1. Ellery Sedgwick (1872-1960), editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1908-1938. Sedgwick, married to a childhood friend of Lowell, was one of her first literary connections. Her first published poem, “A Fixed Idea,” appeared in the *Atlantic* in 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “The Allies,” from *Men, Women and Ghosts* (Macmillan, 1916). The poem was first published in *The Little Review*, January, 1915. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. The poem is written in what Lowell called Polyphonic Prose, poetry without enjambment that appears on the page looking like prose. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. The poem’s subtitle, August 14, 1914, marks the German Empire’s invasion of Belgium/France. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Paul Fort (1872-1960). French poet associated with the Symbolist movement. Founder and editor of the literary reviews *Livre d’Art* and *Vers et Prose*. He published more than thirty volumes of ballads, written using a combination of French alexandrines and unmetered, unrhymed passages printed a prose. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. This is presumably Boston-area lawyer Charles H. Fiske, Jr. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)