Mr. Masefield's "The Old Front Line" (Macmillan; $1.) written several months ago, has since become for us an even more tragic book than when first published. For the Front Line in question is that of the Allies before the Battle of the Somme and of that battle Mr. Masefield says, "It first gave the enemy the knowledge that he was beaten." Today, however, we see the Germans have, for the moment, caught from their English cousins the provoking malady of ignorance as to that very fact.

Despite the terrible significance of these trenches which, cut as they are in chalky soil and flanked with bleached sandbags, gash like festering wounds the ruined countryside, yet a more considerable genius than that of Mr. Masefield would be required sufficiently to diversify so complete and non-selective an account of scenes not obviously dissimilar. Not only does our interest now and then flag, but also our attention, despite the best will in the world, wanders. There are pages which read too much like a Baedaeker of our own flatter states. The author was quite aware of this and, speaking of the Front Line, himself says, "It is a difficult thing to describe without monotony, for it varies so little." Yes, and in those places which even to describe is monotonous, the soldier's life must indeed be maddeningly desiccated. As breeding-grounds of insanity these trenches must outdo what we have hitherto been taught to regard as the very worst of environments, those isolated farms of our own Vermont. What a strange and to us peculiarly pathetic contrast between the hideous dugouts of our Allies and the order and comfort and luxury of those subterranean apartments which after that victory on the

Somme were laid open to our sight. Wainscoting and cretonne curtains sound like a bit of "The Arabian Nights" in this monstrous desert land. It is good to know that the masters of this thaumaturgy were there proven not invincible. As in the three French books, so here too, we are surprised to find how much of the tactics of trench warfare the French and English had to learn from their adversaries. Thanks to the Battle of the Somme we know that lesson was well learned.

When the subject-matter gives Mr. Masefield an opportunity for the exercise of his remarkable talent for vivid and poetical description, he does not disappoint us. He thus describes the crater of a mine sprung by the English on the first morning of the Battle of the Somme:

> It is like the crater of a volcano, vast, ragged, and irregular, about one hundred and fifty yards long, one hundred yards across, and twenty-five yards deep. It is crusted and scabbed with yellowish tetter, like sulphur or the rancid fat on meat. The inside has rather the look of meat, for it is reddish and all streaked and scabbed with this pox and with discoloured chalk. A lot of it trickles and oozes like sores discharging pus, and this liquid gathers in holes near the bottom, and is greenish and foul and has the look of dead eyes looking upward.

We who read Mr. Masefield's "August 1914," probably the most profoundly beautiful poem this war has occasioned, reading these prose descriptions cannot but wish that he had devoted the time such a book as this must have absorbed—requiring as it did so minute an examination of the terrain and so painstaking an alignment of dead facts—to the evocation in verse of the essential reality of No Man's Land. That would indeed have been an awful pendent to the Berkshire downs of "August 1914." Yet perhaps our poet knows himself not adapted to so different an undertaking. For Mr. Masefield is too English not to be more at home among the warm material habitants of a Berkshire down than among the bleak geometrical nudities of the modern battle-field. Some things must be left for our Cubist poets.