

Robert Graves (1895-1985)

3 *'The General Elliott'*

He fell in victory's fierce pursuit,
Holed through and through with shot;
A sabre sweep had hacked him deep
"Twixt neck and shoulder-knot.

The potman cannot well recall, 5
The ostler never knew,
Whether that day was Malplaquet,
The Boyne, or Waterloo.

But there he hangs, a tavern sign, 10
With foolish bold regard
For cock and hen and loitering men
And wagons down the yard.

Raised high above the hayseed world
He smokes his china pipe;
And now surveys the orchard ways, 15
The damsons clustering ripe —

Stares at the churchyard slabs beyond,
Where country neighbours lie:
Their brief renown set lowly down,
But his invades the sky. 20

He grips a tankard of brown ale
That spills a generous foam:
Often he drinks, they say, and winks
At drunk men lurching home.

No upstart hero may usurp 25
That honoured swinging seat;
His seasons pass with pipe and glass
Until the tale's complete —

And paint shall keep his buttons bright

Though all the world's forgot

30

Whether he died for England's pride

By battle or by pot.

1923

(From *Collected Poems 1914-1947*. London: Cassell, 1948)