CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The previous sections have examined the relevance of the present study; pacifism, its nature and evolution in intent and direction; the predecessors and contemporaries of Sassoon; Sassoon and his successors; and Sassoon's own poetry with the particular purpose of identifying the pacifist in him. It now remains, in fine, to sum up Sassoon as a poet and pacifist; in other words Pacifist Poet.

It has been seen in the earlier chapters that, when Sassoon began to write poetry against the backdrop of war, he was found to be different from poets like Brooke and Grenfell. Sassoon's poetry differed from theirs both in temper and in material. They had carried on the peace-time attitude of Georgians. But Sassoon found the Georgian tone and style unsuited and inadequate to his needs. Then, he went back to some of his predecessors for models. Hardy for incident and irony, Housman for bitterness and cynicism, Joyce for realism shorn of obscurities and brutality—to better the shallow facades of complacency. 1

He adopted a technique which liberally utilised anecdotes.

1. BULLOUGH, GEOFFREY: THE THREAT OF MODERN POETRY, P.112.
from war, mingled the familiar with the unfamiliar, the realistic with the fanciful, to make his singularly pacifist view intelligible; in a perceptive style prosaically amusing or detached in detail, he captured images of the event, character, environment and changefulness of atmosphere, revealing themselves in often using an elevated expression, images. He can tell a story with a beguiling ambiguity, often using an elevated expression. His observations of country life and preservation of old ways blending with innovation required by a new turn of feeling, opinion and incident, were also expressed in a most familiar language. He made use of a colloquial style, owing much to the experiments of John Masefield, in a descriptive and impressionistic way. He used the Alexandrine, as it suited a speech which was not often used in poetry and gave it respectability. Sassoon's poetry is remarkable for in the sense that it reveals his innovative vocabulary consisting of a series of new words with which he banter amusingly or fantastically. In his, we see a poet of considerable productiveness for what he wrote came from a daily contact with reality, reflected in deep contemplation; he had been endowed with a gift of music and he is fertile in evoking evocative pictures. He was emotionally involved and his

poetry is charged with an immediacy. Later poetry, on the theme of war, could but be imitative, after Sassoon. The inspiration for Owen's 'Strange Meeting' was Sassoon's 'The Barge-Hunter'. Sassoon's 'Animo' also attempts a similar visionary effect.

Alfred Owen, soon after his first experience in France in 1917, was stimulated by his friendship with Sassoon, who wrote 'Efforts in Basset's manner' and further thought, he declared, 'I am not myself a conventional objector with a seared conscience' and that "All a poet can do to-day is to warn, that is why the wartime poets should be truth-ful." He admired Sassoon's harsh way of expressing it, that he found in Sassoon. He was not as successful as his friend in the poems of mordant bitterness. Yet Owen, like Sassoon, condemned the Church, though, in the Carlton Hall where some pacifist meetings were held, he did not always share the views expressed there. The problem of poetry is not primarily, or even largely, a conscious problem, but one of fidelity to that centre where all experiences are reconciled. His poems are calm. They celebrate a victory of the human spirit and talk of being lifted above the sphere of anger and despair which the poetic imagination can make real.
The Imagists were also affected by the war.

Sir Rupert Sitwell, when he wrote the best of his war sonnets, was under the influence of Sassoon, and directed his poetry against profiteers, armchair-warriors and religious jingoists; the coming of peace found his ironical in the cheering, looking forward to another war, perceiving that the world was no better than before. 'The money changers were still in the temple.' 'Railway shares must go up; wages must go down.' 'And we all manufacture battles.' Later, however, Sitwell turned away from the manner of Sassoon and entered into a more intellectual sphere.1

T.S. Eliot did not so much interest in venting any particular consequence on the war. He became, on the other hand, the spokesman of a disillusioned generation; and developed subsequently into a poet of Christian mysticism. His influence was immense but not necessarily confined to technique.2 He wrote of current dissatisfaction, with the standards of individualism. According to him, the ideal of art was to reach as near as possible a Chinese jar:

"The stillness as a Chinese jar still moves perpetually in its stillness"  
(ASH WEDNESDAY)

2. Ibid: P. 182.
This would explain one's consciousness, but of a time in a world of temporal confusion, only through time, time is conquered. ("Burnt Norton").

Roy Fuller, who started in the cult of Auden, also wrote in the vein of Sassoon but without the bitterness and the pungency of Sassoon's poems. In fact, none of Sassoon's successors, either during war, or in the post-war period, could rise to the passionate heights which Sassoon scaled, with a mastery of irony and compassion, expressed in the sufferings and mass fratricide, with the avowed purpose of educating the Church, the Politician, and the Civilian, even in human, in their attitude to war.

One can experience today in the poetry of Sassoon, an influence, especially in the use of language. In this respect, he is one of the poets of his generation whom we cannot afford to ignore. The tone of his voice is direct and exciting almost in the same way as that of D.H. Lawrence. Sassoon used the colloquial idiom with an enviable mastery. Above all, Sassoon used irony to depict war in its raw vividness, and in its most poignant form. Such are Sassoon's gifts to Modern poetry.
There has been a notion, however, that Sassoon was incapable of intellectual subtleties, 1 grandeur and that there is aesthetic distance in his poetry. It is difficult to set aside this assessment; what was missing, as Murry thought, was apparent, since Sassoon had to grapple with his experience and comprehend it. "This background", according to Maguire, C.E., would lend some "intellectual remoteness" to the verse and save it from presenting mere "brute facts." 2 But then, Sassoon's is even more relevant as a pacifist than a poet, and it would be unfair to expect of him, committed as he is to a noble purpose, things, critics expect from any another poet.

It is hard, indeed, to reach as Sassoon's work as a poet without the man as a man. Sassoon was a country gentleman, living simply in a big house in Kent, and enjoying the perfect peace of the countryside. Such a man, indeed, did not need to write about his own life. He was soon to be known as the bravest officer in a very brave infantry division. For his heroic service he was awarded the Military Cross. Sassoon later refused to return to action and had been declared suffering from shock and was packed to a sanatorium. After release from

1. Murry, John Masefield : THE EVOLUTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL.
military service, he had confined himself in his spacious house, leading a simple life. He felt comfortable and at peace in the company of his books and pictures, and in friendly conversation when people called. He loved solitude, but delighted in occasional company. He watched the ways of the world astutely and had his comments on them. After the war, he became more of a book-hunter. Music was one of his preferences, but he was calm and said very little when the arts and letters were discussed. He drew cartoons excellently. Eventually, he became a Roman Catholic.

Such was the man, Sassoon. He refused action because of his convictions. He exuded an almost unshakable

"O Christ! I want to go out
And screech at them to stop"

(Expressions of War Experience)

The cry did not go very far, though, and it remained a one-man rebellion. We like him: the mind which is capable of bringing home the horror and the inhumanity of the war unimaginative and insensitive to the imagination of the general reader. Such comprehension from a gentle and sensitive writer, with an ability to interpret and record his impression, suggests that his life and work reveal a rare blend of determination, humour,
According to Edmund Blunden, poetry includes a special foresight or vision of the other side of the corners of circumstances. Few of us are spiritually rich enough to refuse the warning of the vision. As has been examined in the earlier chapters, the activation of the present stock-pile of armaments would only mean, "as Sassoon prophetically visualised, it witnesses the land where nothing blooms:

"....... the land where all
Is ruin, and nothing blossoms but the sky".

(FOREWORD: THE TROOPS)

"Inside the nuclear winter will take place,
Earth's light freezes
And the earth would be frozen into one darkened planet.
In the near future is the modern threat of nuclear warfare.
Were this to happen, the remains would very much reflect what Sassoon said of the moon:

"And I know the clouds are moving across the moon,
The low, red rising moon,
Whose voices make the emptiness of light."

If the universe is transformed into something like this soon, when the dread is over, Sassoon would say:

2. BLUNDEN, EDMUND: SIEGFRIED SASSOON'S POETRY, P.56.
& wry smile,
express his sympathy;

Are we down-hearted?
No........
Think we shall win?

Take great care.
And you'll write fair.
and the re-animation took place on the other side of:

"Let there be light, said God, and what He wrought
went past in myriad marching lives, and brought
This hour,...... and my small thought
Holding invisible vastness in its hands.
Let there be God, say I. And what I've done
Goes onward like the splendour of the Sun
And rises up in rapture and is one
With the white power of conscience that commands
Let life be God..... what wail of fiend or wraith
Dare mock my glorious angel where he stands
To fill my dark with fire, my heart with faith?"

("SEQUENCES")

abandoned
visionary bed freed from its frightening discord,

Ritchie Sassoon has so to say is that God should be established

bursting into a song!
first in the ethiess world and on whose word then, the
frightened, laden with the fear of discord, suddenly
will be forgotten and

"Everyone...... burst out singing

........... on, on, and out of sight"

('EVERYONE SANG')

Sassoon was a visionary; Palmer calls him 'a prophet in
poetry, in the absence of a seer and watch tower.'

Of those distinguished writers who have made mystical
discoveries, like Blake, Sassoon transcends human nature and
identifies himself:

"In me, Past, present, future meet
To hold long chiding conference
My love leaps through the future's fence
To dance with dream-enfranchised feet,
In me the caveman claps the seer,
And garlanded Apollo goes
Chanting to Abraham's deaf ear.
In me the tiger sniffs the rose
Look in my heart, kind friends, and tremble.
Since there your elements assemble"

('THE HEART'S JOURNEY')

1. PALMSH, HERBERT; POST VICTORIAN POETRY
granted strength to find
From lamp and flower, simplicity of mind'

became radiant in him. He became a Roman Catholic
subsequently and religious musing had grown from a mystical
simplicity.

Elder poets do look on their successors with hope
and regard. Sassoon, while preserving certain old features,
made innovations required by the times, and on the whole, he
wrote unpretentious and honest, and, therefore, infinitely
appealing poetry.

Sassoon dined home successfully, through his poetry, his firm belief that war is a crime against
the soldier. Rather, at the time he wrote, it was a
strange cry and few knew exactly what he meant. His was
a one-man revolution. If he is to be considered a failure, he is in glorious company. For, does not the
tradition of mankind reveal that Buddha failed, Christ
failed, and Gandhi failed to wean men from their iniquities.

But then, Sassoon was obviously way ahead of his times in his appeal
for a pacifist attitude; in a word, 'simplicity of mind'.