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**POEMS**

**WILFRED OWEN**

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Poems by Wilfred Owen.

This ebook edition was created and published by Global Grey on the 13th August 2023.

The artwork used for the cover is '*Gassed*'

painted by John Singer Sargent.

This book can be found on the site here:

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# 1914

War broke: and now the Winter of the world  
With perishing great darkness closes in.  
The foul tornado, centred at Berlin,  
Is over all the width of Europe whirled,  
Rending the sails of progress. Rent or furled  
Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin  
Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine's thin.  
The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.

For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,  
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,  
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,  
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.  
But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need  
Of sowings for new Spring, and blood for seed.

# A Terre

*(Being the philosophy of many Soldiers.)*

Sit on the bed; I'm blind, and three parts shell.  
Be careful; can't shake hands now; never shall.  
Both arms have mutinied against me,-brutes.  
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats.

I tried to peg out soldierly,—no use!  
One dies of war like any old disease.  
This bandage feels like pennies on my eyes.  
I have my medals?-Discs to make eyes close.  
My glorious ribbons?-Ripped from my own back  
In scarlet shreds. (That's for your poetry book.)

A short life and a merry one, my brick!  
We used to say we'd hate to live dead old,—  
Yet now . . . I'd willingly be puffy, bald,  
And patriotic. Buffers catch from boys  
At least the jokes hurled at them. I suppose  
Little I'd ever teach a son, but hitting,  
Shooting, war, hunting, all the arts of hurting.  
Well, that's what I learnt,—that, and making money.  
Your fifty years ahead seem none too many?  
Tell me how long I've got? God! For one year  
To help myself to nothing more than air!  
One Spring! Is one too good to spare, too long?  
Spring wind would work its own way to my lung,  
And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.  
My servant's lamed, but listen how he shouts!  
When I'm lugged out, he'll still be good for that.  
Here in this mummy-case, you know, I've thought  
How well I might have swept his floors for ever.  
I'd ask no nights off when the bustle's over,  
Enjoying so the dirt. Who's prejudiced  
Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,  
Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn,  
Less warm than dust that mixes with arms' tan?  
I'd love to be a sweep, now, black as Town,  
Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?

O Life, Life, let me breathe,—a dug-out rat!  
Not worse than ours the existences rats lead—  
Nosing along at night down some safe rut,  
They find a shell-proof home before they rot.  
Dead men may envy living mites in cheese,  
Or good germs even. Microbes have their joys,  
And subdivide, and never come to death,  
Certainly flowers have the easiest time on earth.

“I shall be one with nature, herb, and stone.”  
 Shelley would tell me. Shelley would be stunned;  
 The dullest Tommy hugs that fancy now.  
 “Pushing up daisies” is their creed, you know.  
 To grain, then, go my fat, to buds my sap,  
 For all the usefulness there is in soap.  
 D’you think the Boche will ever stew man-soup?  
 Some day, no doubt, if...  
 Friend, be very sure  
 I shall be better off with plants that share  
 More peaceably the meadow and the shower.  
 Soft rains will touch me,—as they could touch once,  
 And nothing but the sun shall make me ware.  
 Your guns may crash around me. I’ll not hear;  
 Or, if I wince, I shall not know I wince.  
 Don’t take my soul’s poor comfort for your jest.  
 Soldiers may grow a soul when turned to fronds,  
 But here’s the thing’s best left at home with friends.  
  
 My soul’s a little grief, grappling your chest,  
 To climb your throat on sobs; easily chased  
 On other sighs and wiped by fresher winds.  
  
 Carry my crying spirit till it’s weaned  
 To do without what blood remained these wounds.



## Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?

Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

## Apologia Pro Poemate Meo

I, too, saw God through mud,—  
 The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.  
 War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,  
 And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child.

Merry it was to laugh there—  
 Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.  
 For power was on us as we slashed bones bare  
 Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

I, too, have dropped off Fear—  
 Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon,  
 And sailed my spirit surging, light and clear  
 Past the entanglement where hopes lay strewn;

And witnessed exultation—  
 Faces that used to curse me, scowl for scowl,  
 Shine and lift up with passion of oblation,  
 Seraphic for an hour; though they were foul.

I have made fellowships—  
 Untold of happy lovers in old song.  
 For love is not the binding of fair lips  
 With the soft silk of eyes that look and long,

By Joy, whose ribbon slips,—  
 But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;  
 Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;  
 Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong.

I have perceived much beauty  
 In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;  
 Heard music in the silentness of duty;  
 Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest spate.

Nevertheless, except you share  
 With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,  
 Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,  
 And heaven but as the highway for a shell

You shall not hear their mirth:  
 You shall not come to think them well content  
 By any jest of mine. These men are worth  
 Your tears: You are not worth their merriment.

*November 1917.*

## Arms and the Boy

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,  
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,  
Or give him cartridges whose fine zinc teeth,  
Are sharp with sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.  
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;  
And God will grow no talons at his heels,  
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

## As Bronze may be much Beautified

*This poem was unfinished upon the author's death and therefore has omissions.*

As bronze may be much beautified  
By lying in the dark damp soil,  
So men who fade in dust of warfare fade  
Fairer, and sorrow blooms their soul.

Like pearls which noble women wear  
And, tarnishing, awhile confide  
Unto the old salt sea to feed,  
Many return more lustrous than they were.

But what of them buried profound,  
Buried where we can no more find.  
Who (  
Lie dark for ever under abysmal war?

# Asleep

Under his helmet, up against his pack,  
After so many days of work and waking,  
Sleep took him by the brow and laid him back.

There, in the happy no-time of his sleeping,  
Death took him by the heart. There heaved a quaking  
Of the aborted life within him leaping,  
Then chest and sleepy arms once more fell slack.

And soon the slow, stray blood came creeping  
From the intruding lead, like ants on track.

Whether his deeper sleep lie shaded by the shaking  
Of great wings, and the thoughts that hung the stars,  
High-pillowed on calm pillows of God's making,  
Above these clouds, these rains, these sleets of lead,  
And these winds' scimitars,  
-Or whether yet his thin and sodden head  
Confuses more and more with the low mould,  
His hair being one with the grey grass  
Of finished fields, and wire-scraggs rusty-old,  
Who knows? Who hopes? Who troubles? Let it pass!  
He sleeps. He sleeps less tremulous, less cold,  
Than we who wake, and waking say Alas!

## At a Calvary near the Ancre

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.  
In this war He too lost a limb,  
But His disciples hide apart;  
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,  
And in their faces there is pride  
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast  
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

The scribes on all the people shove  
And bawl allegiance to the state,  
But they who love the greater love  
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

# Beauty

*This poem was unfinished upon the author's death and therefore has omissions.*

The beautiful, the fair, the elegant,  
Is that which pleases us, says Kant,  
Without a thought of interest or advantage.

I used to watch men when they spoke of beauty  
And measure their enthusiasm. One  
An old man, seeing a ( ) setting sun,  
Praised it ( ) a certain sense of duty  
To the calm evening and his time of life.  
I know another man that never says a Beauty  
But of a horse; ( )

Men seldom speak of beauty, beauty as such,  
Not even lovers think about it much.  
Women of course consider it for hours  
In mirrors; ( )

A shrapnel ball -  
Just where the wet skin glistened when he swam -  
Like a fully-opened sea-anemone.  
We both said 'What a beauty! What a beauty, lad'  
I knew that in that flower he saw a hope  
Of living on, and seeing again the roses of his home.  
Beauty is that which pleases and delights,  
Not bringing personal advantage - Kant.  
But later on I heard  
A canker worked into that crimson flower  
And that he sank with it  
And laid it with the anemones off Dover.

## But I was Looking at the Permanent Stars

*This poem was unfinished upon the author's death and therefore has omissions.*

Bugles sang, saddening the evening air,  
And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.

Voices of boys were by the river-side.  
Sleep mothered them; and left the twilight sad.  
The shadow of the morrow weighed on men.

Voices of old despondency resigned,  
Bowed by the shadow of the morrow, slept.

( ) dying tone  
Of receding voices that will not return.  
The wailing of the high far-travelling shells  
And the deep cursing of the provoking ( )

The monstrous anger of our taciturn guns.  
The majesty of the insults of their mouths.



# The Calls

*Written in October 1918, shortly before Owen's return to the front.*

A dismal fog-hoarse siren howls at dawn.  
I watch the man it calls for, pushed and drawn  
Backwards and forwards, helpless as a pawn.  
But I'm lazy, and his work's crazy.

Quick treble bells begin at nine o'clock,  
Scuttling the schoolboy pulling up his sock,  
Scaring the late girl in the inky frock.  
I must be crazy; I learn from the daisy.

Stern bells annoy the rooks and doves at ten.  
I watch the verger close the doors, and when  
I hear the organ moan the first amen,  
Sing my religion's-same as pigeons'.

A blatant bugle tears my afternoons.  
Out clump the clumsy Tommies by platoons,  
Trying to keep in step with rag-time tunes,  
But I sit still; I've done my drill.

Gongs hum and buzz like saucepan-lids at dusk,  
I see a food-hog whet his gold-filled tusk  
To eat less bread, and more luxurious rusk.

Then sometimes late at night my window bumps  
From gunnery-practice, till my small heart thumps  
And listens for the shell-shrieks and the crumps,  
But that's not all.

For leaning out last midnight on my sill  
I heard the sighs of men, that have no skill  
To speak of their distress, no, nor the will!  
A voice I know. And this time I must go.

## The Chances

I mind as 'ow the night before that show  
 Us five got talkin,—we was in the know.  
 “Over the top to-morrer; boys, we're for it,  
 First wave we are, first ruddy wave; that's tore it.”  
 “Ah well,” says Jimmy,—an' 'e's seen some scrappin'—  
 “There ain't no more nor five things as can 'appen,  
 Ye get knocked out; else wounded—bad or cushy;  
 Scuppered; or nowt except you're feelin' mushy.”

One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops.  
 One lad was hurt, like, losin' both 'is props.  
 And one, to use the word of 'ypocrites,  
 'Ad the misfortune to be took by Fritz.  
 Now me, I wasn't scratched, praise God Almighty,  
 (Though next time please I'll thank 'im for a blighty),  
 But poor old Jim, 'e's livin' an' 'e's not;  
 'E reckoned 'e'd five chances, an' 'e's 'ad;  
 'E's wounded, killed, and pris'ner, all the lot—  
 The ruddy lot all rolled in one. Jim's mad.

## Le Christianisme

So the church Christ was hit and buried  
Under its rubbish and its rubble.  
In cellars, packed-up saints long serried,  
Well out of hearing of our trouble.

One Virgin still immaculate  
Smiles on for war to flatter her.  
She's halo'd with an old tin hat,  
But a piece of hell will batter her.

## Conscious

His fingers wake, and flutter up the bed.  
His eyes come open with a pull of will,  
Helped by the yellow may-flowers by his head.  
The blind-cord drawls across the window-sill . . .  
How smooth the floor of the ward is! what a rug!  
Who's that talking, somewhere out of sight?  
Why are they laughing? What's inside that jug?  
"Nurse! Doctor!" "Yes; all right, all right."

But sudden dusk bewilders all the air—  
There seems no time to want a drink of water.  
Nurse looks so far away. And everywhere  
Music and roses burst through crimson slaughter.  
Cold; cold; he's cold; and yet so hot:  
And there's no light to see the voices by—  
No time to dream, and ask—he knows not what.

## Cramped in that Funnelled Hole

Cramped in that funnelled hole, they watched the dawn  
Open a jagged rim around; a yawn  
Of death's jaws, which had all but swallowed them  
Stuck in the bottom of his throat of phlegm.

They were in one of many mouths of Hell  
Not seen of seers in visions, only felt  
As teeth of traps; when bones and the dead are smelt  
Under the mud where long ago they fell  
Mixed with the sour sharp odour of the shell.

## The Dead-Beat

He dropped,—more sullenly than wearily,  
 Lay stupid like a cod, heavy like meat,  
 And none of us could kick him to his feet;  
 Just blinked at my revolver, blearily;  
 —Didn't appear to know a war was on,  
 Or see the blasted trench at which he stared.  
 "I'll do 'em in," he whined. "If this hand's spared,  
 I'll murder them, I will."

A low voice said,  
 "It's Blighty, p'raps, he sees; his pluck's all gone,  
 Dreaming of all the valiant, that *aren't* dead:  
 Bold uncles, smiling ministerially;  
 Maybe his brave young wife, getting her fun  
 In some new home, improved materially.  
 It's not these stiffs have crazed him; nor the Hun."

We sent him down at last, out of the way.  
 Unwounded;—stout lad, too, before that strafe.  
 Malingering? Stretcher-bearers winked, "Not half!"

Next day I heard the Doc.'s well-whiskied laugh:  
 "That scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray!"

## Disabled

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,  
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,  
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park  
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,  
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,  
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay  
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,  
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,  
 —In the old times, before he threw away his knees.  
 Now he will never feel again how slim  
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.  
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,  
 For it was younger than his youth, last year.  
 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;  
 He's lost his colour very far from here,  
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,  
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,  
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.  
 One time he liked a bloodsmear down his leg,  
 After the matches carried shoulder-high.  
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,  
 He thought he'd better join. He wonders why . . .  
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts.

That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,  
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts,  
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;  
 Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.  
 Germans he scarcely thought of; and no fears  
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts  
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;  
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;  
 Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.  
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.  
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits  
 Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.  
 Now, he will spend a few sick years in Institutes,  
 And do what things the rules consider wise,  
 And take whatever pity they may dole.  
 To-night he noticed how the women's eyes  
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.

How cold and late it is! Why don't they come  
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?



## Dulce et Decorum est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
 Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,  
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...  
 Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
 The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*

## Elegy in April and September

(jabbered among the trees)

**1**

Hush, thrush! Hush, missen-thrush, I listen...  
I heard the flush of footsteps through the loose leaves,  
And a low whistle by the water's brim.

Still! Daffodil! Nay, hail me not so gaily,-  
Your gay gold lily daunts me and deceives,  
Who follow gleams more golden and more slim.

Look, brook! O run and look, O run!  
The vain reeds shook? - Yet search till gray sea heaves,  
And I will stray among these fields for him.

Gaze, daisy! Stare through haze and glare,  
And mark the hazardous stars all dawns and eves,  
For my eye withers, and his star wanes dim.

**2**

Close, rose, and droop, heliotrope,  
And shudder, hope! The shattering winter blows.  
Drop, heliotrope, and close, rose...

Mourn, corn, and sigh, rye.  
Men garner you, but youth's head lies forlorn.  
Sigh, rye, and mourn, corn...

Brood, wood, and muse, yews,  
The ways gods use we have not understood.  
Muse, yews, and brood, wood...

## The End

After the blast of lightning from the east,  
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot Throne;  
After the drums of time have rolled and ceased,  
And by the bronze west long retreat is blown,  
Shall Life renew these bodies? Of a truth,  
All death will he annul, all tears assuage?  
Or fill these void veins full again with youth,  
And wash, with an immortal water, age?

When I do ask white Age, he saith not so:  
'My head hangs weighed with snow.'  
And when I hearken to the Earth, she saith:  
'My fiery heart shrinks, aching. It is death.  
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,  
Nor my titanic tears, the seas, be dried.'

# Exposure

1

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...  
 Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...  
 Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...  
 Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,  
 But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,  
 Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.  
 Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,  
 Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.  
 What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...  
 We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.  
 Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army  
 Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray,  
 But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.  
 Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,  
 With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause and renew,  
 We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,  
 But nothing happens.

2

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—  
 We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,  
 Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,  
 Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.  
 Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed  
 With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;  
 For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;  
 Shutters and doors all closed: on us the doors are closed—  
 We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;  
 Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.  
 For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;  
 Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,  
 For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,  
 Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.  
 The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,  
 Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,  
 But nothing happens.

# Futility

Move him into the sun—  
Gently its touch awoke him once,  
At home, whispering of fields unsown.  
Always it woke him, even in France,  
Until this morning and this snow.  
If anything might rouse him now  
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds—  
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.  
Are limbs so dear-achieved, are sides  
Full-nerved,—still warm,—too hard to stir?  
Was it for this the clay grew tall?  
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil  
To break earth's sleep at all?

## Greater Love

Red lips are not so red  
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.  
Kindness of wooed and wooer  
Seems shame to their love pure.  
O Love, your eyes lose lure  
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead!

Your slender attitude  
Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed,  
Rolling and rolling there  
Where God seems not to care;  
Till the fierce love they bear  
Cramps them in death's extreme decrepitude.

Your voice sings not so soft,—  
Though even as wind murmuring through rafters loft,—  
Your dear voice is not dear,  
Gentle, and evening clear,  
As theirs whom none now hear,  
Now earth has stopped their piteous mouths that coughed.

Heart, you were never hot  
Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;  
And though your hand be pale,  
Paler are all which trail  
Your cross through flame and hail:  
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.

# Happiness

Ever again to breathe pure happiness,  
So happy that we gave away our toy?  
We smiled at nothings, needing no caress?  
Have we not laughed too often since with Joy?  
Have we not stolen too strange and sorrowful wrongs  
For her hands' pardoning? The sun may cleanse,  
And time, and starlight. Life will sing great songs,  
And gods will show us pleasures more than men's.

Yet heaven looks smaller than the old doll's-home,  
No nestling place is left in bluebell bloom,  
And the wide arms of trees have lost their scope.  
The former happiness is unreturning:  
Boys' griefs are not so grievous as our yearning,  
Boys have no sadness sadder than our hope.

## Has Your Soul Sipped?

Has your soul sipped  
Of the sweetness of all sweets?  
Has it well supped  
But yet hungers and sweats?

I have been witness  
Of a strange sweetness,  
All fancy surpassing  
Past all supposing.

Passing the rays  
Of the rubies of morning,  
Or the soft rise  
Of the moon; or the meaning  
Known to the rose  
Of her mystery and mourning.

Sweeter than nocturnes  
Of the wild nightingale  
Or than love's nectar  
After life's gall.

Sweeter than odours  
Of living leaves,  
Sweeter than ardours  
Of dying loves.

Sweeter than death  
And dreams hereafter  
To one in dearth  
Or life and its laughter.

Or the proud wound  
The victor wears  
Or the last end  
Of all wars.

Or the sweet murder  
After long guard  
Unto the martyr  
Smiling at God;

To me was that smile,  
Faint as a wan, worn myth,  
Faint and exceeding small,  
On a boy's murdered mouth.

Though from his throat  
The life-tide leaps  
There was no threat  
On his lips.



But with the bitter blood  
And the death-smell  
All his life's sweetness bled  
Into a smile.

## Hospital Barge

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,  
A barge round old C erisy slowly slewed.  
Softly her engines down the current screwed,  
And chuckled softly with contented hum,  
Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.  
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued;  
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude;  
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes  
To watch her lessening westward quietly.  
Then, as she neared the bend, her funnel screamed.  
And that long lamentation made him wise  
How unto Avalon, in agony,  
Kings passed in the dark barge, which Merlin dreamed.

## I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson

I saw his round mouth's crimson deepen as it fell,  
Like a Sun, in his last deep hour;  
Watched the magnificent recession of farewell,  
Clouding, half gleam, half glower,  
And a last splendour burn the heavens of his cheek.  
And in his eyes  
The cold stars lighting, very old and bleak,  
In different skies.

# Insensibility

1

Happy are men who yet before they are killed  
 Can let their veins run cold.  
 Whom no compassion fleers  
 Or makes their feet  
 Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.  
 The front line withers,  
 But they are troops who fade, not flowers  
 For poets' tearful fooling:  
 Men, gaps for filling:  
 Losses, who might have fought  
 Longer; but no one bothers.

2

And some cease feeling  
 Even themselves or for themselves.  
 Dullness best solves  
 The tease and doubt of shelling,  
 And Chance's strange arithmetic  
 Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.  
 They keep no check on Armies' decimation.

3

Happy are these who lose imagination:  
 They have enough to carry with ammunition.  
 Their spirit drags no pack.  
 Their old wounds save with cold can not more ache.  
 Having seen all things red,  
 Their eyes are rid  
 Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.  
 And terror's first constriction over,  
 Their hearts remain small drawn.  
 Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle  
 Now long since ironed,  
 Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

4

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion  
 How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,  
 And many sighs are drained.  
 Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:  
 His days are worth forgetting more than not.  
 He sings along the march  
 Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,  
 The long, forlorn, relentless trend  
 From larger day to huger night.

5

We wise, who with a thought besmirch  
Blood over all our soul,  
How should we see our task  
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?  
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;  
Dying, not mortal overmuch;  
Nor sad, nor proud,  
Nor curious at all.  
He cannot tell  
Old men's placidity from his.

6

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,  
That they should be as stones.  
Wretched are they, and mean  
With paucity that never was simplicity.  
By choice they made themselves immune  
To pity and whatever mourns in man  
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;  
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;  
Whatever shares  
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

# Inspection

'You! What d'you mean by this?' I rapped.  
'You dare come on parade like this?'  
'Please, sir, it's-' 'Old yer mouth,' the sergeant snapped.  
'I takes 'is name, sir?'-'Please, and then dismiss.'

Some days 'confined to camp' he got,  
For being 'dirty on parade'.  
He told me, afterwards, the damnèd spot  
Was blood, his own. 'Well, blood is dirt,' I said.

'Blood's dirt,' he laughed, looking away,  
Far off to where his wound had bled  
And almost merged for ever into clay.  
'The world is washing out its stains,' he said.  
'It doesn't like our cheeks so red:  
Young blood's its great objection.  
But when we're duly white-washed, being dead,  
The race will bear Field-Marshal God's inspection.'

## The Kind Ghosts

She sleeps on soft, last breaths; but no ghost looms  
Out of the stillness of her palace wall,  
Her wall of boys on boys and dooms on dooms.

She dreams of golden gardens and sweet glooms,  
Not marvelling why her roses never fall  
Nor what red mouths were torn to make their blooms.

The shades keep down which well might roam her hall.  
Quiet their blood lies in her crimson rooms  
And she is not afraid of their footfall.

They move not from her tapestries, their pall,  
Nor pace her terraces, their hecatombs,  
Lest aught she be disturbed, or grieved at all.

## The Last Laugh

'Oh! Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.  
Whether he vainly cursed or prayed indeed,  
The Bullets chirped-In vain, vain, vain!  
Machine-guns chuckled,-Tut-tut! Tut-tut!  
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,-'O Mother, -Mother, - Dad!  
Then smiled at nothing, childlike, being dead.  
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud  
Leisurely gestured,-Fool!  
And the splinters spat, and tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,  
Till slowly lowered, his whole faced kissed the mud.  
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;  
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;  
And the Gas hissed.



## The Letter

With B.E.F. Jun 10. Dear Wife,  
 (Oh blast this pencil. 'Ere, Bill, lend's a knife.)  
 I'm in the pink at present, dear.  
 I think the war will end this year.  
 We don't see much of them square-'eaded 'Uns.  
 We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.  
 I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.  
 (Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)  
 There don't seem much to say just now.  
 (Yer what? Then don't, yer ruddy cow!  
 And give us back me cigarette!)  
 I'll soon be 'ome. You mustn't fret.  
 My feet's improvin', as I told you of.  
 We're out in the rest now. Never fear.  
 (VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near.)  
 Mother might spare you half a sov.  
 Kiss Nell and Bert. When me and you-  
 (Eh? What the 'ell! Stand to? Stand to!  
 Jim, give's a hand with pack on, lad.  
 Guh! Christ! I'm hit. Take 'old. Aye, bad.  
 No, damn your iodine. Jim? 'Ere!  
 Write my old girl, Jim, there's a dear.)

## Mental Cases

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?  
 Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows,  
 Drooping tongues from jaws that slob their relish,  
 Baring teeth that leer like skulls' tongues wicked?  
 Stroke on stroke of pain,—but what slow panic,  
 Gouged these chasms round their fretted sockets?  
 Ever from their hair and through their hand palms  
 Misery swelters. Surely we have perished  
 Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?

—These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.  
 Memory fingers in their hair of murders,  
 Multitudinous murders they once witnessed.  
 Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander,  
 Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.  
 Always they must see these things and hear them,  
 Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,  
 Carnage incomparable and human squander  
 Rucked too thick for these men's extrication.

Therefore still their eyeballs shrink tormented  
 Back into their brains, because on their sense  
 Sunlight seems a bloodsmear; night comes blood-black;  
 Dawn breaks open like a wound that bleeds afresh.

—Thus their heads wear this hilarious, hideous,  
 Awful falseness of set-smiling corpses.

—Thus their hands are plucking at each other;  
 Picking at the rope-knouts of their scourging;  
 Snatching after us who smote them, brother,  
 Pawing us who dealt them war and madness.

# Miners

There was a whispering in my hearth,  
 A sigh of the coal.  
 Grown wistful of a former earth  
 It might recall.

I listened for a tale of leaves  
 And smothered ferns,  
 Frond-forests; and the low, sly lives  
 Before the fawns.

My fire might show steam-phantoms simmer  
 From Time's old cauldron,  
 Before the birds made nests in summer,  
 Or men had children.

But the coals were murmuring of their mine,  
 And moans down there  
 Of boys that slept wry sleep, and men  
 Writhing for air.

And I saw white bones in the cinder-shard,  
 Bones without number.  
 For many hearts with coal are charred,  
 And few remember.

I thought of all that worked dark pits  
 Of war, and died  
 Digging the rock where Death reposes  
 Peace lies indeed.

Comforted years will sit soft-chaired  
 In rooms of amber;  
 The years will stretch their hands, well-cheered  
 By our lifes' ember.

The centuries will burn rich loads  
 With which we groaned,  
 Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids,  
 While songs are crooned.  
 But they will not dream of us poor lads  
 Left in the ground.

# Music

I have been urged by earnest violins  
And drunk their mellow sorrows to the slake  
Of all my sorrows and my thirsting sins.  
My heart has beaten for a brave drum's sake.  
Huge chords have wrought me mighty: I have hurled  
Thuds of gods' thunder. And with old winds pondered  
Over the curse of this chaotic world,-  
With low lost winds that maundered as they wandered.

I have been gay with trivial fifes that laugh;  
And songs more sweet than possible things are sweet;  
And gongs, and oboes. Yet I guessed not half  
Life's symphony till I had made hearts beat,  
And touched Love's body into trembling cries,  
And blown my love's lips into laughs and sighs.

## The Next War

“War’s a joke for me and you,  
While we know such dreams are true.”

*Siegfried Sassoon*

Out there, we’ve walked quite friendly up to Death,-  
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,-  
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.  
We’ve sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,-  
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn’t writhe.  
He’s spat at us with bullets and he’s coughed  
Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft,  
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!  
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.  
No soldier’s paid to kick against His powers.  
We laughed, -knowing that better men would come,  
And greater wars: when each proud fighter brags  
He wars on Death, for lives; not men, for flags.

## A New Heaven (To-On Active Service)

Seeing we never found gay fairyland  
(Though still we crouched by bluebells moon by moon)  
And missed the tide of Lethe; yet are soon  
For that new bridge that leaves old Styx half-spanned;  
Nor ever unto Mecca caravanned;  
Nor bugled Asgard, skilled in magic rune;  
Nor yearned for far Nirvana, the sweet swoon,  
And from high Paradise are cursed and banned;

-Let's die home, ferry across the Channel! Thus  
Shall we live gods there. Death shall be no sev'rance.  
Weary cathedrals light new shrines for us.  
To us, rough knees of boys shall ache with rev'rance.  
Are not girls' breasts a clear, strong Acropole?  
-There our own mothers' tears shall heal us whole.

## Parable of the Old Men and the Young

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
And builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an Angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not so, but slew his son. . . .

## The Roads Also

The roads also have their wistful rest,  
When the weathercocks perch still and roost,  
And the looks of men turn kind to clocks  
And the trams go empty to their drome.  
The streets also dream their dream.

The old houses muse of the old days  
And their fond trees leaning on them doze.  
On their steps chatter and clatter stops  
For the cries of other times hold men  
And they hear the unknown moan.

They remember alien ardours and far futures  
And the smiles not seen in happy features.  
Their begetters call them from the gutters;  
In the gardens unborn child-souls wail,  
And the dead scribble on walls.

Though their own child cry for them in tears,  
Women weep but hear no sound upstairs.  
They believe in love they had not lived  
And passion past the reach of stairs  
To the world's towers or stars.



## S. I. W.

*"I will to the King,  
And offer him consolation in his trouble,  
For that man there has set his teeth to die,  
And being one that hates obedience,  
Discipline, and orderliness of life,  
I cannot mourn him."*

*W. B. Yeats*

Patting goodbye, doubtless they told the lad  
He'd always show the Hun a brave man's face;  
Father would sooner him dead than in disgrace,-  
Was proud to see him going, aye, and glad.  
Perhaps his mother whimpered how she'd fret  
Until he got a nice, safe wound to nurse.  
Sisters would wish girls too could shoot, charge, curse,...  
Brothers—would send his favourite cigarette.  
Each week, month after month, they wrote the same,  
Thinking him sheltered in some Y.M. Hut,  
Where once an hour a bullet missed its aim  
And misses teased the hunger of his brain.  
His eyes grew old with wincing, and his hand  
Reckless with ague. Courage leaked, as sand  
From the best sandbags after years of rain.  
But never leave, wound, fever, trench-foot, shock,  
Untrapped the wretch. And death seemed still withheld  
For torture of lying machinally shelled,  
At the pleasure of this world's Powers who'd run amok.  
He'd seen men shoot their hands, on night patrol.  
Their people never knew. Yet they were vile.  
"Death sooner than dishonour, that's the style!"  
So Father said.

One dawn, our wire patrol  
Carried him. This time, Death had not missed.  
We could do nothing but wipe his bleeding cough.  
Could it be accident?—Rifles go off..  
Not sniped? No. (Later they found the English ball.)

It was the reasoned crisis of his soul.  
Against the fires that would not burn him whole  
But kept him for death's perjury and scoff  
And life's half-promising, and both their riling.

With him they buried the muzzle his teeth had kissed,  
And truthfully wrote the Mother, "Tim died smiling."

## Schoolmistress

Having, with bold Horatius, stamped her feet  
And waved a final swashing arabesque  
O'er the brave days of old, she ceased to bleat,  
Slapped her Macaulay back upon the desk,  
Resumed her calm gaze and her lofty seat.

There, while she heard the classic lines repeat,  
Once more the teacher's face clenched stern;  
For through the window, looking on the street,  
Three soldiers hailed her. She made no return.  
One was called 'Orace whom she would not greet.

## The Send-off

Down the close, darkening lanes they sang their way  
To the siding-shed,  
And lined the train with faces grimly gay.

Their breasts were stuck all white with wreath and spray  
As men's are, dead.

Dull porters watched them, and a casual tramp  
Stood staring hard,  
Sorry to miss them from the upland camp.  
Then, unmoved, signals nodded, and a lamp  
Winked to the guard.

So secretly, like wrongs hushed-up, they went.  
They were not ours:  
We never heard to which front these were sent.

Nor there if they yet mock what women meant  
Who gave them flowers.

Shall they return to beatings of great bells  
In wild trainloads?  
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells,  
May creep back, silent, to still village wells,  
Up half-known roads.

## The Sentry

We'd found an old Boche dug-out, and he knew,  
 And gave us hell; for shell on frantic shell  
 Hammered on top, but never quite burst through.  
 Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime,  
 Kept slush waist-high and rising hour by hour,  
 Choked up the steps too thick with clay to climb.  
 What murk of air remained stank old, and sour  
 With fumes from whizz-bangs, and the smell of men  
 Who'd lived there years, and left their curse in the den,  
 If not their corpses....  
 There we herded from the blast  
 Of whizz-bangs, but one found our door at last.  
 Buffeting eyes and breath, snuffing the candles.  
 And thud! flump! thud! down the steep steps came thumping  
 And splashing in the flood, deluging muck—  
 The sentry's body; then, his rifle, handles  
 Of old Boche bombs, and mud in ruck on ruck.  
 We dredged him up, for dead, until he whined.  
 "O sir, my eyes—I'm blind—I'm blind, I'm blind!"  
 Coaxing, I held a flame against his lids  
 And said if he could see the least blurred light  
 He was not blind; in time they'd get all right.  
 "I can't," he sobbed. Eyeballs, huge-bulged like squids  
 Watch my dreams still; but I forgot him there  
 In posting next for duty, and sending a scout  
 To beg a stretcher somewhere, and floundering about  
 To other posts under the shrieking air.  
  
 Those other wretches, how they bled and spewed,  
 And one who would have drowned himself for good,—  
 I try not to remember these things now.  
 Let dread hark back for one word only: how  
 Half-listening to that sentry's moans and jumps,  
 And the wild chattering of his broken teeth,  
 Renewed most horribly whenever crumps  
 Pummelled the roof and slogged the air beneath—  
 Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout  
 "I see your lights!" But ours had long died out.

## The Show

My soul looked down from a vague height with Death,  
 As unremembering how I rose or why,  
 And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,  
 Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,  
 And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plaques.

Across its beard, that horror of harsh wire,  
 There moved thin caterpillars, slowly uncoiled.  
 It seemed they pushed themselves to be as plugs  
 Of ditches, where they writhed and shrivelled, killed.

By them had slimy paths been trailed and scraped  
 Round myriad warts that might be little hills.

From gloom's last dregs these long-strung creatures crept,  
 And vanished out of dawn down hidden holes.

(And smell came up from those foul openings  
 As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.)

On dithering feet upgathered, more and more,  
 Brown strings, towards strings of grey, with bristling spines,  
 All migrants from green fields, intent on mire.

Those that were gray, of more abundant spawns,  
 Ramped on the rest and ate them and were eaten.

I saw their bitten backs curve, loop, and straighten.  
 I watched those agonies curl, lift, and flatten.

Whereat, in terror what the sight might mean,  
 I reeled and shivered earthward like a feather.

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.  
 And He, picking a manner of worm, which half had hid  
 Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further,  
 Showed me its feet, the feet of many men,  
 And the fresh-severed head of it, my head.

## Six O'Clock in Princes Street

In twos and threes, they have not far to roam,  
Crowds that thread eastward, gay of eyes;  
Those seek no further than their quiet home,  
Wives, walking westward, slow and wise.

Neither should I go fooling over clouds,  
Following gleams unsafe, untrue,  
And tiring after beauty through star-crowds,  
Dared I go side by side with you;

Or be you in the gutter where you stand,  
Pale rain-flawed phantom of the place,  
With news of all the nations in your hand,  
And all their sorrows in your face.

## Smile, Smile, Smile

Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned  
 Yesterday's Mail; the casualties (typed small)  
 And (large) Vast Booty from our Latest Haul.  
 Also, they read of Cheap Homes, not yet planned,  
 For, said the paper, "when this war is done  
 The men's first instinct will be making homes.  
 Meanwhile their foremost need is aerodromes,  
 It being certain war has but begun.  
 Peace would do wrong to our undying dead,—  
 The sons we offered might regret they died  
 If we got nothing lasting in their stead.  
 We must be solidly indemnified.  
 Though all be worthy Victory which all bought,  
 We rulers sitting in this ancient spot  
 Would wrong our very selves if we forgot  
 The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,  
 Who kept this nation in integrity.  
 Nation?—The half-limbed readers did not chafe  
 But smiled at one another curiously  
 Like secret men who know their secret safe.  
 This is the thing they know and never speak,  
 That England one by one had fled to France  
 (Not many elsewhere now, save under France).  
 Pictures of these broad smiles appear each week,  
 And people in whose voice real feeling rings  
 Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things.

*23rd September 1918.*

## Soldier's Dream

I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears;  
And caused a permanent stoppage in all bolts;  
And buckled with a smile Mausers and Colts;  
And rusted every bayonet with His tears.

And there were no more bombs, of ours or Theirs,  
Not even an old flint-lock, not even a pikel.  
But God was vexed, and gave all power to Michael;  
And when I woke he'd seen to our repairs.



## Sonnet On Seeing a Piece of our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,  
Great Gun towering towards Heaven, about to curse;  
Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse  
Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!  
Reach at that Arrogance which needs thy harm,  
And beat it down before its sins grow worse.  
Spend our resentment, cannon,-yea, disburse  
Our gold in shapes of flame, our breaths in storm.

Yet, for men's sakes whom thy vast malison  
Must wither innocent of enmity,  
Be not withdrawn, dark arm, the spoilure done,  
Safe to the bosom of our prosperity.  
But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,  
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

## Spells and Incantations

A vague pearl, a wan pearl  
You showed me once; I peered through far-gone winters  
Until my mind was fog-bound in that gem.

Blue diamonds, cold diamonds  
You shook before me, so that out of them  
Glittered and glowed vast diamond dawns of spring.

Tiger-eyed rubies, wrathful rubies  
You rolled. I watched their hot hearts fling  
Flames from each glaring summer of my life.

Quiet amber, mellow amber  
You lifted; and behold the whole air rife  
With evening, and the auburn autumn cloud.

But pale skin, your pearl skin  
Show this to me, and I shall have surprise  
Of every snow-lit dawn before it break.

But clear eyes, your fresh eyes  
Open; that I may laugh, and lightly take  
All air of early April in one hour.

But brown curls, O shadow me with curls,  
Full of September mist, half-gleam, half-glower,  
And I shall roam warm nights in lands far south.

## Spring Offensive

Halted against the shade of a last hill,  
 They fed, and, lying easy, were at ease;  
 And, finding comfortable chests and knees,  
 Carelessly slept. But many there stood still  
 To face the stark, blank sky beyond the ridge,  
 Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.

Marvelling they stood, and watched the long grass swirled  
 By the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge,  
 And though the summer oozed into their veins  
 Like an injected drug for their bones' pains,  
 Sharp on their souls hung the imminent line of grass,  
 Fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass.

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field—  
 And the far valley behind, where the buttercups  
 Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up,  
 Where even the little brambles would not yield,  
 But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing hands;  
 They breathe like trees unstirred.

Till like a cold gust thrills the little word  
 At which each body and its soul begird  
 And tighten them for battle. No alarms  
 Of bugles, no high flags, no clamorous haste—  
 Only a lift and flare of eyes that faced  
 The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done.  
 O larger shone that smile against the sun,—  
 Mightier than his whose bounty these have spurned.

So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together  
 Over an open stretch of herb and heather  
 Exposed. And instantly the whole sky burned  
 With fury against them; and soft sudden cups  
 Opened in thousands for their blood; and the green slopes  
 Chasmed and steepened sheer to infinite space.

Of them who running on that last high place  
 Leapt to swift unseen bullets, or went up  
 On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge,  
 Or plunged and fell away past this world's verge,  
 Some say God caught them even before they fell.

But what say such as from existence' brink  
 Ventured but drave too swift to sink,  
 The few who rushed in the body to enter hell,  
 And there out-fiending all its fiends and flames  
 With superhuman inhumanities,  
 Long-famous glories, immemorial shames—

And crawling slowly back, have by degrees  
Regained cool peaceful air in wonder—  
Why speak not they of comrades that went under?

## Strange Meeting

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped  
 Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
 Through granites which titanic wars had groined.  
 Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
 Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
 Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
 Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.  
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall;  
 With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;  
 Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,  
 And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
 "Strange friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."  
 "None," said the other, "Save the undone years,  
 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
 Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
 After the wildest beauty in the world,  
 Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
 But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
 For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
 And of my weeping something has been left,  
 Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
 Now men will go content with what we spoiled.  
 Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
 They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  
 None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
 Courage was mine, and I had mystery;  
 Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;  
 To miss the march of this retreating world  
 Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
 Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels  
 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
 Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
 I would have poured my spirit without stint  
 But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
 Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  
 I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
 I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned  
 Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
 I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
 Let us sleep now . . ."

(This poem was found among the author's papers. It ends on this strange note)

*Another Version*

Earth's wheels run oiled with blood. Forget we that.  
Let us lie down and dig ourselves in thought.  
Beauty is yours and you have mastery,  
Wisdom is mine and I have mystery.  
We two will stay behind and keep our troth.  
Let us forego men's minds that are brute's natures,  
Be we not swift with swiftness of the tigress.  
Let us break ranks from those who trek from progress.  
Miss we the march of this retreating world  
Into old citadels that are not walled.  
Let us lie out and hold the open truth.  
Then when their blood hath clogged the chariot wheels  
We will go up and wash them from deep wells.  
What though we sink from men as pitchers falling  
Many shall raise us up to be their filling  
Even from wells we sunk too deep for war  
And filled by brows that bled where no wounds were.

*Alternative Line—*

Even as One who bled where no wounds were.

# Training

Not this week nor this month dare I lie down  
In languour under lime trees or smooth smile.  
Love must not kiss my face pale that is brown.

My lips, parting, shall drink space, mile by mile;  
Strong meats be all my hunger; my renown  
Be the clean beauty of speed and pride of style.

Cold winds encountered on the racing Down  
Shall thrill my heated bareness; but awhile  
None else may meet me till I wear my crown.

## Uriconium An Ode

It lieth low near merry England's heart  
 Like a long-buried sin; and Englishmen  
 Forget that in its death their sires had part.  
 And, like a sin, Time lays it bare again  
 To tell of races wronged,  
 And ancient glories suddenly overcast,  
 And treasures flung to fire and rabble wrath.  
 If thou hast ever longed  
 To lift the gloomy curtain of Time Past,  
 And spy the secret things that Hades hath,  
 Here through this riven ground take such a view.  
 The dust, that fell unnoted as a dew,  
 Wrapped the dead city's face like mummy-cloth:  
 All is as was: except for worm and moth.

Since Jove was worshipped under Wrekin's shade  
 Or Latin phrase was writ in Shropshire stone,  
 Since Druid chaunts desponded in this glade  
 Or Tuscan general called that field his own,  
 How long ago? How long?  
 How long since wanderers in the Stretton Hills  
 Met men of shaggy hair and savage jaw,  
 With flint and copper prong,  
 Aiming behind their dikes and thorny grilles?  
 Ah! those were days before the axe and saw,  
 Then were the nights when this mid-forest town  
 Held breath to hear the wolves come yelping down,  
 And ponderous bears 'long Severn lifted paw,  
 And nuzzling boars ran grunting through the shaw.

Ah me! full fifteen hundred times the wheat  
 Hath risen, and bowed, and fallen to human hunger  
 Since those imperial days were made complete.  
 The weary moon hath waxen old and younger  
 These eighteen thousand times  
 Without a shrine to greet her gentle ray.  
 And other temples rose; to Power and Pelf,  
 And chimed centurial chimes  
 Until their very bells are worn away.  
 While King by King lay cold on vaulted shelf  
 And wars closed wars, and many a Marmion fell,  
 And dearths and plagues help sire and son to hell;  
 And old age stiffened many a lively elf  
 And many a poet's heart outdrained itself.

I had forgot that so remote an age  
 Beyond the horizon of our little sight,  
 Is far from us by no more spanless gauge



Than day and night, succeeding day and night,  
 Until I looked on Thee,  
 Thou ghost of a dead city, or its husk!  
 But even as we could walk by field and hedge  
 Hence to the distant sea  
 So, by the rote of common dawn and dusk,  
 We travel back to history's utmost edge.  
 Yea, when through thy old streets I took my way,  
 And recked a thousand years as yesterday,  
 Methought sage fancy wrought a sacrilege  
 To steal for me such godly privilege!

For here lie remnants from a banquet table -  
 Oysters and marrow-bones, and seeds of grape -  
 The statement of whose age must sound a fable;  
 And Samian jars, whose sheen and flawless shape  
 Look fresh from potter's mould.  
 Plasters with Roman finger-marks impressed;  
 Bracelets that from the warm Italian arm  
 Might seem to be scarce cold;  
 And spears - the same that pushed the Cymry west-  
 Unblunted yet; with tools of forge and farm  
 Abandoned, as a man in sudden fear  
 Drops what he holds to help his swift career:  
 For sudden was Rome's flight, and wild the alarm.  
 The Saxon shock was like Vesuvius' qualm.

O ye who prate of modern art and craft .  
 Mark well that Gaulish brooch, and test that screw!  
 Art's fairest buds on antique stem are graft.  
 Under the sun is nothing wholly new!  
 At Viricon today  
 The village anvil rests on Roman base  
 And in a garden, may be seen a bower  
 With pillars for its stay  
 That anciently in basilic had place.  
 The church's font is but a pagan dower:  
 A Temple's column, hollowed into this.  
 So is the glory of our artifice,  
 Our pleasure and our worship, but the flower  
 Of Roman custom and of Roman power.

O ye who laugh and, living as if Time  
 Meant but the twelve hours ticking round your dial,  
 Find it too short for thee, watch the sublime,  
 Slow, epochal time-registers awhile,  
 Which are Antiquities.  
 O ye who weep and call all your life too long  
 And moan: Was ever sorrow like to mine?  
 Muse on the memories  
 That sad sepulchral stones and ruins prolong.  
 Here might men drink of wonder like strong wine

And feel ephemeral troubles soothed and curbed.  
Yet farmers, wroth to have their laws disturbed,  
Are sooner roused for little loss to pine  
Than we are moved by mighty woes long syne.

Above this reverend ground, what traveller checks?  
Yet cities such as these one time would breed  
Apocalyptic visions of world-wrecks.  
Let Saxon men return to them, and heed!  
They slew and burnt,  
But after, prized what Rome had given away  
Out of her strength and her prosperity.  
Have they yet learnt  
The precious truth distilled from Rome's decay?  
Ruins! On England's heart press heavily!  
For Rome hath left us more than walls and words  
And better yet shall leave; and more than herds  
Or land or gold gave the Celts to us in fee;  
E'en Blood, which makes poets sing and prophets see.

## Wild with all Regrets

(Another version of "A Terre.")

To Siegfried Sassoon

My arms have mutinied against me—brutes!  
 My fingers fidget like ten idle brats,  
 My back's been stiff for hours, damned hours.  
 Death never gives his squad a Stand-at-ease.  
 I can't read. There: it's no use. Take your book.  
 A short life and a merry one, my buck!  
 We said we'd hate to grow dead old. But now,  
 Not to live old seems awful: not to renew  
 My boyhood with my boys, and teach 'em hitting,  
 Shooting and hunting,—all the arts of hurting!  
 —Well, that's what I learnt. That, and making money.  
 Your fifty years in store seem none too many;  
 But I've five minutes. God! For just two years  
 To help myself to this good air of yours!  
 One Spring! Is one too hard to spare? Too long?  
 Spring air would find its own way to my lung,  
 And grow me legs as quick as lilac-shoots.

Yes, there's the orderly. He'll change the sheets  
 When I'm lugged out, oh, couldn't I do that?  
 Here in this coffin of a bed, I've thought  
 I'd like to kneel and sweep his floors for ever,—  
 And ask no nights off when the bustle's over,  
 For I'd enjoy the dirt; who's prejudiced  
 Against a grimed hand when his own's quite dust,—  
 Less live than specks that in the sun-shafts turn?  
 Dear dust,—in rooms, on roads, on faces' tan!  
 I'd love to be a sweep's boy, black as Town;  
 Yes, or a muckman. Must I be his load?  
 A flea would do. If one chap wasn't bloody,  
 Or went stone-cold, I'd find another body.

Which I shan't manage now. Unless it's yours.  
 I shall stay in you, friend, for some few hours.  
 You'll feel my heavy spirit chill your chest,  
 And climb your throat on sobs, until it's chased  
 On sighs, and wiped from off your lips by wind.

I think on your rich breathing, brother, I'll be weaned  
 To do without what blood remained me from my wound.

*5th December 1917.*

## With an Identity Disc

If ever I dreamed of my dead name  
High in the heart of London, unsurpassed  
By Time for ever, and the Fugitive, Fame,  
There seeking a long sanctuary at last,

I better that; and recollect with shame  
How once I longed to hide it from life's heats  
Under those holy cypresses, the same  
That shade always the quiet place of Keats,

Now rather thank I God there is no risk  
Of gravers scoring it with florid screech,  
But let my death be memoried on this disc.  
Wear it, sweet friend. Inscribe no date nor deed.  
But may thy heart-beat kiss it night and day,  
Until the name grow vague and wear away.

## The Wrestlers

So neck to neck and obstinate knee to knee  
 Wrestled those two; and peerless Heracles  
 Could not prevail nor catch at any vantage;  
 But those huge hands which small had strangled snakes  
 Let slip the writhing of Antaeas' wrists;  
 Those clubs of hands that wrenched the necks of bulls  
 Now fumbled round the slim Antaeas' limbs  
 Baffled. Then anger swelled in Heracles,  
 And terribly he grappled broader arms,  
 And yet more firmly fixed his grasping feet,  
 And up his back the muscles bulged and shone  
 Like climbing banks and domes of towering cloud.  
 Many who watched that wrestling say he laughed,-  
 But not so loud as on Eurystheus of old,  
 But that his pantings, seldom loosed, long pent,  
 Were like the sighs of lions at their meat.  
 Men say their fettered fury tightened hour by hour,  
 Until the veins rose tubrous on their brows  
 And froth flew thickly-shivered from both beards.  
 As pythons shudder, bridling-in their spite,  
 So trembled that Antaeas with held strength,  
 While Heracles, - the thews and cordage of his thighs  
 Straitened and strained beyond the utmost stretch  
 From quivering heel to haunch like sweating hawsers -  
 But only staggered backward. Then his throat  
 Growled, like a great beast when his meat is touched,  
 As if he smelt some guile behind Antaeas,  
 And knew the buttressed bulking of his shoulders  
 Bore not the mass to move it one thumb's length.  
 But what it was so helped the man none guessed,  
 Save Hylas, whom the fawns had once made wise  
 How earth herself empowered him by her touch,  
 Gave him the grip and stringency of winter,  
 And all the ardour of the invincible spring;  
 How all the blood of June glutted his heart;  
 And the wild glow of huge autumnal storms  
 Stirred on his face, and flickered from his eyes;  
 How too, Poseidon blessed him fatherly  
 With wafts of vigour from the keen sea waves,  
 And with the subtle coil of currents -  
 Strange underflows, that maddened Heracles.  
 And towards the night they sundered, neither thrown.  
 Whereat came Hylas running to his friend  
 With fans, and sponges in a laving-bowl,  
 And brimmed his lord the beakerful he loved,  
 Which Heracles took roughly, even from him.

Then spake that other from the place he stood:  
 ‘O Heracles, I know thy fights and labours,  
 What man thou wert, and what thou art become,  
 The lord of strength, queller of perilous monsters,  
 Hero of heroes, worthy immortal worship,  
 But me thou canst not quell. For I, I come  
 Of Earth, and to my father Poseidon,  
 Whose strength ye know, and whose displeasure ye know.  
 Therefore be wise, and try me not again,  
 But say thou findest me peer, and more than peer.’  
 But Heracles, of utter weariness,  
 Was loath to answer, either yea or nay.  
 And a cruel murmur rankled through the crowd.  
 Now he whose knees propped up the head of him,  
 Over his lord’s ear swiftly whispered thus:  
 ‘If thou could’st lift the man in air - enough.  
 His feet suck secret virtue of the earth.  
 Lift him, and buckle him to thy breast, and win.’  
 Up sprang the son of Perseus deeply laughing  
 And ere the crimson of his last long clutch  
 Had faded from that insolent’s throat, again  
 They closed. Then he, the Argonaut,  
 Remembering how he tore the oaks in Argos,  
 Bound both his arms about the other’s loins  
 And with a sudden tugging, easily  
 Rooted him up; and crushed his inmost bones.  
 Forth to the town he strode, and through the streets,  
 Bearing the body light as leopard-skins,  
 And glorious ran the shouting as he strode -  
 Some say his footfalls made an earthquake there  
 So that he dropped Antaeas: some say not:  
 But that he cast him down by Gea’s altar  
 And Gea sent that earthquake for her son,  
 To rouse him out of death. And lo! he rose,  
 Alive, and came to Heracles  
 Who feasted with the people and their King.  
 And fain would all make place for him  
 But he would not consent. And Heracles,  
 Knowing the hate of Hylas for his deeds,  
 Feasted and slept; and so forgot the man,  
 And early on the morrow passed with Hylas  
 Down to the Argo, for the wind was fair.

THE END

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