

### Wilfred Owen, "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.

### "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.*

## “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 moans in man  
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;  
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;  
Whatever shares  
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

### **“Strange Meeting”**

It seemed that out of 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,—  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

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 that 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 had 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. . . .”

*All poems from 1917-1918*