



In Memoriam: Remembrance Day 2018
A Selection of Poems



The Drum (John Scott of Amwell, 1730-83)

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace, and glittering arms;
And when Ambition's voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall, in foreign lands.

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns, and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widow's tears, and orphans moans;
And all that misery's hand bestows,
To fill the catalogue of human woes.



British Army Recruits, 1775

Old Man Travelling (William Wordsworth, 1770-1850)

The little hedge-row birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression; every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought—He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
Long patience has such mild composure given,
That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.
—I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
"Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital."

The Due of the Dead (William Makepeace Thackeray, 1811-63)

I sit beside my peaceful hearth,
With curtains drawn and lamp trimmed bright
I watch my children's noisy mirth;
I drink in home, and its delight.

I sip my tea, and criticise
The war, from flying rumours caught;
Trace on the map, to curious eyes,
How here they marched, and there they fought.

In intervals of household chat,
I lay down strategic laws;
Why this manoeuvre, and why that;
Shape the event, or show the cause.

Or, in smooth dinner-table phrase,
'Twixt soup and fish, discuss the fight;
Give to each chief his blame or praise;
Say who was wrong and who was right.

Meanwhile o'er [the] bloody plain
The scathe of battle has rolled by--
The wounded writhe and groan--the slain
Lie naked staring to the sky.

The out-worn surgeon plies his knife,
Nor pauses with the closing day;

While those who have escaped with life
Find food and fuel as they may.....

The living, [Canada's] hand may crown
With recognition, frank and free;
With titles, medals, and renown;
The wounded shall our pensioners be.

But they, who meet a soldier's doom--
Think you, is it enough, good friend,
To plant the laurel at their tomb,
And carve their names--and there an end?

No. They are gone: but there are left
Those they loved best while they were here--
Parents made childless, babes bereft,
Desolate widows, sisters dear.

All these let grateful [Canada] take;
And, with a large and liberal heart,
Cherish, for her slain soldiers' sake,
And of her fullness give them part.

Fold them within her sheltering breast;
Their parent, husband, brother, prove.
That so the dead may be at rest,
Knowing those cared for whom they love.

Anthem for Doomed Youth (Wilfred Owen 1893-1918)

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.



Paths of Glory, C R W Nevinson,

from **Walking Wounded** (Vernon Scannell 1922-2007)

The road was empty but it seemed to wait---
Like a stage which knows its cast is in the wings—
Wait for a different traffic to appear.
The mist still hung in snags from dripping thorns;
Absent-minded guns still sighed and thumped.
And then they came, the walking wounded,
Straggling the road like convicts loosely chained,
Dragging at ankles exhaustion and despair.
Their heads were weighted down by last night's lead.
And eyes still drank the dark. They trailed the night
Along the morning road. Some limped on sticks
Others wore loose dressings, splints and slings...
A humble brotherhood,
Not one was suffering lethal hurt,
They were not magnified by noble wounds,
There was no splendour in that company.
And yet, remembering after eighteen years,
In the heart's throat a sour sadness stirs;
Imagination pauses and returns
To see them walking still, but multiplied
In thousands now. And when heroic corpses
Turn slowly in their decorated sleep
And every ambulance has disappeared
The walking wounded still trudge down that lane,
And when recalled they must bear arms again. (1965)

In Celebration of Spring (John Balaban, 1943-)

Our Asian war is over; others have begun....
In delta swamp in a united Vietnam...
At night, on the old battlefield, ghosts,
Like patches of fog, lurk into villages
To maunder on doorsills of cratered homes,
While all across the USA
The wounded walk about and wonder where to go.

And today, in the summer of lyric sunlight,
The chrysalis pulses in its mushy cocoon,
Under the bark on a gnarled root of an elm.
In the brilliant creek, a minnow flashes
Delirious with gnats. The turtle's heart
Quickens its raps in the warm bank sludge.
As she chases a frisbee spinning in sunlight,
A girl [runs] full and strong;
A boy's stomach, as he turns, is flat and strong.

Swear by locust, by dragonflies on ferns,
By the minnow's flash, the trembling of a breast,
By the new earth spongy under our feet;
That as we grow old, we will not grow evil,
That although our garden seeps with sewage...swear
By this dazzle that does not wish to leave us—
That we will be keepers of a garden, nonetheless.

Unmentioned in Dispatches (Peter Wyton, 1944--)

Some of them never come home to fanfares,
they dump their kitbags down at the door,
kiss their wives and let their children
wrestle them down to the kitchen floor,
switch the telly on, pour out a whiskey,
search for the local football score.

Some of them skip the quayside welcome,
dodge the bunting and cannonade,
make their landfall in silent harbours,
nod to the coastguard, but evade
the searchlight of public scrutiny
like those engaged in the smuggling trade.

Some of them land at lonely airfields
far removed from the celebration,
hang their flying gear in a locker,
cadge a lift to the railway station,
make for home and take for granted
the short-lived thanks of a grateful nation.

Some of them miss the royal salute,
the victory parade along the Mall,
the fly-past, the ships in formation passing
the cheering crowds on the harbour wall.
Remembered only by friends and relatives,
some of them never come home at all. (Iraq 1991)

Reconciliation (Walt Whitman, 1819-92)

WORD over all, beautiful as the sky!

Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost;

That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again, and ever again,
this soil'd world:

... For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead;

I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I draw near;

I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

WORD over all, beautiful as the sky!



*Euphronios; The Death of Sarpedon; conveyed by Sleep (L) and Death (R),
attended by the god Hermes*

Memorial Day Prayer (Barbara Pescan)

Spirit of Life

Whom we have called by many names

In thanksgiving and anguish—

Bless the poets and those who mourn

Send peace for the soldiers who did not make wars

But whose lives were consumed by them

Let strong trees grow above the graves far from home

Breathe through the arms of their branches

The earth will swallow your tears while the dead sing

“No more, never again, remember me.”

For the wounded ones, and those who received them back,’

Let there be someone ready when the memories come

When the scars pull and the buried metal moves

And forgiveness for those of us who were not there

For our ignorance.

And in us, the veterans in the forest of a thousand fallen promises,

let new leaves grow on our stumps,

Give us courage to answer the cry of humanity’s pain

And with our bare hands, out of full hearts,

With all our intelligence

Let us create the peace.