

IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT HAVE WE WEPT

War

The songs I've sung are futile,
Of little futile things,
Of foolish dreams and fancies
On feeble faltering wings;
So I will cease my singing
And take you by the hand,
Down days and darksome ditches
To the night of No-mans land;
Where the day is full of horror
That words may never tell,
And the twilight full of terror'
And life is laughing hell.
Where your body will be filth-clad
And your soul will fade away;
Where you'll curse your only brother
As you plod the clutching clay.
You'll scramble in the muck heap
To soothe your hunger-ache,
With your silly heart aflutter
And your silly soul aquake
And when your heart is broken,
And you care not if you die,
You'll keep on carrying on
Till self-pity makes you cry;
Till you take the man who loved you
And rake him through the mud,
And scoop a shallow hollow,
With your hands all smeared with blood,
And throw him in and leave him;
And you'll laugh for – God knows why!
And you'll keep on carrying on,
(Or God loves you and you die),
'Mong the filth and fear and hunger
In strife to fight and fend,
From ages unbeginning
To ages beyond end

For Britain's Sake

There is a call – it sounds more louder – clearer,
As if 'twere only given yesterday;
And tho' by thought of parting you've grown drear,
When duty calls, how can I bid you stay?

There is a call – 'Your King and Country need you'
For Right and Liberty to lend a hand;
Go forth my boy, and may God's blessing speed you
To help in serving our dear Motherland;

There is a call – a call for hearts grown weary
Of this dead strife, but courage stays my fears;
And tho' for Sundered hearts, days will be dreary,
My seal of love is smiles, not sigh or tears;

List to the bugle call; yet sounds it clearer!
Death may be thine; to me life's shrouded woe;
Hope gives us strength as parting ways draw nearer,
And thus for Britain's sake, I bid thee 'Go'

Knittin' Fir Da Boys

Bi a cloddy fire dey sit
Lookin' o'er some maps,
While dir busy fingers knit
Jersey, stocking, belt or mitt
Fir da sodjier chaps

'Here' says Jeanie 'is da place
Whar dir feactin' noo;
Whar wir boys da Germans face.
O' dat sic a wicked race
Might dis battle rue'

Katie, in a low, soft voice
Answers fir da rest;-
'Lass; dis toucht maks me rejoice!
Love o' honour i' wir boys
Shore will stand da test.

'Fir dir, ye ken, as true as steel
An' dey'd never stoop

E inhuman blow ta deal;
Prood we trooly oucht ta feel
O' each British troop.

'Courage rins trou every vein
Truth it is dir seal;
Honour dey will aye retain;
On dir names sall rest nae stain
Whether woe or weal'

Quick da oors each idder shase,
An' da fire burns low;
Dan each lassie loves ta trace
E dear laddie's laachin' face
I' da ember's glow

Still dir knittin' needles ply-
Tho' da night grows aald-
Sped bi touchts o' boys 'at lie
'Neath a bleak an' sunliss sky
I' da trenches caald

I' dis wark some Shetland lasses
Every oor employs;
Nae matter what dir creed, dir class is
Da best wie dir time ta pass is
Knittin' fir da boys.

The Sorrow of the Sun

The great sun robed in splendour
Rode across the lea
And sank down in a slumber
Beyond the purple sea;
Where, wrought in gorgeous colour,
His magic in the deep,
Garbed the waves in wonder
And soothed the world to sleep.
Into nook and cranny
Nestling sparrows crept;
In the velvet twilight
All the world slept

In Peace.

The Knitters Song

*'Plain and purl, purl and plain' –
Winds may blow, fall sleet or rain,
At love's sweet task she calmly sits'
Where glow and shade of firelight flits
Through dreams long silvery trail, and knits.
Needles clink to this refrain--
'Plain and purl', purl and plain'*

*'Purl and plain, plain and purl'-
Whirring shrapnel, gas-clouds thick curl;
Bullets hissing like valve-oozed steam,
Bayonets flashing with sun-lit gleam,
Fields once verdant, a blood-dyed stream,
Death-dealing missiles swiftly hurl;
'Purl and plain, plain and purl'*

But somewhere, lowering, lurking
Death with a hungry lust
Prowled to clutch quick
And crush it into dust;
For ere the dawn was whitening
Ma, grabbed by the hand,
Was filled with foul temptation
To soil the summer land.

*'Plain and purl, purl and plain'-
Trenches muddy, cold, deep with rain;
Thoughtful faces, grim, eager set
Peer through the misty, drizzling wet
Over a sand-bagged parapet
Home visions glint, haunt of pain;
'Plain and purl, purl and plain'*

*'Purl and plain, plain and purl'-
On mine-strewn seas there's sails to furl;
On field to conquer hated foe;
At home too, women share of woe
As in their knitting row on row
Pain, tears and sorrow wave and curl
'Purl and plain, plain and purl'*

Dawn!

The sun came scrambling madly
Over the scraggy ridge;
Rearing his head in anger
Of man's mad sacrilege;
Swerving high in his heaven
Sweeping the mists aside
Filling with urge of living
Man, in his lusty pride;
Man, gone down to battle,
'Mid the blatant, brazen thrums,
'Mid the flourishing of banners
And the throbbing of loud drums;
Gone down to death rejoicing
Because he deemed he should
To vindicate his honour
And prove his manhood good.

*'Plain and purl, purl and plain'-
Muscle and sinew, body and brain;
Giving for Right, the best of life'
Cutting shackles with blood-stained knife,
Britain to free from crushing strife;
Shall it, we wonder, be in vain?
'Plain and purl, purl and plain'*

*'Purl and plain, plain and purl'
Dead embers fall, sparks upward whirl.
Yet still, where cast by firelight glow
The shadows deftly come and go
(Full snow or rain, wind loudly blow)
Her needles ply, soft wool to curl;
'Purl and plain, plain and purl'*

The sun reached out his fingers
And touched man standing there,
Warming his heart with mem'ry
His soul with visions fair;
But the great guns whispered sadly
And lured his heart away
From dreams of little homeland
And little folks at play;
The great guns growled a challenge

That rent the air in twain,
The world reeled and staggered
And groaned and reeled again
In fire and smoke and thunder
And blood and cries and pain –
Death, with its shudd'ring, quivering –
And the land all strewn with slain.
And the great sun, pale with anguish,
In grief bowed low his head,
And wrapped him in a grey cloud
And wept above the dead

The Toll of War

Sodden and wet
The parapet
Was caved and wrecked by wrath of deadly shell;
Once strong defence, lay broken, twisted wire –
All frail against the wall of steel and fire
That turned, with fury, 'No man's land' to hell

The Waste

No soldier now, with sullen, steadfast gaze
Stares out upon the gloomy night;
A thousand sentries have 'stood down'
Have left their fire-steps lonely to the stars.
No longer endless, snakey transport winds
Its limbered length for crawling miles;
A million ceaseless men who came and went
All day, all night, have gone, nor come again;
And all is silent in the silent waste

Billets

*From out the reeling night the old chateau
Rears up to meet a straggling file of men
Muddy and sore: who filled with thankfulness,
Plod up the pond'rous stair in heavy pain,
Weary and numbed, and sodden with rain.*

*Then snuggle down to sweet oblivion;
In chinks aglow, the guttering candle ends*

*Flicker against the gaunt, grey, dripping beams
And flare to humid, rough-hewn rafters, hung
With muddy trappings. Rifles feebly flung*

*Against the walls; and here and there about –
Helmets and bandoliers and bayonets,
Box- respirators dropped amongst the straw;
So, reeking damp, still, motionless, they lie
As dead, a few who fought and did not die*

Drear waste of desolation dread
Land of lone scattered graves
Where strong men falt'ring, flung them down o'erwhelmed,
Strong men to man's leprous mood a prey;
Their great hearts broken for mankind
And this – the wilderness of death!
O dead of many lands! O fallen brave,
Full face to face as foe to foe you fought,
And fell - A myriad flowers will flaunt
Their merry brotherhood o'er you,
Or shed a tear, soft, tender, sisterwise.

R.I.P.

*Lay them together in this muddy shell-hole
Cover them over with this muddy sheet.
Heed not their staring eyes, they gaze to starry skies,
Wrap their red tartans around their poor feet.
Cover them quickly, nor mutter a prayer,
Pile on the earth quick with never a pang,
Mark it another grave – haste, ev'ry second save –
Here, on this rifle their helmets hang.*

*High soar the night flares – hush! Swift to your fire-
stop;
Leave them to rest out there under the stars,
Boys of the city, men of the tartan dead
Laid in the lone waste by sad, dead Le Sars.*

*So do we leave you, lads, laid in the sheer waste,
Sleeping till summer shall flit o'er the foam,
Robed in her gold and blue, to clasp, caressing you
Close to her bosom, her own gathered home.*

Fathers of men, in pride you bade them go –
Are you proud now? Your sons are dead,
Their limbs lie rotting in the mire.
Mothers of men, you wept, and bade them go –
Do you weep now? They did not fail. They died,
As men who go to war must die.
Pale wives of men, who let them go,
Your children tell of how a father comes
Not back again, but somewhere fell – enough!
And maidens of the starlit eve
Whose bright-eyed pledged sent them forth –
You are not sorry now? The sunny locks
You loved, lie blood-soiled, sodden in the mud;
The lips your crimson lips soft-kissed
Were food for maggots long ago;
They did not break the vows they made, but true
To manhood's test they fought; and they are dead.
'Twas war – and then, you bade them go,
The young, the fair; the dreams of youth,
The sweet and gentle hope of new-born Spring?

The Unknown

*Often, these mark the eye across the waste
'Here lies an unknown German R.I.P.'
Scrawled by indifferent hand in careless haste,
These common words, a common foeman's fee.*

*A soldier, struggling through the twilight dim,
Exhausted, threw him down awhile to rest;
Seeing rag-strewn a green, protruding limb
Muttered 'A poor damned Alemand gone west'*

*Paid to the dead his simple debt,
Not knowing why; and hid a rotting hand –
Weltering his way in pain, through cold and wet,
Adown the gloom of war's corpse cluttered land.*

Oh silent waste! O silent sons of men!
O land of bleak, grey huddled ruin
Of rubble heaps, the homes of men!
Here lies the flower of ev'ry land; the pride
And joy of all the world's heart and hills
Lie buried here.

Soul-mate of man
O woman of all time! Here lies
The triumph of your hope, a stripling youth,
Your throbbing heart's mad joy, here in the waste
O silent waste! – How silent now!

War Girls

There's the girl who clips your ticket for the train,
And the girl who speeds the lift from floor to floor,
There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain,
And the girl who calls for orders at your door.
Strong, sensible and fit,
They're out to show their grit,
And tackle jobs with energy and knack.
No longer caged and penned up
They're going to keep their end up
Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

There's the motor girl who drives a heavy van,
There's the butcher girl who brings your joint of meat,
There's the girl who cries 'All fares, please!' like a man
And the girl who whistles taxis up the street.
Beneath each uniform
Beats a heart that's soft and warm,
Though of canny mother-wit they show no lack;
But a solemn statement this is,
They've no time for love and kisses
Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

Forget-Me-Not

'Forget-me-not' – I whispered as I gave
To one I loved a little flowerlet blue,
'And may the Father ever strong to save
Keep, guide and watch in tenderness o'er you'

He smiled and answered – 'How can I forget
My sunny helper, noble brave and true?'
A handclasp strong; lips firm to kiss then met;
I echoed back his parting word 'Adieu'.

Months pass; a note comes writ in feeble hand,

Ere stilled the heart pierced by the deadly shot,
And with a faded flower (you understand?)
My whispered farewell – ‘Dear, forget-me-not’

Mothers

In the still of the night
Have we wept.
And our hearts, shattered and aching
Have prayed.
In the cold, cold moonlight
Have we sobbed
And dreamed of what might have been.
And our hearts have bled from stabs
Given unheeding.
We are the women who have suffered alone –
Alone and in silence.

The Home Farer

No sail was set; at eve the blue peaked isle
Slept in the slumb'rous sunset in the sea;
At dawn a bugle blew; and with a smile
You rose, and went with rifle slung;
While by the wave-lapped shore idly the 'Daybreak' swung.
Since when, four fruitful harvests lush have fed
The land; and four fierce, burning years of war
Have ta'en their priceless toil of precious dead;
And yet a restless soul still seeks
An isle of dreams afar, some isle of purple peaks.

And you are travelling 'neath new stars; and some
Of ours are travelling very far, beyond
The sunset, and the sun; no more to come
Great souls, and greet us when soft gleams
The dawn, no more to tread our petalled path of dreams.

Beyond the sunset, oceans thence, where hand
In hand the midnight sun and magic, mad
Aurora Borealis blaze, a land
Where dazzling rainbow, flickering light
Is intermingling golden noon and silver night

Wet sand and moonlit flowers; the deep sea-song
Of battling surf on wild black reefs, where plunge
Great, wise eyed, grizzled seals the spume among;
And sudden by the shore, a nest
Of tents, where sleeps the caravan of timeless rest

Smoking their pipes, and piling up the fire,
Their gleaming, flame-lit flagons held on high,
Drinking to song and sword, and sea-born sire
Are they, who spurned life's pang to prize
And died, and won Valhalla's torch lit paradise

And you are travelling far, but will return
Again, one day return at darkling eve,
To find the sea and sky all smould'ring burn
In ruddy blaze; as if the rest
Ten thousand flaming galleys bore, into the West

The dying day. Against the pyre-light red
Thrice-peaked and purple, Heart's Desire! – The lure
That lit some savage soul, dim ages dead
That carved the keel, that chipped the oar'
And shone the star to guide the steersman to the shore

Fast by the shore, the 'Day-break' swinging low,
We'll strike the white sails out, and cast away;
And you and I will there, will sail, will row
Until the heart no longer speaks
In pain, O Isle of dreams! O purple Isle of Peaks

He Went for a Soldier

He marched away with a blithe young score of him
With the first volunteers,
Clear-eyed and clean and sound to the core of him,
Lushing under the cheers.
They were fine, new flags that swung a-flying there,
Oh, the pretty girls he glimpsed a-crying there,
Pelting him with pinks and roses –
Billy, the Soldier Boy!

Soon he is one with the blinding smoke of it –
Volley and curse and groan;
Then has he done with the knightly joke of it –

It's rending flesh and bone.
There are pain-crazed animals a-shrieking there
And a warm blood stench that is a-reeking there;
He fights like a rat in a corner –
Billy, the Soldier Boy!

There he lies now, like a ghoulish score of him
Left on the field for dead;
The ground all around is smeared with the gore of him –
Even the leaves are red.
The thing that was Billy lies a-dying there,
Writhing and a-twisting and a-crying there;
A sickening sun grins down on him –
Billy, the Soldier Boy!

Didymus to the Trench Rat

O big gey rat, with your muddy grey hair,
Do you love the light of the flickering flare
That you peer at the night by the parapet there?

Reck you of shell shrieking shrill in your ear?
Does your hair ever creep when the shell hurtles near?
Know you ought of death? Know you nothing of fear?

Why are you here, where the world lies lost
In the slime and stench and the flesh-stinging frost,
Living ever alone by the listening post?

Scorning faith in your shadowy flight
Scurrying alone in a scampering fright;
With your glittering eyes gleaming hate through the night;

Or flitting past like a scuffling shade,
When the star-shells lower, till they fluttering fade
Till they flare as they die, like a clutching for aid

Back to the billets I'll fare, far from the ken
Of the bursting shell, and the crouching men;
And I'll lie 'mong the straw, and I'll think of you then.

Big grey rat, with your muddy grey hair
Splashing along with an impudent air,
Like a gibbering ghost squelching by to your lair.

Grief

At dawn he writhed in agony
And cursed his fate, declaimed, reviled;
The while you soothed his pain – and smiled

At noon he raved, low, whimp'ringly,
The mumblings of a fretful child;
And all the while you soothed – and smiled

Till night and death came stealthily –
He lay as one who dreaming slept –
Love, how you sobbed, and wept and wept

In A Soldier's Hospital – Gramophone Tunes

Through the long ward the gramophone
Grinds out nasal melodies;
'Where did you get that girl?' it shrills.
Patients listen at their ease,
Through clouds of strong tobacco smoke;
The gramophone can always please.

The Welsh boy has it by his bed,
(He's lame – one leg was blown away)
He'll lie propped up with the pillows there,
And wind the handle half the day.
His neighbour, with the shattered arm,
Picks out the records he must play.

Jock, with his crutches beats the time;
The gunner, with his head close-bound,
Listens with puzzled, patient smile;
(Shell-shock – he cannot hear a sound).
The others join in from their beds,
And send the chorus rolling round.

Somehow for me these common tunes
Can never sound the same again;
They've magic now to thrill my heart
And bring before me, clear and plain,
Man is the master of his flesh,
And has the laugh of death and pain

Arras

I went and walked by Arras
In the dim uncertain night;
I went and walked by Arras
In the dazzling noon-day light;
There, I saw a fairy glamour,
And – I saw another sight

Out by Arras in the night-time
Star-shells in the star-lit sky
Showered like wild silver rain drops
From a fountain scattered high;
Like the silver scales of fishes
In the tideway curving by.

Out by Arras in the night-time
There was glint of red and green
Like the glow of fairy camp-fires
In some hidden, high wood seen;
Like the sunset of the night-land
Where no man has ever been

Out by Arras in the daytime
There lay 'bove the sun-parched sand,
Where together men and torture
Live with foul deed hand in hand;
Horror stricken, God forsaken
Stretches broad of war-cursed land

And upon the stretches barren
Out by Arras, thousands lie,
That the wind of war has blasted,
Sweeping on without a sigh;
In the hollows, huddled hundreds
Who were not afraid to die.

Roses

I cultured in my beauteous garden wide
A nook of roses with cool sheltered bowers-
Pale climbers 'midst a red full-bodied tide;
Sweet nature's merit to devoted hours.

There joy-bells chimed in glad poetic measure
To fill the life of one bright-eyed and fair –
My only boy. Ah bleeding heart can treasure
His rose-lived dreams which found a birthplace there;
The clarion call, when August was rose-kissing
With half-chilled lips, he heard above Joy's bells
And answered, fought for Britain, now this – 'missing
Since Arras battle' – all the present tells
Thro' dreaded silence, present drifts to past
But roses breathe sweet memories, which last.

The Shell

Shrieking its message the flying death
Cursed the resisting air,
Then buried its nose by a battered church
A skeleton gaunt and bare.

The brains of science, the money of fools
Had fashioned an iron slave
Destined to kill, yet the futile end
Was a child's uprooted grave.

A Memory

There was no sound at all, no crying in the village,
Nothing you would count as sound, that is, after the shells;
Only behind a wall the low sobbing of women,
The creaking of a door, a lost dog – nothing else.

Silence which might be felt, no pity in the silence,
Horrible, soft like blood, down all the blood-stained ways;
In the middle of the street two corpses lie unburied,
And a bayoneted woman stares in the market-place.

Humble and ruined folk – for these no pride of conquest,
Their only prayer; 'O! Lord, give us our daily bread!
Not by the battle fires, the shrapnel are we haunted;
Who shall deliver us from the memory of these dead?

Bones

Behold, a wilderness of rain-drenched bones,
Bones bleak and bare, sun-bleached and blanched and bare,
O'er fields afar, down streets amaze,
Ones scattered here and there and everywhere;
Across the sterile deserts of the earth,
And oe'r the rock-beds of the sea'
Our sons, our lusty sons, who laughed and slew,
Blindly betrayed with lures of liberty

Our brothers, lovers, and our husband-men,
Our patient, brave, bread-winning, bosom mates,
With whom we dared to meet the taunt
Of life, the thrill of death – what now abates
The secret quivering of our mother hearts!
What crowns our love's high throne of thrones!
Our lovers, where are they! Where! Where!
The fathers of our babes – bones, bones and bones

White bones, wind-strewn along the weary waste
And down the winding roads, and haply spread
Beside the lazy river bank,
To which their golden, boyhood hours were wed;
Across the sands, beneath the sparkling waves,
In silent eddies of the tide,
Under a thousand keels that proudly urge
Their surging ways through foaming water wide;

Our fathers too, they come again no more,
Our fearless fathers, fearful, loathe to go
And leave us, fatherless, alone;
But went, because some fool had shouted 'foe'!
Who danced us on their knees, and strode away,
And might not journey back again;
They linger with their brothers long, too long;
Their withering bones are whitening in the rain.

Their bones are bleaching in the sun,
The grinning spectres of unholy dearth,
They leer among the ocean bed,
They curse the endless acres of the earth;
The countless bones of all our home-folk dead
Beneath the loam, lapped in the wave,
Who left the kindly warmth of our hearths

To creep into the coldness of the grave.
Bones, and bones, like pebbles on the shore,
On shores that round the earth for ever run,
An hundred million bones that heed
Not rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor fiery sun;
A myriad bones of all our martyred men
Laid in the lap of all things dead;
Raised in the splendour of their glorious youth
And lashed a-smother in one gristly bed.

They are our dead - our dead, my many mothers,
O German, Belgian, British mothers mine,
Our sons, our husbands, and our brothers
All killed to slumber in one sorry shrine;
Bones, and bones, washed white in burning tears,
Bleached in the anger of our hate,
For passion-blind we smiled and bade them slay;
Now we are blind with bitter tears – too late.

Peace

'There is no peace, no peace' the big guns shout
To drown the little voices that ev'ry hour,
Persistent as the Muezzin from his tower
Proclaims that all is well.

Yet who should doubt

The deep-sea thunder in dim moonlight caves,
The green hills singing to the morning sun
The wild flowers flaunting till the day is done
Or plaintive seagull cries o'er twilight waves?
'No peace' they growl! The little voice pleads on –
A lark high singing o'er the barrage blast,
A moonbeam on the lake's dark bosom cast,
A whisper from a thousand moths anon,
'Lo! beauty, beauty may not, cannot cease
And beauty's thrice starred crown is peace; is peace'

Restore

Rides Spring in laughter riding
Om golden hoofs set free –
We greet the sunlit daffodils
Glad as they used to be.

We, who at dawn but yestermorn
With you, the scattered dead
Saw your poor silly, clutching hands
Your bloody, cloven heads.

You, mates of ours, who gave your lives
That beauty might endure
"Mong all the mystery of Spring
Safe-guarded and secure

What may we now, in recompense
Who greet the Spring today,
Unworthy of such sacrifice –
Nor may one tithe repay

Who may not cry. You died full well,
Knowing you died in vain
Give back the barrage-hell, O war
And our dead mates again

In Flanders

Where lilies were flame-fanned
In sun flushed poppy flare,
Now silent stand
 Little white crosses

Row upon row
Where peasants come to pray,
Snowdrops in Hades
In simple innocent array
They stand, where pilgrims knelt
In summer's dusky gloom
Long years ago, to kiss
The temple dust – so soon the tomb.

Long years ago, ere came
Red war with ruthless hand
And slew young love, and drove
Reluctant beauty from the land.

 Little white crosses
Above the mud and clay
Of those who dared to die,
Their deeds more eloquent than they;

Unsullied in the waste
As chaste as snow-drift
On the barren hills
When swift the storm-clouds lift;
Sudden in served rank
To greet the dawn, dew bright,
Scattering their gems broadcast
To herald day, to banish night.

The Ridge 1919

Here on the ridge where the shrill north-easter trails
Low clouds along the now'
And in the streaming moonlit vapour veils
The peopled earth below,

Let me, O life, a little while forget
The horror of past years –
Man and his agony and bloody sweat,
The terror and the tears,

And struggle only with the mist and snow
Against the hateless wind,
Till scourged and shriven I again may go
To dwell among my kind

Will You Forget?

Will you forget?
When all the fight is done
And victory won,
Will you forget?
The soldiers in their pride
Who freely fought and died
Will you forget?

Dedicated

*To you, true comrade, stalwart in the fight,
Who staunch and strong, dark tyranny defies,*

*Fighting injustice as your sacred plight
Plunging to death with laughter in your eyes;*

*And you, my comrade of the withered limb,
Hobbling with tedious footsteps tentative
Who pledged your youth to win the need of him
Who fought too well, and fell, yet dared to live*

*And you, old comrade, 'neath your wooden cross,
Enwrapt in mud and winter rain,
Who laid you down nor counted ought the loss,
Or gain, but died as many do – in vain*

Will you forget?
When war gives up his lease,
To gentle-spoken peace,
Will you forget?
The heroes in their graves?
That you might have been slaves,
Will you forget?

Remember

*O ploughman, with your burnished share
Down Flanders' rank, shell-furrowed field,
Remember – ev'ry rich, red sod
Is destined to a secret yield*

*And Sower, when your generous hand
The speckled loam you broadcast strew,
Forget not, 'mid your harvest dreams
This way passed other sowers than you*

*O reaper, when you bind the sheaves,
No sorrow need your soul enslave,
If in the freedom that they sought
You glean the golden youth they gave.*

*And dark-eyed maids of Picardy,
When poppies burn with scarlet flare,
Pluck to your hearts, the memory
And bind the blossoms in your hair.*

Will you forget?
The widow and her brood?
Oh, heavens, if you should –
Will you forget?
The blinded and the lamed,
The broken and the maimed,
Will you forget?

The Monument

*When Summer comes they hobble to the sunlit
plinth,
To sit, and watch the eager folks troop by;
'Tis good to meet the sun's strong kiss
And see the clouds stride down the sky.*

*They crawl from out dim alleys of the slums,
Pale human refuse hung with filth rags;
To crouch, and leer, and spit
Upon the sunlit, dusty flags.*

*Once, dawn was all a blaze of gold,
As laughingly they went the way
Of big adventure in great pride of soul;
And wild were all your dreams that day.*

*Now at this statued soldier's feet
They sit and stare; and spit and stare,
Nor ever question why men stop
To gaze upon such sculpture rare.*

Will you forget?
Like those in other wars,
The soldier and the scars –
Will you forget?
When times are safe and soft,
My God! I wonder oft,
Will you forget?

Great Wars

For all the years of blood
And clash of arms,
How little, looking back,
Is left.

A memory –
Across a waste of mud,
Picking his way, sure-footed
Over the broken duck-boards,
Robbie o' Nedderbrek,
Alert, war-stained; rifle
And uniform grey
As the stark ground.

And as he passed, a smile,
A smile that put the world to shame
And lit the grey unwholesome land
Like sunlight on the Lees o Breck,
Or wavelets sparkling on the voe –
And Robbie striding o the banks
And Mary, standing by the door.

Battalion, runner now –
No time to spare,
He hurried on,
Clad in the courtliness
Of other days
Down
Into the grim land.

And after all those years
Of deadlier strife and spurious peace,
I look, but cannot see
The broken dynasties,
The tumbled crowns,
The millions buried
Where they fell;

Only the momentary flash
Of Robbie, crofter,
Caught up in the war,
Passing with firm tread,
His rifle slung

Over an island graciousness,
Smiling a courteous greeting
As he passed
Into the history of an age

Reprise

From ages unbeginning
To ages beyond end