

EAE 0422 A
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Wilfred Owen, « A Terre », ca. 1917, first published 1919.

(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.

5 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.

10 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 buck!
We used to say we'd hate to live dead old, -
Yet now...I'd willingly be puffy, bald,

15 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.

20 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,

25 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,

30 I'd ask no night 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?

35 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 -
40 Nosing along at night down some safe vat,
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,
45 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.
50 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
55 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;
60 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 the thing's best left at home with friends.
My soul's a little grief, grappling your chest,
65 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.

Honour and dishonour. A speech by the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George at the Queen's hall, London, Sept. 19, 1914 (London Methuen & S^o, 1914)
[this excerpt is the second half of the speech]

- Lunacy is always distressing, but sometimes it is dangerous, and when you get it manifested in the head of the State, and it has become the policy of a great Empire, it is about time when that should be ruthlessly put away. I do not believe the German Emperor meant all these speeches. It was simply the martial straddle which he had acquired ; but there were men around him who meant every word of it.
- 5 This was their religion. Treaties? They tangled the feet of Germany in her advance. Cut them with the sword. Little nations? They hinder the advance of Germany. Trample them in the mire under the German heel. The Russian Slav? He challenges the supremacy of Germany and Europe. Hurl your legions at him and massacre him. Britain? She is a constant menace to the predominancy of Germany in the world. Wrest the trident out of her hands. Ah! more than that. The new philosophy of Germany
- 10 is to destroy Christianity. Sickly sentimentalism about sacrifice for others — poor pap for German digestion. We will have a new diet. We will force it on the world. It will be made in Germany. A diet of blood and iron. What remains? Treaties have gone; the honour of nations gone; liberty gone. What is left? Germany — Germany is left — Deutschland über Alles. That is all that is left.
- That is what we are fighting, that claim to predominancy of a civilisation, a material one, a hard one, a
- 15 civilisation which if once it rules and sways the world, liberty goes, democracy vanishes, and unless Britain comes to the rescue, and her sons, it will be a dark day for humanity. We are not fighting the German people. The German people are just as much under the heel of this Prussian military caste, and more so, thank God, than any other nation in Europe. It will be a day of rejoicing for the German peasant and artisan and trader when the military caste is broken. You know his pretensions. He gives
- 20 himself the airs of a demi-god. Walking the pavements — civilians and their wives swept into the gutter; they have no right to stand in the way of the great Prussian junker. Men, women, nations — they have all got to go. He thinks all he has got to say is, “We are in a hurry.” That is the answer he gave to Belgium. “Rapidity of action is Germany's greatest asset,” which means “I am in a hurry. Clear out of my way.”
- 25 You know the type of motorist, the terror of the roads, with a 60-horse power car. He thinks the roads are made for him, and anybody who impedes the action of his car by a single mile is knocked down. The Prussian junker is the road-hog of Europe. Small nationalities in his way hurled to the roadside, bleeding and broken; women and children crushed under the wheels of his cruel car. Britain ordered out of his road. All I can say is this: if the old British spirit is alive in British hearts, that bully will be
- 30 torn from his seat. Were he to win it would be the greatest catastrophe that has befallen democracy since the days of the Holy Alliance and its ascendancy. They think we cannot beat them. It will not be easy. It will be a long job. It will be a terrible war. But in the end we shall march through terror to triumph. We shall need all our qualities, every quality that Britain and its people possess. Prudence in council, daring in action, tenacity in purpose, courage in defeat, moderation in victory, in all things
- 35 faith, and we shall win.
- It has pleased them to believe and to preach the belief that we are a decadent nation. They proclaim it to the world, through their professors, that we are an unheroic nation skulking behind our mahogany counters, whilst we are egging on more gallant races to their destruction. This is a description given to us in Germany — “a timorous, craven nation, trusting to its fleet.” I think they are beginning to find
- 40 their mistake out already. And there are half a million of young men of Britain who have already registered their vow to their King that they will cross the seas and hurl that insult against British courage against its perpetrators on the battlefields of France and of Germany. And we want half a million more. And we shall get them.
- But Wales must continue doing her duty. That was a great telegram that you, my Lord (the Chairman),
- 45 read from Glamorgan. I should like to see a Welsh army in the field. I should like to see what the race who faced the Normans for hundreds of years in their struggle for freedom, the race that helped to win the battle of Crecy, the race that fought for a generation under Glendower, against the greatest captain in Europe — I should like to see that race give a good taste of its quality in this struggle in Europe; and they are going to do it.
- 50 I envy you young people your opportunity. They have put up the age limit for the Army, but I am sorry to say I have marched a good many years even beyond that. It is a great opportunity, an opportunity that only comes once in many centuries to the children of men. For most generations sacrifice comes

in drab and weariness of spirit. It comes to you to-day, and it comes to-day to us all, in the form of the glow and thrill of a great movement for liberty, that impels millions throughout Europe to the same noble end. [Applause.] It is a great war for the emancipation of Europe from the thralldom of a military caste which has thrown its shadows upon two generations of men, and is now plunging the world into a welter of bloodshed and death. Some have already given their lives. There are some who have given more than their own lives ; they have given the lives of those who are dear to them. I honour their courage, and may God be their comfort and their strength. But their reward is at hand ; those who have fallen have died consecrated deaths. They have taken their part in the making of a new Europe — a new world. I can see signs of its coming in the glare of the battlefield.

The people will gain more by this struggle in all lands than they comprehend at the present moment. [Hear, hear.] It is true they will be free of the greatest menace to their freedom. That is not all. There is something infinitely greater and more enduring which is emerging already out of this great conflict; a new patriotism, richer, nobler, more exalted than the old. I see a new recognition amongst all classes, high and low, shedding themselves of selfishness; a new recognition that the honour of a country does not depend merely on the maintenance of its glory in the stricken field, but in protecting its homes from distress as well. It is a new patriotism, it is bringing a new outlook for all classes. A great flood of luxury and of sloth which had submerged the land is receding, and a new Britain is appearing. We can see for the first time the fundamental things that matter in life and that have been obscured from our vision by the tropical growth of prosperity.

May I tell you, in a simple parable, what I think this war is doing for us ? I know a valley in North Wales, between the mountains and the sea — a beautiful valley, snug, comfortable, sheltered by the mountains from all the bitter blasts. It was very enervating, and I remember how the boys were in the habit of climbing the hills above the village to have a glimpse of the great mountains in the distance and to be stimulated and freshened by the breezes which came from the hilltops, and by the great spectacle of that great valley.

We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable, too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish. And the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the great everlasting things that matter for a nation ; the great peaks of honour we had forgotten — duty and patriotism, clad in glittering white; the great pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again, but as long as the men and women of this generation last they will carry in their hearts the image of these great mountain peaks, whose foundations are unshaken though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war.

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Paul Nash, We are Making a New World, 1918, Oil on canvas, 70x90cm
Imperial War Museum, London