

To Speed Them All

Texts

John Milton

This is the month, and this the happy morn,
Wherein the Son of Heaven's eternal King,
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

Scripture

Why do the nations so furiously rage together?
Why do they imagine a vain thing?

Kenneth Patchen

I have lighted the candles, Mary...
How softly breathes your little Son

My wife has spread the table
With our best cloth. There are apples,
Bright as red clocks, upon the mantel.
The snow is a weary face at the window.
How sweetly does He sleep

"Into this bitter world, O Terrible Huntsman!"
I say, and she takes my hand--"Hush,
You will wake Him."

The taste of tears is on her mouth
When I kiss her. I take an apple
And hold it tightly in my fist;
The cold, swollen face of war leans in the window.

They are blowing out the candles, Mary...
The world is a thing gone mad tonight.
*O hold Him tenderly, dear Mother,
For His is a kingdom in the hearts of men.*

Wilfred Owen

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 for them from prayers or 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 good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

To Speed Them All (Cont.)

John Milton

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
 His reign of peace upon the earth began;
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist,
 Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

Chinua Achebe

After a war life catches
desperately at passing
hints of normalcy like
vines entwining a hollow
twig; its famished roots
close on rubble and every
piece of broken glass.

Wilfred Owen

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.

A. E. Housman

Here dead lie we because we did not choose
 To live and shame the land from which we sprung.
Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
 But young men think it is, and we were young.

From the Ordinary of the Mass

*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi
Miserere nobis
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi
Miserere nobis
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi
Dona nobis pacem*

(O Lamb of God, who taketh
away the sin of the world, have
mercy upon us. Grant us your
peace.)

Scripture

My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.
Not as the world gives, give I unto you.

Herbert H. Hines

We open here our treasures and our gifts;
And some of it is gold,
And some is frankincense,
And some is myrrh;
For some has come from plenty,
Some from joy,
And some from deepest sorrow of the soul.
But Thou, O God, dost know the gift is love,
Our pledge of peace, our promise of good-will.
Accept the gift and all the life we bring.