

REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

THEY by Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon (1886 - 1967)

Born to wealthy parents in Matfield, England, Siegfried Sassoon joined the war effort after living the life of a young country gentleman, hunting, playing cricket, and writing small volumes of poetry. His life was to turn dramatically as he was commissioned an officer to the Royal Welch Fusiliers, an armed regiment of the British military. Sassoon showed great bravery on the front line, and he was decorated twice for near-suicidal actions that saved his men. By 1915 he was serving in France where he was wounded in action, as he was two more times during battle. Sassoon became vocal against the war, writing poetry and letters in protest. In 1917, he was hospitalized for shell shock. In the hospital, he continued his war protests while also using his poetry to help his fellow soldiers cope. Sassoon survived hospitalization and the war. He died in 1967 from stomach cancer.

THEY

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back
They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
In a just cause: they lead the last attack
On Anti-Christ; their comrade's blood has bought
New right to breed an honorable race.
They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
'For George lost both legs; and Bill's stone blind;
Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find
A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.'
And the bishop said: "The ways of God are strange!"

REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

The Target by Ivor Gurney

Ivor Gurney (1890 - 1937)

Born in Gloucester, England, to a lower-middle-class professional family, Ivor Gurney enthusiastically enlisted when World War I broke out. Due to poor eyesight, however, he was initially turned down. That did not stop him from trying to enlist again in 1915. This time, he was accepted. By 1916 he was fighting in France. There he suffered from multiple effects of battle: in April 1917, he was wounded, and then again in August 1917, he was gassed. As a result of these injuries and other symptoms, Gurney was sent to a military hospital where he was diagnosed with shell shock. Later treatment indicated that he suffered from schizophrenia. Recently, scholars have come to believe that a diagnosis of bipolar disorder may be more accurate. Gurney died of tuberculosis in 1937 while still a mental hospital patient in London.

The Target

I shot him, and it had to be
One of us! 'Twas him or me.
'Couldn't be helped,' and none can blame
Me, for you would do the same.

My mother, she can't sleep for fear
Of what might be a-happening here
To me. Perhaps it might be best
To die, and set her fears at rest.

For worst is worst, and worry's done.
Perhaps he was the only son...
Yet God keeps still, and does not say
A word of guidance any way.

Well, if they get me, first I'll find
That boy, and tell him all my mind,
And see who felt the bullet worst,
And ask his pardon, if I durst.

All's a tangle. Here's my job.
A man might rave, or shout, or sob;
And God He takes no sort of heed.
This is a bloody mess indeed.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

The Assault Heroic by Robert Graves

Robert Graves (1895 -1985)

Born in Wimbledon, England, to well-to-do parents, Robert Graves, like other young men of his generation, joined the military in 1914 and served as a junior officer during World War I. In 1915 he fought in the Battle of Loos in western France, the first major British attack of the war and the first time the British military used poison gas. In 1916 Graves was injured by an exploding shell piercing his chest during the battle of the Somme. He was returned home to hospitalization for his physical and mental injuries. While he was healing, he published his first collection of poetry. In 1918, he spent a year in the trenches, where he was once again wounded. The war traumatized him, and he dealt with all the trauma through the power of words on paper. Graves published over 140 books, 15 novels, 10 translations, and 40 works of nonfiction, autobiography, and literary essays. He died in 1985 in Majorca.

The Assault Heroic

Down in the mud I lay,
Tired out by my long day
Of five damned days and nights,
Five sleepless days and nights,...
Dream-snatched, and set me where
The dungeon of Despair
Looms over Desolate Sea,
Frowning and threatening me
With aspect high and steep-
A most malignant keep.
My foes that lay within
Shouted and made a din,
Hooted and grinned and cried:
'Today we've killed your pride;
Today your ardor ends.
We've murdered all your friends;
We've undermined by stealth
Your happiness and your health.
We've taken away your hope;
Now you may droop and mope
To misery and to Death.'
But with my spear of Faith,
Stout as an oaken rafter,
With my round shield of laughter,
With my sharp, tongue-like sword

That speaks a bitter word,
I stood beneath the wall
And there defied them all.
The stone they cast I caught
And alchemized with thought
Into such lumps of gold
As dreaming misers hold.
The boiling oil they threw
Fell in a shower of dew,
Refreshing me; the spears
Flew harmless by my ears,
Struck quivering in the sod;
There, like the prophet's rod,
Put leaves out, took firm root,
And bore me instant fruit.
My foes were all astounded,
Dumbstricken and confounded,
Gaping in a long row;
They dared not thrust nor throw.
Thus, then, I climbed a steep
Buttress and won the keep,
And laughed and proudly blew
My horn, 'Stand to! Stand to!
Wake up, sir! Here's a new
Attack! Stand to! Stand to!

REFLECTIONS ON THE WAR

One by Metallica

Metallica (1981-)

"One" by Metallica is one of the band's most iconic and emotionally powerful songs. It tells the story of a soldier who becomes a quadruple amputee and loses his sight, hearing, and speech due to injuries sustained in war. Trapped in his own mind, the protagonist longs for death as his only escape. The song was written by James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich, inspired by Dalton Trumbo's anti-war novel *Johnny Got His Gun*. "One" was released as the third single from their 1988 album, *...And Justice for All*. It was the first Metallica song to have an official music video, released in January 1989. The video incorporates scenes from the 1971 film *Johnny Got His Gun*, emphasizing the song's grim anti-war message. Critically acclaimed, "One" earned Metallica their first Grammy Award for Best Metal Performance in 1990 and remains a staple in their live performances.

One

I can't remember anything
Can't tell if this is true or a dream
Deep down inside I feel the scream
This terrible silence stops me
Now that the war is through with me
I'm waking up, I cannot see
That there's not much left of me
Nothing is real but pain now
Hold my breath as I wish for death
Oh please, God, wake me
Back in the womb it's much too real
In pumps life that I must feel
But can't look forward to reveal
Look to the time when I'll live
Fed through the tube that sticks in me
Just like a wartime novelty
Tied to machines that make me be
Cut this life off from me
Hold my breath as I wish for death

Oh please, God, wake me
Now the world is gone, I'm just one
Oh God, help me
Hold my breath as I wish for death
Oh please, God, help me
Darkness imprisoning me
All that I see
Absolute horror
I cannot live
I cannot die
Trapped in myself
Body my holding cell
Landmine has taken my sight
Taken my speech
Taken my hearing
Taken my arms
Taken my legs
Taken my soul
Left me with life in hell