

1899

WAR IS KIND AND OTHER LINES

Stephen Crane

Crane, Stephen (1871-1900) - An American novelist, short-story writer, and poet who is often called the first modern American writer. *War is Kind and Other Lines* (1899) - Crane's second collection of free verse. Similar in style, yet often more cynical than his earlier volume, "The Black Riders and Other Lines," these poems serve as a good example of Crane's use of dramatic irony.

I Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.

Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
Do not weep.

War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,
Little souls who thirst for fight,
These men were born to drill and die.

The unexplained glory flies above them,
Great is the battle-god,
great, and his kingdom — A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.

Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
Do not weep.

War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
Eagle with crest of red and gold,
These men were born to drill and die.

Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
Make plain to them the excellence of killing
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
Do not weep.

War is kind.

II "What says the sea, little shell? What says the sea? Long has our brother been silent to us,
Kept his message for the ships, Awkward ships, stupid ships."

"The sea bids you mourn, O Pines, Sing low in the moonlight.

He sends tale of the land of doom, Of place where endless falls A
rain of women's tears, And men in grey robes — Men in grey robes
— Chant the unknown pain.”

“What says the sea, little shell? What says the sea? Long has our
brother been silent to us, Kept his message for the ships, Puny
ships, silly ships.”

“The sea bids you teach, O Pines, Sing low in the moonlight; Teach
the gold of patience, Cry gospel of gentle hands, Cry a brotherhood
of hearts.

The sea bids you teach, O Pines.”

“And where is the reward, little shell? What says the sea? Long has
our brother been silent to us, Kept his message for the ships, Puny
ships, silly ships.”

“No word says the sea, O Pines, No word says the sea.

Long will your brother be silent to you, Keep his message for the
ships, O puny pines, silly pines.”

III To the maiden The sea was blue meadow, Alive with little froth-
people Singing.

To the sailor, wrecked, The sea was dead grey walls Superlative in
vacancy, Upon which nevertheless at fateful time Was written The
grim hatred of nature.

IV A little ink more or less!

I surely can't matter?

Even the sky and the opulent sea, The plains and the hills, aloof,
Hear the uproar of all these books.

But it is only a little ink more or less.

What? You define me God with these trinkets? Can my misery
meal on an ordered walking Of surpliced numskulls? And a
fanfare of lights? Or even upon the measured pulpittings Of the
familiar false and true? Is this God? Where, then, is hell? Show me
some bastard mushroom Sprung from a pollution of blood.

It is better.

**Where is God? V “Have you ever made a just man?” “Oh, I have
made three,” answered God, “But two of them are dead, And the
third — Listen! Listen!**

And you will hear the thud of his defeat.”

VI I explain the silvered passing of a ship at night, The sweep of
each sad lost wave, The dwindling boom of the steel thing's

striving, The little cry of a man to a man, A shadow falling across
the greyer night, And the sinking of the small star; Then the waste,
the far waste of waters, And the soft lashing of black waves For
long and in loneliness.

Remember, thou, O ship of love, Thou leavest a far waste of waters,
And the soft lashing of black waves For long and in loneliness.

VII "I have heard the sunset song of the birches, A white melody in
the silence, I have seen a quarrel of the pines.

At nightfall The little grasses have rushed by me With the wind
men.

These things have I lived," quoth the maniac, "Possessing only
eyes and ears.

But you — You don green spectacles before you look at roses."

VIII Fast rode the knight With spurs, hot and reeking, Ever waving
an eager sword, "To save my lady!" Fast rode the knight, And
leaped from saddle to war.

Men of steel flickered and gleamed Like riot of silver lights, And
the gold of the knight's good banner

Still waved on a castle wall.

A horse, Blowing, staggering, bloody thing, Forgotten at foot of
castle wall.

A horse Dead at foot of castle wall.

IX Forth went the candid man And spoke freely to the wind —
When he looked about him he was in a far strange country.

Forth went the candid man And spoke freely to the stars — Yellow
light tore sight from his eyes.

"My good fool," said a learned bystander, "Your operations are
mad."

"You are too candid," cried the candid man, And when his stick
left the head of the learned bystander

It was two sticks.

X You tell me this is God? I tell you this is a printed list, A burning
candle, and an ass.

XI On the desert A silence from the moon's deepest valley.

Fire rays fall athwart the robes Of hooded men, squat and dumb.

Before them, a woman Moves to the blowing of shrill whistles And distant thunder of drums, While mystic things, sinuous, dull with terrible colour, Sleepily fondle her body Or move at her will, swishing stealthily over the sand.

The snakes whisper softly; The whispering, whispering snakes, Dreaming and swaying and staring, But always whispering, softly whispering.

The wind streams from the lone reaches Of Arabia, solemn with night, And the wild fire makes shimmer of blood Over the robes of the hooded men Squat and dumb.

Bands of moving bronze, emerald, yellow, Circle the throat and the arms of her, And over the sands serpents move warily Slow, menacing and submissive, Swinging to the whistles and drums, The whispering, whispering snakes, Dreaming and swaying and staring, But always whispering, softly whispering.

The dignity of the accursed; The glory of slavery, despair, death, Is in the dance of the whispering snakes.

XII A newspaper is a collection of half-injustices Which, bawled by boys from mile to mile, Spreads its curious opinion To a million merciful and sneering men, While families cuddle the joys of the fireside When spurred by tale of dire lone agony.

A newspaper is a court Where every one is kindly and unfairly tried By a squalor of honest men.

A newspaper is a market Where wisdom sells its freedom And melons are crowned by the crowd.

A newspaper is a game Where his error scores the player victory While another's skill wins death.

A newspaper is a symbol; It is feckless life's chronicle, A collection of loud tales Concentrating eternal stupidities, That in remote ages lived unhaltered, Roaming through a fenceless world.

XIII The wayfarer, Perceiving the pathway to truth, Was struck with astonishment.

It was thickly grown with weeds.

"Ha," he said, "I see that none has passed here In a long time." Later he saw that each weed Was a singular knife.

"Well," he mumbled at last, "Doubtless there are other roads."

XIV A slant of sun on dull brown walls, A forgotten sky of bashful blue.

Toward God a mighty hymn, A song of collisions and cries,
 Rumbling wheels, hoof-beats, bells, Welcomes, farewells, love-
 calls, final moans, Voices of joy, idiocy, warning, despair, The
 unknown appeals of brutes, The chanting of flowers, The screams
 of cut trees, The senseless babble of hens and wise men —

A cluttered incoherency that says at the stars:

“O God, save us!”

XV Once a man clambering to the housetops Appealed to the
 heavens.

With strong voice he called to the deaf spheres; A warrior’s shout
 he raised to the suns.

Lo, at last, there was a dot on the clouds, And — at last and at last
 — — God — the sky was filled with armies.

XVI There was a man with tongue of wood Who essayed to sing,
 And in truth it was lamentable.

But there was one who heard The clip-clapper of this tongue of
 wood And knew what the man Wished to sing, And with that the
 singer was content.

XVII The successful man has thrust himself Through the water of
 the years, Reeking wet with mistakes — Bloody mistakes; Slimed
 with victories over the lesser, A figure thankful on the shore of
 money.

Then, with the bones of fools He buys silken banners Limned with
 his triumphant face; With the skins of wise men He buys the trivial
 bows of all.

Flesh painted with marrow Contributes a coverlet, A coverlet for
 his contented slumber.

In guiltless ignorance, in ignorant guilt, He delivered his secrets to
 the riven multitude.

“Thus I defended: Thus I wrought.” Complacent, smiling, He
 stands heavily on the dead.

Erect on a pillar of skulls He declaims his trampling of babes;

Smirking, fat, dripping, He makes speech in guiltless ignorance,
 Innocence.

XVIII In the night Grey heavy clouds muffled the valleys, And the
 peaks looked toward God alone.

“O Master that movest the wind with a finger, Humble, idle, futile peaks are we.

Grant that we may run swiftly across the world To huddle in worship at Thy feet.”

In the morning A noise of men at work came the clear blue miles,
And the little black cities were apparent.

“O Master that knowest the meaning of raindrops, Humble, idle, futile peaks are we.

Give voice to us, we pray, O Lord, That we may sing Thy goodness to the sun.”

In the evening The far valleys were sprinkled with tiny lights.

“O Master, Thou that knowest the value of kings and birds, Thou hast made us humble, idle futile peaks.

Thou only needest eternal patience; We bow to Thy wisdom, O Lord — Humble, idle, futile peaks.”

In the night Grey heavy clouds muffled the valleys, And the peaks looked toward God alone.

XIX The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top

Blood — blood and torn grass — Had marked the rise of his agony
— This lone hunter.

The grey-green woods impassive Had watched the threshing of his limbs.

A canoe with flashing paddle, A girl with soft searching eyes, A call: “John!”

Come, arise, hunter!

Can you not hear?

The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top.

XX The impact of a dollar upon the heart Smiles warm red light,
Sweeping from the hearth rosily upon the white table, With the hanging cool velvet shadows Moving softly upon the door.

The impact of a million dollars Is a crash of flunkeys, And yawning emblems of Persia Cheeked against oak, France and a sabre, The outcry of old beauty Whored by pimping merchants To submission before wine and chatter.

Silly rich peasants stamp the carpets of men, Dead men who dreamed fragrance and light Into their woof, their lives; The rug of an honest bear Under the feet of a cryptic slave Who speaks always of baubles, Forgetting state, multitude, work, and state, Champing and mouthing of hats, Making ratful squeak of hats, Hats.

XXI A man said to the universe:

“Sir I exist!” “However,” replied the universe, “The fact has not created in me A sense of obligation.”

XXII When the prophet, a complacent fat man, Arrived at the mountain-top, He cried: “Woe to my knowledge!

I intended to see good white lands And bad black lands, But the scene is grey.”

XXIII There was a land where lived no violets.

A traveller at once demanded : “Why?” The people told him:

“Once the violets of this place spoke thus:

‘Until some woman freely gives her lover To another woman We will fight in bloody scuffle.’” Sadly the people added:

“There are no violets here.”

XXIV Ay, workman, make me a dream, A dream for my love. Cunningly weave sunlight, Breezes, and flowers.

Let it be of the cloth of meadows.

And — good workman —

And let there be a man walking thereon.

XXV Each small gleam was a voice, A lantern voice — In little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

A chorus of colours came over the water; The wondrous leaf-shadow no longer wavered, No pines crooned on the hills, The blue night was elsewhere a silence, When the chorus of colours came over the water, Little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

Small glowing pebbles Thrown on the dark plane of evening Sing good ballads of God And eternity, with soul’s rest.

Little priests, little holy fathers, None can doubt the truth of your hymning, When the marvellous chorus comes over the water, Songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

XXVI The trees in the garden rained flowers.

Children ran there joyously.

They gathered the flowers Each to himself.

Now there were some Who gathered great heaps — Having opportunity and skill — Until, behold, only chance blossoms Remained for the feeble.

Then a little spindling tutor Ran importantly to the father, crying:

“Pray, come hither!

See this unjust thing in your garden!” But when the father had surveyed, He admonished the tutor:

“Not so, small sage!

This thing is just.

For, look you, Are not they who possess the flowers Stronger,
bolder, shrewder Than they who have none?

Why should the strong — The beautiful strong — Why should they
not have the flowers?” Upon reflection, the tutor bowed to the
ground, “My lord,” he said, “The stars are displaced By this
towering wisdom.”

XXVII When a people reach the top of a hill, Then does God lean
toward them, Shortens tongues and lengthens arms.

A vision of their dead comes to the weak.

The moon shall not be too old Before the new battalions rise, Blue
battalions.

The moon shall not be too old When the children of change shall
fall Before the new battalions, The blue battalions.

Mistakes and virtues will be trampled deep.

A church and a thief shall fall together.

A sword will come at the bidding of the eyeless, The God-led
turning only to beckon, Swinging a creed like a censer At the head
of the new battalions, Blue battalions.

March the tools of nature’s impulse, Men born of wrong, men born
of right, Men of the new battalions, The blue battalions.

The clang of swords is Thy wisdom, The wounded make gestures
like Thy Son’s; The feet of mad horses is one part — Ay, another is
the hand of a mother on the brow of a youth.

Then, swift as they charge through a shadow, The men of the new
battalions, Blue battalions — God lead them high, God lead them
far, God lead them far, God lead them high, These new battalions
The blue battalions.

THE END