

Two poems on the theme of Remembrance from Fr Rob Esdaile

Lions And Donkeys (For Remembrance Sunday)

And after all the carnage,
after all the millions of dead
and the billions of bullets
had been expended,
do you know the greatest moral failing of them
all?
Beyond all the bayonettings, shootings, gassings,
pulverisings,
something far more deadly in effect took place
in a railway coach at Compiègne
and in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles:
the Humiliation of the Vanquished
and the Vengeance of the Victors,
grinding Germany into the dirt
and the Jews into the Camps
and the World back into War.
All for want of imagination and forgiveness,
reconciliation and friendship
and a Christ-like love of enemy.

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Passiondale

The ancient emblems of Christ's death
have become now strangely shrunk.
The forest whence the cross was hewn is no
more:
a treeless, birdless, muddy waste stands in its
place;
its wood cut into shorter pit-prop lengths
to hold the weight of sandbag and of earth.
The nails are now recast in two-inch lengths
that hug the sides of rifled tubes.
The lance, truncated as a bayonet,
is fit not just for the piercing of a lifeless corpse
but for the cut and thrust of hand-to-hand
combat.
Pilate's placard that proclaimed Christ King
is blasted from its perch and lost to mud.

All these are, I say, reduced, excepting only this:
the Crown of Thorns -
now grown barbarous in length, industrial in
strength,
line after wretched line of wire, wreathing half a
continent in blood.
The young lions stagger, weighed down not by
wooden beams
but by the heavy packs decreed by donkeys
safely in the rear.
Their backs are lacerated not by whips but by
the modern scourge
of withering machine-gun fire.

Here they find their Calvary; not this time a hill
but just as much a place of skulls, these
Flanders' fields.
And here dies Christ, not once but a million
times and more,
in those impaled and draped upon the wire,
and more agonisingly in those condemned
to live a whole life long, remembering
this inhuman passion and the crucifixion of their
hope.

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Fr. Rob Esdaile's second volume of poems, Renew, Refresh, Rejoice, has just been published and is available from Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Hampton Court Way, Thames Ditton KT7 0LP for £6.50 inc. p&p.