

Fragments Libretto [Translations in italics]

Spoken Facts 1

August 1914

Lest we forget.
Lest we forget, forget.
War! Krieg! [War!]
War! Noble war, a noble war!
I'll fight for my country
Ich sterb' für die Heimat
[I die for the Homeland]
I'll die for my country
Ich sterb' für das Licht
[I die for the Light]
I can face death
Die Heimat, die Heimat!
My country, my country!

Hoch gingen die Wogen
[High went the waves]
It will all be over by Christmas

I work on the land ¹
helping me dad
But Oh, how I hate it
being a farm lad
I know I'll be here
for the rest of my life
Milking the cows
and finding a wife

But - I hear there's a war
and young lads they need
to spread their wings
and you don't have to read

If I stop a bit of
German lead
It will be a sport ²

War! Glorious war!
Ich geh' gern ein!
[I go gladly to it]

Hoch gingen die Wogen
der Begeisterung ³
[High went the waves of
enthusiasm]
It will all be over
by Christmas

I'll fight for my country/
I work on the land...
I can face death
Die Heimat!
My country!
Die Heimat! Ah!

NOTE: For the composer's notes on each section, see www.emily-feldberg-music.uk/fragments.htm

¹ Open Fire by Helen Jowett, 2014.
Used by kind permission of the author.

² George Rothwell Seager, courtesy of

the Imperial War Museum:
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections>
³ Diary entry of Ruhr Miner in 1914,
in *Germany after the First World War*
by Richard Bessel (1993) Clarendon
Press, Oxford (p.3). With thanks to
Professor Bessel for the German text.

Abschied ⁴

Vorm Sterben mach' ich noch mein Gedicht
Still, Kameraden, stört mich nicht
Wir ziehn zum Krieg, der Tod ist unser Kitt
O heult' mir doch die Geliebte nit
Was liegt an mir? Ich geh' gern ein
Die Mutter weint
Man muss aus Eisen sein
Die Sonne fällt zum Horizont hinab
Bald wirft man mich ins milde Massengrab
Am Himmel brennt das brave Abendrot
Vielleicht bin ich in dreizehn Tagen tot

Parting ⁵

*Before I die I will write my poem.
Quiet, friends, don't disturb me.
We're heading for war. Death is our bond.
Oh, if only my beloved would stop howling.
What am I to do. I go gladly to it.
Mother is crying. One must be made of iron.
The sun sinks to the horizon.
Soon I will be thrown into the soft mass grave.
The sky is aflame with a splendid sunset
Perhaps in thirteen days I may be dead*

⁴ *Abschied* (Farewell) by Alfred Lichtenstein (1889-1914). From *Alfred Lichtenstein, Dichtungen*. Edited by Kanzog, Vollmer & Raabe

(1989). Arche Verlag AG, Zürich.

⁵ With thanks to Alison Dietz for the translation.

Lament

Schmerz! Schmerz!

[Pain! Pain!]

Genommen und genommen^{6 7}

[Taken and taken]

Menschen genommen, Glauben genommen

[People taken, faith taken]

I walk in the half-light, I walk in the half-light

The pain has left weariness, the pain has left weariness

Life on its way to death⁸

Schmerz! Schmerz!

Schmerz! Schmerz!

Ich geh' im Halbdunkel

[I walk in the half-light/twilight - lit. half-dark]

Der Schmerz hat Müdigkeit zurück gelassen

[The pain has left weariness behind it]⁹

No counting the lives lost, none are left⁹

Schmerz!

⁶ From Käthe Kollwitz, *Die Tagebücher*. btb Verlag (Random House) 1999. First published 1955, edited by Hanz Kollwitz. Retrieved from <https://www.adelinde.net/kathe-kollwitz-zeitzeugin-des-1-weltkrieges/>

⁷ With thanks to Trevor Brawn for advice on translation.

⁸ Vera Brittain, 1916, in *Vera Brittain: A Life* by Paul Berry & Mark Bostridge (1996). Pimlico, London.

⁹ Courtesy of the British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/excerpt-letter-from-mohammed-agim-to-subedar-major-firoz-khan#sthash.k2V5hSR0.dpuf>
Shelfmark IOR/L/MIL/5/825/4 f.425.

Canary Girls

Earning high wages? Yus, Five quid a week.¹⁰
A woman, too, mind you, I calls it dim sweet.
Ye're asking some questions -
but bless yer, here goes:
I spends the whole racket on good times and clothes.

I'm having life's good times, see 'ere, it's like this
The 'oof' come o' danger, a touch and go bizz
We're all here today mate, tomorrow perhaps dead
If Fate tumbles on us and blows up our shed.

Me saving? Elijah! Yer do think I'm mad.
I'm acting the lady, but - I ain't living bad.

Earning high wages? Yus, Five quid a week.
A woman, too, mind you, I calls it dim sweet.
Ye're asking some questions -
but bless yer, here goes:
I spends the whole racket on good times and clothes.

Afraid! Are yer kidding? With money to spend!
Years back I wore tatters, now silk stockings, mi friend!
I've bracelets and jewellery, rings envied by friends;
A sergeant to swank with and something to lend.

¹⁰ *Munitions Wages* by Madeline Ida Bedford (1885-1956) from *The Young Captain, and other poems: Fragments of War and Love* (1917) published by Erskine Macdonald. Retrieved from <http://projects.oucs.ox.ac.uk/jtap/tutorials/intro/women/>

Oh, Silvertown, Oh, Silvertown¹¹
The place blew up, there were scores of dead
One great roar and flash!
Fountains of flame spread like a rose
Fiery rose, hundreds dead;
What a high price to pay.

Afraid! Are yer kidding? With money to spend!
Years back I wore tatters, now silk stockings, mi friend!

I drive out in taxis, do theatres in style.
And this is mi verdict - it is jolly worthwhile.
Worthwhile, for tomorrow if I'm blown to the sky
I'll have repaid mi wages in death - and pass by.

¹¹ Extracts from an anonymous account in a leaflet published to raise funds for a church destroyed in the Silvertown explosion on 19th January 1917. Quoted in *A century on: the mysterious cause and tragic legacy of London's biggest explosion* by Toby Butler, published online in *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/a-century-on-the-mysterious-cause-and-tragic-legacy-of-londons-biggest-explosion-71353>

Spoken Facts 2
The Knock on the Door¹²

All bloody practices we do utterly deny
and all outward wars and strife
and fighting with outward weapons for any end
or under any pretence¹³

Congscription or not

'By George! I'd have military training in Heaven!'
'Congscription just for the upper classes
as an example to the lower classes.'
'Congscription is the badge of the slave.'

We deny the right of any government
to make a bounden duty the slaughter of our fellows.

Enlist or desert
Exemption on grounds of conscience
Every man who is single must register to enlist
or become a deserter
That knock on the door, that knock on the door
that brings the great decision

I've made the great decision.
All bloody practices we do utterly deny
All outward wars and strife
and fighting with outward weapons for any end.
This is our testimony to the whole world.

¹² The title of this section is taken from the phrase, 'None would ever forget that knock on the door, on or after 2 March 1916' in David Boulton (2016): *2 March 1916: D-day for conscientious objectors*, in *the Friend*, Vol 174, no. 9, p. 5. (Special Issue, 26 February 2016). Used by kind permission of the author.

¹³ 'A declaration from the Quakers to Charles II, 1660', extract in Quaker Faith and Practice 24.04 (1994/2013) and <http://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/24-04/>

¹⁴ Opposing views quoted by David Boulton (2016) in *The politics of conscription and conscience*, in *the Friend*, Vol 174, no. 9, p. 8. (Special Issue, 26 February 2016).

Under a Cloudless Blue Sky

Under a cloudless blue sky hay meadows ready and dry¹⁵
Troop mass of thousands, two mighty Empires
all standing ready to die
Promise of hot summer sun, bayonets glistening as one
Wave upon wave come, bayonets shining
This is the place called The Somme.

Big boots - can't walk
Out of breath - can't talk
I'm here in War, no going back

The losses were terrible, men fell in their battalions
The very first day they counted sixty thousand

(Can't walk - out of breath...)

Three lines of trenches, three lines of barbed wire
Many will die in the mire

There is trench foot, body lice, surgery without morphine
Untended wounded, sweet stench of gangrene

There's a war - I came and I'm no damn good
Please God stop it all now - if only I could

(Under a November sky... the mire...)

¹⁵ Emily Feldberg, 2018, combined with extracts from *Open Fire* by Helen Jowett, 2014. Used by kind permission of the author.

I see their faces scared, eyes wide
Boys just like me, inside I cried
Screams and blood, bodies out of control
Waves of colour, silver hole

Your Johnny died peacefully, he felt no pain
He died for his country, did not die in vain
Walter starb ruhig, Schmerz fühlt' er nicht
[Walter died peacefully, he felt no pain]
Er starb für die Heimat, er starb für das Licht
[He died for the Homeland, he died for the Light]
No shrapnel dismembered his limbs or his brain
No lying in shell-holes in the Somme's lethal rain
No long drawn-out death surrounded by blood
No helpless drowning in gangrenous mud

We don't know where he died, where to find his remains
but we know he died peacefully and felt no pain
under a cloudless blue sky.

Lament

Schmerz! Schmerz! Genommen und genommen
Menschen genommen, Glauben genommen
I walk in the half-light, I walk in the half-light
The pain has left weariness, the pain has left weariness
Life on its way to death [8]
Schmerz!
Ich geh' im Halbdunkel
Der Schmerz hat Müdigkeit zurück gelassen
There is no counting the lives lost, none are left
Schmerz!

Kuchen¹⁶

We bring some cake here, it is for you
Eat and be rested, you are too thin
Habt ihr gehört? Habt ihr gehört?
[Have you heard? Have you heard?]
Hier gibt es Kuchen, Kuchen für uns!
[There's cake here, cake for us!]

Kuchen! Kuchen! Kuchen für uns! Schmeckt!
[Cake! Cake! Cake for us! Tasty!]
Vielen Dank, das ist gut!
[Many thanks, it's good!]
Kuchen! Kuchen! Kuchen für uns!
Cake will do you good!

Somewhere I have a son; he fought and killed just like you
He smiled, had fears, but I cannot dry his tears
And he lived and like cake just like you.
He was his mother's son; you are your mother's son
And you still live, to you I give this cake to a mother's son.

Somewhere now lies my son; he fought and killed just like you
He smiled, had fears, and I cannot dry my tears
But I can give to another mother's son.
He smiled, had fears, and she cannot dry her tears
But she can give to another mother's son.

Hier gibt es Kuchen, Kuchen für uns!
Eat and be rested, you look too thin...
Kuchen, Kuchen, Kuchen für uns! Cake will do you good.

¹⁶ Text by Emily Feldberg, based on an account by Anna Fleisch recalling a story told by her grandfather, who never otherwise talked about the war. Used by kind permission of Anna Fleisch.

Thanks too to Dody Scheffler for advice on this and other matters.

Three Tommies¹⁷

Three Tommies sat in a trench one day
Discussing the war in the usual way
They talked of the mud and they talked of the Hun
Of what was to do, and what had been done -
They talked about rum
And though it is hard to believe
They even found time to talk about leave
But the point which they argued
from post back to pillar,
Was whether Notts County could beat Aston Villa

The night sped away and zero drew nigh
Equipment made ready, all lips getting dry
And watches consulted with each passing minute
Till five more to go, then 'twould find them all in it
The word came along down the line to "get ready!"
The sergeants admonishing all to keep steady
But out rang a voice getting shriller and shriller:
"I tell yer Notts County can beat Aston Villa!"

The Earth shook and swayed and the barrage was on
As they leapt o'er the top with a rush and were gone
Away into Hunland, through mud and through wire,
Stabbing and dragging themselves through the mire,
No time to heed those who are falling en route
Till, stopped by a strong point, they lay down to shoot,
Then, through the din came a voice: "Say, Jack Miller!
I tell yer Notts County can beat Aston Villa!"

¹⁷ *The Burning Question*, Anon. From the facsimile edition of *The Wipers Times* (1973) introduced by Patrick Beaver & Peter Davies. Macmillan.

The strong point has gone, and forwards they press
Towards their objective, in numbers growing less
They reach it at last, and prepare to resist
The counter-attack which will come through the mist
Of the rain falling steadily-
Dig and hang on
The word for support back to H.Q. has gone
The air, charged with moment, grows stiller and stiller
"Notts County's no earthly beside Aston Villa."

Two "Blighties", a struggle through mud to get back
To the old A.D.S. down a rough duck-board track
A hasty field dressing, a ride in a car
A wait in a C.C.S., then there they are:
Packed side by side in a clean Red Cross train
Happy in hopes to see Blighty again
Still, through the bandage, muffled, "Jack Miller
I bet you Notts County can beat Aston Villa!"

Three Tommies sat in a trench one day
Discussing the war in the usual way
They talked of the mud and they talked of the Hun
Of what was to do, and what had been done -
They talked about rum
And though it is hard to believe
They even found time to talk about leave
But the point which they argued over and over
Was whether Minehead Town -
could beat Bristol Rovers!

Duty Alone

He is sustained by duty alone;¹⁸

Duty, duty alone

Es ist alles Schwindel;

Schwindel, Schwindel

Es ist alles Schwindel:

Der Krieg ist für die Reichen,

Der Mittelstand muss weichen,

Das Volk, das stellt die Leichen¹⁹

[*It's all a swindle*

War is for the wealthy

The middle class must give way

The people provide the corpses]

He is sustained by duty alone;

Duty alone

¹⁸ 1916, in *Vera Brittain: A Life* by Paul Berry & Mark Bostridge (1996, p.106). Pimlico, London.

¹⁹ Quoted in German and in English translation by Richard Bessel in *Germany after the First World War* (1993) Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.1. With thanks to Professor Bessel for clarifying the translation and the military context.

Vale (Farewell) ²⁰

And so, farewell. All our sweet songs are sung,
Our red rose-garland's withered;
The sun-bright day---
Silver and blue and gold---
Wearied to sleep.

The shimmering evening, like a grey, soft bird,
Barred with the blood of sunset,
Has flown to rest
Under the scented wings
Of the dark-blue Night.

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Life on its way to death
Schmerz!
Ich geh' im Halbdunkel
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There is no counting the lives lost, none are left
Schmerz!

²⁰ Vale by Roland Leighton (1895-1915). (*Vale* is Latin for Farewell.) Used with permission from The First World War Poetry Digital Archive, University of Oxford (www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit) © The Leighton family literary estate.

Lest We Forget

All was quiet - no flashes, no shells, nothing²¹
The Great Shadow is lifted and Peace has come²²
And we are only justified in going on living
if our futures manifest at every point and at all times
a heroism equal to those killed in battle²³
Suffering world
Ich hatt' einen Kameraden,
einen bessern findst du nit²⁴
Suffering world
The long dreary years ahead²⁵
Peace has come to a suffering world
Suffering, suffering world.
Lest we forget.
Lest we forget, lest we forget.
Lest we forget.

²¹ Extract from a recorded interview with Rachel Cadbury from the Imperial War Museum Sound Archives, ref 10038/6: ‘... it was all quiet on the western front, there were no flashes, no shells, nothing,’ quoted in Felicity Goodall (2010) *We will not go to war. Conscientious objection during the world wars* published by The History Press, p.77. (First published as *A Question of Conscience* in 1997).

²² From *My Small Share. A Quaker Diary from WWI* by Ernest W. Pettifer, edited by Bryan G.E. Pettifer (2014). The diary entry for 10th November 1918 (p.107) states: ‘I knew that at last the Great Shadow had lifted and that peace had come again to a suffering world.’

²³ From Corder Catchpool’s letters home, in quoted in Felicity Goodall (2010, above) p.75.

²⁴ ‘Der gute Kamerad,’ which has been translated for use in numerous fighting forces across the world, was written by German poet Ludwig Uhland and set to music by Friedrich Silcher, based on a Swiss folk song. It is often played on German Remembrance Day, and has been an integral part of German military funerals since 1871.

²⁵ Vera Brittain, 1917, quoted in *Vera Brittain: A Life* by Paul Berry & Mark Bostridge (1996). Pimlico, London, p.94.n