

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Joyce Kilmer

- poems -

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Memorial Day

The bugle echoes shrill and sweet,
But not of war it sings today.
The road is rhythmic with the feet
Of men-at-arms who come to pray.

The rose blossoms white and red
On tombs where weary soldiers lie;
Flags wave above the honored dead
And martial music cleaves the sky.

Above their wreath-strewn graves we kneel,
They kept the faith and fought the fight.
Through flying lead and crimson steel
They plunged for Freedom and the Right.

May we, their grateful children, learn
Their strength, who lie beneath this sod,
Who went through fire and death to earn
At last the accolade of God.

In shining rank on rank arrayed,
They march, the legions of the Lord;
He is their Captain unafraid,
The Prince of Peace. . . who brought a sword.

Alfred Joyce Kilmer

Rouge Bouquet

In a wood they call Rouge Bouquet
There is a new-made grave today,
Built by never a spade nor pick
Yet covered with earth 10 meters thick.
There lie many fighting men,
 Dead in their youthful prime,
Never to laugh nor love again
 Nor taste the Summertime.
For Death came flying through the air
And stopped his flight at the dugout stair,
Touched his prey and left them there,
 Clay to clay.
He hid their bodies stealthily
In the soil of the land they fought to free
 And fled away.
Now over the grave abrupt and clear
 Three volleys ring;
And perhaps their brave young spirits hear
 The bugles sing:
"Go to sleep!
Go to sleep!
Slumber well where the shell screamed and fell.
Let your rifles rest on the muddy floor,
You will not need them any more.
Danger's past;
Now at last,
Go to sleep!"

There is on earth no worthier grave
To hold the bodies of the brave
Than this place of pain and pride
Where they nobly fought and nobly died.
Never fear but in the skies
Saints and angels stand
Smiling with their holy eyes
 On this new-come band.
St. Michael's sword darts through the air
and touches the aureole on his hair
As he sees them stand saluting there,
 His stalwart sons:
And Patrick, Brigid, Columkill
Rejoice that in veins of warriors still
 The Gael's blood runs.
And up to Heaven's doorway floats,
 From the wood called Rouge Bouquet,
A delicate cloud of bugle notes
 That softly say:
"Farewell!
Farewell!
Comrades true, born anew, peace to you!
Your souls shall be where the heroes are
And your memory shine like the morning-star.

Brave and dear,
Shield us here.
Farewell!"

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