

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Frederic Manning**

**- poems -**

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## The Trenches

Endless lanes sunken in the clay,  
Bays, and traverses, fringed with wasted herbage,  
Seed-pods of blue scabious, and some lingering blooms;  
And the sky, seen as from a well,  
Brilliant with frosty stars.  
We stumble, cursing, on the slippery duck-boards.  
Goaded like the damned by some invisible wrath,  
A will stronger than weariness, stronger than animal fear,  
Implacable and monotonous.

Here a shaft, slanting, and below  
A dusty and flickering light from one feeble candle  
And prone figures sleeping uneasily,  
Murmuring,  
And men who cannot sleep,  
With faces impassive as masks,  
Bright, feverish eyes, and drawn lips,  
Sad, pitiless, terrible faces,  
Each an incarnate curse.

Here in a bay, a helmeted sentry  
Silent and motionless, watching while two sleep,  
And he sees before him  
With indifferent eyes the blasted and torn land  
Peopled with stiff prone forms, stupidly rigid,  
As tho' they had not been men.

Dead are the lips where love laughed or sang,  
The hands of youth eager to lay hold of life,  
Eyes that have laughed to eyes,  
And these were begotten,  
O Love, and lived lightly, and burnt  
With the lust of a man's first strength: ere they were rent,  
Almost at unawares, savagely; and strewn  
In bloody fragments, to be the carrion  
Of rats and crows.

And the sentry moves not, searching  
Night for menace with weary eyes.

Frederic Manning