

Reflection

Remembering with Siegfried Sassoon.

At the Cenotaph

I saw the Prince of Darkness, with his Staff,
Standing bare-headed by the Cenotaph:
Unostentatious and respectful, there
He stood, and offered up the following prayer.
'Make them forget, O Lord, what this Memorial
Means; their discredited ideas revive;
Breed new belief that War is purgatorial
Proof of the pride and power of being alive;
Men's biologic urge to readjust
The Map of Europe, Lord of Hosts, increase;
Lift up their hearts in large destructive lust;
And crown their heads with blind vindictive Peace.'
The Prince of Darkness to the Cenotaph
Bowed. As he walked away I heard him laugh.

(this poem appeared in 1936 the Oxford Book of English verse by Siegfried Sassoon, *inspired by a visit of Ribbentrop to the cenotaph in London where he laid a wreath*) Sassoon's poem is a reminder that people should never be complacent about peace. The constant work needed to maintain it is as important as the work to achieve it. In that light the constant tending of the world's war cemeteries has become a sad, and painful, metaphor. (From the Peace Pledge Union)

On passing the new Menin Gate

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,
the unheroic dead who fed the guns?
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate,–
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?

Crudely renewed, the Salient holds its own.
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.



Here was the world's worst wound. And here with pride
'Their name liveth for ever', the Gateway claims. those who suffered
Was ever an immolation so belied
as these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime

Rise and deride this sepulchre of crime.

Passchendaele is in the news. We shall remember them we say.... But how? There is the danger of making heroes out of those who suffered the atrocities of war, both soldiers and civilians, and as they die, as sacrificial victims, we are pushed to prove that they did not die in vain, particularly the soldiers fighting in our name. 'I died in hell.....' they called it Passchendaele' wrote Siegfried Sassoon. We need to work for peace, nonviolent ways forward, recognising scapegoating, we need to work and pray tirelessly for peace.

Sr Jess r.a.

