

Insights from the Isles
Ruach, Breath of Life Ministries
Trouble (3) Praying for The Oppressed



Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived. (Gal. 6:2 The Message).

I recently came across an anthology of poems and reflections on the First World War. (*Stones in the Millpond* by Christian Tait - Shetland Library) As I read the account of the experiences her father's generation had been obliged to go through, it prompted me to think about the unseen victims of so many conflicts: those who are physically maimed and those who watch - and suffer - as a result. When you think of the extent of the AIDS virus in certain countries today, not least in Africa, Russia and China, the sheer extent of the suffering beggars belief.

A Shetland Times reporter during the First World War wrote that 'the average soldier buries his suffering under a bushel of silence.' As you read Christian's words, may the Spirit of prayer and compassion come on you and lift the veil of silent suffering enough to help you intercede for many victims of suffering - whether innocent or otherwise.

Many returning soldiers were unable to speak of their experiences with civilian friends and family, for those who had not been there could not envisage the magnitude of the horror. This created a chasm between husbands and wives, and between friends. Many who had their faces shattered could not endure the mental pain and committed suicide. Christian wrote,

'My grandfather must have spent countless hours writing to his brothers, striving to strike the right note which would offer comfort, understanding, information, love, encouragement - and reassurance that a 'normal' world still existed away from the chaos and carnage they had to endure; and to, somehow, lift their spirits for a moment. It must have been a lonely and heart-rending task.' It was this thought which inspired her to write the following poem, which captures these emotions, and the spirit of the age.

'Dear Bother'

Here by the hearth, when Kathie's asleep,
I shed my cheerful daytime mask,
And search my aching heart for words
To write to you - a troubling task . . .

I stir the embers, sit and stare
At images appearing there.
Men choke and drown in dying coals -
Now stinking, ordure-filled shell-holes.
You've never told me but I find
Your wordless truths fly to mind.
Mangled bodies, tangled wire -
Hideous pictures in the fire.

Your letters carefully conceal
The depths of suffering that you feel.
Unspoken rules say, "Hide your tears,
Don't tell the facts, don't name your fears
To acknowledge makes them so.
Play the ostrich, they may go.
Each of us must spare the other.
Brother must give strength to brother."

I write, therefore, of trivial things,
Keep the tone light-hearted, bring
A touch of humour here and there,
A smile to counteract despair...
I strive to generate a view
Of normal humdrum life for you,
Of sanity - an anchor for
You to hold through this mad war.

I never show the pain I keep
Locked inside, nor how I weep
As kneeling down I plead and pray.
"God spare my brothers one more day."
My helplessness is hard to bear
When Death walks at your shoulder there.
We must not rail against His will.
He tests us hard, but loves us still . . .

While I watch flickering Northern Lights,
Gunfire's aurora fills your nights,
Its hideous beauty silhouettes
Those who guard the parapets.
Your suffering torments my mind's eye
With brutish fantasies, and I
Can only write and send you love . . .

With cigarettes and socks and gloves.