

Armistice Day : The Deserter: “I Refuse to Murder or Maim this Man, My Brother, I Refuse to Obey your Command”

by Albert Young, in Red Dawn, Sept 1915. First printed Daily Herald early 1915

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“I refuse to murder or maim this man, my brother,
Or soil my soul in the smoke of war’s red smother.
I refuse to kindle the flame that shall burn this city,
So my heart be murder-stained and dead to pity.

I refuse to obey your command. I have no duty
Other than love of Life and love of Beauty.
Tho’ you riddle my body with lead still I’ll be grateful.
But I’m gone- and you’re left behind, pursuing and hateful.

I fly with the wings of the wind and a hope surprising-
And reach a haven at last, as the sun is rising.
And here till the night-shades fall I sleep in gladness,
Then up, on the dark, rough road, to my home of sadness.

Hard on my track snarl the hounds of hell’s own breeding;
But again I’m gone and roadway’s ‘neath me speeding.
Soon my garb of shame’s sunk to the depths of the river,
And dressed in the clothes of a man I offer thanks to the giver.

For I will not murder or maim this man, my brother,
Or sink my soul in the slime of war’s red smother.
I’ll get away if I can and in more peaceful regions
I’ll live and love and forget War and its murdering smother”.

The Deserter, Albert Young, in Red Dawn, Sept 1915. First printed Daily Herald early 1915

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