

V—J

Jose Ma. Espino, Jr.

We waken from a nightmare of a dream:
How brightly through our window pours the light!
We look out; there the pearly dewdrops gleam
On spray-crowned cornstalks, brightening the sight;
And out beyond, a stretch of green, lush plain
That nevermore shall sound to roar of gun
Or mutely hear the groans of men in pain;
And Nature, soon to pardon, has begun
To hide each pillbox in a bushy dress
And shroud each shell-hole with a cloak of green.
A patient mother cleaning up the mess
Of her fractious childrens quarrels, harsh and mean.

* * * * *

The smoke of gunfire slowly thins away
And rage of conflict dies upon the hills;
The breathless word, in tremulous relay,
Runs down the line and sows its share of thrills;
Now foxholed, whiskered soldiers clamber out
Like gophers coming up from winter sleep—
First growing disbelief, then waning doubt,
And then a sigh for feelings far too deep:

*For they have sampled of the bitter dregs of war
And striven through trials never meant for man;
Where there's no respite but in dumbly watching water
seep into your foxhole,*

*No planning farther than the next ditch to dive into,
 the next clip of bullets, the next tin of meat hash,
 Where office-clerks and tailors and school-teachers
 become vicious machines of cunning and hate,
 Where boyish faces take on a bitter, grim hardness,
 and smiling eyes are forever lost,
 Where stretchers hurry by, and the wounded mutter
 over and over in the dark: my God . . . my God . . .
 And you dimly wonder when you'll be next . . .*

* * * * *

But that's all swallowed in the ebbing tide
 Of painful human tragedies soon forgot;
 We stand before Almighty God's just chide
 To answer for each hasty word and shot,
 For rash employment of his generous gifts,
 For squandered lives; for grieving, haunted eyes,
 For souls astray and lost upon the drifts,
 The victor and the vanquished pay the price:
 There are no crowns of laurel to receive;
 There are but rubble, and the solemn sight
 Of neat, white crosses fading in the eve
 As one lone sentry challenges the night,

* * * * *

Our weary sons and brothers homeward turn.
 Go out and meet them: let them live anew
 The laughter and the love for which they yearn,
 The things they've fought for; happiness long due.
 Their breasts are gay with ribbons: let those be
 But markers of a dead and buried past;
 Each oak-leaf cluster has been paid its fee,
 Each battle-star a buddy missing last,
 So let their wounds that rankle quietly heal,
 And bring to them the candid, easy joys
 Of sunny porch, a pillow's downy feel,
 Of Sunday paper, baby's cooing voice,
 Of morning shower, coffee on the stove,
 The jeweled lawn, the wind that smells of Spring;
 Lead them down green byways, let them rove
 Where fish are jumping, plovers on the wing,

Where vain clouds eye themselves in mirror-lakes:
 For ease of heart and mind is swiftest gained
 In free and honest dailies clear of stakes,
 In simple things untrammelled and unfeigned.

* * * * *

And you: who have been spared the armed grenade,
 The poised trench-knife, the ready bayonet,
 The dash from hole to mound, and enfilade;
 Make doubly sure that there will not be yet
 Another call for boys from school and farm,
 From round the cheery fires of Christmas-eve,
 From twosomes on the porch, lost in a charm;
 And pray, that those whose reasoned dictates weave
 The destinies of citizen and state,
 Are prejudiced by neither vengeful ire
 Nor righteous indignation or just hate;
 That those among us who have tapped the fire
 Of awesome power ours to loose and play,
 Lose not their prudence, and presumptuous set
 To tread the pathways of the gods; yes, pray
 That God "be with us yet --lest we forget!"

* * * * *

Make sure you do not sabotage the dreams
 Of Sammy from Missouri's fruited plains,
 Of Tony reared by Samar's quiet streams,
 Of all the Pierres and Ivans, Chans and Waynes
 From Tatsienlu and Kuibyshev and Leeds,
 —Yes, even Hans from Duisburg on the Ruhr
 And Hochii called from Yezo's salmon breeds—
 Who, cloistered now in silence, ask no more;
 For stripped of creed and color, breed and birth,
 All men are one in search of happiness;
 The sacrifice displays a matchless worth
 When simple men, with so much to possess,
 Secure their happiness, and to that end
 Unshrinking yield their precious gift of life.
 On you devolves the duty to defend
 The grail that lent a meaning to that strife:
 Salerno, Iwo Jima, Normandy,

Remain as beach-heads on uncertain shores;
 Ardennes and Villa Verde presently
 Are hollow gains along our sacred course;
 The strikes of patriot forces everywhere
 Are heavy blood investments unmatured;
 Not even yielded sword and broken spur
 Are guarantees of victory assured;
 But when the guns are stilled on plain and cape
 And mighty fleets the seas no longer scour,
 The crucial battle for the peace takes shape:
 Will you turn craven on this hanging hour?

* * * * *

*Have you stood to watch the sunlight fade
 On a gentle slope where white wooden crosses
 and plain metal tags
 Etch a geometric symmetry
 on the jagged muddledness of human blunders?
 A tense wind rushes up:
 It is a wind drawn from cool hills
 and uncharted wastelands,
 From immense waters and torn beaches
 and furied ground,
 It sweeps through the white crosses
 and brushes your cheek;
 And borne on that wind is a voice:
 The voice of men who are but long lists
 on monotonous files,
 The voice of unsung heroes of forgotten battles
 fought in hidden places,
 And it says:*

* * * * *

*You cheered us when we stood
 And you praised us when we fell
 At Bataan . . . Warsaw . . . Changteh . . . Stalingrad
 Dunkerque . . . Wake . . . Bastogne . . . everywhere;
 You gave medals and made promises;
 Will you stop there?*

*We had as much right as you to live;
Show us
That at those moments
It was a greter privilege to die.*

*Everything as yet seems senseless;
Only you, now, can give it meaning.
You must.*

* * * * *

August, 1945

END



THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

The terrible thing about the truth is that when you look for it, you always find it.

One could not find a more appalling illustration of the prostitution of truth, honour and morality than is seen in the press.

—John L. Stoddard

* * * * *

This alone truth sometimes craves, that it be not condemned unheard.

—Tertullian

* * * * *

THAT BEARDLESS MAN

At a public dinner a speaker spoke for half an hour and looked like going for another thirty minutes.

A guest turned to a woman next to him and remarked: "Can nothing be done to shut this man up?"

"Well, responded the other cheerfully and frankly, "I've tried for fifteen years."

Vart Hem.