

Dublin, Easter 1916

We were not of a mind for battle, nor the crashing of swords on shields,
While the waft of the wind brought tidings of cowslips in the fields,
And the blackbird called in the gloaming, and the cloud dropped honeydew,
And the swallows were flashing sunward over the morning blue.

We were weary of the old fighting: we lifted the voice and said:
'Let the past be over and done with - let the dead bury the dead -
Proclaim our peace to the peoples that dwell in the east and the west,'
And we looked for peace with honour, since peace with honour were best.

For the light of youth was behind us; the shadows stretched cold and long:
Our dream was a withered blossom his away in a book of song.
In the showers of our tears had been quenched the flame of the old desire -
And we never thought of the young men, with the young men's hearts of fire.

They were not born of helots, nor come of the stock of slaves,
They said: 'If we be not free men, 'tis better to fight and die,'
And they rose up in noble madness, and shook the heavens with a cry:

'Give battle!: O hear them, 'Give battle! Though we be but one to ten'!
There was a battle and wrath in the city, and the moans of dying men;
There was whitening of women's faces; there was clamour, and drear affright,
And the boom of the cannon thundered out of the dark at night.

The grey ship stole up the river, and flung the ravening shell:
Out the midnight sky there were fires like the open mouth of Hell;
And the young men said to each other: 'what is man but his breath!'
And they turned aside from the slaying, and delivered themselves to death.

Be theirs wisdom, or glorious folly, they were of us, our brothers, our own,
Flesh of our very flesh - bone of our very bone-
Drooping we sat in the Night, of its brooding sorrow a part,
And heard, in the terrible silence, the sob of the Nation's heart.

By Tallaght Poet, Alice Furlong 1876-1946