

## Poem - No Men Are Foreign

By James Kirkup

### About the Poet

**James Falconer Kirkup**, (23 April 1918 – 10 May 2009), was an English poet, translator and travel writer. He wrote over 30 books, including autobiographies, novels and plays. He wrote under many pen-names including James Falconer, Aditya Jha, Jun Honda, Andrew James, Taeko Kawai, Felix Liston, Edward Raeburn, and Ivy B. Summerforest. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962.

After the writing of simple verses and rhymes from the age of six, and the publication of *The Drowned Sailor* in 1947, Kirkup's published works encompassed several dozen collections of poetry, six volumes of autobiography, over a hundred monographs of original work and translations and thousands of shorter pieces in journals and periodicals. His skilled writing of *haiku* and *tanka* is acknowledged internationally. Many of his poems recall his childhood days in the north-east. His home town of South Shields now holds a growing collection of his works in the Central Library, and artefacts from his time in Japan are housed in the nearby Museum. His last volume of poetry was published during the summer of 2008.

### Introduction to the poem

The title- 'No men are Foreign' means that the no men belong to another country. The poet wants to say that all men are same, all men are equal. He wants to promote the concept of universal brotherhood. In this poem, the poet wants to tell us that everyone in this world is same. All people, all men are same – they eat, live, die the same way. Everyone gets the bounties of nature like, sunshine, land etc in equal measure. We can also say that it is a peace poem.

### Poem and Explanation

#### Stanza 1

Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign

Beneath all uniforms, a single body breathes

Like ours: the land our brothers walk upon

Is earth like this, in which we all shall lie.

## **Beneath: under** **Strange: unknown**

In the first line the poet says that no men are strange, and no country is foreign. So, he is attempting to remove the borders from the Earth which have been erected to separate different countries. Then only no country will be foreign. We will feel every country as our own land when there will be no borders, everyone will be free to move around. The poet wants to say that the entire Earth is one and all the people who live on this Earth belong to one human race. Then he says that inside the uniforms worn by soldiers of different countries, the human being is the same. God has made all of us in a similar way. All breathe in the same way. Then he says that all the soldiers are our brothers – we all walk upon the same ‘Mother Earth’ and upon our death, shall lie in the grave in the same Earth.

### **Stanza 2**

They, too, aware of sun and air and water,  
Are fed by peaceful harvests, by war’s long winter starv’d.  
Their hands are ours, and in their lines we read  
A labour not different from our own.

‘They’ refers to those people who belong to other countries. We call them foreigners and discriminate them and fight with them also. The poet says that nature has given all the bounties to all people also just like he has given to us. Everyone gets sunlight, air and water in equal measure which means that God does not differentiate between people from different countries. We all do farming during the time of peace, when there is no war. We live a relaxed life and eat the things given to us by nature. Further, he adds that the way we starve during wars and winter time is the same for those belonging to other countries. Even they don’t get food at that time. So, he wants to say that foreigners who belong to another country and we, both are same. And then the poet says that even their hands are same as ours, they work very hard just like we do. He is giving all these examples to convey to the reader that there is no difference in us and the people belonging to another country.

### **Stanza 3**

Remember they have eyes like ours that wake  
Or sleep, and strength that can be won  
By love. In every land is common life  
That all can recognise and understand.

The poet asks the reader to remember something. He says that we should keep in mind that the people of another country, whom we think to be our enemies, have been bestowed by

God with similar appearance like us. God has given them eyes like ours which open when awake and close when we are asleep. Similarly, he has given them strength which we can win through love. Then he says that in every country, in every land there is one common thing, that is life. Life means all the things that are living. And if we can recognize them and if we can understand their feelings and realize that they are like us, then there will be no fights or wars between us.

#### **Stanza 4**

Let us remember, whenever we are told  
To hate our brothers, it is ourselves  
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.  
Remember, we who take arms against each other

#### **dispossess: dislodge; deprive**

The poet says that we should remember that whenever someone tells us to hate a person from another country, to think him as our enemy, and whenever we think someone to be our enemy, then we deprive ourselves, we cheat ourselves, and we condemn ourselves. He says that we should stay away from such negativity. We should not consider anyone to be our enemy. During a war, both the parties must bear the loss. And that is why the poet says that war is not in our favour. He says that whenever we pick any weapon against someone, we should remember one thing.....

#### **Stanza 5**

It is the human earth that we defile.  
Our hells of fire and dust outrage the innocence  
Of air that is everywhere our own,  
Remember, no men are foreign, and no countries strange.  
defile: make dirty; pollute  
outrage the innocence of: violate the purity of

We should keep in mind that whenever we pick weapons against any person, we make the Earth dirty because weapons kill people and their bodies which fall on the Earth make it dirty. Whenever war happens, it leads to a lot of bloodshed, fire and death. These dead bodies accumulate on the Earth and it make it impure. The fire of war which erupts, the smoke which comes out, the dust which fills the air - it is so dirty that it pollutes and outrages the purity of the air. With all these things the poet wants to give us a message that we should not indulge in war. Finally, he ends the poem by writing the first line in reverse and saying that Remember, no men are foreign, and no countries strange.

## Literary Devices

- i. Rhyme Scheme - The entire poem is written in free verse. There is no rhyme scheme in the poem.

The literary devices used are as follows –

- i. Alliteration: The repetition of a consonant sound in two or more closely placed words is called alliteration. The instances of alliteration in the poem are -

- Stanza 1 - Body, breathes 'b' sound is repeated
- Stanza 2 – war's, winter 'w' sound is repeated

- i. Metaphor

- Stanza 1 - Uniform refers to the military of different countries
- Stanza 2 – wars time is compared to the winter season

- i. Repetition: It is used in the entire poem.

- 'Remember' word is repeated 5 times in this poem.
- 'Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign' is repeated in stanza 1 and stanza 5

- i. Enjambment - running lines of poetry from one line to the next without using any kind of punctuation to indicate a stop. Instances of enjambment in the poem are as follows-

- Stanza 1 – line 2, 3 and 4
- Stanza 2 – line 3 and 3
- Stanza 3 – line 1, 2, and 3
- Stanza 4 – line 1 and 2
- Stanza 5 – Line 2 and 3

## Summary

The poem 'No Men Are Foreign' begins and ends with the same line- 'Remember no men are strange, no countries foreign' as the poet wants to emphasize on the fact that all the people living on this Earth are the same and that we have created distinctions by erecting borders and fences, different languages, etc. While we are alive, we walk on the same Earth and upon our

death, we will lie in our graves in the same earth. He draws another similarity that we all enjoy good food during peace and starve during war and in winter time. We all have similar hands which we use to do a lot of hard work. All of us have eyes which remain open when we are awake and close when we are asleep. He reminds the reader that whenever we hate someone, we cheat and hate ourselves. Also, when we pick up weapons against someone, we pollute the Earth and make it impure with the huge mounds of dead bodies strewn on it.

## **Question and Answers**

1. (i) "Beneath all uniforms . . ." What uniforms do you think the poet is speaking about?

(ii) How does the poet suggest that all people on earth are the same?

A. (i) The uniforms refer to those worn by soldiers belonging to different countries who indulge in wars and fights.

(ii) The poet says that all the people are the same in the following ways –

- i. we belong to one human race
- ii. we walk on the same Earth
- iii. Upon death, we will lie in our graves in the same Earth
- iv. During peace we all enjoy the bounties of nature
- v. During war and in the winter season, we all starve due to shortage of food
- vi. We all do a lot of labour with our hands
- vii. We have eyes which function in the same way

2. In stanza 1, find five ways in which we all are alike. Pick out the words.

A. The five words which indicate that we are all alike are –

- i. we walk
- ii. we breathe
- iii. we have eyes
- iv. we work with our hands
- v. we enjoy the bounties of nature

3. How many common features can you find in stanza 2? Pick out the words.

A. There are three common features in stanza two. They are as follows –

- i. We enjoy the bounties of nature and eat good food during peace
- ii. We starve during war and in winter season.
- iii. We have similar hands which we use for doing labour

4. "...whenever we are told to hate our brothers ..." When do you think this happens? Why? Who 'tells' us? Should we do as we are told at such times? What does the poet say?

A. The leaders of any country tell the masses to hate the people of another country. They say so to fulfil their personal gains and benefits. The poet says that we should not follow them because when we hate our brothers, we hate and belittle ourselves. When we indulge in wars, we pollute and render the mother Earth impure by laying dead bodies on it.

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