

Poems by Stephen Crane  
From *The Black Riders* (1895)

II

In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
who, squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said, "Is it good, friend?"  
"It is bitter bitter," he answered;  
"But I like it  
Because it is bitter,  
And because it is my heart."

XIX

A god in wrath  
Was beating a man;  
He cuffed him loudly  
With thunderous blows  
That rang and rolled over the earth.  
All people came running.  
The man screamed and struggled,  
And bit madly at the feet of the god.  
The people cried,  
"Ah, what a wicked man!"  
And "Ah, what a redoubtable god!"

XLII

I walked in a desert.  
And I cried,  
"Ah, God, take me from this place!"  
A voice said, "It is no desert."  
I cried, "Well, But-  
The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon."  
A voice said, "It is no desert."

LVI

A man feared that he might find an assassin;  
Another that he might find a victim.  
One was more wise than the other.

From *War is Kind*

I

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.

Because your lover threw wild hands toward the  
sky  
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.  
Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,  
Little souls who thirst for fight,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
The unexplained glory flies above them,  
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom --  
A field where a thousand corpses lie.  
Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.  
Because your father tumbled in the yellow  
trenches,  
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.  
Swift blazing flag of the regiment,  
Eagle with crest of red and gold,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,  
Make plain to them the excellence of killing  
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.  
Mother whose heart hung humble as a button  
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

III

To the maiden  
The sea was blue meadow,  
Alive with little froth-people  
Singing.  
To the sailor, wrecked,  
The sea was dead grey walls  
Superlative in vacancy,  
Upon which nevertheless at fateful time  
Was written  
The grim hatred of nature.  
XVI

There was a man with tongue of wood  
Who essayed to sing,  
And in truth it was lamentable.  
But there was one who heard  
The clip-clapper of this tongue of wood  
And knew what the man  
Wished to sing,  
And with that the singer was content.

XXI

A man said to the universe:

"Sir I exist!"

"However," replied the universe,

"The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation."

**"Lines"**

Published in *The Philistine* (June 1898); see the original publication at

<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/crane/pics4.htm>

When a people reach the top of a hill,  
Then does God lean toward them,  
Shortens tongues and lengthens arms.  
A vision of their dead comes to the weak.  
The moon shall not be too old  
Before the new battalions rise,  
Blue battalions.  
The moon shall not be too old  
When the children of change shall fall  
Before the new battalions,  
The blue battalions.  
Mistakes and virtues will be trampled deep.  
A church and a thief shall fall together.  
A sword will come at the bidding of the eyeless,  
The God-led, turning only to beckon,  
Swinging a creed like a censer  
At the head of the new battalions,  
Blue battalions.  
March the tools of nature's impulse,  
Men born of wrong, men born of right,  
Men of the new battalions,  
The blue battalions.  
The clang of swords is Thy wisdom,  
The wounded make gestures like Thy Son's;  
The feet of mad horses is one part --  
Ay, another is the hand of a mother on the brow  
of a youth.  
Then, swift as they charge through a shadow,  
The men of the new battalions,  
Blue battalions --  
God lead them high, God lead them far,  
God lead them far, God lead them high,  
These new battalions,  
The blue battalions.

**"A man adrift on a slim spar"**

First published by *The Bookman* in 1929.

A man adrift on a slim spar  
A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle  
Tented waves rearing lashed dark points  
The near whine of froth in circles.  
God is cold.

The incessant raise and swing of the sea  
And growl after growl of crest  
The sinkings, green, seething, endless  
The upheaval half-completed.  
God is cold.

The seas are in the hollow of The Hand;  
Oceans may be turned to a spray  
Raining down through the stars  
Because of a gesture of pity toward a babe.  
Oceans may become grey ashes,  
Die with a long moan and a roar  
Amid the tumult of the fishes  
And the cries of the ships,  
Because The Hand beckons the mice.

A horizon smaller than a doomed assassin's cap,  
Inky, surging tumults  
A reeling, drunken sky and no sky  
A pale had sliding from a polished spar.  
God is cold.

The puff of a coat imprisoning air.  
A face kissing the water-death  
A weary slow sway of a lost hand  
And the sea, the moving sea, the sea.

God is cold.