



No Men Are Foreign



Have you ever thought of some people as strange, or other countries as 'foreign'? We have many ways of thinking of other people as different from 'us', as 'them.' 'They' may belong to a different country, or speak a different language. In this poem, however, the poet reminds us of the many ways in which we are all the same — for we are all human.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

JAMES KIRKUP

GLOSSARY

dispossess: dislodge; deprive

defile: make dirty; pollute

outrage the innocence of: violate the purity of

Thinking about the Poem

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?
2. In stanza 1, find five ways in which we all are alike. Pick out the words.
3. How many common features can you find in stanza 2? Pick out the words.
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?

*I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but
of the world.*

SOCRATES