

Remembrance Sunday

The Centenary of Armistice Day ~ The Great War 1918~2018

Soldiers? No, Britain Lost 700,000 Poets, Teachers, Inventors... and Fathers

By Peter Hitchens
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<https://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2018/11/soldiers-no-britain-lost-700000-poets-teachers-inventors-and-fathers.html>

What do you think about during the two minutes silence? I used to think of men at war, and hear in my head the shouts and the clash of arms. Now I see a narrow street of small houses at dusk. A young man in army uniform is embracing his wife and little children in a lighted doorway.

He will not return.

I recently learned that, on the first day of commemoration, in 1919, the silence was often far from silent. In many places, when the traffic and the factories stopped, the sound of uncontrollable weeping could be heard in many towns.

Nearly three quarters of a million young men had died far away. In an age when death was still marked by elaborate rituals of mourning, they'd had no funerals. For the first time, the bereaved had an opportunity to grieve properly.

This commemoration is above all about the First World War, which has just ceased to be a warm, living memory and become the cold untouchable past. As a child I knew and talked to people who had lived through it, who had seen Zeppelins caught in the searchlights. In my teenage years, the Great War was as close to us as the 1960s are now.

I knew, when I first learned about it, that the 1914 war was a chasm between us and another world.

I rather liked the look of the world that had been lost – calmer, slower, more solid than ours. I had a feeling we were now a smaller people than we had been, scuttling about in the ruins of a lost civilisation.

It has also struck me, since I am so often told that those who fought in 1914 did so for our freedom, that we are far less free as a people, from all kinds of government interference, than we were before that war. It was 1914 that began the era of heavy taxation, surveillance, regulation and general snooping and bureaucracy which now stifle us.

It was also 1914 that swept away the restrained and quiet world of yesterday, and the great, stuffy cumbersome empires of Austria, Germany and Russia, replacing them with the slick murderous modern empires of the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. Was this progress? Give me the Kaiser and Tsar, any day, rather than Hitler and Stalin. I used to think the 1914 war was terrible but necessary, and now I know too much history to believe this any more. If we were trying to prevent German domination of Europe, we failed, for here they still are, dominating away, through the medium of the EU.

As for the squandering of young men, the best we had in every class, how much have we suffered the absence, before they could make their mark, of all those lost fathers, scientists, teachers, inventors, poets, parsons., businessmen, composers, geniuses, or just plain good kind honest citizens?

I'm not against war, as a necessity. Attack me, and I will defend myself. Threaten me, and I will stand up to you. And I believe in being ready for war, to maintain peace. Respect your own army, or you will one day have to respect someone else's.

I happen to think that modern Britain has foolishly allowed its defences to grow far too weak, and I would strengthen them.

But after a century of silences, as we remember the intolerable numbers of the beloved dead, as the bugles call once again from the sad shires, I beg all those with any influence over our national policy to be a little less enthusiastic about war than they seem to be.

In the past 100 years, war has not made us greater, but diminished and ended our greatness.

And when we remember the dead we should, above all, remember and regret what they might have been, had they lived.

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