

LINES COMPOSED AT THE SCARRITT-BENNETT CENTER, ON REMEMBERING THE
ANNIVERSARY OF A TRAGEDY, SEPTEMBER 2006

Adapted from a poem by William Wordsworth, 1798.

FIVE years have past; five winters, with the length
Of five long summers! and again we hear
Those towers, flaming from exploding planes
With a loud, infernal roar. Once again
Do we behold those clouds of billowing dust,
That on a sunny, New York day provoke
Thoughts of terrified confusion; and connect
The subways with the coldness of the sky.
The day is come when we again recline
Here, in our living rooms, and view

10

That plot of Pennsylvania forest ground,
That edifice, which, once scarred, now stands renewed,
Re-clad in concrete shrouds, protecting us,
We think, from evil forces. Once again I see
Their faces, hardly faces, frightened blurs
Of grief and fear run wild: these families
Pained to the very core; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, by the awful breeze!
With no uncertain notice, we have seen
Strong rescue workers, fire and police,

20

Give what they had, their lives, their work, their all
To save some soul from loss.

These monstrous forms,
Replayed a thousand times, have been to us
The unrelenting beating of a drum:
And oft, in lonely rooms, or 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, we've owed to them
Long hours of weariness, sensations numbed,
Seared in the blood, no longer felt in heart;
And passing even into our purer mind,
With muted desperation:--feelings too
Of unremembered hatreds: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
And quench his little, unremembered, acts
Of kindness or of love. Nor less, I fear,
To them we may have owed another loss,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Is gone. The breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Does not suspend, nor cease; we find no rest
In body to become a living soul:
While with an eye made suspect by the power

30

40

Of terror's claw, the deep, deep power of fear,
We long to see the death of things.

If this

50 Be but a faithless cry, yet, oh! how oft--

In prayer and amid the many shapes
Of joyful worship; when the peaceful bliss
Unspeakable, and the marvels of this world,
Would calm the fearful beatings of our hearts--
How oft, surrounded, have we heard from thee,
O Day we died! thou e'er repeated sign,
How often have we longed to turn from thee!

And now, with gloom of half-defeated wars,
With many soldiers lost on every side,
60 And something of a mad intensity

The icon in the mind revives again:
While here we cringe, not only with the sense
Of present loss, but with grief worn thoughts
That in this moment should be life and food
For future years. Can we yet dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what we were when first
We gazed upon those towers? When like a doe
Blinded by the flash of what we saw, we stood
Stunned, silenced, unknowing what this meant,
70 And who had left us dead: more like a man

Rushing to destroy the thing he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. To do justice then,
(To hunt the men who did this in their tracks,
Surround them in their caves, bring them to trial!)
To us was all in all.--We cannot paint
What then we were. The cry, "To arms and men!"
Haunted us with passion: not yet Iraq--
Afghanistan, its mountains, Taliban,
Their names and very forms, were then to us
An appetite; a feeling and a call, 80
That had no need to be explained,
Or justified, nor any interest
Else an eye for eye.--That time is past,
And Taliban control the land no more,
Though still they rise in factions. Not just for this
Faint we, and mourn and murmur, other wars
Have followed; for that loss, in Terror's name,
There is small recompense. For we have learned
To look on nations, not as in the hour
Of more thoughtful youth; but hearing now

90 The loud, triumphal music of true tyranny,
Both harsh and grating, and of ample power
To crush the basic rights we knew. Now creeps
A presence that seduces with the lie
That Terror can be fought; a boding, sense
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the place of setting suns,
Or ocean depths, or fiery, fouling air,
Or blood red moon, or mountain's magma flow;

Emotion and a spirit that impels
100 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
To split the bad from good.
Yet may we be
True lovers of this land, its peoples many-hued,
Of many faiths, or none, and all that we behold
From this green earth, of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In Christ, the world he made, and loves,
The anchor of our purest thoughts, the nurse,
110 The guide, the guardian of our hearts, and soul
Of every moral being.
And oh, perchance,
If we were more thus taught, should we the less
Suffer our genial spirits to decay.
Yet thou art with us, Christ, upon these banks
Of these dread days; thou, O dearest Friend,
Our dear, dear Friend; for in thy voice we catch
The language of our deepest heart, and read
Our dearest pleasures in the rising light
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May we behold in Thee what once we were,
120 O dear, dear Brother! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Thou never didst betray
The heart that loved Thee; 'tis thy privilege,
Through all the years of every life, to lead
From joy to joy: for Thou canst so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so lead
With humbling acts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
130 The deadly intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Thy cheerful faith, that all whom we behold
Are gifts, and joys and blessings. Therefore, though
No stars should shine up on us, no light found,
And though the blinding winds of war be bent
To swirl against us: still now, and in the after years,
When these wild fantasies of powers shall come to end
In somber sadness; Thy mind, imbued in us,
Shall be the mansion for all lovely forms,
140 Thy Table be for us, and all, a dwelling
For truth, and life, and peace; now, then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be our portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy may we remember Thee,
And all Thine exhortations! Or, perchance--
If we should be where we no more can hear
Each others voice, but only catch from Thy wild
Eyes those gleams of true existence-- may we not
Forget that in the depths of this horrific dream

We stood together; and that we, so long
Thy worshippers by grace, remembered Thee
Though wearied in our service: rather say
With warmer love--oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor may we then forget,
That after many sufferings, many years
Of exile, as it seems, those woods, those towers,
Those planes and wars and fears, were to us
More dear, both for themselves and for Thy sake!

Copyright ©, Taylor Burton-Edwards, 2006.