EASTER, 1916

BY

W. B. Yeats
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I have met them at close of day
   Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses,
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
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II

That woman at while would be shrill
In aimless argument;
Had ignorant good will;
All that she got she spent,
Her charity had no bounds:
Sweet voiced and beautiful,
She had ridden well to hounds.
This man had managed a school
An our wingèd mettlesome horse.
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.

He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
III
Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter, seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute change.
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim;
And a horse plashes within it
Where long-legged moor-hens dive
And hens to moor-cocks call.
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

IV
Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death.
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all she had done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead.
And what if excess of love
EASTER, 1916

Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse—
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

W. B. YEATS.

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