

Make Bright the Arrows

1940 *NOTEBOOK*

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY



HARPER & BROTHERS *Publishers*

New York *and* London

1940

MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS

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MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS

Books by

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

The Lamp and the Bell

Second April

Three Plays

Renascence

A Few Figs from Thistles

The Harp Weaver

Aria da Capo

The King's Henchman

The Buck in the Snow

The Princess Marries the Page

Poems Selected for Young People

Fatal Interview

Wine from These Grapes

Conversation at Midnight

Huntsman, What Quarry?

Make Bright the Arrows

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“Make bright the arrows; gather the
shields: the Lord hath raised up the spirit
of the kings of the Medes.”

—Jeremiah LI-ii

*Make bright the arrows,
Gather the shields:
Conquest narrows
The peaceful fields.*

*Stock well the quiver
With arrows bright:
The bowman feared
Need never fight.*

*Make bright the arrows,
O peaceful and wise!
Gather the shields
Against surprise.*

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TO THE MAID OF ORLEANS

JOAN, Joan, can you be
Tending sheep in Domrémy?
Have no voices spoken plain:
France has need of you again?—

You, so many years ago
Welcomed into Heaven, we know,
Maiden without spot or taint,
First as foundling, then as saint.

Or do faggot, stake and torch
In your memory roar and scorch
Till no sound of voice comes through
Saying France has need of you?

Joan, Joan, hearken still,
Hearken, child, against your will:
Saint thou art, but at the price
Of recurring sacrifice;

Martyred many times must be
Who would keep his country free.

MEMORY OF ENGLAND

October 1940

I AM glad, I think, my happy mother died
Before the German airplanes over the English country-
side
Dropped bombs into the peaceful hamlets that we used to
know—
Sturminster-Newton, and the road that used to run
Past bridge, past cows in meadow,
Warm in the sun,
Cool in the elm-tree's shadow,
To the thatched cottage roofs of Shillingstone;
Dropped bombs on Romsey Abbey, where the aging rec-
ords show
(Or did a little while ago)
In faded ink and elegant fine hand
The name of a boy baby christened there
In 15— (I forget the year)
Later to sail away to this free land
And build in what is now named Massachusetts a new
Romsey here.
(My ancestor,—I still can see the page,
Our sentimental journey, our quaint pilgrimage!)

Dorset and Hampshire were our home in England: the
tall holly trees, the chestnuts that we found
Glossy within their shaggy burrs on the cold autumn
ground
In the New Forest, new in the Norman's day, where we
walked alone,
Easing at times our joyful weary backs
By shifting to a stump the weight of our small shoulder-
packs,
Meeting no living creature all one lovely day
But trees and ferns and bracken and, directly in our way
Or grazing near at hand,
From time to time a herd of small wild ponies; well aware
Of imminent sunset—and we two alone long miles from
anywhere.

All that we moved among, heath, bracken, hollies with
round berries red
Bright for an English Christmas, beech and oak,
Chestnut, with its sweet mealy food
On the leaves thick about us in the autumn air
Plentiful, gleaming from its rough burrs everywhere—
All this was good,
And all had speech, and spoke,
And all the magic unfamiliar land
Was ours by distant heritage and ours by deep love close
at hand.

How many miles we walked I now forget, dog-tired at
night

Spying an inn's warm light
Through small-paned windows thrown,—
To Romsey, and then back to Shillingstone.

So gravely threatened now
That lovely village under the Barrow's brow,
Where peering from my window at dawn under the shelv-
ing thatch
With cold bare feet and neck scratched by the straw
I saw the hounds go by;
So gravely threatened the kind people there,
She in her neat front flower plot,
He like as not
Up in the 'lotment hoeing,
Or coming home to his supper of beer and cheese,
Bread and shallots,
These thoughts . . . —
And thoughts like these . . .
Make me content that she, not I,
Went first, went without knowing.

I FORGOT FOR A MOMENT

July 1940

I FORGOT for a moment France; I forgot England; I forgot
my care:

I lived for a moment in a world where I was free to be
With the things and people that I love, and I was happy
there.

I forgot for a moment Holland, I forgot my heavy care.

I lived for a moment in a world so lovely, so inept
At twisted words and crooked deeds, it was as if I slept
and dreamt.

It seemed that all was well with Holland—not a tank had
crushed

The tulips there.

Mile after mile the level lowlands blossomed—yellow
square, white square,

Scarlet strip and mauve strip bright beneath the brightly
clouded sky, the round clouds and the gentle air.

Along the straight canals between striped fields of tulips
in the morning sailed

Broad ships, their hulls by tulip-beds concealed, only the
sails showing.

It seemed that all was well with England—the harsh foreign voice hysterically vowing,
Once more, to keep its word, at length was disbelieved,
and hushed.

It seemed that all was well with France, with her straight roads
Lined with slender poplars, and the peasants on the skyline ploughing.

I DREAMT THE LOWLANDS

I DREAMT the Lowlands still were free.
That the big wind-mill and the pollard willow, the knot-
willow tree,
Beside the still canal, that the knot-willow still was free.

Small Holland, that had held away
The sea
So many years; with three
Great man-made dykes, The Watcher, The Dreamer
and The Sleeper, held away
The sea; —
Poured into now, now inundated from the dykeless side,
By Germany,
More ruthless than the sea,
For the sea, though stern and cold, had never lied.

Drowned land, drowned land.
Poor Holland, decent men,
Great engineers,—had you no fourth dyke, then,
Dyke called The Spyer, dyke against treachery?

(Note: A part of Holland, a stretch of coast-line on the North Sea, is protected from inundation by three dykes, one behind the other, known as "De Waker, de Droomer, en de Slaper". If the Watcher (or Waker) which fronts the sea, should be broken, the Dreamer would rouse; if the Dreamer were overcome, the Sleeper would wake.)