

No Men are Foreign

by James Kirkup



Central Idea of the Poem

The poem 'No Men are Foreign' is about the concept of universal brotherhood and equality. The poet says that the whole world is one.

All of us have a common feeling of love and a common resource of our life inspite of the different nationalities, religion or colour. We must unite to make everyone's life better. When we hate one another, we betray humanity. By indulging in wars against each other, we spoil the purity of this Earth which belongs to all of us. We all are human beings and we should remember that no man is foreign and no countries are strange.

Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

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.

Explanation The poet herein promotes global brotherhood and states that no person living on the planet is strange and no land is foreign. According to him, we all are brothers and sisters. There may exist a difference between the uniforms worn by soldiers of different countries. They may also exist a difference between our cultures, religions etc and may be seperated by man made boundaries but we all are human beings. God has made is in a similar way. Each and every land in the world is same. We all live upon the same Mother Earth and upon death, shall be buried in the same Earth.

Stanza 2

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.

Word Meanings

Harvest - The produce from the fields, **Starv'd** - shortened form of starved that means died due to hunger.

Explanation Herein the poet states that those people who we call the strangers use that same resources that we do. They are aware of the same sun, air and water. They breathe the same air, enjoy the warmth of the same sun and drink the same water. They get their food in the same manner as, we get our food, from the field.

They have also faced many hardships during wars, suffered the cold winter and starved with hunger. Further, just like us the strangers also work hard to earn their livelihood. Thus, we all are similar to each other. According to the poet, if all of the things are common between all of us, then there is nothing strange or foreign.

Stanza 3

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.

Explanation The poet says that even the physical characteristics of the strangers are similar to ours. They have eyes that wake up or sleep just like us. They too have the same strength which can be won by love and sympathy. Our lives and their lives have no difference. Every country has the same type of life that can be easily noticed and appreciated.

Stanza 4

Let us remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brother, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each other

Word Meanings

Dispossess - deprive, Betray - to cheat or to bluff, Condemn - attack

Explanation In these lines, the poet points out that in our world there are some people who spread hatred and create differences; such people give way to wars and makes us kill other humans. In such a situation, we must remember that if we hate our brothers, we hate ourselves, we are only cheating and attacking ourselves. We must remember that we are equals and similar to each other before taking arms against each other.

Stanza 5

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.

Word Meanings

Defile - to pollute, Outrage - to overcome, to surpass

Explanation In wars, we pollute and destroy the Earth that should be full of unity and peace. Our hatred and anger destroys the innocence as well as the positive qualities that we are born with. War leads to a lot of blood shed and death which makes Mother Earth impure. The smoke full of dangerous chemicals during wars fill the air that we breathe with such inhumane acts we are degrading ourselves. So, we must not commit such anti-human acts and remember that no one is strange and no country is foreign.

NCERT FOLDER

(Here, we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

I. *Thinking about the Poem* (Page 81)

- 1 (a) "Beneath all uniforms ..." What uniforms do you think the poet is speaking about?
(b) How does the poet suggest that all people on earth are the same?

Ans. (a) The poet is speaking about 'uniforms' of different colours, castes, creeds, religions and nationalities of the people.
(b) The poet says that though people of different nationalities look different from outside, but we all are human beings. We have the same body, the same needs and we use same resources.

- 2 In stanza 1, find five ways in which we all are alike. Pick out the words.

Ans. In following ways, we all are alike in stanza 1

- (i) No men are strange.
- (ii) No countries are foreign.
- (iii) A single body breathes beneath all uniforms.
- (iv) The land is same everywhere.
- (v) The land where we all shall lie, is also the same.

- 3 How many common features can you find in stanza 2? Pick out the words.

Ans. Following common features can be found in stanza 2

- (i) They, too, are aware of sun, air and water.
- (ii) They, too, are fed by peaceful harvests.
- (iii) Their hands are like ours.
- (iv) A labour not different from our own.

- 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?

Ans. We are told to hate our brothers when our country is at war with another country. Countries wage war against other countries over territories, natural resources or over some very little issue that can be peacefully solved.

People with some superior motive provoke us to hate and fight each other. We should not do as we are told. Instead, we should remain peaceful. We should remember that we all are similar and in hating our brothers, we hate our own selves.

The poet says that all human are brothers and sisters. We should love them all.