

A Song of Memory, Hope and Peace

1. For once beauty of the Somme,
rolling hills and fertile fields,
singing birds by streams belonged,
human life and nature pealed:

*All creations' voices raised,
singing peaceful songs of praise.*

2. For the horrors of the Somme,
shells and guns and frightened men.
Whistles blew a deadly song,
noise and cries the loud refrain:

*Human voices scream and shout:
Tommy, Pomme, or Fritz and Kraut.*

(in 2nd line of the chorus line, the words are said, not sung, music played more staccato)

3. For the memories of the Somme,
deathly silence, land laid bare.
Back at home the women mourn
private wailing, public tear:

All voice falls

(musician only plays 2nd line, fading in volume)

4. For the lessons of the Somme,
children come to learn true cost.
Swords to ploughs, their new found psalm,
youth no more to war be lost:

*Furrows turn and skylarks sing
may peace on earth now ring.*

5. Yet, for healing of the Somme,
nations must from conflict cease.
Love, forgiveness be your song,
pray and work, unite in peace:

*All voices raise,
singing hopeful songs of praise.*

Martin Henninger and David Pickering,
Written together whilst visiting the Somme, May 2018

Suggested tune: Lucerna Laudoniae, 41 RS, 181 CH4

Scripture references:

Vs 1. singing birds by streams belong Psalm 104.12

Vs 3. women mourn, private wailing Jeremiah 31.15

Vs 4. swords to ploughs, Isaiah 2.4b

Not only did we travel to the Somme, but when there we travelled through different times. Poignantly for Martin following in his grandfather's footsteps visiting a village where his diary relates he'd spent the most awful of nights. Whilst there we met the village mayor whose own grandfather was mayor during WW1. And we also visited a battlefield where my grandfather's regiment had served and the grave of a cousin of my grandmother of whom she was very fond and mourned his early death. And so we found ourselves going back and forward in time. And we were not alone, for we saw parties of school children, who like us, coming to discover and learn.

We also looked forward, and mindful of the many conflicts since the Somme reflected that the lessons of the Somme are not just for history, but today too, and thought that every new leader of a nation should have as part of their induction, a visit to the Somme.

And so the words of the hymn flowed from our journeying in time and also drawing on the sounds we heard or imagined.

Verse 1 is set in prior to the carnage, when the rolling fields paled with nature's sounds

Verse 2 moves forward to the horrific cacophony of the war, and then to the heartache of loss in verse 3. Verse 4 imagined the songs of today's children and finally verse five looks to a future, and asks the nature of the song that nations must sing, that we may unite in true peace.