

_BY THOMAS HARDY

The Man He Killed

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“Had he and I but met

By some old ancient inn,

We should have sat us down to wet

Right many a nipperkin!

“But ranged as infantry,

And staring face to face,

I shot at him as he at me,

And killed him in his place.

“I shot him dead because —

Because he was my foe,

Just so: my foe of course he was;

That’s clear enough; although

“He thought he’d ‘list, perhaps,

Off-hand like — just as I —

Was out of work — had sold his traps —

No other reason why.

“Yes; quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down

You'd treat if met where any bar is,

Or help to half-a-crown."

Word Galaxy:

Foe	An enemy
staring	Look at with great concentration
Inn	A small hotel
curious	Eager to know something
Trap	A scheme for tricking or catching someone
Range	Arrange in a row or in a specified manner
Half a crown	A coin formerly used in Great Britain
Infantry	An army unit consisting of soldiers who fight on foot
Nipperkin	liquor container or vessel with a capacity of a half pint or less
Quaint	Strange

Stanza

Vocabulary

Meaning

"Had he and I but met By some old ancient inn, We should have sat us down to wet Right many a nipperkin!	Old ancient inn: Both 'old' and 'ancient' emphasize the age of the object of the sentence. The poet wants to emphasize the established routine of British camaraderie. Nipperkin: This is a West England colloquial term. It is the unit of measurement of volume. Roughly, the half or less than half of a pint.	"If only we'd met in some old pub, we would have sat down and shared many a beer!
"But ranged as infantry, And staring face to face, I shot at him as he at me, And killed him in his place.	Ranged as infantry: The soldiers arranged in troops in their camp, ready for battle.	"But I met him on the battlefield, each of us aiming at the other. We both took aim and fired, but he missed, while my shot killed him where he stood.

"I shot him dead because —
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like — just as I —
Was out of work — had sold his traps —
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

That's clear enough:
a sarcastic quip - the speaker knows the soldier was his enemy because they were in opposing camps but he can't understand how that justifies taking someone's life.

He'd 'list: enlist in the army
Off-hand like: casually; just like that
Had sold his traps: 'traps' is a short form of trappings, which means one's belongings. It means that he had sold all his belongings for money.

Quaint: weird; strange.
Half a crown: money (one-eighth of a pound).

"I shot him dead because... well, because he was the enemy, that's all. He was the one I was supposed to shoot, obviously.

"Then again, he'd probably joined his army in similar circumstances to me, on a kind of whim. He was probably out of work at the time, just like I was. He'd probably had to sell his belongings—I can't think why else he would have enlisted.

"Yup, war is a very strange thing! You end up shooting someone who you'd get along well with in a bar—who you'd even give money if they needed it."

Questions & Answers:

1. Why does the speaker enlist in the army?

Ans: The speaker enlists in the army because he was unemployed.

2. "He thought he had list, perhaps, off-hand like-just as I-was out of work-had sold his traps-no other reason why", what is this saying?

Ans: By saying the above lines, the only reason, he enlisted was because he didn't have a job. And he is assuming that the other man he killed enlisted for the same reason.

3. "That's clear enough, although" what is the speaker trying to say?

Ans: By saying the above line, the excuse that the other army man was his enemy is not a good enough excuse.

4. "Because he was my foe", what is the speaker trying to justify?

Ans: He is trying to come up with good excuses on why he killed the other man.

5. What is the poem trying to say?

Ans: The soldiers are similar-both enlisted in war. They may have been friends if they met at a bar rather than on the battlefield. But they met on the battlefield; therefore, they had to shoot at each other.

6. Why does the poet call war quaint and curies?

Ans: The poet calls war quaint and curies because it changes you as a person. The same fellow, whom you should have otherwise befriended and offered a drink, becomes your enemy on the battlefield. Like the speakers in the poem, many people cannot think of a valid reason why they maim, injure or kill each other and destroy property in a normal situation.

7. Explain the lines:

"He thought he'd list, perhaps, Off-hand like-just as I-was out of work..."

Ans: The poet says that he had enrolled himself in the army just like that - without too much thinking. Similarly, he feels the other man could have joined the enemy army maybe because he was out of work, or just like that or been in real need of money. Killing, injuring, fighting must not have been in the minds of both these people.

8. Read the lines given below and answer the questions that follow:

**"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!"**

(a) Who are the people being referred to in the above stanza?

Ans: The two people being referred to in the above stanza are the soldier who narrating an incident and the enemy soldier whom he had killed during the war.

(b) Where does 'I' imagine that they could have been?

Ans: The soldier 'I' who is narrating an incident imagines that they could have met at some old ancient inn.

(c) What would they have done?

Ans: They would have sat down together and wet many a nipperkin (had some drinks together).

(d) Which words in the above verse suggest that the two would have spend a lot of time together?

Ans: The words 'many a nipperkin' suggest that the two would have spent a lot of time together.

9. Why did the speaker have to kill the other soldier?

Ans: The speaker had to kill the other soldier as he was fighting a battle and the other soldier was the enemy. They had faced each other on the battlefield and were firing at each other.

10. What would the speaker have done if he had met the other man, in any place other than a battlefield?

Ans: In the poem, the speaker says that he would have greeted the other soldier, socialized with him and even offered him money or other help, if he had met the other soldier, in any place other than a battlefield.