

## Dooley is a Traitor

James Michie, 1959

'So then you won't fight?'  
'Yes, your Honour,' I said, 'that's right.'  
'Now is it that you simply aren't willing,  
Or have you a fundamental objection to killing?'  
Says the judge, blowing his nose  
And making his words stand to attention in long rows.  
I stand to attention too, but with half a grin  
(In my time I've done a good many in).  
'No objection at all, sir,' I said.  
'There's a deal of the world I'd rather see dead –  
Such as Johnny Stubbs or Fred Settle or my last landlord, Mr Syme.  
Give me a gun and your blessing, your Honour, and I'll be killing  
them all the time.  
But my conscience says a clear no  
To killing a crowd of gentlemen I don't know.  
Why, I'd as soon think of killing a worshipful judge,  
High-court, like yourself (against whom, God knows, I've got no  
grudge –  
So far), as murder a heap of foreign folk.  
If you've got no grudge, you've got no joke  
To laugh at after.'  
Now the words never come flowing  
Proper for me till I get the old pipe going.  
And just as I was poking  
Down baccy, the judge looks up sharp with 'No smoking,  
Mr Dooley. We're not fighting this war for fun.  
And we want a clearer reason why you refuse to carry a gun.  
This war is not a personal feud, it's a fight  
Against wrong ideas on behalf of the Right.  
Mr Dooley, won't you help to destroy evil ideas?'  
'Ah, your Honour, here's  
the tragedy,' I said. 'I'm not a man of the mind.  
I couldn't find it in my heart to be unkind  
To an idea. I wouldn't know one if I saw one. I haven't one of my  
own.  
So I'd best be leaving other people's alone.'  
'Indeed,' he sneers at me, 'this defence is  
Curious for someone with convictions in two senses.  
A criminal invokes conscience to his aid  
To support an individual withdrawal from a communal crusade  
Sanctioned by God, led by the Church, against a godless, churchless

nation!  
 I asked his Honour for a translation.  
 ‘You talk of conscience,’ he said. ‘What do you know of the Christian  
 creed?’  
 ‘Nothing, sir, except what I can read.  
 That’s the most you can hope for from us jail-birds.  
 I just open the Book here and there and look at the words.  
 And I find that when the Lord himself misliked an evil notion  
 He turned it into a pig and drove it squealing over a cliff into the  
 ocean,  
 And the loony ran away  
 And lived to think another day.  
 There was a clean job done and no blood shed!  
 Everybody happy and forty wicked thoughts drowned dead.  
 A neat and Christian murder. None of your mad slaughter  
 Throwing away the brains with the blood and the baby with the  
 bathwater.  
 Now I look at the war as a sportsman. It’s a matter of choosing  
 The decentest way of losing.  
 Heads or tails, losers or winners,  
 We all lose, we’re all damned sinners.  
 And I’d rather be with the poor cold people at the wall that’s shot  
 Than the bloody guilty devils in the firing-line, in Hell and keeping  
 hot.’  
 ‘But what right, Dooley, what right,’ he cried,  
 ‘Have you to say the Lord is on your side?’  
 ‘That’s a dirty crooked question,’ back I roared.  
 ‘I said not the Lord was on my side, but I was on the side of the  
 Lord.’  
 Then he was up at me and shouting,  
 But by and by he calms: ‘Now we’re not doubting  
 Your sincerity, Dooley, only your arguments,  
 Which don’t make sense.’  
 (‘Hullo,’ I thought, ‘that’s the wrong way round.  
 I may be skylarking a bit, but my brainpan’s sound.’)  
 Then biting his nail and sugaring his words sweet:  
 ‘Keep your head, Mr Dooley. Religion is clearly not up your street.  
 But let me ask you as a plain patriotic fellow  
 Whether you’d stand there so smug and yellow  
 If the foe were attacking your own dear sister.’  
 ‘I’d knock their brains out, mister,  
 On the floor,’ I said. ‘There,’ he says kindly, ‘I knew you were no  
 pacifist.  
 It’s your straight duty as a man to enlist.  
 The enemy is at the door.’ You could have downed  
 Me with a feather. ‘Where?’ I gasp, looking round.

'Not this door,' he says angered. 'Don't play the clown.  
But they're two thousand miles away planning to do us down.  
Why, the news is full of the deeds of those murderers and rapers.'  
'Your Eminence,' I said, 'my father told me never to believe the  
papers  
But to go by my eyes,  
And at two thousand miles the poor things can't tell truth from lies.'  
His fearful spectacles glittered like the moon: 'For the last time what  
right  
Has a man like you to refuse to fight?'  
'More right,' I said, 'than you.  
You've never murdered a man, so you don't know what is it I won't  
do.  
I've done it in good hot blood, so haven't I the right to make bold  
To declare that I shan't do it in cold?'  
The judge rises in a great rage  
And writes Dooley Is A Traitor in black upon a page  
And tells me I must die.  
'What, me?' says I.  
'If you still won't fight.'  
'Well, yes, your Honour,' I said, 'that's right.'