

# William Blake, "A War Song to Englishmen"

## Description

WILLIAM BLAKE

### • "A War Song to Englishmen" •

Prepare, prepare, the iron helm of war,  
Bring forth the lots, cast in the spacious orb;  
Thâ€™ Angel of Fate turns them with mighty hands,  
And casts them out upon the darkenâ€™d earth!

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    5

Prepare your hearts for Deathâ€™s cold hand! prepare  
Your souls for flight, your bodies for the earth!  
Prepare your arms for glorious victory!  
Prepare your eyes to meet a holy God!

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    10

Whose fatal scroll is that?â€™ Methinks â€™tis mine!  
Why sinks my heart, why faltereth my tongue?  
Had I three lives, Iâ€™d die in such a cause,  
And rise, with ghosts, over the well-fought field.

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    15

The arrows of Almighty God are drawn!  
Angels of Death stand in the lowâ€™ring heavens!  
Thousands of souls must seek the realms of light,  
And walk together on the clouds of heaven!

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    20

Soldiers, prepare! Our cause is Heavenâ€™s cause;  
Soldiers, prepare! Be worthy of our cause:  
Prepare to meet our fathers in the sky:  
Prepare, O troops, that are to fall to-day!

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    25

Alfred shall smile, and make his harp rejoice;  
The Norman William, and the learned Clerk,  
And Lion Heart, and black-browâ€™d Edward, with  
His loyal queen shall rise, and welcome us!

Prepare, prepare.    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    Â    30

## NOTES:

**26** *Alfred* Alfred the Great (849-899), King of Wessex, 871-899, a Saxon kingdom in southwestern England. He prevented England from falling to the Danes (Britannica).

**27** *William* William the Conqueror (c. 1028-1087), the first Norman King of England, ruled as William I from 1066 (Britannica); *Clerk* Probably a reference to Lanfranc (c. 1005-1089), archbishop of Canterbury and trusted counsellor of William (Britannica).

**28** *Lion Heart* King Richard I (1157-1199) reigned from 1189 to 1199, known for his prowess in the Third Crusade (1189-1192 (Britannica)); *Edward* King Edward IV (1442-1483), reigned from 1461-1470, and again from April 1471-1483. He was a leading orchestrator of the Wars of the Roses (Britannica).

**29** *His loyal queen* King Edward IV secretly married Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492) in 1464. She was a daughter of Lancastrians, which angered the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses (Britannica).

**SOURCE:** *Poetical Sketches* (London 1783), pp. 58-59. [Google Books]

*Edited by Grae Zimmerman*