

## Amidst the flames by Gil Oldham

Never have I seen such a light. This one before me swathes and roars, it topples stone and in its wake wrack and ruin run rampant; there framed in the light is Muchelney Abbey and beneath it is me.

There is noise. Just as I have found myself transfixed on the blaze, the spell is broken and I am thrown into the cacophony of the present- the silhouetted figures of men on horseback still eager to fan the flames and the monks as they stumble into the night or else cry out for me to flee. I am happy to turn my back to them; they know nothing of faith- to what ends did they go to preserve their church? All they could do was stand by, idle, as Cromwell's men ravaged and razed and their eyes glistened not in hatred nor scorn but pity, the pity which one might grant to a disobedient dog being punished or a mule at the whip. This stirred up such a wrath within me that I seized a dagger and lunged at their leader with enough force to draw blood. Clutching at the wound, his eyes now flash fire at me and he draws his men away. Finally, there is silence once again.

Listen to that quiet- an emptiness, no lamentations to be heard on this black night, no grief but my own and that, to me, is abhorrent.

In this silence I can finally come to terms with the blackened heap before me- smoke billowing into the night air, the crackle of the dying embers. On this field it seems all that exists is the world and me and I throb with betrayal.

Cromwell's men are little more than specks on the horizon now. I wonder to myself. My thoughts are jumbled and confused but I try and make sense of them. What cause to fight for now? The abbey, reduced to debris? No. There is little left to fight for, yet so much to fight against, a tide, like trying to push the ocean back from the shore.

I doubt the world will ever be the same again.

What's that? There, on the horizon! They return to finish me off! Those knaves- no better than mutts they are, ready to devour any meal put on a platter before them. A glint of metal flashes in the distance. At least I can look them in the eye before they feast. The thudding of hooves sounds. Those traitors to the church, no dignity, no pride. Pity is the only thing for them. If only I had dug my blade in further... The ground begins to shudder beneath me. The grate of steel on scabbard reaches my ears. The pounding of blood in my head rises to a constant roar.

What's this, my foot turned towards the night? Do I feel myself follow its lead? Do I see freedom, with arms outstretched toward me? Salty and bitter, how these tears run down my face.