

# Collected Poems

Frances Cornford  
1954

**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* Collected Poems

*Date of first publication:* 1954

*Author:* Frances Cornford (1886-1960)

*Date first posted:* May 4, 2015

*Date last updated:* May 4, 2015

Faded Page eBook #20150508

This ebook was produced by: Barbara Watson, Al Haines, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

FRANCES CORNFORD

COLLECTED  
POEMS

LONDON

THE CRESSET PRESS

First published in September 1954 by the Cresset Press Ltd  
11 Fitzroy Square, London, W1  
Second impression, January 1955

Printed in Great Britain by the Shenval Press Ltd  
London, Hertford and Harlow

TO THE MEMORY  
OF MY OLD FRIEND AND MENTOR  
EDDIE MARSH

# PREFACE

This collection contains all the poems I wish to preserve from my previously published work. It starts with a poem I wrote in 1902 when I was sixteen, and ends with several written during the past twelve months. I have slightly revised some of my earlier work in places where I was originally most dissatisfied with it, and yet found myself, at the time, incapable of emending it. No poems included in the last group have appeared in book form before. My thanks are due to the editors of TIME AND TIDE, THE LISTENER, PUNCH and THE NEW STATESMAN AND NATION for permission to reprint some of these. Messrs Bowes & Bowes Publishers Ltd., The Hogarth Press and the Cambridge University Press have each, in the past, published volumes of my verse, and I am grateful for their kind permission to select from these.

Once more I wish to thank Mr John Hayward for the vigilant care with which he has gone through the whole book, and Mr David Castillejo for his practical aid and for his understanding, without which I should never have succeeded in preparing it for the press. It was to have been dedicated to Sir Edward Marsh who, through all the last years of his life, helped me over every stray poem, with an unflagging friendship and skill. Instead, I must dedicate it to his memory.

*November 1953*

F. C. C.



# CONTENTS

JUVENILIA: From *POEMS* (1910)

[\*Autumn Morning at Cambridge\*](#)

[\*The Watch\*](#)

[\*The Certain Knot of Peace\*](#)

[\*Pre-existence\*](#)

[\*Youth\*](#)

[\*To a Fat Lady seen from the Train\*](#)

[\*London Streets\*](#)

[\*Dawn\*](#)

From *SPRING MORNING* (1915)

[\*A Recollection\*](#)

[\*A Wasted Day\*](#)

[\*In Dorset\*](#)

[\*Night Song\* \[original title: \*At Night\*\]](#)

From *AUTUMN MIDNIGHT* (1923)

[\*Autumn Midnight\*](#)

[\*Better\*](#)

[\*The New-born Baby's Song\*](#)

[\*The Country Bedroom\*](#)

[\*A Country Legacy\*](#)

[\*The Princess and the Gypsies\*](#)

[\*Susan to Diana\*](#)

[\*A Lodging for the Night\* \[original title: \*The Old Nurse\*\]](#)

[\*Contemporaries\* \[original title: \*No Immortality?\*\]](#)

[\*An Allegory\*](#)



From *DIFFERENT DAYS* (1928)

*Lincolnshire Remembered*

*Words for Music* [original title: *The Unbeseechable*]

*Apartments*

*The Old Friend* [original title: *The Dead One*]

*At Night*

*At the End*

*Cambridgeshire*

*A Glimpse*

*Féri Bekassy* [original title: *Féri Dead 1915*]

*Mediterranean Morning*

*Words for a Song* [original title: *The Lovers in the Lane*]

*She warns Him*

*Ancestors*

*A Stranger in Provence* [original title: *Provence*]

*The Woman with the Baby to the Philosophers*

*The Sick Queen*

From *MOUNTAINS AND MOLEHILLS* (1934)

*On August the Thirteenth*

*The Old Servant*

*A Back View*

*Ode on the Whole Duty of Parents*

*After a Latin Epitaph in Madingley Church*

*Tapestry Song*

*Neighbours*

*The Madman and the Child*

*After the Eumenides*

*The Past* [original title: *Near an Old Prison*]

*Yama and Yami*

*Night-Nursery Thoughts*

*Coursegoules*

*The Lake and the Instant*

*Cambridge Autumn*  
*The Trumpet Shall Sound*  
*The Single Woman*  
*The Revelation* [original title: *The Conversation*]  
*Fairy-Tale Idyll for Two Voices*

From *TRAVELLING HOME* (1948)

*Travelling Home*  
*Waking in the Attic Bedroom*  
*The Corner of the Field*  
*The Visit*  
*Early Waking*  
*Childhood*  
*To a Young Cat in the Orchard*  
*In the Backs*  
*Gone Down*  
*After the Examination*  
*The Grandson Dresses Up*  
*Family Likeness*  
*Bedroom Dawn*  
*The Coast: Norfolk*  
*Bicker's Cottage*  
*Summer Beach*  
*Seascape*  
*Lovers in the Mountains*  
*Morning Prayer*  
*Behind the Greek Restaurant*  
*Lost*  
*London Spring*  
*Benefactors*  
*The Old Woman in Spring*  
*Parting in Peacetime*  
*Parting in Wartime*  
*From a Letter to America on a Visit to Sussex*  
*Soldiers on the Platform*

Casualties

Autumn Blitz

For M.S. Singing Frühlingsglaube in 1945

The Face in the Opposite Corner

A Friend

The True Evil

For J.R.—On Elisabeth Singing

Northern Return

Houndkirk

Summer Rain

Night Storm

Lyne

Village before Sunset

All Souls' Night

City Evening

For Carmen at an English Window

Late Home

## POEMS 1948-1953

On the Cliff

Daybreak

Figures on the Platform

The Spanish Maids in England

Country Idyll

The Scholar

Inscription for a Wayside Spring

The Night Express

Cornish Waking

The Handkerchief

The Conscript

A Wartime Sketch

Mr Cooper

The Herd

The Old Woman at the Flower Show

The Quarrel

[Two Years Old](#)

[The Gull](#)

[June Indoors](#)

[Midsummer Waking](#)

[August](#)

[November Landscape](#)

[After the Party](#)

[For Nijinsky's Tomb](#)

[A Diplomat. Triolet](#)

[The Montreux Hotel. Triolet](#)

[Words for a Madrigal](#)

Two Epitaphs:

[For Charlotte Brontë](#)

[On a Pet](#)

## OCCASIONAL VERSES

[Lines on Foreign Travel](#)

[Rondeau on Wines in Wartime](#)

Journeys End in Lovers' Meeting:

[At a Dinner Party](#)

[In a Cambridge Garden](#)

[Charm for Obtaining Domestic Help](#)

[Anagram for Guy Fawkes Night](#)

[Epitaph on a Reviewer](#)

[Index of First Lines](#)



# JUVENILIA: From *POEMS* (1910)

# AUTUMN MORNING AT CAMBRIDGE

---

I ran out in the morning, when the air was clean and new  
And all the grass was glittering and grey with autumn dew,  
I ran out to an apple-tree and pulled an apple down,  
And all the bells were ringing in the old grey town.

Down in the town off the bridges and the grass,  
They are sweeping up the leaves to let the people pass,  
Sweeping up the old leaves, golden-reds and browns,  
Whilst the men go to lecture with the wind in their gowns.

*October 1902*

# THE WATCH

---

I wakened on my hot, hard bed,  
Upon the pillow lay my head;  
Beneath the pillow I could hear  
My little watch was ticking clear.  
I thought the throbbing of it went  
Like my continual discontent;  
I thought it said in every tick:  
I am so sick, so sick, so sick;  
O Death, come quick, come quick, come quick,  
Come quick, come quick, come quick, come quick.



# THE CERTAIN KNOT OF PEACE

---

So, my proud soul, so you, whose shining force  
    Could gallop with me to eternity,  
Stand now, appealing like a tired horse:  
    Unharness me.

O passionate world! O faces of my friends!  
    O half-grasped meanings, intricate and deep!  
Sudden, as with a child, the tumult ends,  
    Silenced by sleep.

1907

# PRE-EXISTENCE

---

I laid me down upon the shore  
And dreamed a little space;  
I heard the great waves break and roar  
The sun was on my face.

My idle hands and fingers brown  
Played with the pebbles grey;  
The waves came up, the waves went down,  
Both thundering and gay.

The pebbles smooth and salt and round  
Were warm upon my hands,  
Like little people I had found  
Sitting among the sands.

The grains of sand completely small  
Soft through my fingers ran;  
The sun shone down upon us all,  
And so my dream began:

How all of this had been before,  
How ages far away  
I lay on some forgotten shore  
As here I lie today.

The waves came shining up the sands,  
As here today they shine;  
And in my pre-Pelasgian hands  
The sand was warm and fine.

I have forgotten whence I came  
Or where my home might be,  
Or by what strange and savage name  
I called that thundering sea.

I only know the sun shone down  
As still it shines today,  
And friendly in my fingers brown  
The little pebbles lay.

1907

# YOUTH

---

A young Apollo, golden-haired,  
Stands dreaming on the verge of strife  
Magnificently unprepared  
For the long littleness of life.

# TO A FAT LADY SEEN FROM THE TRAIN

TRIOLET

---

O why do you walk through the fields in gloves,

Missing so much and so much?

O fat white woman whom nobody loves,

Why do you walk through the fields in gloves,

When the grass is soft as the breast of doves

And shivering-sweet to the touch?

O why do you walk through the fields in gloves,

Missing so much and so much?

# LONDON STREETS

VILLANELLE

---

‘The blundering and cruel ways of nature’

CHARLES DARWIN

O Providence, I will not praise,  
Neither for fear nor joy of gain,  
Your blundering and cruel ways.

This city where the dun fog stays,  
These tired faces in the rain,  
O Providence, I will not praise.

Here in the mud and wind that slays  
In the cold streets, I scan again  
Your blundering and cruel ways.

And all men’s miserable days,  
And all their ugliness and pain,  
O Providence, I will not praise.

I will not join the hymns men raise  
Like slaves who would avert, in vain,  
Your blundering and cruel ways.

At least, in this distracted maze,  
I love the truth and see it plain;  
O Providence, I will not praise  
Your blundering and cruel ways.

# DAWN

---

So begins the day,  
Solid, chill, and grey,  
But my heart will wake  
Happy for your sake;  
Singing like a child,  
No more tossed and wild,  
Quiet as a flower  
In this first grey hour.

So my heart will wake  
Happy, for your sake.

From *SPRING MORNING* (1915)



# A RECOLLECTION

---

My father's friend came once to tea.  
He laughed and talked. He spoke to me.  
But in another week they said  
That friendly pink-faced man was dead.

'How sad . . .' they said, 'the best of men . . .'  
So I said too, 'How sad'; but then  
Deep in my heart I thought, with pride,  
'I know a person who has died'.

# A WASTED DAY

---

I spoiled the day;  
Hotly, in haste,  
All the calm hours  
I gashed and defaced.

Let me forget,  
Let me embark,  
Sleep for my boat,  
And sail through the dark.

Till a new day  
Heaven shall send  
Whole as an apple,  
And kind as a friend.

## IN DORSET

---

From muddy road to muddy lane  
I plodded through the falling rain;  
For miles and miles was nothing there  
But mist, and mud, and hedges bare.

At length approaching I espied  
Two gipsy women side by side;  
They turned their faces broad and bold  
And brown and freshened by the cold,  
And stared at me in gipsy wise  
With shrewd, unfriendly, savage eyes.

No word they said, no more dared I,  
And so we passed each other by,  
The only living things that met  
In all those miles of mist and wet.

# NIGHT SONG

---

On moony nights the dogs bark shrill  
Down the valley and up the hill.

There's one is angry to behold  
The moon so unafraid and cold,  
That makes the earth as bright as day,  
But yet unhappy, dead, and grey.

Another in his strawy lair  
Says: 'Who's a-howling over there?  
By heavens I will stop him soon  
From interfering with the moon.'

So back he barks, with throat upthrown:  
'You leave our moon, our moon alone.'  
And other distant dogs respond  
Beyond the fields, beyond, beyond.

# From *AUTUMN MIDNIGHT* (1923)

*To Jacques and Gwen Raverat*

# AUTUMN MIDNIGHT

---

Why is it grown so suddenly cold at night?  
The handles of the chest-of-drawers are bright  
And round, and hard, and like a usurer's eyes—  
Perhaps it is the moon's cold from the skies?  
I wish I had not woken thus alone—  
I think she pours a coldness of her own  
On each loved leaf upon the garden trees,  
So that they never can recover. These  
And ruined starry daisies all will say:  
'Queen of the garden, now we go away,  
Now we have known the cold of the moon that kills  
And though tomorrow all the heaven fills  
With golden light until the chill sun's set,  
Though for an hour the midges minuet,  
Though for an hour we glisten in the sun,  
Our day, our day is done.'

I'll sleep again in this warm cave of bed;  
Tomorrow all the flowers will be dead.

## BETTER

---

The air is still grey,  
The buds are still cold;  
The sun sets early  
In a pool of dazzy gold.

But my Mamma got up today and fastened on her gown,  
And on the sheltered terraces went walking up and down.

Violets blue, violets white,  
We found one of each;  
She touched with her fingers  
The buds on the peach;

A cold-stalked snow-drop I put into her hand,  
And we were both more glad than we could say, or understand.

# THE NEW-BORN BABY'S SONG

---

When I was twenty inches long,  
I could not hear the thrushes' song;  
The radiance of morning skies  
Was most displeasing to my eyes.

For loving looks, caressing words,  
I cared no more than sun or birds;  
But I could bite my mother's breast,  
And that made up for all the rest.



# THE COUNTRY BEDROOM

---

My room's a square and candle-lighted boat,  
In the surrounding depths of night afloat;  
My windows are the portholes, and the seas  
The sound of rain on the dark apple-trees.

Seamster-like beneath, an old horse blows  
A snort of darkness from his sleeping nose,  
Below, among drowned daisies. Far off, hark!  
Far off one owl amidst the waves of dark.

# A COUNTRY LEGACY

---

Gold-headed rose for bees to sup,  
And vetch and varnished buttercup,  
And hemlock, with its hollow stalk, are up.

Blue speedwell lovely as the dew  
And old brown-headed plantains too—  
Before I knew myself, these friends I knew.

O child to be, though my life ends  
And change or chance your spirit rends,  
With the same faces, these will be your friends.

# THE PRINCESS AND THE GYPSIES

---

As I looked out one May morning  
I saw the tree-tops green;  
I said: 'My crown I will lay down  
And live no more a queen.'

Then I tripped down my golden steps  
Dressed in my silken gown,  
And when I stood in the open wood  
I met some gypsies brown.

'O gentle, gentle gypsies  
That roam the wide world through,  
Because I hate my crown and state,  
O let me come with you!

'My councillors are old and grey  
And sit in narrow chairs,  
But you can hear the birds sing clear  
And your hearts are as light as theirs.'

'If you would come along with us  
Then you must count the cost,  
For though in Spring the sweet birds sing,  
In Winter comes the frost.

'Your ladies serve you all the day  
With courtesy and care,  
Your fine-shod feet they tread so neat  
But a gypsy's feet go bare.

'You wash in water running warm  
Through basins all of gold;  
The streams where we roam have silvery foam,  
But the streams, the streams are cold.

‘And barley bread is bitter to taste,  
Whilst sugary cakes they please.  
Which will you choose, O which will you choose,  
Which will you choose of these?’

‘For if you choose the mountain streams  
And barley bread to eat,  
Your heart will be free as the birds in the tree  
But the stones will cut your feet.

‘The mud will spoil your silken gown  
And stain your insteps high,  
The dogs in the farm will wish you harm  
And bark as you go by.

‘And though your heart grow deep and gay  
Your heart grow wise and rich,  
The cold will make your bones to ache  
And you will die in a ditch.’

‘O gentle, gentle gypsies  
That roam the wide world through,  
Although I praise your wandering ways  
I dare not come with you.’

I hung about their fingers brown  
My ruby rings and chain,  
And with my head as heavy as lead  
I turned me back again.

As I went up the palace steps  
I heard the gypsies laugh;  
The birds of spring so sweet did sing,  
It broke my heart in half.

SUSAN TO DIANA  
VILLANELLE

---

Your youth is like a water-wetted stone,  
A pebble by the living sea made rare,  
Bright with a beauty that is not its own.

Behold it flushed like flowers newly-blown,  
Miraculously fresh beyond compare,  
Your youth is like a water-wetted stone.

For when the triumphing tide recedes, alone  
The stone will stay, and shine no longer there  
Bright with a beauty that is not its own.

But lie and dry as joyless as a bone,  
Because the sorceress sea has gone elsewhere.  
Your youth is like a water-wetted stone.

Then all your lovers will be children, shown  
Their treasure only transitory-fair,  
Bright with a beauty that is not its own.

Remember this before your hour is flown;  
O you, who are so glorious, beware!  
Your youth is like a water-wetted stone,  
Bright with a beauty that is not its own.

# A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

---

I am an old woman, comfortable, calm and wise  
Often I see the spirits of the dead with my own eyes.  
They come into my house. I am no more afraid  
Than of the coal-scuttle or my breakfast newly laid.  
One night over the fields the wind blew wild,  
And I thought I heard in it the ravaging voice of a child.  
I thought I heard in it, sweeping the cold lands,  
The voice of a child who suddenly misses those only hands  
That understood to make him safe, usual, and warm.  
It cried unceasingly until I knew it was not the voice of the storm.  
I tried to fall asleep; but how could I sleep,  
And hear that creature in despair continually weep?  
Then to the grown spirits imploringly I said:  
‘Friends, give me here that new spirit who is lately dead,  
Who will not enter your new world of light  
Because he misses the hands of his mother this first night,  
And she, poor soul, lies weeping tear on tear  
And cannot pierce the night with love. But I hear.  
Give me her wandering child!’ Then, as I lay in bed,  
Against my breast I felt a small and blunt-nosed head,  
A cold sob-quivering body growing calm  
And toes like round cold buds that warmed inside my palm.  
Soon in the hushing night and darkness deep,  
That comforted safe spirit sighed and fell asleep,  
And I slept too, most satisfied, until  
I woke and saw to-morrow’s dawn, everywhere cold and still.  
But out of my white bed where morning shone  
Out of my arms, away, the new-born spirit was gone.

# CONTEMPORARIES

---

Can it be possible when we grow old  
And Time destroys us, that your image too,  
The timeless beauty that your youth bestowed  
(As though you'd lain a moment since by the river  
Thinking and dreaming under the grey sky  
When May was in the hedges) will dissolve?  
This unique image now we hold: your smile,  
Which kept a secret sweetness like a child's  
Though you might be most sad, your frowning eyes,  
Can they be drowned in Time, and nothing left  
To the revolving hard, enamelled world,  
Full, full forever of fresh fears and births  
And busyness, of all you were? Perhaps  
A thousand years ago some Greek boy died,  
So lovely-bodied, so adored, so young,  
Like us, his lovers treasured senseless things,  
And laughed with tears remembering his laughter,  
And there was friendship in the very sound  
Of his forgotten name to them. Of him  
Now we know nothing, nothing is altered now  
Because of all he was. Most loved, on you  
Can such oblivion fall? Then, if it can,  
How futile, how absurd the life of man.

*April 1915*

# AN ALLEGORY

---

I dreamt Death called my friend. And I  
Went too, for both of us must die.

But neither of us dared alone  
To face him sitting on his throne;

And so we called, both I and he,  
On our Good Deeds for company.

I took a trumpet and a drum  
And proudly summoned mine to come.

I thought they could not hear at first;  
I beat my drum until it burst,

I blew my trumpet, till at last  
From that walled city of the past.

(Where in the inmost citadel  
In luxury I let them dwell)

A little postern was undone  
And out they straggled, one by one.

In thin procession on they came  
They all seemed weak and mostly lame,

Their faces, smug and strained and small,  
They turned to me. I knew them all.

Then spoke my comrade, haltingly:  
'If you exist, O come to me.'

And suddenly, as swift as flame,



A host of dancing children came,

And like the waves, without an end  
They danced and leapt about my friend.

He stared. He said: 'For Heaven's sake,  
Who are you? Here is some mistake.'

But like the sea upon the shores  
They thundered: 'Father, we are yours!'

And even then the trumpet spoke:  
'Come both before your Judge!'

—I woke.

# From *DIFFERENT DAYS* (1928)

*To William Rothenstein*

# LINCOLNSHIRE REMEMBERED

---

Gold as the hair of fairy-story queens,  
The ricks stand squarely in the weathered farm.  
There the first star on still September eves  
Stabs through pure waters of the sky, to shine  
On their grave foreheads. Round their bases broad,  
Brisk-gallivanting cocks and hens proclaim:  
'Look! Look! Our ricks!' and of the long-roofed barns  
(Darkening, majestic, where wagons sleep  
Noble as Agamemnon's chariot), 'Look!  
Look!' they say, 'our barns! What barns! Look! Look!'

And there, across the gate, the old white horse  
(Hooved like Leviathan, sea-monster-lipped)  
Bestirs himself and answers: 'Hens know less  
Than the blue-bottles on my morning nose.  
For all the world, the farm, the dung, the grass,  
The fields of bean and corn, the far-off church,  
The reeds, the dykes, the ever-breaking sea,  
The thistly dunes, and I myself, belong  
To the sky only: because only sky  
Covers us all for ever, as the ground  
Covers the dead.' He moves as though before  
Man sliced the vast of time in fretful hours;  
And the wide sky on the old farm looks down.

Mellow, grey-red, those bricks the pear-tree holds  
With strong round stem. His topmost leaves are friends  
With the paint-faded window-sill; they see  
All happenings of the hidden shadowed room;  
They know at midnight how the cold moon throws  
Slabs of eternity across the quilt,  
The jug, and breathing mounds that will be men  
When unborn morrow breaks. They peep and know  
How of its baptism, still the white quilt keeps

A frugal faint remembrance through the day.

Mellow, grey-red, the tiles of the old roof  
They have drunk in all the September suns,  
All the grey-growing eves when lovers strayed  
And browsing sheep cared not that they had kissed,  
Or, raising heads, indifferently knew  
That this was wise and usual, like the birds  
Finding invisible pathways through the air,  
Or as the sea that sounds for ever there.

So, as it darkens, leave the farm to rest,  
My lingering thoughts, in quiet on the plain.  
There autumn winds grow cold, and by the gate  
A scythe hangs waiting in a sycamore tree.  
But not a man who heaves along the road  
In corduroys, cares what the shadows hide.  
For country people know, though they have not read,  
And need no emblem of mortality.  
The lichen on the grave-stones and the roofs,  
November sleet, the smell of the church aisle  
Speak without words, and in their hearts they hear:  
Sceptre and crown must tumble down, these say,  
And come at last in the cold, earthen clay  
To equal the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Nor, if they have finished work, are they afraid.

# WORDS FOR MUSIC

---

'Time stands still  
With gazing on her face,'  
Sang Dowland to his lute,  
Full of courtly grace.

Now that his musician's face  
And her face are dust,  
Still I cry, Stand still;  
Still cry I must.

Stand still, Time;  
Hold, hold your pace;  
Still stand than the smile  
On Pharaoh's face.

Still than December's frost  
That takes the heart with wonder,  
Or the pause that comes between  
Lightning and thunder.

Time, stand still;  
Hush now your tread,  
Stand, stiller than a room  
Where lie the sheeted dead.

Where, in the busy noon,  
None comes and goes;  
Where the tree of endless peace  
To the ceiling grows.

O Time, Time,  
Stark and full of pain,  
Why drag me into space,  
A dog upon a chain?

I who would float with you,  
A ship sailing white,  
Who cannot tell which power is hers,  
Or which the wind's delight.

So my refreshèd soul  
Time would adore,  
If for one moment's space  
Time were no more.

Now with Dowland's broken lute  
And his forgotten rhyme,  
Still I cry, Stand still,  
Stand still, Time.

# APARTMENTS

---

Now the forgiving sun, with beams aslope,  
Who, in pure sky where not a chimney smokes,  
Rose over green, umbrageous, rooted oaks,  
Enters the city room, that has no pride,  
Goldenly, with fresh morning airs allied,  
And to the blistered washing-stand says: Hope.

# THE OLD FRIEND

---

The wrong you did is gentle, like the trust  
You put in us, and like your voice and air,  
The wrong you have done is very quiet, just  
Not being there.



# AT NIGHT

---

This is your nursing mother, this is sleep,  
And milk of darkness. Dedicated lie  
With graspless hands. Or is this the bottom of the sea?

Now let my fancy wander a little while.  
I am a rock a thousand fathoms sunk,  
Dark and for ever immobile. My thoughts  
Like droves of silvery, soundless fish appear  
And visit me, and pass, who wave-lapped lie.

When I was a child, I used to think the elves  
So curled round safely in the centre of flowers.  
White, perfect-petalled roses lapped them round  
Through all night's darkness; with the light they woke  
And shook the pollen from their heads, and danced  
On tippety toes.

Or, next, I am that Princess  
I dreamed in youth, with eyes like hazel pools  
And gold-encircled head. She has left the lawns  
Where peacocks with their furred embroidered tails  
Sleep on the balustrades; left far behind  
Lit galleries and gallants, lutanists,  
And long-curved princes with their captured eyes.  
She has laid aside her green embroideries,  
With slender fingers lifted off her crown  
And won this wealth of solitude. Yet she,  
So lovely, lying in her silken sheets,  
Is no more safe than I am.

I am safe  
As all wild creatures. In their burrows deep,  
Rooty and dark, the furred rabbits lie  
Safe till to-morrow's dewy nibbling dawn,  
And somewhere, unimaginably far,  
Striped tigers with their sleep-enchanted paws

In eastern caverns.

Why, I am so safe

That if an ichthyosaurus came outside  
In the bright moon, and with soft primitive paws  
Snuffed at the window-pane, I should not stir!  
I should not stir though all the garden filled  
With monsters humping to the star-strewn sky;  
I am too remotely safe in this dark bed.

I think my bed is a fortress on a rock.  
Now faintly, as I lie unreachable,  
I hear the wash and roar of the waves of care,  
I hear the retreating shingle of desire  
Pour away, far off. O this falling night,  
Coming to me, the haggard, as to a child,  
A child with sealed eyes, innocent as a flower,  
Hearing with tender ears what soundless truth?  
Absorbing wisdom, what strange wisdom is it?

Sleep, both are yours and my entire need,  
My sustenance and peace. In the chaos of day  
On far tomorrow's shore I shall come in vain,  
Rootless and starved, unless I taste them now;  
Now as my phantasies foldward drift like sheep  
Receive another child, my mother Sleep.

## AT THE END

---

The day my great-aunt Sarah died, how I remember well,  
She lay alone with daffodils and never rang her bell.  
She lay as quiet as her chair and books upon her shelf.  
She gave no trouble to her nurse, no trouble to herself.  
She was more quiet than the bare, ploughed fields that lay outside.  
The knowledge in her listening face as certain was, and wide.

# CAMBRIDGESHIRE

---

The stacks, like blunt impassive temples, rise  
Across flat fields against the autumnal skies.  
The hairy-footed horses plough the land,  
Or as in prayer and meditation stand  
Upholding square, primeval, dung-stained carts,  
With an unending patience in their hearts.

Nothing is changed. The farmer's gig goes by  
Against the horizon. Surely, the same sky,  
So vast and yet familiar, grey and mild,  
And streaked with light like music, I, a child,  
Lifted my face from leaf-edged lanes to see,  
Late-coming home, to bread-and-butter tea.

# A GLIMPSE

O grasses wet with dew, yellow fallen leaves,  
Smooth-shadowed waters Milton loved, green banks,  
Arched bridges, rooks, and rain-leaved willow-trees,  
Stone, serious familiar colleges,  
Cambridge, my home:  
The figure of a scholar carrying back  
Books to the library, absorbed, content,  
Seeming as everlasting as the elms  
Bark-wrinkled, puddled round their roots, the bells,  
And the far shouting in the football fields.

The same since I was born, the same to be  
When all my children's children grow old men.

# FÉRI BEKASSY<sup>[1]</sup>

---

We, who must grow old and staid,  
Full of wisdom, much afraid,  
In our hearts like flowers keep  
Love for you until we sleep.

You the brave, and you the young  
You of a thousand songs unsung,  
Burning brain, and ardent word,  
You the lovely and absurd.

Say, on that Galician plain  
Are you arguing again?  
Does a trench or ruined tree  
Hear your—‘O, I *don't* agree!’

We, who must grow staid and old,  
Full of caution, worn and cold,  
In our hearts, like flowers keep  
Your image, till we also sleep.

1915

---

[1] Fèrencz Bekassy (1891-1915) Hungarian poet, scholar of Kings College, Cambridge, killed in action on the Eastern Front, 1915.

# MEDITERRANEAN MORNING

---

Brekekoax the night-frogs said, while I  
Slept in my southern room. But now I lie  
And through the pale green-slitted shutters see  
Another day, fine unbelievably  
(So a child looks, to know its mother's mind  
Not clouded, but miraculously kind.)

How virgin and majestic stands the hill,  
How warm the sun upon the window-sill,  
How clear the summit's rocky shadow shows,  
Blue and at peace, yet promising what, who knows?  
(Something the heart expects in youth and will  
At sight of mountains till its beat be still.)

Life's every noise is happy in the sun,  
Bells, bees, wheels, voices, all with day begun.  
And now the sun splashes its largesse through  
The cool, soft-dusted plane-tree avenue,  
And shows how white the children's frocks and shoes,  
How like a lilac flower the washerwoman's blouse.

# WORDS FOR A SONG

---

‘Through all these days and all these weeks,  
So often you have kissed my cheeks,  
I sometimes think they must have grown  
To silver, gold, and precious stone.’

‘O, cheeks of silver and of gold,  
My dearest, would be hard and cold,  
I would not kiss them, even so,  
To say Good-night, before I go.’



# SHE WARNS HIM

---

I am a lamp, a lamp that is out;  
I am shallow stream;  
In it are neither pearls or trout,  
Nor one of the things that you dream.

Why do you smile and deny, my lover?  
I will not be denied.  
I am book, a book with a cover,  
And nothing at all inside.

Here is the truth, and you must grapple,  
Grapple with what I have said.  
I am a dumpling without any apple,  
I am a star that is dead.

# ANCESTORS

---

I have forgotten the country in the North, where my people lived before me.  
The stone walls curving over green hills; the air as pure as spirits could breathe  
in heaven, but much more cold.

The cry of the curlews, like a voice given to the sky; the dark bogs and the  
stones.

The brown streams, always talking to the lonely sheep.

My people before me had brown eyes like the streams, and bodies built to  
endure the battering wind like walls. And their forgotten faces, I think,  
were shy, resolved, and fresh.

They lived in stone houses, under the black-shadowing sycamores.

They knew the rent sky sweeping over the moors on stormy days, like passion  
in unspeaking hearts.

And I, in this protected house, breathing the hot air, I have forgotten that my  
people came from the North.

# A STRANGER IN PROVENCE

---

The olive boughs are black, like blinding hair  
Of tree-nymphs who at noon, when no one's there  
A sleeping shepherd in cool arms uphold.  
The olive-leaves are silver and so old,  
A thousand years the sun has visited these;  
They are like immortal spirits of other trees.

A hundred, hundred years ancestral hands  
Have built the terraced hills of southern lands,  
A thousand aeons, where their summits rise,  
The idle sun-enchanted butterflies  
Have shown the stone and lavender their wings,  
Receiving light with all created things.

O, as the basking lizards quick to flee  
And earth-brown goats, and the far perfect sea  
And terraced nearer hills accept the light,  
Receive, my heart; receive, as here at night  
The wide-mouthed glass receives the country wine;  
And make this ancient bounty also mine.

The polished crimson cherries on the bough  
Accept their rounded bright fulfilment now,  
The square-slabbed water-tanks receive the sky  
To plunge in their cold bosoms. Tell me why  
Receive the fountains and the figs' green leaves,  
And all Provence, except my heart, receives?

# THE WOMAN WITH THE BABY TO THE PHILOSOPHERS

---

How can I dread you, O portentous wise,  
When I consider you were once this size?  
How cringe before the sage who understands,  
Who once had foolish, perfect, waving hands,  
As small as these are? How bow down in dread,  
When I conceive your warm, domed, downy head  
Smelling of soap? O you—from North to South  
Renowned—who put your toes inside your mouth.

# THE SICK QUEEN

---

I hear my children come. They trample with their feet,  
Fetched from their play to kiss my thin-boned hands lying on the sheet,  
Fresh as young colts with every field before them,  
With gazing apple-faces. Can it be this body bore them?  
This poor body like an outworn glove,  
That yet subdues a spirit which no more knows that it can love.  
All day is theirs. I belong to night,  
The brown surrounding caverns made of dream. The long failing fight,  
On and on with pain. Theirs is sweet sleep  
And morning breakfast with bright yellow butter. They can laugh and weep  
Over a tiny thing, a toy, a crumb, a letter.  
Tomorrow they will come again and say: '*Now* are you better?'  
'Better, my lords, today', the Chamberlain replies;  
And I shall be too tired and too afraid to cry out that he lies.

From *MOUNTAINS AND MOLEHILLS*  
(1934)

*For Francis Cornford*

# ON AUGUST THE THIRTEENTH

(At The Mount, Marsden, Bucks)

Out of this seemliness, this solid order,  
At half-past four to-day,  
When down below  
Geraniums were bright  
In the contented glow,  
Whilst Williams planted seedlings all about,  
Supremely geometrically right  
In your herbaceous border,  
You had to go  
Who always liked to stay.  
Before Louisa sliced the currant roll,  
And re-arranged the zinnias in the bowl,  
All in a rhythm reachless by modernity,  
Correct and slow,  
And brought the tea and tray,  
At half-past four on Friday you went out:  
To the unseemly, seemly,  
Dateless, whole  
Light of Eternity  
You went away.

## THE OLD SERVANT

---

I cannot but believe, though you were dead,  
Lying stone-still, and I came in and said  
Having been out perhaps in mud and rain:  
‘O dear, O look, I have torn my skirt again,’  
That you would rise with the old simple ease,  
And say, ‘Yes, child’, and come to me. And there  
In your white crackling apron, on your knees  
With your quick hands, rough with the washing-up  
Of every silver spoon and cherished cup,  
And bending head, coiled with the happy hair  
Your own child should have pulled for you (but no,  
Your child who might have been, you did not bear,  
Because the endless riches of your care  
Were all for us) you would mend and heal my tear—  
Mend, touch and heal; and stitching all the while,  
Your cottons on the floor, look up and show  
The sudden light perpetual of your smile—  
Then, with your darning finished, being dead  
Go back and lie, like stone, upon your bed.



## A BACK VIEW

Now when his hour shall strike  
For this old man,  
And he arrives in Heaven late  
He can  
To Peter and the Angel Gabriel,  
Having completely known,  
Completely tell  
What it was like  
To lean upon a gate;  
And knowing one thing well  
He need not fear his fate.

# ODE ON THE WHOLE DUTY OF PARENTS

---

The spirits of children are remote and wise,  
They must go free  
Like fishes in the sea  
Or starlings in the skies,  
Whilst you remain  
The shore where casually they come again.  
But when there falls the stalking shade of fear,  
You must be suddenly near,  
You, the unstable, must become a tree  
In whose unending heights of flowering green  
Hangs every fruit that grows, with silver bells;  
Where heart-distracting magic birds are seen  
And all the things a fairy-story tells;  
Though still you should possess  
Roots that go deep in ordinary earth,  
And strong consoling bark  
To love and to caress.

Last, when at dark  
Safe on the pillow lies an up-gazing head  
And drinking holy eyes  
Are fixed on you,  
When, from behind them, questions come to birth  
Insistently,  
On all the things that you have ever said  
Of suns and snakes and parallelograms and flies,  
And whether these are true,  
Then for a while you'll need to be no more  
That sheltering shore  
Or legendary tree in safety spread,  
No, then you must put on  
The robes of Solomon,  
Or simply be  
Sir Isaac Newton sitting on the bed.

# AFTER A LATIN EPITAPH IN MADINGLEY CHURCH

[The monument bears no name or date]

---

Bring roses, singing girls, soft pansies strew  
To decorate these little ashes new;  
Nor with one cry or longing tears invade  
The sleeping stillness of an infant maid,  
Who in one showery day was here and gone,  
To God's invariable peace passed on.  
He whispered to her soul; without a stain,  
She, to his goodness, gave it back again.

# TAPESTRY SONG

---

O here is Paradise for me  
    With white does bounding,  
And here the fair immortal Tree  
    With various fruits abounding.

Hesperidean apples gold,  
    And apples red as wine,  
And gourds that show like moons below,  
    And silver pears that shine.

O sweeter, sweeter, every one  
    Than mead the gods have drunk,  
And all are for the Shepherd's Son  
    Who leans against the trunk.

And there he'll stay, the timeless day,  
    Where no harsh wind can find him,  
His crook among the strawberry leaves,  
    And woven woods behind him.

There roam the strange and savage beasts;  
    No peace their fear will grant them  
Until he play his roundelay  
    And music shall enchant them.

Now, in the dark arcaded wood  
Every creature still is stood;  
Each one pricks a happy ear,  
Tirlee, Tirlow, his song to hear.

Out of the branching wood come they  
All for his silver roundelay,  
Out of the wood on dancing feet  
So to obey his music sweet.

Here the gentled Tiger goes  
By the delicate, dancing Does;  
Here the Stag with golden horns  
And the prancing Unicorns.

Conies gambol out of the rocks,  
Leveret with tawny Fox;  
Leaping Lambs desert their folds,  
Frogs dance out of the marigolds.

Here appear in lumbering bounds  
Great King Theseus' dew-lapped Hounds;  
Here his white, unharnessed Steed  
Comes curvetting over the mead.

Here with jewelled tails aglow  
Peacocks gloriously go;  
Here the swinging Monkey gets  
Purple grapes for castanets.

Caterpillars striped and green  
Measuring up the twigs are seen;  
Asp with spotted Adder weaves,  
Harmless, in and out the leaves.

Dove and Hawk with folded wing  
On the fruited branches swing;  
Hovering, dipping, dancing rise  
Honey-bees and Butterflies.

All Creation, safe and free,  
Sings around the Happy Tree.  
Tirlee, Tirlow, and Ut Hoy,  
Play for ever, Shepherd Boy.

# NEIGHBOURS

---

Old Mrs Thompson down the road is dead.  
The maids knew first from what the milkman said,  
He heard on Sunday she was very bad,  
And as they dust, they are sorry, stirred, and glad.

One day soon I shall die,  
As still as Mrs Thompson I shall lie;  
And in her house that April day  
The maids of the new family will say  
That Mrs Jones, who was me, has passed away.  
They will know first, because the fish-boy heard;  
And as they dust, be sorry, glad, and stirred.

# THE MADMAN AND THE CHILD

---

‘Where have you been? You look queer,  
You look black.’ ‘O my dear,  
All alone to Hell and back,  
By my known, my desert track;  
Though once I might, like you, have gone  
By candlelight to Babylon.’

‘What have you seen?’ ‘No flame or fires,  
But such a stream of terrors and desires.  
O my child, nothing’s there  
Like your fingers, like your hair,  
Nor this table, nor this chair;  
Nothing certain but despair.’



# AFTER THE EUMENIDES

---

Long ago, in stony Greece,  
The human heart knew no peace.  
In its darkness it was torn,  
And cursed, as now, the fate of being born;  
And hoped to heal its agony with song.

O Lord, how long?

# THE PAST

When we would reach the anguish of the dead,  
Whose bones alone, irrelevant, are dust,  
Out of ourselves we know we must, we must  
To some obscure but ever-bleeding thing  
Unreconciled, a needed solace bring,  
Like a resolving chord, like daylight shed.  
Or do we through thick time reach back in vain  
To inaccessible pain?

# YAMA AND YAMI

[From the Veda]

---

The first created pair possessed a world  
Where darkness was unknown;  
Till Yama died, and left in endless light  
Yami, his twin, alone.

The high Gods tried to comfort her distress,  
But all in vain they tried.  
She would not listen to their wisest words;  
She said: 'Today he died.'

Then were the Gods confounded, for her grief  
Troubled their equal sight;  
They said: 'In this way she will not forget.  
We must create the Night.'

So they created Night. And after Night  
Came into being Morrow;  
And she forgot him. Thus it is they say:  
'The days and nights make men forget their sorrow.'

# NIGHT-NURSERY THOUGHTS

---

O sometimes when I wake at night  
I think the moon so round and bright  
That it must fall for very light.

That lovely, lovely liquid fall  
Would make the stars cry out and call,  
But would not burn my hands at all.

Now even raindrops off the tip  
Of leaves and twigs, soft, softly drip;  
But if the moon should suddenly slip,

You would not hear the softest sup  
And nobody could scrape it up;  
It could not stay in any cup.

The moon would fall without a sound  
Without a stain upon the ground,  
And in the morning not be found.

# COURSEGOULES

---

Beside the road to Coursegoules

Are shepherdess and sheep.

The sun is hot. The shade is cool

Beside the road to Coursegoules,

And every man's a fool, a fool

Who does not fall asleep

Beside the road to Coursegoules

And shepherdess and sheep.

# THE LAKE AND THE INSTANT

---

Have you not seen  
The dove-grey waters' undulating sheen  
Whereon a bird can rest  
Its rounded, slowly, slowly heaving breast,  
Whilst all the blue-aired delicate mountains round  
Attend, without a sound?  
So, freed from fear, man's first primeval crime,  
A heart might rest upon the lap of time.

# CAMBRIDGE AUTUMN

---

For long, so long, this timeless afternoon  
My body has lain in sun-receiving fields  
On the wood's border, by the bounteous elms,  
An unbeliever in approaching night  
And the cold, winter-prophesying dew,  
Heedless of all, forgetting all but now.

So when the creaking of a country cart  
Reaches my wind-hushed heart, my thought divines  
Its red and faded wheels, its Saxon self,  
But gropingly, I have forgotten carts.  
The seated driver towering on its side,  
Who jolts at leisure down the long, low road  
Towards the dun-thatched village, fares too far  
For my lulled sense to follow. Even the old  
Labourer sunning in a Windsor chair  
With pink and purple asters at his door,  
Who, as I passed this morning, stirred awake  
My fathers' fathers' long-acquainted loves,  
Even his image is too hard to hold  
Lapped as I lie in this Lethean gold.

This hushing wind on every side, as though  
The world's invisible sails swelled softly out  
And bore me to Eternity, laid low,  
Like the dead knights and nobles of the north,  
When their last battle had gone well with them,  
Among Northumbrian boulders quite at rest;  
Or as they lie, pure-effigied in sleep  
And stone in shadowed aisles. Yet nowhere pours  
This consecrating warmth but out of doors.

Now lift your lids and turn from dreams away,  
And watch, more perfectly, as here you may,

The dear progression of a country day,  
That friendliness which never had a name,  
Serene, eventful. Look, two pheasants came!  
Among the faded thistles bleached and brown,  
They foot it featly picking silver down;  
They sun their long soft tails, they disappear  
Behind the elm-boles. Hips and haws are here  
Contented (it would seem they had almost said)  
To know another day of turning red.

Sudden, an echoing bang, a farmer's gun.  
The settled rooks rise circling, one by one  
From the tall elm. The undistracted skies  
Fill with an old cacophony of cries:

I spy, I can,  
A dog. A man.  
What? Where? Which one?  
A man. A gun.  
He's here. He's where?  
He's gone. Beware.  
Cry out. Cry on.  
He's gone.

Then, suavely slow and gradually dumb,  
Back in a circling saraband they come  
Each to his elm-bough, neither fast nor soon,  
Black judges of the golden afternoon.

The new-born calf lies down to sleep again  
In the long, growing shadows of the plain;  
His swing-tail mother feeds, and now and then  
To guard his safety in a world of men  
Turns a slow gazing head; whilst gazing I  
At peace upon this rounded planet lie.  
This planet soon from the benignant sun  
And so sure-seeming amplitude of light  
To turn away, and like a great horse plunge  
Deep in submerging lapping seas of cold



And ever-darkening space.

I saw last night

A streak of sunset over mounded stacks  
Bleak as the eyes of ghosts; and mist comes soon.  
Even this last largesse, these blackberries  
Warm on the hedge, are purple-dark as storms,  
Storms that will wake the safely-sleeping child  
In midnight terror, sway the blackened elms  
In gulfs of night, and the clear stars devour.  
And these rich fields will darken in an hour.

O I must go and find my morning way,  
The farm, the gate, and the old labourer  
Whose image by the cottage door returns,  
Though earlier drowned in dreams. His waiting hands  
Like tree-roots, resting, and that lifted head,  
So soon to know the dark of death, no more  
Like this unconquered planet to emerge  
On April days renewed with daffodils.

His unexperienced spring will be elsewhere—  
Only the dead can tell how strange, how fair,  
How certain, like the look their faces bear  
After the storm and ravage. Now it seems  
Though all creation shares the departing light—  
The roads, the shafted waggons put to rest,  
The cropping beasts, the rooks in evening flight,  
The barns, the stubble golden from the west,  
The heavy elms—yet most of all to those  
Old patient eyes no temporal spring will bless,  
This vast, warm earthly autumn tenderness  
Is come to say Amen, before they close.

# THE TRUMPET SHALL SOUND

(MESSIAH 1742)

---

We who are met to celebrate  
Grandly today our God and King and State  
‘We shall be changed’—but shall not change too far:  
Twice as superb will be, and twice as big  
Each fair, abounding, and immortal wig;  
And every button on our coats, a star.

Where Lords and Commons ever equal are  
Each regal coach will grow a wingèd car,  
Whose laurelled lackeys in triumphant light  
Sing their symmetrical delight;  
And link-boys with the flaming cherubim  
Dance in their buckled shoes and shout the morning hymn;  
Where coachmen crowned with asphodel and moly  
Echo the cries of Holy, Holy, Holy;  
And disembodied horses fly  
With golden trumpeters about the sky.

O we shall change, but with no pangs of birth,  
To glorious heaven from this glorious earth.

# THE SINGLE WOMAN

---

Now quenched each midnight window is. Now unimpeded  
Darkness descends on roof and tree and slope;  
And in my heart the houses that you have not needed  
Put out their lights of comfort and of hope.

# THE REVELATION

---

In my dark mind you kicked a stone away.  
There in the light, a full-grown Purpose lay;  
And half in terror, half in glad surprise  
I saw his unknown coils and sleeping eyes.

# FAIRY-TALE IDYLL FOR TWO VOICES

---

O sing or tell a story. What shall I tell?  
There was a Princess woke at early dawn,  
A Princess in a castle, in the north,  
And saw the forests rising tree on tree  
Out of her little window, and ran forth  
To look for berries in the autumn woods.  
O sing of what she found in the woods as well.

She must slip away before the kitchen stirs,  
With hooded golden hair, down garden walks,  
Past home-faced apples, over the open ground  
Where feed her father's herd of cream-white cows,  
With swinging tails and delicate, peaceful feet  
Among the mountain crocuses, with bells  
Like hope and dew, and come to the edge of the woods.  
Brave she must be, for in the woods are bears;  
The noise of waters fills them like a breath  
And footsteps make no sound. At home they tell  
The king of the bears is an enchanted Prince  
Who waits release. But who shall break the spell?

The forests rise around her tree on tree,  
To cloud-high crags; they rise round secret lawns  
Where red ash-berries for no human hand  
Drop. And she listens. If she listens long  
She hears clear voices, voices of surprise,  
Wonder and argument and prophecies,  
Hid in the streams. For whom to understand?  
She only feels a spirit, that is hers,  
Tells her to climb, to climb and fear no ills,  
To fear no presence in the unpeopled woods,  
Or hidden in the caverns of the hills.  
She can but tell how swiftly she must start  
Up, up the paths where only hunters go,

Running with silver shoes that make no mark,  
Quick with a purpose that she cannot know  
And singing unawares.

Wet bilberries and scarlet cranberries  
Four-leaved Herb Paris with his sorcerer's heart,  
Whose home is in the stillness under trees,  
And black strange cherries, strange with double stones—  
O all of these,  
Tell how she plucked them with her weaving hands  
To make a wreath of berries bright and dark,  
And some that shone like blood in the early sun,  
To make a wreath, a wreath for whom begun?  
To make a garland for the king of the bears.  
And then, O tell  
How all at once her singing voice was dumb  
And her heart fell.

Fierce-eyed and hairy round a jutting rock  
Dark, dark and softly-footing he was there,  
The king of the woods, the black enchanted bear,  
Unpassably, unconquerably come.  
But quickly, now tell this:  
How she was brave, how she was not afraid,  
She flung the wreath of berries round his neck,  
The ripple of her amber-yellow hair  
Sweeping his claws and pouring from her hood,  
Her young thin arms, her oval cheek in fur,  
And made him captive, captive with a kiss.

And suddenly, suddenly, there  
Slant-eyed and smiling in the leaf-strewn light,  
Silent as moss, and all the streams his speech,  
A Prince was standing in the bilberry wood,  
Proud and delivered in the world of men.  
Right through the trees the sun ascending burned  
In wealth of swaying gold his glorious way,

And wrapped in light and shadow each to each  
No spoken word need say,  
For in the arisen morning there he stands,  
Free from his cavern's airless echoing space,  
Safe from the dark compulsion of his form.

Sing how he looked at her with eyes returned  
From exile to the harbour of her face,  
To certainty from storm;  
And touched her shoulders with his stranger's hands,  
With hands grown more familiar in an hour  
Than all her home and years of yesterday,  
The unilluminated years before.  
O sing and tell of this, and tell no more,  
But how, as on the first created day  
All things were new,  
And through the tall-stemmed forest, far below,  
Before they turned in harmony to go,  
The clustered berries round their shoulders wound.  
Before they reached the fruitful open ground  
They heard the bells of feeding flocks, the sound  
Like hope and dew.

# From *TRAVELLING HOME* (1948)

*To Ada Sharpley  
who made so much of the poetry  
in my childhood*



# TRAVELLING HOME

---

The train. A hot July. On either hand  
Our sober, fruitful, unemphatic land,  
This Cambridge country plain beneath the sky  
Where I was born, and grew, and hope to die.

Look! where the willows hide a rushy pool,  
And the old horse goes squelching down to cool,  
One angler's rod against their silvery green,  
Still seen today as once by Bewick seen.

A cottage there, thatched sadly, like its earth,  
Where crimson ramblers make a shortlived mirth;  
Here, only flies the flick-tail cows disturb  
Among the shaven meads and willow-herb.

There, rounded hay-ricks solemn in the yard,  
Barns gravely, puritanically tarred,  
Next heavy elms that guard the ripening grain  
And fields, and elms, and corn, and fields again.

Over the soft savannahs of the corn,  
Like ships the hot white butterflies are borne,  
While clouds pass slowly on the flower-blue dome  
Like spirits in a vast and peaceful home.

Over the Dyke I watch their shadows flow  
As the Icenian watched them long ago;  
So let me in this Cambridge calm July  
Fruitfully live and undistinguished die.

# WAKING IN THE ATTIC BEDROOM

---

More innocently born and calmer seems  
In its soft summer haze  
This Sunday morning than all other days.  
No early footsteps walk into my dreams,  
A peace is everywhere  
As if the whole created world believed in prayer,  
Over the solitary fields of wheat,  
And down the village street,  
And on my folded clothes across the chair.

# THE CORNER OF THE FIELD

---

Here the young lover, on his elbow raised,  
Looked at his happy girl with grass surrounded,  
And flicked the spotted beetle from her wrist:  
She, with her head thrown back, at heaven gazed,  
At Suffolk clouds, serene and slow and mounded;  
Then calmly smiled at him before they kissed.

# THE VISIT

There is a bed-time sadness in this place  
That seemed ahead so promising and sweet,  
Almost like music calling us from home;

But now the staircase does not need our feet,  
The drawer is ignorant of my brush and comb,  
The mirror quite indifferent to your face.

# EARLY WAKING

---

‘Does a bird rejoice like me  
In this earth-fresh dawn?’

‘Dearest, on a silvery tree  
He achieves an ecstasy,  
You, in bed, a yawn.’

# CHILDHOOD

---

I used to think that grown-up people chose  
To have stiff backs and wrinkles round their nose,  
And veins like small fat snakes on either hand,  
On purpose to be grand.  
Till through the bannisters I watched one day  
My great-aunt Etty's friend who was going away,  
And how her onyx beads had come unstrung.  
I saw her grope to find them as they rolled;  
And then I knew that she was helplessly old,  
As I was helplessly young.

# TO A YOUNG CAT IN THE ORCHARD

---

Elegant creature with black shoulders bent,  
Stalking the bird in song,  
To what intent?  
Tell what a wild source brims those empty eyes,  
What well of shameless light,  
Beyond the bounds of Hell or Paradise  
Or wrong  
Or right.

## IN THE BACKS

---

Too many of the dead, some I knew well,  
Have smelt this unforgotten river smell,  
Liquid and old and dank;  
And on the tree-dark, lacquered, slowly passing stream  
Have seen the boats come softly as in dream  
Past the green bank.  
So Camus, reverend sire, came footing slow  
Three hundred years ago,  
And Milton paced the avenue of trees  
In miracle of sun and shade as now,  
The fresh-attempted glorious cadences  
Behind his youthful brow.

Milton and Chaucer, Herbert, Herrick, Gray,  
Rupert, and you forgotten others, say—  
Are there slow rivers and bridges where you have gone away?  
What has your spirit found?  
What wider lot?  
Some days in spring do you come back at will,  
And tread with weightless feet the ancient ground?  
O say, if not,  
Why is this air so sacred and so still?



# GONE DOWN

---

No longer will his name be found  
Beside the College stair;  
White-lettered on the old black ground  
Another name is there.  
In the calm court new footsteps sound,  
In courts too calm to care.

## AFTER THE EXAMINATION

---

When someone's happy in a house there shows  
A chink of honey-coloured light beneath the bedroom door,  
Where once a thunder-purple gloom oozed out across the floor;  
And even the stairs smell like an early rose.

# THE GRANDSON DRESSES UP

---

James painted black moustaches round his nose,  
And in the glass a sneering Satan smiled.  
I thought once more how harrowingly glows  
Beneath the cork the innocence of a child.

# FAMILY LIKENESS

---

That eager, honouring look  
Through microscope or at a picture-book,  
That quick, responsive, curious delight—  
For half a century I have seen it now  
Under the shaggy or the baby brow,  
And always blessed the sight.

# BEDROOM DAWN

---

Is this obscurity not quite unbroken,  
As though the heart of night had bled away,  
This quietness before a bird has spoken  
Really the day?

And is this depth of darkness redefined,  
The safe diurnal washing-stand and soap,  
This first small stir of the awakened mind,  
Possibly hope?

# THE COAST: NORFOLK

---

As on the highway's quiet edge  
He mows the grass beside the hedge,  
The old man has for company  
The distant, grey, salt-smelling sea,  
A poppied field, a cow and calf,  
The finches on the telegraph.

Across his faded back a hone,  
He slowly, slowly scythes alone  
In silence of the wind-soft air,  
With ladies' bedstraw everywhere,  
With whitened corn, and tarry poles,  
And far-off gulls like risen souls.

## BICKER'S COTTAGE

---

Companionable ticking of the clock;  
Collapsing of the coal;  
The chair-legs warm;  
Tobacco in a bowl;  
The door sealed up;  
The sooted kettle's hiss;  
The firelit loaf; the cocoa-tin; the cup;  
Outside, the unplumbed night and pattering storm.  
At such an hour as this  
A ghost might knock,  
Lacking unearthly comfort in its soul.

# SUMMER BEACH

---

For how long known this boundless wash of light,  
This smell of purity, this gleaming waste,  
This wind? This brown, strewn wrack how old a sight,  
These pebbles round to touch and salt to taste.

See, the slow marbled heave, the liquid arch,  
Before the waves' procession to the land  
Flowers in foam; the ripples' onward march,  
Their last caresses on the pure hard sand.

For how long known these bleaching corks, new-made  
Smooth and enchanted from the lapping sea?  
Since first I laboured with a wooden spade  
Against this background of Eternity.



# SEASCAPE

---

The liquid unhorizoned sea  
Heaves tranquilly,  
As though  
Inshore below,  
How few feet deep,  
A lazy mermaid turned herself in sleep.  
That boy, entranced, who quite forgets his spade  
To stand and stare,  
Might almost wade  
And peering find his ankles in her seaweed hair.  
But he would rather watch his cork afloat,  
Lulled on the lucent, calm expanse above,  
Or see the far-off chuffing motor-boat  
As white as Noah's dove.

# LOVERS IN THE MOUNTAINS

---

Fresh as the foam of torrents from the snow,  
Dark, soft as footsteps in the woods below,  
Complete as sunlight falling from above,  
New as young vine-leaves, is our virgin love.

# MORNING PRAYER

---

My hands, O Lord, receive the crystal day,  
Let me preserve it whole for evermore,  
And grey-broomed evening find to sweep away  
No fragments on the floor.

# BEHIND THE GREEK RESTAURANT

---

The Cypriot woman, as she closed her dress,  
Smiled at the baby on her broad-lapped knee,  
Beautiful in a calm voluptuousness  
Like a slow sea.

# LOST

---

Because no notice-board was nailed  
With clear directing words  
That none might stray,  
Only my heart could find me out the way  
As surely as the migratory birds.  
But my heart failed.

# LONDON SPRING

---

The rounded buses loom through softest blue,  
The pavement smells of dust but of narcissus too,  
The awnings stretch like petals in the sun,  
And even the oldest taxis glitter as they run.

Over the sooted secret garden walls  
As in another Eden cherry-blossom falls,  
Lithe under shadowing lilacs steal the cats,  
And even the oldest ladies tilt their summery hats.

# BENEFACTORS

---

Still the medieval hunger to atone  
Troubles the secret heart of men today,  
And still they know no penitence prolonged,  
No costly, ornate edifice of stone  
Can ever wash the finished past away,  
Nor thank the dead they intimately wronged.

# THE OLD WOMAN IN SPRING

---

I envy your contorted bole,  
You ancient tree. By every soul  
Your youthfulness of heart is seen,  
Because you fountain into green.

Unaltered as in winter now  
My twisted hands and wrinkled brow;  
Yet my heart, too, though none believes,  
Is happy with a thousand leaves.



# PARTING IN PEACETIME

---

When we had reached the gate I raised my eyes  
And, kissing you good night, I laughed and said  
I feared the stars might strike you from the skies,  
Like crystal stones on your too happy head.

## PARTING IN WARTIME

---

How long ago Hector took off his plume,  
Not wanting that his little son should cry,  
Then kissed his sad Andromache goodbye—  
And now we three in Euston waiting-room.

# FROM A LETTER TO AMERICA ON A VISIT TO SUSSEX: SPRING 1942

---

How simply violent things  
Happen, is strange.  
How strange it was to see  
In the soft Cambridge sky our Squadron's wings,  
And hear the huge hum in the familiar grey.  
And it was odd today  
On Ashdown Forest that will never change,  
To find a gunner in the gorse, flung down,  
Well-camouflaged, and bored and lion-brown.  
A little further by those twisted trees  
(As if it rose on humped preposterous seas  
Out of a Book of Hours) up a bank  
Like a large dragon, purposeful though drunk,  
Heavily lolloped, swayed and sunk,  
A tank.  
All this because manoeuvres had begun.  
But now, but soon,  
At home on any usual afternoon,  
High overhead  
May come the Erinyes winging.  
Or here the boy may lie beside his gun,  
His mud-brown tunic gently staining red,  
While larks get on with their old job of singing.

# SOLDIERS ON THE PLATFORM

---

Look how these young, bare, bullock faces know,  
With a simplicity like drawing breath,  
That out of happiness we fall on woe  
And in the midst of life we are in death.

See how in staring sameness each one stands,  
His laden shoulders, and his scoured hands;  
But each behind his wall of flesh and bone  
Thinks with this secret he is armed alone.

# CASUALTIES

---

This once protected flesh the War-god uses  
Like any gadget of a great machine;  
This flesh once pitied where a gnat had been,  
And kissed with passion on invisible bruises.

# AUTUMN BLITZ

---

Unshaken world! Another day of light  
After the human chaos of the night;  
Although a heart in mendless horror grieves,  
What calmly yellow, gently falling leaves!

FOR M. S.  
SINGING *FRÜHLINGSGLAUBE* IN 1945  
*Nun muss sich alles, alles wenden*

---

Here are the Schubert Lieder. Now begin.

First the accompaniment,  
Heart-known and heaven-sent  
And so divinely right  
The inmost spirit laughs with sure delight.

And now the fountain of the melody.

To your forgiven fields I am entered in,  
Spring of my adolescence, Spring of the world,  
Where every secret lime-leaf is unfurled,  
Where all's made well again, yet more's to be—

Then why this misery?

Because, O enemy alien heart, we fear  
That you are lost on your demoniac shore,  
And we deny that in your music—here  
Is your unchanged, unchanging innocent core.

# THE FACE IN THE OPPOSITE CORNER

---

—Why frown? Why stare?  
—My heart's a cell, rock-walled,  
Defaced and scrawled,  
And there  
The secret blood runs down.  
That's why I frown.



# A FRIEND

On days when you have been  
Unhappy, lonely, ill,  
Your spirit I have seen  
Receiving, listening still.

On mornings when my kind  
Seem all a conquered race,  
Then I recall to mind  
I have seen your risen face.

# THE TRUE EVIL

---

When he was questioned at the time of the trial—  
This is a truth I once refused to know—  
Peter outside in the yard denied his Master,  
And heard, immediately, the cock crow.

But now I have known a more complete disaster,  
An empty horror Peter never knew,  
When I was questioned, after my denial  
No cock crew.

## FOR J. R.—ON ELISABETH SINGING

---

You who, frustrated, died so long ago  
In night and pain, but left a child to grow;  
Passionate spirit, in the shades rejoice;  
All that you suffered and knew is in her voice.

# NORTHERN RETURN

---

Again the cry of black-faced lambs across the brackened hills;  
Clouds flowering like dreams on barren crests;  
A heart that hears the secret sound of amber-running rills  
And in this scent of silence humbly rests.

# HOUNDKIRK

---

Though iron-strong and grey,  
The moorland wall gives way,  
More grey, more strong on high  
The weathering sky.

# SUMMER RAIN

---

What sound more pleasant to the ear from birth  
Than evening showers on the orchard leaves?  
For then the child in every heart believes  
That every thing is solaced on the earth.  
Horror, dismay—all evils that men do,  
Despair and rage, were never, never true.

How good the dripping of the ivied boughs,  
The bolt upon the square Victorian pane,  
The unimpassioned running tears of rain,  
The dark receiving safety round the house.  
Despair and rage and horror and dismay  
Were never real, and now are washed away.

# NIGHT STORM

---

Around the eaves a soul unchristened,  
A perished child, complains—  
The Gabble-ratchet, said my mother,  
(Her Yorkshire people told each other)  
Lost in the weeping rains.

Like me they must have lain and listened  
Since there were window-panes.

## LYNE

---

See where the stones are worn beside the street  
By leisured, prosperous, long-departed feet,  
And swept again, already smooth and neat,  
As swaying shadows of the lilac fall  
Over the crumbled, secret garden wall.  
Behind that knocker and that kind, green door  
Aunt Sarah lived in eighteen-thirty-four.  
By then, her father, Robert Pearce, was dead:  
'He loved the very stones of Lyne,' she said,  
And now each ledge and cornice seem to rise,  
Washed by the love of long-acquainted eyes.

Where the church towers to the equal sky,  
By the paved path, look where the Pearces lie  
Beneath their dignity of tabled stone,  
Still by the passers-by revered and known,  
And grass grows greenly, as it surely must  
From sober, righteous and godly dust.  
Friend, like an Orpheus of our latter days,  
On this dear seemliness you dare not gaze  
Too long or longingly. I warn you, no!  
Now take the mass-made motor-bus and go.



# VILLAGE BEFORE SUNSET

---

There is a moment country children know  
When half across the field the shadows go  
And even the birds sing leisurely and slow.

There's timelessness in every passing tread;  
Even the far-off train as it puffs ahead,  
Even the voices calling them to bed.

# ALL SOULS' NIGHT

---

My love came back to me  
Under the November tree  
Shelterless and dim.  
He put his hand upon my shoulder,  
He did not think me strange or older,  
Nor I, him.

# CITY EVENING

---

This is the hour when night says to the streets  
'I am coming'; and the light is so strange  
The heart expects adventure in everything it meets;  
Even the past to change.

# FOR CARMEN AT AN ENGLISH WINDOW

---

What's early spring in Spain?  
As here, in lightless light, no tender rain  
Falls on your terrace in Madrid, I know;  
Sun strikes and east wind sears,  
And there, like joy through hard and crystal tears  
The almond-trees are blossoming in snow.

# LATE HOME

---

The winds are out in the abysm of night;  
The blown trees stoop.  
But man invented fire and candle-light,  
And man invented soup.

POEMS 1948-1953 & OCCASIONAL  
VERSES

# ON THE CLIFF

---

O sky, grass, earth!  
How calm it is to lie  
Stretched here, unloved, unhated,  
By your complete indifference reproved.

But earth, grass, sky,  
Were we not once by birth  
Closely related?

Unquiet creature, No!  
Cousins perhaps, yet very long ago  
And many, many, many times removed.

# DAYBREAK

---

I heard an ancient sound: a cock that crew  
In graying light as I lay warm in bed.  
A long metallic cry of dung and dew  
And the unearthly dead.



## FIGURES ON THE PLATFORM

---

Travelling at night no man has any home  
Beyond the station's melancholy dome.  
The giant tired engine starts again  
For homeless fields anonymous in rain,  
Now it has gone. But that was not our train.  
Even the kit-bag and the trundled can  
Are cared-for and considered more than man  
Who has been travelling since his life began.

His soul, uncomforted by cups of tea,  
Enviest the soul of the baby on his knee,  
Escaped in peace from its small house of sense.  
Even his grin for the barmaid was pretence;  
And soon his cup will lose its tiny heat  
Abandoned on the desert of a seat;  
Even the bottom sip was hardly sweet  
And held no hope; it tasted sad, of spoon.

O, if our journey's end were coming soon,  
But will it ever come in a thousand hours?  
We are the prey of adamantine powers,  
Remote, uncaring, cold, yet easily crossed;  
They may not punish us for being lost  
If we remain their puppets, twitched and tossed,  
They may not quite malevolently mind  
Our presence here, if hopelessly resigned.

# THE SPANISH MAIDS IN ENGLAND

---

‘All the windows in the house are open’

Ascención called up to Salomé.  
Leaning from her attic that fine day,  
Sun-warmed sills are made to lean upon,  
Down smiled Salomé at Ascención.  
Ascención in indolence below,  
Too content to wish to come or go,  
Clasped her washing in a calm surprise,  
Sun-bright dazzle pleasant in her eyes.

All the windows in the house were open.

Summer sauntered through the kitchen door,  
Feet like blossom on the faded floor;  
Heat and stillness harmonized the day,  
Ascención smiled up at Salomé.

Neither needed any word of comment,  
Gladly in their veins, for one long moment,  
Each forgetting severance and pain,  
Strong as music flowed the sap of Spain.

All the windows in the house were open.

# COUNTRY IDYLL

---

Deep in the stable tied with rope,  
The cow has neither dignity nor hope.

With ugly, puzzled, hot despair  
She needs the calf that is not there,  
And mourns and mourns him to unheeding air.

But if the sleeping farmer hears,  
He pulls the blanket higher round his ears.

# THE SCHOLAR

---

You often went to breathe a timeless air  
And walk with those you loved, perhaps the most.  
You spoke to Plato. You were native there.  
Like one who made blind Homer sing to him,  
You visited the caves where sirens swim  
Their deep-indented coast.

With us you seemed

A quiet happy sailor come of late  
From those strange seas you best could navigate,  
Knowing a world that others only dreamed.  
Almost we looked for spray upon your hair,  
Who met you, silent-footed on the stair,  
Like an Elysian ghost.

So on that day

You left us on a deep withdrawing tide,  
We dared not beg you, with one sigh, to stay  
Or turn from your discoveries aside.

# INSCRIPTION FOR A WAYSIDE SPRING

---

ALL MEN FROM ALL LANDS  
KNEEL BEFORE YOU GO  
CUP YOUR HANDS  
LIKE A BOWL  
LET ME OVERFLOW  
READ WHAT THESE WORDS TELL  
LEAN DOWN AND KNOW  
EACH ONE  
BESIDE MY BRINK  
BEND DOWN LOW  
LOST SON  
SAD DAUGHTER  
BEND DOWN AND DRINK  
I AM THE WATER OF THE WELL  
THAT MAKES MEN WHOLE  
I AM THE COLD WATER  
THAT RESTORES YOUR SOUL

# THE NIGHT EXPRESS

---

Who heard a whistle in the night, so far,  
Who heard the whistle of the train pass?  
—I heard,  
    Said a hedge-safe bird,  
—And I, said the bleached grass.  
—I heard, said the sinking star,  
—And I, said the apple, nested on the ground,  
—And I, the mooned church-tower said,  
—And I, the graves around.  
—And you, said the roof of the farm overhead  
    To the child in bed,  
    You heard the sound.  
—I, said the child, asleep almost,  
    I heard it plain,  
    I heard the whistle, the whistle of the train,  
    Like a friend, like a ghost.

# CORNISH WAKING

---

A sea-bird's shadow went across the wall;  
My bedroom faced the sea,  
A wordless thought I never shall recall  
Escaped scot-free.

# THE HANDKERCHIEF

---

When captains are preoccupied  
With tackle and supplies,  
Unnoticed on the cold quayside  
His Sophy's signal flies.



# THE CONSCRIPT

---

In summer months when he was four  
And used a wooden spade,  
Bill Turner floated from this shore  
The boats his father made.

Now he, a soldier, sails from home  
On wild December ways,  
Remembering the gentle foam  
And those protected days.

# A WARTIME SKETCH

---

Drink the unflowing waters with green hair  
You Cambridge willows, calm and unaware;  
Soon he will vanish like a summer's midge,  
That calm-struck soldier leaning on the bridge,  
And things be always as they always were.

# MR COOPER

---

For many years he bent above his ground  
To dig and drill and dutifully tend,  
(While the observant robin hopped around),  
Then earth drew down his body out of sight  
To lie in equal patience day and night.  
And now perhaps his patient soul has found  
A heaven, half-familiar, like a friend,  
Like Histon Chapel in astounding light.

## THE HERD

---

How calmly cows move to the milking sheds,  
How slowly, hieratically along,  
How humbly with their moon-surmounted heads,  
Though fly-pursued and stained, they pass me by  
As gravely as the clouds across the sky,  
They being, like the stars 'preserved from wrong'.

# THE OLD WOMAN AT THE FLOWER SHOW

---

Come inside the swinging gate  
And pay your pennies for the Fête,  
Where once I strolled with all the rest  
In my sash and Sunday best.

Dust and ash the eyes I sought,  
Where I strolled and strayed and sat,  
And the rose my mother bought  
To stick inside my shady hat,  
His blue eyes and my bright sash,  
Dust and ash.

# THE QUARREL

---

How simple is my burden every day

Now you have died, till I am also dead,

The words 'Forgive me', that I could not say,

The words 'I am sorry', that you might have said.

## TWO YEARS OLD

---

A child that prospers, carries everywhere  
A little dome of pleasant secret air,  
We, who receive his unconcerned embrace  
Perceive it, sacred, round the soft-nosed face.

# THE GULL

In ritual circles, resolute and high,  
    He smoothly, purely passed. I almost heard  
The music which that sun-perfected bird  
    Left in the soundless sky.



# JUNE INDOORS

---

The moths of night in vain,  
White thoughts of dark,  
Fluster the outward pane  
But leave no mark.  
Must houses always be  
Closed tight on mystery?

# MIDSUMMER WAKING

---

The midnight wind pours darkness through the trees,  
How huge their mounded presences appear.  
The door-knob turns. Whose visiting hands are these?  
What are these footsteps that I do not hear?

# AUGUST

Our orchard with her wealth of blossoms spent,  
Her grass shorn close, her clamour of singing dumb,  
Is like a woman, jewelless, content,  
Whose time is almost come.

# NOVEMBER LANDSCAPE

---

The lawns, the light, the shrouded trees are grey,  
The lake in trance repeats the moveless day;  
Yet, like a royal ghostly barge, moves on  
In proud insulted thought, a single swan.

## AFTER THE PARTY

---

Banish the scent of sherry and cigars,  
    Throw back the shutters, quench the cultured light,  
Let in the air. O fresher than the stars  
    The rank, primeval innocent smell of night!

# FOR NIJINSKY'S TOMB

---

Nijinsky's ashes here in peace repose  
No more the Faun, the Harlequin, the Rose.

We saw him framed in light before the crowds,  
Hushed like a tree that waits the touch of dawn,  
A panther ready, or an arrow drawn.  
Then music came, the sure, awakening bars,  
He leapt beyond the bounds of joy and grief,  
His heart conferred in those transfigured hours,  
Strength like the sun, precision like the stars;  
The sea was his; the buoyancy of clouds,  
The sap that flows in every fluted leaf.  
The blossoming, in light, of fields of flowers.  
Yet later, smiling in applauded grace,  
The Faun, the Rose was never wholly ours,  
We saw remoteness in the tilted face,  
He heard alone, beyond our human ears,  
Beyond applause, the Music of the Spheres.

Nijinsky's ashes here in peace are laid  
Their perfect tribute to Perfection paid.

A DIPLOMAT  
TRIOLET

---

Into the innocence of out-of-doors  
    From faithless man I fly.  
I fly from polished lies on polished floors  
Into the innocence of out-of-doors.  
How candid every stone upon the moors,  
    How like a flute the sky.  
Into the innocence of out-of-doors  
    From faithless man, I fly.

A MONTREUX HOTEL  
TRIOLET

---

The waiter brought a vision by mistake,  
I only ordered coffee and a roll.  
Breakfast is all you hope for when you wake;  
The waiter brought a vision by mistake,  
For there, through slatted shutters, was a lake,  
O pure, O placid, like a seraph's soul.  
The waiter brought a vision by mistake,  
I only ordered coffee and a roll.



# WORDS FOR A MADRIGAL

---

Bow down you trees your rich-embroidered boughs,  
Bow low,  
And softly fold the sleeping shepherd round.  
You squirrels in the grove who swing at ease,  
And hide your secret nuts where no one sees,  
Where none may know,  
You doves among the branches make no sound,  
The sleeping, sleeping shepherd never rouse,  
The happy shepherd sleeping on the ground.  
Bow low you trees your rich-embroidered boughs,  
Bow down, you trees.

# TWO EPITAPHS

---

FOR CHARLOTTE BRONTË IN HAWORTH CHURCH YARD

The children of my fiery heart and brain  
Endure, created, like the wind and rain  
Imperishably wild.

But near this stone, and in this iron air,  
I died, because my body could not bear  
A mortal child.

ON A PET

Florence has lost her joy, her marmoset.  
No more those bright world-penetrating eyes  
Peer from the sacred cavern of her muff,  
Two jewels closely set.  
Un-nibbled now the sugared cherry lies,  
November sleet whips through the northern skies,  
The tiny tropic heart has throbbed enough.

# OCCASIONAL VERSES

# LINES ON FOREIGN TRAVEL

---

If any future, Love, were sure  
Be ours to hear with rapture pure  
Like 'Open Sesame' resounding:  
*Messieurs les voyageurs en voiture.*

And, Ah, those sacred wheels that say  
Their *Non sporgersi* all the way,  
In stern beloved trilingual measure  
*Nicht hinauslehnen* night or day.

What shall we find with dawn begun  
And Europe's black effacement done?  
Beyond Vallorbe the Alps arising?  
The bridge at Avignon in the sun?

1942

# RONDEAU ON WINES IN WARTIME

---

There is no cider at the Traveller's Rest;  
But where's your *Graves*? Your *Beaune*? Your *Beaujolais*?  
The *Nuits* you prayed for? *Veuve Cliquot*? *Vin d' Ay*?—  
And vain as well the simpler suit I pressed:

'Grant me the vin-du-pays of the west,  
The amber largesse of a labourer's day!'  
There is no cider at the Traveller's Rest  
(But where's your *Graves*? Your *Beaune*? Your *Beaujolais*?)

Your every plea seemed sweet as love confessed:  
*Pommery*, *Saint Emilion*, *Montrachet*!  
*Lachryma Christi*, *Clos Vougeot*, *Vouvray*!  
Yet Mars denied each connoisseur request.  
Nor has my humble homely prayer been blessed.  
There is no cider at the Traveller's Rest.

# JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS' MEETING

---

## I AT A DINNER PARTY

—Jean, let me introduce Sir Robert Frazer,  
But once in Wiltshire years ago you met,  
Don't I remember?

—Yes, I can't forget. . .

Our Hostess acts the imbecile, it pays her.

—You always were so horrid about people.

—And you were always bringing out their best.

—Bob, do behave like any other guest . . .

Do you remember Wagdon Prior steeple  
And how it rises out of Salisbury plain?

—I dislike steeples seen at any angle,

—How strange that we should only meet to wrangle.

—Frankly, I hope we never shall again.

—But do say something in this awful lull,  
You always had the gift of being dull.

## II IN A CAMBRIDGE GARDEN

—Bill, take a cushion on the ground, that's better!

Just how you used to lie ten years ago.

—Tell me one thing I have a right to know,  
Why did you never answer my last letter?

—I used to wish when I was seventeen  
(You can't chew grass *and* make a noble face)

That I could find that fairy-story place  
Where there is everything that might have been.

That treasured kitten grown Eternal Cat,  
The plays we meant to act in, you and I,  
Even the tears there was never time to cry,  
Do you think Heaven was really always that,  
Not harps and halos?

—Clare, I know it well  
And go there often, but its name is Hell.

# CHARM FOR OBTAINING DOMESTIC HELP

---

SABAÓTH, ZAGOÚRE, PATOÚRE, ELOAÍ.

By these hidden Names I speak

Come and help us through the week!

ABLATHANABLA hear my spell,

Come on Saturdays as well!

By the hidden Names of power,

Come for half-a-crown an hour!

PAPHRO OSORONOPHRIS, BAROUKH, ADONAÍ, ELOAÍ.

# ANAGRAM FOR GUY FAWKES NIGHT

---

G ive me crowding children. A front lawn damp  
U nder an angular bejewelled Great Bear:  
Y oung hot brothers held to peer through window-bars

F idgeting in vain for rockets due to flare:  
A fter altercations round the oily cycle-lamp  
W onderful and sudden showers in blackest air,  
K ingly gold eclipsing the ineffectual stars.  
E very bang expended. One smouldering spark.  
S ilence. Smell of sulphur. Re-instated dark.



# EPITAPH FOR A REVIEWER

---

Whoso maintains that I am humbled now  
    (Who wait the Awful Day) is still a liar;  
I hope to meet my Maker brow to brow  
    And find my own the higher.

# INDEX OF FIRST LINES

---

A child that prospers, carries everywhere

A sea bird's shadow went across the wall

A young Apollo, golden-haired

Again the cry of black-faced lambs across the brackened hills

All men from all lands

All the windows in the house are open

Around the eaves a soul unchristened

As I looked out one May morning

As on the highway's quiet edge

Banish the scent of sherry and cigars

Because no notice-board was nailed

Beside the road to Coursegoules

Bill, take a cushion on the ground, that's better!

Bow down you trees your rich-embroidered boughs

Brekekoax the night-frogs said, while I

Bring roses, singing girls, soft pansies strew

Can it be possible when we grow old

Come inside the swinging gate

Companionable ticking of the clock

Deep in the stable tied with rope

Does a bird rejoice like me

Drink the unflowing waters with green hair

Elegant creature with black shoulders bent

Florence has lost her joy, her marmoset

For how long known this boundless wash of light  
For long, so long, this timeless afternoon  
For many years he bent above the ground  
Fresh as the foam of torrents from the snow  
From muddy road to muddy lane

Give me crowding children. A front lawn damp  
Gold as the hair of fairy-story queens  
Gold-headed rose for bees to sup

Have you not seen  
Here are the Schubert Lieder. Now begin  
Here the young lover, on his elbow raised  
How calmly cows move to the milking sheds  
How can I dread you, O portentous wise  
How long ago Hector took off his plume  
How simple is my burden every day  
How simply violent things

I am a lamp, a lamp that is out  
I am an old woman, comfortable, calm and wise  
I cannot but believe, though you were dead  
I dreamt Death called my friend. And I  
I envy your contorted bole  
I have forgotten the country in the North, where my people lived before me  
I heard an ancient sound: a cock that crew  
I hear my children come. They trample with their feet  
I laid me down upon the shore  
I ran out in the morning, when the air was clean and new  
I spoiled the day  
I used to think that grown-up people chose  
I wakened on my hot, hard bed  
If any future, Love, were sure  
In my dark mind you kicked a stone away

In ritual circles, resolute and high  
In summer months when he was four  
Into the innocence of out-of-doors  
Is this obscurity not quite unbroken

James painted black moustaches round his nose  
Jean, let me introduce Sir Robert Frazer

Long ago, in stony Greece  
Look how these young, bare, bullock faces know

More innocently born and calmer seems  
My father's friend came once to tea  
My hands, O Lord, receive the crystal day  
My love came back to me  
My room's a square and candle-lighted boat

Nijinsky's ashes here in peace repose  
No longer will his name be found  
Now quenched each midnight window is. Now unimpeded  
Now the forgiving sun, with beams aslope  
Now when his hour shall strike

O grasses wet with dew, yellow fallen leaves  
O here is Paradise for me  
O Providence, I will not praise  
O sing or tell a story. What shall I tell?  
O sky, grass, earth!  
O sometimes when I wake at night  
O why do you walk through the fields in gloves  
Old Mrs Thompson down the road is dead  
On days when you have been

On moony nights the dogs bark shrill  
Our orchard with her wealth of blossoms spent  
Out of this seemliness, this solid order

SABAÓTH, ZAGOÚRE, PATOÚRE, ELOAÍ  
See where the stones are worn beside the street  
So begins the day  
So, my proud soul, so you, whose shining force  
Still the medieval hunger to atone

That eager, honouring look  
The air is still grey  
The children of my fiery heart and brain  
The Cypriot woman, as she closed her dress  
The day my great-aunt Sarah died  
The first created pair possessed a world  
The lawns, the light, the shrouded trees are grey  
The liquid unhorizoned sea  
The midnight wind pours darkness through the trees  
The moths of night in vain  
The olive boughs are black, like blinding hair  
The rounded buses loom through softest blue  
The spirits of children are remote and wise  
The stacks, like blunt impassive temples, rise  
The train. A hot July. On either hand  
The waiter brought a vision by mistake  
The winds are out in the abysm of night  
The wrong you did is gentle, like the trust  
There is a bed-time sadness in this place  
There is a moment country children know  
There is no cider at the Traveller's Rest  
This is the hour when night says to the streets  
This is your nursing mother, this is sleep  
This once protected flesh the War-god uses  
Though iron-strong and grey

Through all these days and all these weeks  
Time stands still  
Too many of the dead, some I knew well  
Travelling at night no man has any home

Unshaken world! Another day of light

We who are met to celebrate  
We, who must grow old and staid  
What's early spring in Spain?  
What sound more pleasant to the ear from birth  
When captains are preoccupied  
When he was questioned at the time of the trial  
When I was twenty inches long  
When someone's happy in a house there shows  
When we had reached the gate I raised my eyes  
When we would reach the anguish of the dead  
Where have you been? You look queer  
Who heard a whistle in the night, so far  
Whoso maintains that I am humbled now  
Why frown? Why stare?  
Why is it grown so suddenly cold at night?

You often went to breathe a timeless air  
You who, frustrated, died so long ago  
Your youth is like a water-wetted stone

THE END

# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Collected Poems* by Frances Cornford]