

# POEMS

FRANCES CORNFORD

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# POEMS

BY  
FRANCES CORNFORD

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CAMBRIDGE  
BOWES & BOWES

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## **AUTUMN MORNING AT CAMBRIDGE**

I ran out in the morning, when the air was clean & new,  
And all the grass was glittering, & grey with autumn dew,  
I ran out to the 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.

## **AUTUMN EVENING**

The shadows flickering, the daylight dying,  
And I upon the old red sofa lying,

The great brown shadows leaping up the wall,  
The sparrows twittering; and that is all.

I thought to send my soul to far-off lands,  
Where fairies scamper on the windswept sands,  
Or where the autumn rain comes drumming down  
On huddled roofs in an enchanted town.

But O my sleepy soul, it will not roam,  
It is too happy and too warm at home:  
With just the shadows leaping up the wall,  
The sparrows twittering; and that is all.

## HARVEST

### TRIOLET

They are mowing wheat  
    Through the heavy days;  
Through the silent heat  
They are mowing wheat;  
Flat fields retreat  
    Into shrouding haze;  
They are mowing wheat  
    Through the heavy days.

## DIRGE

*The Devil has taken my Soul to eat,  
My Soul that was bitter, & tender & sweet;  
And every day and every day  
He comes and sucks my Soul away.*

First he smiled, and he sharpened his knife,  
And he whittled away the Joy of Life;  
And next he tore with his cruel tooth  
All the spirit and glamour of Youth;  
And last with his cold black finger ends  
He crushed to death the Love of Friends.  
O how shrunken and shrivelled and wan  
Was my poor Soul when love was gone!

*The Devil has taken my Soul to eat,  
My Soul that was bitter, & tender & sweet;  
And every day and every day  
He comes and sucks my Soul away.*

**THE WOODS OF DESPAIR**



Blank and bare  
Are the Woods of Despair,  
On the goldenest summer day;  
And grim and grey  
The trodden way  
That leads, that leads you there.

    O often trodden,  
    Slippery, sodden,  
Lonely, loathèd way.

Turn and pace  
From place to place,  
From desolate nook to nook;  
And in every brook  
You stop to look,  
You meet your own, own face,  
    Your sickened, weary,  
    Desolate, dreary,  
Lonely, loathèd face.

## **THE MOUNTAINS IN WINTER**

Unutterably far, and still, and high,  
The mountains stand against the sunset sky.

O little angry heart, against your will  
You must grow quiet here, and wise, and still.

## **E.W.D.**

The sudden knowledge that you are not there,  
That I live on alone,  
Seems still too vast and desolate to bear,  
My dear, my own.

The merciful slow years, that rend and rob,  
But yet restore again,  
Are shattered suddenly by one great throb  
Of the old pain.

## **QUIET**

Some day, though I am not brave,  
I shall find the rest I crave  
In an undeservèd grave;

Some day, quiet I shall lie  
Underneath a quiet sky.

There no nerves shall throb & fray,  
No dead hopes with faces grey  
Haunt the endless, ugly, day;  
Some day, quiet I shall lie  
Underneath a quiet sky.

## 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.

## TO R. M.

Untangling problematic Ifs,  
    Sifting the false and true,  
Along the visionary cliffs  
    I went, and walked with you.

It seemed, my thoughts, so frail of growth,  
    So tentative and stiff,  
Leapt to the arms of yours, and both  
    Went dancing down the cliff.

And on the cliff above the sea,  
    They danced so free and high;  
I knew through all the years to be  
    They could not fade or die.

I looked into your eyes, to bless  
    The knowledge in your eyes:  
That one alone is foolishness,  
    But two at once are wise.

**"THE CERTAIN KNOT OF PEACE"**

So, my proud soul, so you, whose shining force  
Had galloped 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.

## THE TWO ARMIES

TO J.

I dreamt, when I had talked with you,  
God re-arranged the world in two,  
And marshalled it in two great lines,  
Bohemians and Philistines;  
And well I knew, O well I knew,  
Which host my heart would lead me to.

All honour to the Philistines,  
Whose sober gods, in solid shrines,  
Are Duty and Obedience,  
Self-sacrifice and Common-sense.

With tender and untortured hearts,  
They go their ways and play their parts.  
I honour them, so let it be;  
But O, their ways are not for me.

For I must go to join that throng,  
So often ruthless, stained, and wrong,  
Who madly plunge and stray and strive,  
But, O my God, they are alive!

Life stabs them deep with Love and Hate,  
And from their longings they create;  
And even their blackest, deepest wrongs  
Must blossom into little songs.

## **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,  
Most thundering and gay.

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

The grains of sand so shining-small  
Soft through my fingers ran;  
The sun shone down upon it 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 to-day.

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

I have forgotten whence I came,  
Or what 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 to-day,  
And in my fingers long and brown  
The little pebbles lay.

# YOUTH

## EPIGRAM

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

# TO A LADY IN MOURNING

## EPIGRAM

I liken thy attire of sober grey  
Unto a quiet lake, at shut of day:  
The collar round about thy neck, I take  
For one white sail upon the quiet lake.

# HOSPITALITY



## TRIOLET

People are like wallèd towers,  
    Built to face the winter skies;  
Though you talk to them for hours,  
People are like wallèd towers;  
Dumb they are, and nothing flowers  
    At their close-barred window-eyes.  
People are like wallèd towers,  
    Built to face the winter skies.

## A SHORT PRAYER

Along the road, from day to day,  
There are various curious things in the way;  
And every well-conducted horse  
Will shy at them all as a matter of course,  
Will shy at them all (for such is the code),  
And splutter about at the side of the road.

The donkey, on the other hand,  
It says: I want to understand;  
It points its ears, and snuffles its nose,  
And thoroughly looks at the things as it goes,

Looks at them all with its candid eyes;  
And we none of us like it, because it is wise.

But the gentleman's horse is a different race;  
It never can look at a thing in the face;  
But if once it conceives that its passage is blocked,  
It says: I am shocked, I am shocked, I am shocked.  
And we cry (for such conduct we truly revere):  
The Lord of the animal kingdom is here.

Along the road of life I pray  
But one advantage on the way  
(I pray it with a humble heart):  
O let me drag a coster's cart.

## **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?

## **ON THE ROAD IN FEBRUARY**

I thought she was a country squire's daughter:  
Along the leafless hedges drowned in sun,  
    She galloped on her pony—coat undone,  
And hair flung up like golden flakes of water.

## **ON THE SEASHORE**

AN EPIGRAM

Now, like a rising thought, the waters swell & dome;  
    Then crash in thundering eloquence of wave;  
And last the still shore delicately lave  
In whispering curves of sweet, insinuating foam.

## **FEAR OF LIFE**

### **TRIOLET**

Thought shield you with her great grey wings.  
    Away from hearts that wrench and tear,  
Away from personal, tingling things  
Thought shield you, with her great grey wings;  
From dread, and tenderness that stings,  
    Into the clean, impartial air.  
Thought shield you, with her great grey wings,  
    Away from hearts that wrench and tear.

## **DISLIKE OF DEATH**

### **TRIOLET**

My mother earth I shall forget  
    When I am sick and like to die;  
There, in a breathless chamber set,  
My mother earth I shall forget,  
These hedges starred with flowers wet,

These muddy roads beneath the sky.  
My mother earth I shall forget,  
When I am sick and like to die.

## LONDON STREETS

### VILLANELLE

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 the 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 A LINCOLNSHIRE FARM**

FOR F.M.C.

Through the sheltering sycamores  
Blows the wild wind from the shores,  
And the nations of the wheat  
Bow and sway before his feet.  
Where the far fields fade, and die  
In the shining of the sky,  
Right across the spacious plain  
He is gone, and back again.  
He will ruffle, as they browse,  
Those old meadow-gods, the cows;  
He will toss, like prancing steeds,  
All the beanfields and the reeds,  
Whilst the scattered clouds on high  
Speed like galleons through the sky.

We alone are safe indoors,  
Sheltered by the sycamores.

## **THE DANDELION**

### NURSERY RHYME

The dandelion is brave and gay,  
And loves to grow beside the way;

A braver thing was never seen,  
To praise the grass for growing green;  
    You never saw a gayer thing,  
    To sit and smile and praise the spring.

The children with their simple hearts,  
The lazy men that come in carts,  
The little dogs that lollop by,  
They all have seen its shining eye:  
    And every one of them would say,  
    They never saw a thing so gay.

## **THE RAGWORT**

### NURSERY RHYME

The thistles on the sandy flats  
Are courtiers with crimson hats;  
The ragworts, growing up so straight,  
Are emperors who stand in state,  
And march about, so proud and bold,  
In crowns of fairy-story gold.

The people passing home at night  
Rejoice to see the shining sight;  
They quite forget the sands and sea



Which are as grey as grey can be,  
Nor ever heed the gulls who cry  
Like peevish children in the sky.

## **THE POPLAR IN AUGUST**

TRIOLET FOR C.M.J.

Poplar, poplar, in the heat,  
    Shivering and bending,  
Have you shade for dusty feet,  
Poplar, poplar, in the heat?  
Shade is cool and sleep is sweet,  
    And roads unending.  
Poplar, poplar, in the heat,  
    Shivering and bending.

## **IN DORSET**

FOR W.R.

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.

## **THE SAVAGE BY THE SEA**

### **TRIOLET**

If I could hang all the foam of the sea in my hair,  
If I could sing all the songs that were ever invented,  
If I could kiss all the pebbles that ever there were,  
If I could hang all the foam of the sea in my hair,  
If I could drink all the waves as they break over there,

Should I then be contented?  
If I could hang all the foam of the sea in my hair?  
If I could sing all the songs that were ever invented?

## **THE CHILD STEALER**

WORDS WRITTEN FOR THE TUNE OF *MY LOVE'S AN  
ARBUTUS*

A child in the city,  
So solemn and wise,  
With dirt on its fingers,  
And dust in its eyes.

If I were a gipsy,  
With long brown arms,  
I would hug it, and steal it  
Away from all harms.

And in the green lane  
Where my gipsy-tent stands,  
It should lie in my arms  
And feed from my hands.

It should drink of sweet milk  
And wash in the streams,

Whose voices all night  
Should sound through its dreams.

It should know the wild creatures  
And herbs as they grow,  
The stars how they shine,  
The winds how they blow,

The sun in the morning,  
The grass in the rain,  
And never return  
To the city again.

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