

SPIRITS IN BONDAGE

A CYCLE OF LYRICS

By Clive Hamilton [C. S. Lewis]

In Three Parts

I. The Prison House

II. Hesitation

III. The Escape

"The land where I shall never be

The love that I shall never see"

Historical Background

Published under the pseudonym, Clive Hamilton, *Spirits in Bondage*

was C. S. Lewis' first book. Released in 1919 by Heinemann, it

was reprinted in 1984 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and included

in Lewis' 1994 Collected Poems. It is the first of Lewis' major published works to enter the public domain in the United States .

Readers should be aware that in other countries it may still be under copyright protection.

Most of the poems appear to have been written between 1915 and

1918, a period during which Lewis was a student under W. T.

Kirkpatrick, a military trainee at Oxford , and a soldier serving

in the trenches of World War I. Their outlook varies from Romantic

expressions of love for the beauty and simplicity of nature to

cynical statements about the presence of evil in this world. In

a September 12, 1918 letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis

said that his book was, "mainly strung around the idea that I

mentioned to you before--that nature is wholly diabolical &

malevolent and that God, if he exists, is outside of and in

opposition to the cosmic arrangements." In his cynical poems,

Lewis is dealing with the same questions about evil in nature that Alfred Lord Tennyson explored from a position of troubled faith in "In Memoriam A. H." (Stanzas 54f). In a letter written perhaps to reassure his father, Lewis claimed, "You know who the God I blaspheme is and that it is not the God that you or I worship, or any other Christian."

Whatever Lewis believed at that time, the attitude in many of these poems is quite different from the attitude he expressed in his many Christian books from the 1930s on. Attempts in movies and on stage plays to portray Lewis as a sheltered professor who knew little about pain until the death of his wife late in life, have to deal not only with the many tragedies he experienced from a boy on, but also with the disturbing issues he faced in many of these early poems.

## Prologue

As of old Phoenician men, to the Tin Isles sailing

Straight against the sunset and the edges of the earth,

Chaunted loud above the storm and the strange sea's wailing,

Legends of their people and the land that gave them birth-

Sang aloud to Baal-Peor, sang unto the horned maiden,

Sang how they should come again with the Brethon treasure laden,

Sang of all the pride and glory of their hardy enterprise,

How they found the outer islands, where the unknown stars arise;

And the rowers down below, rowing hard as they could row,

Toiling at the stroke and feather through the wet and weary weather,

Even they forgot their burden in the measure of a song,

And the merchants and the masters and the bondsmen all together,

Dreaming of the wondrous islands, brought the gallant ship along;

So in mighty deeps alone on the chainless breezes blown

In my coracle of verses I will sing of lands unknown,

Flying from the scarlet city where a Lord that knows no pity,

Mocks the broken people praying round his iron throne,

-Sing about the Hidden Country fresh and full of quiet green.

Sailing over seas uncharted to a port that none has seen.

## Part I The Prison House

### I. Satan Speaks

I am Nature, the Mighty Mother,

I am the law: ye have none other.

I am the flower and the dewdrop fresh,

I am the lust in your itching flesh.

I am the battle's filth and strain,

I am the widow's empty pain.

I am the sea to smother your breath,

I am the bomb, the falling death.

I am the fact and the crushing reason

To thwart your fantasy's new-born treason.

I am the spider making her net,

I am the beast with jaws blood-wet.

I am a wolf that follows the sun

And I will catch him ere day be done.

## II. French Nocturne (Monchy-Le-Preux)

Long leagues on either hand the trenches spread

And all is still; now even this gross line

Drinks in the frosty silences divine

The pale, green moon is riding overhead.

The jaws of a sacked village, stark and grim;

Out on the ridge have swallowed up the sun,

And in one angry streak his blood has run

To left and right along the horizon dim.



There comes a buzzing plane: and now, it seems

Flies straight into the moon. Lo! where he steers

Across the pallid globe and surely nears

In that white land some harbour of dear dreams!

False mocking fancy! Once I too could dream,

Who now can only see with vulgar eye

That he's no nearer to the moon than I

And she's a stone that catches the sun's beam.

What call have I to dream of anything?

I am a wolf. Back to the world again,

And speech of fellow-brutes that once were men

Our throats can bark for slaughter: cannot sing.

### III. The Satyr

When the flowery hands of spring

Forth their woodland riches fling,

Through the meadows, through the valleys

Goes the satyr carolling.

From the mountain and the moor,

Forestgreen and ocean shore

All the faerie kin he rallies

Making music evermore.

See! the shaggy pelt doth grow

On his twisted shanks below,

And his dreadful feet are cloven

Though his brow be white as snow-

Though his brow be clear and white

And beneath it fancies bright,

Wisdom and high thoughts are woven

And the musics of delight,

Though his temples too be fair

Yet two horns are growing there

Bursting forth to part asunder

All the riches of his hair.

Faerie maidens he may meet

Fly the horns and cloven feet,

But, his sad brown eyes with wonder

Seeing-stay from their retreat.

#### IV. Victory

Roland is dead, Cuchulain's crest is low,

The battered war-rear wastes and turns to rust,

And Helen's eyes and Iseult's lips are dust

And dust the shoulders and the breasts of snow.

The faerie people from our woods are gone,

No Dryads have I found in all our trees,

No Triton blows his horn about our seas

And Arthur sleeps far hence in Avalon.

The ancient songs they wither as the grass

And waste as doth a garment waxen old,

All poets have been fools who thought to mould

A monument more durable than brass.

For these decay: but not for that decays

The yearning, high, rebellious spirit of man

That never rested yet since life began

From striving with red Nature and her ways.

Now in the filth of war, the baresark shout

Of battle, it is vexed. And yet so oft

Out of the deeps, of old, it rose aloft

That they who watch the ages may not doubt.

Though often bruised, oft broken by the rod,

Yet, like the phoenix, from each fiery bed

Higher the stricken spirit lifts its head

And higher-till the beast become a god.

## V. Irish Nocturne

Now the grey mist comes creeping up

From the waste ocean's weedy strand

And fills the valley, as a cup

If filled of evil drink in a wizard's hand;

And the trees fade out of sight,

Like dreary ghosts unhealthily,

Into the damp, pale night,

Till you almost think that a clearer eye could see

Some shape come up of a demon seeking apart

His meat, as Grendel sought in Harte

The thanes that sat by the wintry log-

Grendel or the shadowy mass

Of Balor, or the man with the face of clay,

The grey, grey walker who used to pass

Over the rock-arch nightly to his prey.

But here at the dumb, slow stream where the willows hang,

With never a wind to blow the mists apart,

Bitter and bitter it is for thee. O my heart,

Looking upon this land, where poets sang,

Thus with the dreary shroud

Unwholesome, over it spread,

And knowing the fog and the cloud

In her people's heart and head

Even as it lies for ever upon her coasts

Making them dim and dreamy lest her sons should ever arise

And remember all their boasts;

For I know that the colourless skies

And the blurred horizons breed

Lonely desire and many words and brooding and never a deed.

## VI. Spooks

Last night I dreamed that I was come again

Unto the house where my beloved dwells

After long years of wandering and pain.

And I stood out beneath the drenching rain

And all the street was bare, and black with night,

But in my true love's house was warmth and light.

Yet I could not draw near nor enter in,



And long I wondered if some secret sin

Or old, unhappy anger held me fast;

Till suddenly it came into my head

That I was killed long since and lying dead-

Only a homeless wraith that way had passed.

So thus I found my true love's house again

And stood unseen amid the winter night

And the lamp burned within, a rosy light,

And the wet street was shining in the rain.

VII. Apology

If men should ask, Despoina, why I tell

Of nothing glad nor noble in my verse

To lighten hearts beneath this present curse

And build a heaven of dreams in real hell,

Go you to them and speak among them thus:

"There were no greater grief than to recall,

Down in the rotting grave where the lithe worms crawl,

Green fields above that smiled so sweet to us."

Is it good to tell old tales of Troynovant

Or praises of dead heroes, tried and sage,

Or sing the queens of unforgotten age,

Brynhild and Maeve and virgin Bradamant?

How should I sing of them? Can it be good

To think of glory now, when all is done,  
And all our labour underneath the sun  
Has brought us this-and not the thing we would?

All these were rosy visions of the night,  
The loveliness and wisdom feigned of old.  
But now we wake. The East is pale and cold,  
No hope is in the dawn, and no delight.

#### VIII. Ode for New Year's Day

Woe unto you, ye sons of pain that are this day in earth,  
Now cry for all your torment: now curse your hour of birth  
And the fathers who begat you to a portion nothing worth.  
And Thou, my own beloved, for as brave as ere thou art,

Bow down thine head, Despoina, clasp thy pale arms over it,  
Lie low with fast-closed eyelids, clenched teeth, enduring heart,  
For sorrow on sorrow is coming wherein all flesh has part.  
The sky above is sickening, the clouds of God's hate cover it,  
Body and soul shall suffer beyond all word or thought,  
Till the pain and noisy terror that these first years have wrought  
Seem but the soft arising and prelude of the storm  
That fiercer still and heavier with sharper lightnings fraught  
Shall pour red wrath upon us over a world deform.

Thrice happy, O Despoina, were the men who were alive  
In the great age and the golden age when still the cycle ran  
On upward curve and easily, for them both maid and man  
And beast and tree and spirit in the green earth could thrive.  
But now one age is ending, and God calls home the stars  
And looses the wheel of the ages and sends it spinning back

Amid the death of nations, and points a downward track,

And madness is come over us and great and little wars.

He has not left one valley, one isle of fresh and green

Where old friends could forgather amid the howling wreck.

It's vainly we are praying. We cannot, cannot check

The Power who slays and puts aside the beauty that has been.

It's truth they tell, Despoina, none hears the heart's complaining

For Nature will not pity, nor the red God lend an ear,

Yet I too have been mad in the hour of bitter paining

And lifted up my voice to God, thinking that he could hear

The curse wherewith I cursed Him because the Good was dead.

But lo! I am grown wiser, knowing that our own hearts

Have made a phantom called the Good, while a few years have sped

Over a little planet. And what should the great Lord know of it

Who tosses the dust of chaos and gives the suns their parts?

Hither and thither he moves them; for an hour we see the show of it:

Only a little hour, and the life of the race is done.

And here he builds a nebula, and there he slays a sun

And works his own fierce pleasure. All things he shall fulfill,

And O, my poor Despoina, do you think he ever hears

The wail of hearts he has broken, the sound of human ill?

He cares not for our virtues, our little hopes and fears,

And how could it all go on, love, if he knew of laughter and tears?

Ah, sweet, if a man could cheat him! If you could flee away

Into some other country beyond the rosy West,

To hide in the deep forests and be for ever at rest

From the rankling hate of God and the outworn world's decay!

IX. Night

After the fret and failure of this day,  
And weariness of thought, O Mother Night,  
Come with soft kiss to soothe our care away  
And all our little tumults set to right;  
Most pitiful of all death's kindred fair,  
Riding above us through the curtained air  
On thy dusk car, thou scatterest to the earth  
Sweet dreams and drowsy charms of tender might  
And lovers' dear delight before to-morrow's birth.  
Thus art thou wont thy quiet lands to leave  
And pillared courts beyond the Milky Way,  
Wherein thou tarriest all our solar day  
While unsubstantial dreams before thee weave  
A foamy dance, and fluttering fancies play  
About thy palace in the silver ray  
Of some far, moony globe. But when the hour,  
The long-expected comes, the ivory gates

Open on noiseless hinge before thy bower  
Unbidden, and the jewelled chariot waits  
With magic steeds. Thou from the fronting rim  
Bending to urge them, whilst thy sea-dark hair  
Falls in ambrosial ripples o'er each limb,  
With beautiful pale arms, untrammelled, bare  
For horsemanship, to those twin chargers fleet  
Dost give full rein across the fires that glow  
In the wide floor of heaven, from off their feet  
Scattering the powdery star-dust as they go.  
Come swiftly down the sky, O Lady Night,  
Fall through the shadow-country, O most kind,  
Shake out thy strands of gentle dreams and light  
For chains, wherewith thou still art used to bind  
With tenderest love of careful leeches' art  
The bruised and weary heart  
In slumber blind.



X. To Sleep

I will find out a place for thee, O Sleep-

A hidden wood among the hill-tops green,

Full of soft streams and little winds that creep

The murmuring boughs between.

A hollow cup above the ocean placed

Where nothing rough, nor loud, nor harsh shall be,

But woodland light and shadow interlaced

And summer sky and sea.

There in the fragrant twilight I will raise

A secret altar of the rich sea sod,

Whereat to offer sacrifice and praise

Unto my lonely god:

Due sacrifice of his own drowsy flowers,

The deadening poppies in an ocean shell

Round which through all forgotten days and hours

The great seas wove their spell.

So may he send me dreams of dear delight

And draughts of cool oblivion, quenching pain,

And sweet, half-wakeful moments in the night

To hear the falling rain.

And when he meets me at the dusk of day

To call me home for ever, this I ask-

That he may lead me friendly on that way

And wear no frightful mask.

## XI. In Prison

I cried out for the pain of man,

I cried out for my bitter wrath

Against the hopeless life that ran

For ever in a circling path

From death to death since all began;

Till on a summer night

I lost my way in the pale starlight

And saw our planet, far and small,

Through endless depths of nothing fall

A lonely pin-prick spark of light,

Upon the wide, enfolding night,  
With leagues on leagues of stars above it,  
And powdered dust of stars below-  
Dead things that neither hate nor love it  
Not even their own loveliness can know,  
Being but cosmic dust and dead.  
And if some tears be shed,  
Some evil God have power,  
Some crown of sorrow sit  
Upon a little world for a little hour-  
Who shall remember? Who shall care for it?

## XII. De Profundis

Come let us curse our Master ere we die,

For all our hopes in endless ruin lie.

The good is dead. Let us curse God most High.

Four thousand years of toil and hope and thought

Wherein man laboured upward and still wrought

New worlds and better, Thou hast made as naught.

We built us joyful cities, strong and fair,

Knowledge we sought and gathered wisdom rare.

And all this time you laughed upon our care,

And suddenly the earth grew black with wrong,

Our hope was crushed and silenced was our song,

The heaven grew loud with weeping. Thou art strong.

Come then and curse the Lord. Over the earth

Gross darkness falls, and evil was our birth

And our few happy days of little worth.

Even if it be not all a dream in vain

-The ancient hope that still will rise again-

Of a just God that cares for earthly pain,

Yet far away beyond our labouring night,

He wanders in the depths of endless light,

Singing alone his musics of delight;

Only the far, spent echo of his song

Our dungeons and deep cells can smite along,

And Thou art nearer. Thou art very strong.

O universal strength, I know it well,

It is but froth of folly to rebel;

For thou art Lord and hast the keys of Hell.

Yet I will not bow down to thee nor love thee,

For looking in my own heart I can prove thee,

And know this frail, bruised being is above thee.

Our love, our hope, our thirsting for the right,

Our mercy and long seeking of the light,

Shall we change these for thy relentless might?

Laugh then and slay. Shatter all things of worth,

Heap torment still on torment for thy mirth-

Thou art not Lord while there are Men on earth.

### XIII. Satan Speaks

I am the Lord your God: even he that made  
Material things, and all these signs arrayed  
Above you and have set beneath the race  
Of mankind, who forget their Father's face  
And even while they drink my light of day  
Dream of some other gods and disobey  
My warnings, and despise my holy laws,  
Even tho' their sin shall slay them. For which cause,  
Dreams dreamed in vain, a never-filled desire  
And in close flesh a spiritual fire,  
A thirst for good their kind shall not attain,  
A backward cleaving to the beast again.  
A loathing for the life that I have given,



A haunted, twisted soul for ever riven

Between their will and mine-such lot I give

White still in my despite the vermin live.

They hate my world! Then let that other God

Come from the outer spaces glory-shod,

And from this castle I have built on Night

Steal forth my own thought's children into light,

If such an one there be. But far away

He walks the airy fields of endless day,

And my rebellious sons have called Him long

And vainly called. My order still is strong

And like to me nor second none I know.

Whither the mammoth went this creature too shall go.

XIV. The Witch

Trapped amid the woods with guile  
They've led her bound in fetters vile  
To death, a deadlier sorceress  
Than any born for earth's distress  
Since first the winner of the fleece  
Bore home the Colchian witch to Greece-  
Seven months with snare and gin  
They've sought the maid o'erwise within  
The forest's labyrinthine shade.  
The lonely woodman half afraid  
Far off her ragged form has seen  
Sauntering down the alleys green,  
Or crouched in godless prayer alone  
At eve before a Druid stone.  
But now the bitter chase is won,  
The quarry's caught, her magic's done,

The bishop's brought her strongest spell  
To naught with candle, book, and bell;  
With holy water splashed upon her,  
She goes to burning and dishonour  
Too deeply damned to feel her shame,  
For, though beneath her hair of flame  
Her thoughtful head be lowly bowed  
It droops for meditation proud  
Impenitent, and pondering yet  
Things no memory can forget,  
Starry wonders she has seen  
Brooding in the wildwood green  
With holiness. For who can say  
In what strange crew she loved to play,  
What demons or what gods of old  
Deep mysteries unto her have told  
At dead of night in worship bent

At ruined shrines magnificent,

Or how the quivering will she sent

Alone into the great alone

Where all is loved and all is known,

Who now lifts up her maiden eyes

And looks around with soft surprise

Upon the noisy, crowded square,

The city oafs that nod and stare,

The bishop's court that gathers there,

The faggots and the blackened stake

Where sinners die for justice' sake?

Now she is set upon the pile,

The mob grows still a little while,

Till lo! before the eager folk

Up curls a thin, blue line of smoke.

"Alas!" the full-fed burghers cry,

"That evil loveliness must die!"

## XV. Dungeon Grates

So piteously the lonely soul of man

Shudders before this universal plan,

So grievous is the burden and the pain,

So heavy weighs the long, material chain

From cause to cause, too merciless for hate,

The nightmare march of unrelenting fate,

I think that he must die thereof unless

Ever and again across the dreariness

There came a sudden glimpse of spirit faces,

A fragrant breath to tell of flowery places

And wider oceans, breaking on the shore

From which the hearts of men are always sore.

It lies beyond endeavour; neither prayer  
Nor fasting, nor much wisdom winneth there,  
Seeing how many prophets and wise men  
Have sought for it and still returned again  
With hope undone. But only the strange power  
Of unsought Beauty in some casual hour  
Can build a bridge of light or sound or form  
To lead you out of all this strife and storm;  
When of some beauty we are grown a part  
Till from its very glory's midmost heart  
Out leaps a sudden beam of larger light  
Into our souls. All things are seen aright  
Amid the blinding pillar of its gold,  
Seven times more true than what for truth we hold  
In vulgar hours. The miracle is done  
And for one little moment we are one  
With the eternal stream of loveliness

That flows so calm, aloft from all distress

Yet leaps and lives around us as a fire

Making us faint with overstrong desire

To sport and swim for ever in its deep-

Only a moment.

O! but we shall keep

Our vision still. One moment was enough,

We know we are not made of mortal stuff.

And we can bear all trials that come after,

The hate of men and the fool's loud bestial laughter

And Nature's rule and cruelties unclean,

For we have seen the Glory-we have seen.

XVI. The Philosopher

Who shall be our prophet then,  
Chosen from all the sons of men  
To lead his fellows on the way  
Of hidden knowledge, delving deep  
To nameless mysteries that keep  
Their secret from the solar day!  
Or who shall pierce with surer eye!  
This shifting veil of bittersweet  
And find the real things that lie  
Beyond this turmoil, which we greet  
With such a wasted wealth of tears?  
Who shall cross over for us the bridge of fears  
And pass in to the country where the ancient Mothers dwell?  
Is it an elder, bent and hoar  
Who, where the waste Atlantic swell  
On lonely beaches makes its roar,  
In his solitary tower



Through the long night hour by hour  
Pores on old books with watery eye  
When all his youth has passed him by,  
And folly is schooled and love is dead  
And frozen fancy laid abed,  
While in his veins the gradual blood  
Slackens to a marish flood?  
For he rejoiceth not in the ocean's might,  
Neither the sun giveth delight,  
Nor the moon by night  
Shall call his feet to wander in the haunted forest lawn.  
He shall no more rise suddenly in the dawn  
When mists are white and the dew lies pearly  
Cold and cold on every meadow,  
To take his joy of the season early,  
The opening flower and the westward shadow,  
And scarcely can he dream of laughter and love,

They lie so many leaden years behind.

Such eyes are dim and blind,

And the sad, aching head that nods above

His monstrous books can never know

The secret we would find.

But let our seer be young and kind

And fresh and beautiful of show,

And taken ere the lustyhead

And rapture of his youth be dead;

Ere the gnawing, peasant reason

School him over-deep in treason

To the ancient high estate

Of his fancy's principate,

That he may live a perfect whole,

A mask of the eternal soul,

And cross at last the shadowy bar

To where the ever-living are.

XVII. The OceanStrand

O leave the labouring roadways of the town,

The shifting faces and the changeful hue

Of markets, and broad echoing streets that drown

The heart's own silent music. Though they too

Sing in their proper rhythm, and still delight

The friendly ear that loves warm human kind,

Yet it is good to leave them all behind,

Now when from lily dawn to purple night

Summer is queen,

Summer is queen in all the happy land.

Far, far away among the valleys green

Let us go forth and wander hand in hand

Beyond those solemn hills that we have seen

So often welcome home the falling sun

Into their cloudy peaks when day was done-

Beyond them till we find the ocean strand

And hear the great waves run,

With the waste song whose melodies I'd follow

And weary not for many a summer day,

Born of the vaulted breakers arching hollow

Before they flash and scatter into spray,

On, if we should be weary of their play

Then I would lead you further into land

Where, with their ragged walls, the stately rocks

Shunt in smooth courts and paved with quiet sand

To silence dedicate. The sea-god's flocks

Have rested here, and mortal eyes have seen

By great adventure at the dead of noon

A lonely nereid drowsing half a-swoon

Buried beneath her dark and dripping locks.

XVIII. Noon

Noon! and in the garden bower

The hot air quivers o'er the grass,

The little lake is smooth as glass

And still so heavily the hour

Drags, that scarce the proudest flower

Pressed upon its burning bed

Has strength to lift a languid head:

-Rose and fainting violet

By the water's margin set

Swoon and sink as they were dead

Though their weary leaves be fed

With the foam-drops of the pool

Where it trembles dark and cool

Wrinkled by the fountain spraying

O'er it. And the honey-bee

Hums his drowsy melody

And wanders in his course a-straying

Through the sweet and tangled glade

With his golden mead o'erladen,

Where beneath the pleasant shade

Of the darkling boughs a maiden

-Milky limb and fiery tress,

All at sweetest random laid-

Slumbers, drunken with the excess

Of the noontide's loveliness.

XIX. Milton Read Again (InSurrey )

Three golden months while summer on us stole

I have read your joyful tale another time,

Breathing more freely in that larger clime

And learning wiselier to deserve the whole.

Your Spirit, Master, has been close at hand

And guided me, still pointing treasures rare,

Thick-sown where I before saw nothing fair

And finding waters in the barren land,

Barren once thought because my eyes were dim.

Like one I am grown to whom the common field

And often-wandered copse one morning yield

New pleasures suddenly; for over him

Falls the weird spirit of unexplained delight,

New mystery in every shady place,

In every whispering tree a nameless grace,

New rapture on the windy seaward height.

So may she come to me, teaching me well

To savour all these sweets that lie to hand

In wood and lane about this pleasant land

Though it be not the land where I would dwell.

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XX. Sonnet

The stars come out; the fragrant shadows fall

About a dreaming garden still and sweet,



I hear the unseen bats above me bleat  
Among the ghostly moths their hunting call,  
And twinkling glow-worms all about me crawl.  
Now for a chamber dim, a pillow meet  
For slumbers deep as death, a faultless sheet,  
Cool, white and smooth. So may I reach the hall  
With poppies strewn where sleep that is so dear  
With magic sponge can wipe away an hour  
Or twelve and make them naught. Why not a year,  
Why could a man not loiter in that bower  
Until a thousand painless cycles wore,  
And then-what if it held him evermore?

XXI. The Autumn Morning

See! the pale autumn dawn

Is faint, upon the lawn

That lies in powdered white

Of hoar-frost dight

And now from tree to tree

The ghostly mist we see

Hung like a silver pall

To hallow all.

It wreathes the burdened air

So strangely everywhere

That I could almost fear

This silence drear

Where no one song-bird sings

And dream that wizard things

Mighty for hate or love

Were close above.

White as the fog and fair

Drifting through the middle air

In magic dances dread

Over my head.

Yet these should know me too

Lover and bondman true,

One that has honoured well

The mystic spell

Of earth's most solemn hours

Wherein the ancient powers

Of dryad, elf, or faun

Or leprechaun

Oft have their faces shown

To me that walked alone

Seashore or haunted fen

Or mountain glen

Wherefore I will not fear

To walk the woodlands sere

Into this autumn day

Far, far away.

Part II Hesitation

XXII. L'Apprenti Sorcier

Suddenly there came to me

The music of a mighty sea

That on a bare and iron shore

Thundered with a deeper roar

Than all the tides that leap and run

With us below the real sun:

Because the place was far away,

Above, beyond our homely day,

Neighbouring close the frozen clime

Where out of all the woods of time,

Amid the frightful seraphim

The fierce, cold eyes of Godhead gleam,

Revolving hate and misery

And wars and famines yet to be.

And in my dreams I stood alone  
Upon a shelf of weedy stone,  
And saw before my shrinking eyes  
The dark, enormous breakers rise,  
And hover and fall with deafening thunder  
Of thwarted foam that echoed under  
The ledge, through many a cavern drear,  
With hollow sounds of wintry fear.  
And through the waters waste and grey,  
Thick-strown for many a league away,  
Out of the toiling sea arose  
Many a face and form of those  
Thin, elemental people dear  
Who live beyond our heavy sphere.  
And all at once from far and near,  
They all held out their arms to me,  
Crying in their melody,

"Leap in! Leap in and take thy fill

Of all the cosmic good and ill,

Be as the Living ones that know

Enormous joy, enormous woe,

Pain beyond thought and fiery bliss:

For all thy study hunted this,

On wings of magic to arise,

And wash from off thy filmed eyes

The cloud of cold mortality,

To find the real life and be

As are the children of the deep!

Be bold and dare the glorious leap,

Or to thy shame, go, slink again

Back to the narrow ways of men."

So all these mocked me as I stood

Striving to wake because I feared the flood.

XXIII. Alexandrines

There is a house that most of all on earth I hate.

Though I have passed through many sorrows and have been

In bloody fields, sad seas, and countries desolate,

Yet most I fear that empty house where the grasses green

Grow in the silent court the gaping flags between,

And down the moss-grown paths and terrace no man treads

Where the old, old weeds rise deep on the waste garden beds.

Like eyes of one long dead the empty windows stare

And I fear to cross the garden, I fear to linger there,

For in that house I know a little, silent room

Where Someone's always waiting, waiting in the gloom

To draw me with an evil eye, and hold me fast-

Yet thither doom will drive me and He will win at last.



XXIV. In Praise of Solid People

Thank God that there are solid folk

Who water flowers and roll the lawn,

And sit an sew and talk and smoke,

And snore all through the summer dawn.

Who pass untroubled nights and days

Full-fed and sleepily content,

Rejoicing in each other's praise,

Respectable and innocent.

Who feel the things that all men feel,

And think in well-worn grooves of thought,

Whose honest spirits never reel

Before man's mystery, overwrought.

Yet not unfaithful nor unkind,

with work-day virtues surely staid,

Theirs is the sane and humble mind,

And dull affections undismayed.

O happy people! I have seen

No verse yet written in your praise,

And, truth to tell, the time has been

I would have scorned your easy ways.

But now thro' weariness and strife

I learn your worthiness indeed,

The world is better for such life

As stout suburban people lead.

Too often have I sat alone

When the wet night falls heavily,

And fretting winds around me moan,

And homeless longing vexes me

For lore that I shall never know,

And visions none can hope to see,

Till brooding works upon me so

A childish fear steals over me.

I look around the empty room,

The clock still ticking in its place,

And all else silent as the tomb,

Till suddenly, I think, a face

Grows from the darkness just beside.

I turn, and lo! it fades away,

And soon another phantom tide

Of shifting dreams begins to play,

And dusky galleys past me sail,

Full freighted on a faerie sea;

I hear the silken merchants hail

Across the ringing waves to me

-Then suddenly, again, the room,

Familiar books about me piled,

And I alone amid the gloom,

By one more mocking dream beguiled.

And still no neared to the Light,

And still no further from myself,

Alone and lost in clinging night

-(The clock's still ticking on the shelf).

Then do I envy solid folk

Who sit of evenings by the fire,

After their work and doze and smoke,

And are not fretted by desire.

### Part III The Escape

#### XXV. Song of the Pilgrims

O Dwellers at the back of the North Wind,

What have we done to you? How have we sinned

Wandering the Earth from Orkney unto Ind ?

With many deaths our fellowship is thinned,

Our flesh is withered in the parching wind,

Wandering the earth from Orkney unto Ind.

We have no rest. We cannot turn again

Back to the world and all her fruitless pain,

Having once sought the land where ye remain.

Some say ye are not. But, ah God! we know

That somewhere, somewhere past the Northern snow

Waiting for us the red-rose gardens blow:

-The red-rose and the white-rose gardens blow

In the green Northern land to which we go,

Surely the ways are long and the years are slow.

We have forsaken all things sweet and fair,

We have found nothing worth a moment's care

Because the real flowers are blowing there.

Land of the Lotus fallen from the sun,

Land of the Lake from whence all rivers run,

Land where the hope of all our dreams is won!

Shall we not somewhere see at close of day

The green walls of that country far away,

And hear the music of her fountains play?

So long we have been wandering all this while

By many a perilous sea and drifting isle,

We scarce shall dare to look thereon and smile.

Yea, when we are drawing very near to thee,

And when at last the ivory port we see

Our hearts will faint with mere felicity:

But we shall wake again in gardens bright

Of green and gold for infinite delight,

Sleeping beneath the solemn mountains white,

While from the flowery copses still unseen

Sing out the crooning birds that ne'er have been

Touched by the hand of winter frore and lean;



And ever living queens that grow not old

And poets wise in robes of faerie gold

Whisper a wild, sweet song that first was told

Ere God sat down to make the Milky Way.

And in those gardens we shall sleep and play

For ever and for ever and a day.

Ah, Dwellers at the back of the North Wind,

What have we done to you? How have we sinned,

That yes should hide beyond the Northern wind?

Land of the Lotus, fallen from the Sun,

When shall your hidden, flowery vales be won

And all the travail of our way be done?

Very far we have searched; we have even seen  
The Scythian waste that bears no soft nor green,  
And near the Hideous Pass our feet have been.

We have heard Syrens singing all night long  
Beneath the unknown stars their lonely song  
In friendless seas beyond the Pillars strong.

Nor by the dragon-daughter of Hypocras  
Nor the vale of the Devil's head we have feared to pass,  
Yet is our labour lost and vain, alas!

Scouring the earth from Orkney unto Ind,  
Tossed on the seas and withered in the wind,  
We seek and seek your land. How have we sinned?

Or is it all a folly of the wise,

Bidding us walk these ways with blinded eyes

While all around us real flowers arise?

But, by the very God, we know, we know

That somewhere still, beyond the Northern snow

Waiting for us the red-rose gardens blow.

XXVI. Song

Faeries must be in the woods

Or the satyrs' laughing broods-

Tritons in the summer sea,

Else how could the dead things be

Half so lovely as they are?

How could wealth of star on star

Dusted o'er the frosty night

Fill thy spirit with delight

And lead thee from this care of thine

Up among the dreams divine,

Were it not that each and all

Of them that walk the heavenly hall

Is in truth a happy isle,

Where eternal meadows smile,

And golden globes of fruit are seen

Twinkling through the orchards green;

Were the Other People go

On the bright sward to and fro?

Atoms dead could never thus

Stir the human heart of us

Unless the beauty that we see

The veil of endless beauty be,

Filled full of spirits that have trod

Far hence along the heavenly sod

And see the bright footprints of God.

#### XXVII. The Ass

I woke and rose and slipt away

To the heathery hills in the morning grey.

In a field where the dew lay cold and deep

I met an ass, new-roused from sleep.

I stroked his nose and I tickled his ears,

And spoke soft words to quiet his fears.

His eyes stared into the eyes of me

And he kissed my hands of his courtesy.

"O big, brown brother out of the waste,

How do thistles for breakfast taste?

"And do you rejoice in the dawn divine

With a heart that is glad no less than mine?

"For, brother, the depth of your gentle eyes

Is strange and mystic as the skies:

"What are the thoughts that grope behind,

Down in the mist of a donkey mind?

"Can it be true, as the wise men tell,

That you are a mask of God as well,

"And, as in us, so in you no less

Speaks the eternal Loveliness,

"And words of the lips that all things know

Among the thoughts of a donkey go?

"However it be, O four-foot brother,

Fair to-day is the earth, our mother.

"God send you peace and delight thereof,

And all green meat of the waste you love,

"And guard you well from violent men

Who'd put you back in the shafts again."

But the ass had far too wise a head

To answer one of the things I said,

So he twitched his fair ears up and down

And turned to nuzzle his shoulder brown.

#### XXVIII. Ballade Mystique

The big, red-house is bare and lone

The stony garden waste and sere



With blight of breezes ocean blown

To pinch the wakening of the year;

My kindly friends with busy cheer

My wretchedness could plainly show.

They tell me I am lonely here-

What do they know? What do they know?

They think that while the gables moan

And easements creak in winter drear

I should be piteously alone

Without the speech of comrades dear;

And friendly for my sake they fear,

It grieves them thinking of me so

While all their happy life is near-

What do they know? What do they know?

That I have seen the Dagda's throne

In sunny lands without a tear

And found a forest all my own

To ward with magic shield and spear,

Where, through the stately towers I rear

For my desire, around me go

Immortal shapes of beauty clear:

They do not know, they do not know.

L'Envoi

The friends I have without a peer

Beyond the western ocean's glow,

Whither the faerie galleys steer,

They do not know: how should they know?

XXIX. Night

I know a little Druid wood

Where I would slumber if I could

And have the murmuring of the stream

To mingle with a midnight dream,

And have the holy hazel trees

To play above me in the breeze,

And smell the thorny eglantine;

For there the white owls all night long

In the scented gloom divine

Hear the wild, strange, tuneless song

Of faerie voices, thin and high

As the bat's unearthly cry,

And the measure of their shoon

Dancing, dancing, under the moon,

Until, amid the pale of dawn

The wandering stars begin to swoon. . . .

Ah, leave the world and come away!

The windy folk are in the glade,

And men have seen their revels, laid

In secret on some flowery lawn

Underneath the beechen covers,

Kings of old, I've heard them say,

Here have found them faerie lovers

That charmed them out of life and kissed

Their lips with cold lips unafraid,

And such a spell around them made

That they have passed beyond the mist

And found the Country-under-wave. . . .

Kings of old, whom none could save!

XXX. Oxford

It is well that there are palaces of peace

And discipline and dreaming and desire,

Lest we forget our heritage and cease

The Spirit's work-to hunger and aspire:

Lest we forget that we were born divine,

Now tangled in red battle's animal net,

Murder the work and lust the anodyne,

Pains of the beast 'gainst bestial solace set.

But this shall never be: to us remains

One city that has nothing of the beast,

That was not built for gross, material gains,

Sharp, wolfish power or empire's gluttoned feast.

We are not wholly brute. To us remains

A clean, sweet city lulled by ancient streams,

A place of visions and of loosening chains,

A refuge of the elect, a tower of dreams.

She was not builded out of common stone

But out of all men's yearning and all prayer

That she might live, eternally our own,

The Spirit's stronghold-barred against despair.

XXXI. Hymn (For Boys' Voices)

All the things magicians do

Could be done by me and you

Freely, if we only knew.

Human children every day

Could play at games the faeries play

If they were but shown the way.

Every man a God would be

Laughing through eternity

If as God's his eyes could see.

All the wizardries of God-

Slaying matter with a nod,

Charming spirits with his rod,

With the singing of his voice

Making lonely lands rejoice,

Leaving us no will nor choice,

Drawing headlong me and you

As the piping Orpheus drew

Man and beast the mountains through,

By the sweetness of his horn

Calling us from lands forlorn

Nearer to the widening morn-

All that loveliness of power



Could be man's peculiar dower,

Even mine, this very hour;

We should reach the Hidden Land

And grow immortal out of hand,

If we could but understand!

We could revel day and night

In all power and all delight

If we learn to think aright.

XXXII. "Our Daily Bread"

We need no barbarous words nor solemn spell

To raise the unknown. It lies before our feet;

There have been men who sank down into Hell

In some suburban street,

And some there are that in their daily walks

Have met archangels fresh from sight of God,

Or watched how in their beans and cabbage-stalks

Long files of faerie trod.

Often me too the Living voices call

In many a vulgar and habitual place,

I catch a sight of lands beyond the wall,

I see a strange god's face.

And some day this work will work upon me so

I shall arise and leave both friends and home

And over many lands a pilgrim go

Through alien woods and foam,

Seeking the last steep edges of the earth

Whence I may leap into that gulf of light

Wherein, before my narrowing Self had birth,

Part of me lived aright.

### XXXIII. How He Saw Angus the God

I heard the swallow sing in the eaves and rose

All in a strange delight while others slept,

And down the creaking stair, alone, tip-toes,

So carefully I crept.

The house was dark with silly blinds yet drawn,

But outside the clean air was filled with light,

And underneath my feet the cold, wet lawn

With dew was twinkling bright.

The cobwebs hung from every branch and spray

Gleaming with pearly strands of laden thread,

And long and still the morning shadows lay

Across the meadows spread.

At that pure hour when yet no sound of man,

Stirs in the whiteness of the wakening earth,

Alone through innocent solitudes I ran

Singing aloud for mirth.

Till I had found the open mountain heath

Yellow with gorse, and rested there and stood

To gaze upon the misty sea beneath,

Or on the neighbouring wood,

-That little wood of hazel and tall pine

And youngling fir, where oft we have loved to see

The level beams of early morning shine

Freshly from tree to tree.

Through the denser wood there's many a pool

Of deep and night-born shadow lingers yet

Where the new-wakened flowers are damp and cool

And the long grass is wet.

In the sweet heather long I rested there

Looking upon the dappled, early sky,

When suddenly, from out the shining air

A god came flashing by.

Swift, naked, eager, pitilessly fair,

With a live crown of birds about his head,

Singing and fluttering, and his fiery hair,

Far out behind him spread,

Streamed like a rippling torch upon the breeze

Of his own glorious swiftness: in the grass

He bruised no feathery stalk, and through the trees

I saw his whiteness pass.

But when I followed him beyond the wood,

Lo! He was changed into a solemn bull

That there upon the open pasture stood

And browsed his lazy full.

#### XXXIV. The Roads

I stand on the windy uplands among the hills of Down

With all the world spread out beneath, meadow and sea and town,

And ploughlands on the far-off hills that glow with friendly brown.

And ever across the rolling land to the far horizon line,

Where the blue hills border the misty west, I see the white roads twine,

The rare roads and the fair roads that call this heart of mine.

I see them dip in the valleys and vanish and rise and bend

From shadowy dell to windswept fell, and still to the West they wend,

And over the cold blue ridge at last to the great world's uttermost end.

And the call of the roads is upon me, a desire in my spirit has grown

To wander forth in the highways, 'twixt earth and sky alone,

And seek for the lands no foot has trod and the seas no sail has known:

For the lands to the west of the evening and east of the morning's birth,

Where the gods unseen in their valleys green are glad at the ends of the earth

And fear no morrow to bring them sorrow, nor night to quench their mirth.

XXXV. Hesperus

Through the starry hollow

Of the summer night

I would follow, follow



Hesperus the bright,

To seek beyond the western wave

His garden of delight.

Hesperus the fairest

Of all gods that are,

Peace and dreams thou bearest

In thy shadowy car,

And often in my evening walks

I've blessed thee from afar.

Stars without number,

Dust the noon of night,

Thou the early slumber

And the still delight

Of the gentle twilit hours

Rulest in thy right.

When the pale skies shiver,

Seeing night is done,

Past the ocean-river,

Lightly thou dost run,

To look for pleasant, sleepy lands,

That never fear the sun.

Where, beyond the waters

Of the outer sea,

Thy triple crown of daughters

That guards the golden tree

Sing out across the lonely tide

A welcome home to thee.

And while the old, old dragon

For joy lifts up his head,

They bring thee forth a flagon

Of nectar foaming red,

And underneath the drowsy trees

Of poppies strew thy bed.

Ah! that I could follow

In thy footsteps bright,

Through the starry hollow

Of the summer night,

Sloping down the western ways

To find my heart's delight!

XXXVI. The Star Bath

A place uplifted towards the midnight sky  
Far, far away among the mountains old,  
A treeless waste of rocks and freezing cold,  
Where the dead, cheerless moon rode neighbouring by-  
And in the midst a silent tarn there lay,  
A narrow pool, cold as the tide that flows  
Where monstrous bergs beyond Varanger stray,  
Rising from sunless depths that no man knows;  
Thither as clustering fireflies have I seen  
At fixed seasons all the stars come down  
To wash in that cold wave their brightness clean  
And win the special fire wherewith they crown  
The wintry heavens in frost. Even as a flock  
Of falling birds, down to the pool they came.  
I saw them and I heard the icy shock  
Of stars engulfed with hissing of faint flame

-Ages ago before the birth of men

Or earliest beast. Yet I was still the same

That now remember, knowing not where or when.

XXXVII. Tu Ne Quaesieris

For all the lore of Lodge and Myers

I cannot heal my torn desires,

Nor hope for all that man can speer

To make the riddling earth grow clear.

Though it were sure and proven well

That I shall prosper, as they tell,

In fields beneath a different sun

By shores where other oceans run,

When this live body that was I

Lies hidden from the cheerful sky,  
Yet what were endless lives to me  
If still my narrow self I be  
And hope and fail and struggle still,  
And break my will against God's will,  
To play for stakes of pleasure and pain  
And hope and fail and hope again,  
Deluded, thwarted, striving elf  
That through the window of my self  
As through a dark glass scarce can see  
A warped and masked reality?  
But when this searching thought of mine  
Is mingled in the large Divine,  
And laughter that was in my mouth  
Runs through the breezes of the South,  
When glory I have built in dreams  
Along some fiery sunset gleams,

And my dead sin and foolishness

Grow one with Nature's whole distress,

To perfect being I shall win,

And where I end will Life begin.

### XXXVIII. Lullaby

Lullaby! Lullaby!

There's a tower strong and high

Built of oak and brick and stone,

Stands before a wood alone.

The doors are of the oak so brown

As any ale in Oxford town,

The walls are builded warm and thick

Of the old red Roman brick,

The good grey stone is over all

In arch and floor of the tower tall.

And maidens three are living there

All in the upper chamber fair,

Hung with silver, hung with pall,

And stories painted on the wall.

And softly goes the whirring loom

In my ladies' upper room,

For they shall spin both night and day

Until the stars do pass away.

But every night at evening.

The window open wide they fling,

And one of them says a word they know

And out as three white swans they go,

And the murmuring of the woods is drowned

In the soft wings' whirring sound,

As they go flying round, around,



Singing in swans' voices high

A lonely, lovely lullaby.

XXXIX. World's Desire

Love, there is a castle built in a country desolate,

On a rock above a forest where the trees are grim and great,

Blasted with the lightning sharp-giant boulders strewn between,

And the mountains rise above, and the cold ravine

Echoes to the crushing roar and thunder of a mighty river

Raging down a cataract. Very tower and forest quiver

And the grey wolves are afraid and the call of birds is drowned,

And the thought and speech of man in the boiling water's sound.

But upon the further side of the barren, sharp ravine

With the sunlight on its turrets is the castle seen,

Calm and very wonderful, white above the green

Of the wet and waving forest, slanted all away,

Because the driving Northern wind will not rest by night or day.

Yet the towers are sure above, very mighty is the stead,

The gates are made of ivory, the roofs of copper red.

Round and round the warders grave walk upon the walls for ever

And the wakeful dragons couch in the ports of ivory,

Nothing is can trouble it, hate of the gods nor man's endeavour,

And it shall be a resting-place, dear heart, for you and me.

Through the wet and waving forest with an age-old sorrow laden

Singing of the world's regret wanders wild the faerie maiden,

Through the thistle and the brier, through the tangles of the thorn,

Till her eyes be dim with weeping and her homeless feet are torn.

Often to the castle gate up she looks with vain endeavour,

For her soulless loveliness to the castle winneth never.

But within the sacred court, hidden high upon the mountain,

Wandering in the castle gardens lovely folk enough there be,

Breathing in another air, drinking of a purer fountain

And among that folk, beloved, there's a place for you and me.

#### XL. Death in Battle

Open the gates for me,

Open the gates of the peaceful castle, rosy in the West,

In the sweet dim Isle of Apples over the wide sea's breast,

Open the gates for me!

Sorely pressed have I been

And driven and hurt beyond bearing this summer day,

But the heat and the pain together suddenly fall away,

All's cool and green.

But a moment agone,

Among men cursing in fight and toiling, blinded I fought,

But the labour passed on a sudden even as a passing thought,

And now-alone!

Ah, to be ever alone,

In flowery valleys among the mountains and silent wastes untrod,

In the dewy upland places, in the garden of God,

This would atone!

I shall not see

The brutal, crowded faces around me, that in their toil have grown

Into the faces of devils-yea, even as my own-

When I find thee,

O Country of Dreams!

Beyond the tide of the ocean, hidden and sunk away,

Out of the sound of battles, near to the end of day,

Full of dim woods and streams.

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext of Spirits in Bondage, by C. S. Lewis