

Classic Poetry Series

Francis William Bourdillon
- poems -

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Francis William Bourdillon(22 March 1852 – 13 January 1921)

Francis William Bourdillon was a British poet and translator.

Life

Born in Runcorn, Cheshire, grew up at Woolbeding Rectory, near Midhurst, and deeply loved the area, and later built for himself and his family the house nearby, called 'Buddington'.

He was educated at Worcester College, Oxford. He acted as tutor to the sons of Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein. Later he did tutoring for the University of Eastbourne, and lived in Eastbourne, and near Midhurst, Sussex.

He is known mostly for his poetry, and in particular the single short poem *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes*. He in fact had many collections published, from *Among The Flowers, And Other Poems* (1878) to *Gerard and Isabel: a Romance in Form of Cantefable* (1921), and including *a Chryseis*, and *Preludes and Romances* (1908).

In 1896 he published *Nephel *, a romantic novel. He translated *Aucassin et Nicolette* as *Aucassin and Nicolet* (1887), wrote a scholarly work *The Early Editions of the Roman de la Rose* (1906), *Russia Reborn* (1917), and published a number of essays with the Religious Tract Society.

A Spring Evening

Across the Glory of the glowing skies,
A veil is drawn of shadowed mists that rise
From lavishness from God's late gift. the rain.

So, after farewell said, fond memories
Of words and looks, now over, come again
Across the glowing heart, a veil of pain.

Francis William Bourdillon

A Violinist

THE LARK above our heads doth know
A heaven we see not here below;
She sees it, and for joy she sings;
Then falls with ineffectual wings.

Ah, soaring soul! faint not nor tire!
Each heaven attained reveals a higher.
Thy thought is of thy failure; we
List raptured, and thank God for thee.

Francis William Bourdillon

All's Well

Watchman, watchman, what of the night,
What of the night to tell?
The heavens are dark, and never a light
But the far-off flicker of Hell.
But the steed is in the stall,
Unsleeping;
And the warder on the wall,
Watch-keeping;
And the granary is stored,
And ready gun and sword.
In the name of the Lord,
All's Well!

Watchman, watchman, what of the night,
What of the night to tell?
The wind blows fierce, and the foam flies white,
And the waters moan and swell.
But the foes to haven keep,
Safe hiding;
And our ships are on the deep,
Sure riding;
And the gallant hearts on board
Keep ceaseless watch and ward.
In the name of the Lord,
All's Well!

Watchman, watchman, what of the night,
What of the night to tell?
There are widows weeping, and babes affright,
And a ceaseless burial bell.
But the hand that holds the gun
Still shakes not;
And the line drops one by one,
Yet breaks not.
Of the blood so nobly poured
There shall surely be reward.
In the name of the Lord,

All's Well

Francis William Bourdillon

Christmas Roses

White-faced Winter Roses,
O'er the grave I plant you
Where the dead reposes,
That a soul may haunt you,
And your ghostly whiteness
In the Winter gloom,
Seem some spirit-brightness
Shining from the tomb!

Francis William Bourdillon

Drought

For rain, for rain the parched lands cry,
Reproachful to the cloudless sky.
The hot white fields in light are blinking,
The rivers in their beds are shrinking.

For rest, for rest the weary cry
That watch from dark to dawn the sky;
A little sleep their limbs are craving,
A little rest from ceaseless raving.

God gives in His good time the rain,
And sends the sick man peace for pain;
But while we wait His gracious sending,
Alas! the sad days seem unending.

Yet, when the evening comes, the dew
Brings to the fields a fragrance new;
And loving smiles at day's returning
Will soothe awhile the sick man's yearning.

Francis William Bourdillon

Eurydice

HE came to call me back from death
To the bright world above.
I hear him yet with trembling breath
Low calling, "O sweet love!
Come back! The earth is just as fair;
The flowers, the open skies are there;
Come back to life and love!"

Oh! all my heart went out to him,
And the sweet air above.
With happy tears my eyes were dim;
I called him, "O sweet love!
I come, for thou art all to me.
Go forth, and I will follow thee,
Right back to life and love!"

I followed through the cavern black;
I saw the blue above.
Some terror turned me to look back:
I heard him wail, "O love!
What hast thou done! What hast thou done!"
And then I saw no more the sun,
And lost were life and love.

Francis William Bourdillon

Excelsior

If one should strive to reach a star,
He would not build a ladder high,
Seek foot by foot to climb so far,
And step by step ascend the sky;

But he would seek the wild bird's wings,
The secret of the lightning's play,
Leap out upon the night's blue rings,
And hail at dawn his wished-for day.

I will not vainly seek to thee
By ladder-steps of wealth or fame,
Till some few feet below me be
The world, thy distance still the same.

But I will seek that influence
By which all nature's marvels move,
Till I, by flash or flight from hence,
Win to thee as on wings of Love.

Francis William Bourdillon

Here And There

'HERE'

Soft benediction of September sun;
Voices of children, laughing as they run;
Green English lawns, bright flowers and butterflies;
And over all the blue embracing skies.

'THERE'

Tumult and roaring of the incessant gun;
Dead men and dying, trenches lost and won;
Blood, mud, and havoc, bugles, shoutings, cries;
And over all the blue embracing skies.

Francis William Bourdillon

Night

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies,
When love is done.

Francis William Bourdillon

Old And Young

LONG ago, on a bright spring day,
I passed a little child at play;
And as I passed, in childish glee
She called to me, "Come and play with me!"

But my eyes were fixed on a far-off height
I was fain to climb before the night;
So, half-impatient, I answered, "Nay!
I am too old, too old to play."

Long, long after, in Autumn time—
My limbs were grown too old to climb—
I passed a child on a pleasant lea,
And I called to her, "Come and play with me!"

But her eyes were fixed on a fairy-book;
And scarce she lifted a wondering look,
As with childish scorn she answered, "Nay!
I am too old, too old to play!"

Francis William Bourdillon

On The South Downs

Light falls the rain
On link and laine,
After the burning day;
And the bright scene,
Blue, gold, and green,
Is blotted out in gray.

Not so will part
The glowing heart
With sunny hours gone by;
On cliff and hill
There lingers still
A light that cannot die.

Like a gold crown
Gorse decks the Down,
All sapphire lies the sea;
And incense sweet
Springs as our feet
Tread light the thymy lea.

Fade, vision bright!
Fall rain, fall night!
Forget, gray world, thy green!
For us, nor thee,
Can all days be
As though this had not been!

Francis William Bourdillon

Only To Live

Only to live! There nothing is more sweet.
Only to live! There nothing is more bitter.
Only to live, when flowers are at the feet
And overhead the happy swallows twitter.
Only to live! There nothing is more sweet.
Only to live, when flies the angry sleet,
And the head bows above a dead love's litter.
Only to live! There nothing is more bitter.

Francis William Bourdillon

Sonnet I

Oft had I felt, like pure Endymion,
Such love for the sweet moon, that I had well
Believed her able on earth to love and dwell
With whatso man she set her love upon;
But as I wandered once when day was done
Beside the murmuring, moon-lit ocean-swell,
Sudden thy silent beauty on me shone,
Fair as the moon had give thee all her spell.
Then, as Endymion had found on earth,
In unchanged beauty but in fashion changed,
Her whom I loved so long; so felt I then,
Not that a new love in my heart had birth,
But that the old, that far from reach had ranged,
Was now on earth, and to be loved of men.

Francis William Bourdillon

Sonnet II

As strong, as deep, as wide as is the sea,
Though by the wind made restless as the wind,
By billows fretted and by rocks confined,
So strong, so deep, so wide my love for thee.
And as the sea; though oft huge waves arise,
So oft that calms can never quite assuage,
So huge that ocean's whole self seems to rage;
Yet tranquil, deep, beneath the tempest lies:
So my great love for thee lies tranquil, deep,
Forever; though above it passions fierce,
Ambition, hatred, jealousy; like waves
That seem from earth's core to the sky to leap,
But ocean's depths can never really pierce;
Hide its great calm, while all the surface raves.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Acorn

An acorn swung
On an oak-tree bough;
So long it had hung,
It would fain fall now
To the kindly earth,
That its germ within
Might burst into birth,
And its life begin.

And the autumn came
With its burning hand,
And each leaf grew a flame,
And each bough a brand.
And a worm came up
And began to eat
Though the hard, dry cup
To the acorn sweet.

And the acorn thought,
"I shall soon see now
The life I have sought,
When I fall from the bough;
For the worm gnaws through
Each tendon slight,
That about me grew,
And bound me tight."

And with dying day
Came the zephyr's sound;
And the acorn lay
Next morn on the ground;
But its germ was gone
By the worm's sharp teeth;
And the ground it had won
Was its grave in death.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Call

Hark! 'tis the rush of the horses,
The crash of the galloping gun!
The stars are out of their courses;
The hour of Doom has begun.
Leap from thy scabbard, O sword!
Leap! 'Tis the Day of the Lord!
Prate not of peace any longer,
Laughter and idlesse and ease!
Up, every man that is stronger!
Leave but the priest on his knees!
Quick, every hand to the hilt!
Who striketh not—his the guilt!
Call not each man on his brother!
Cry not to Heaven to save!
Thou art the man—not another—
Thou, to off glove and out glaive!
Fight, ye who ne'er fought before!
Fight, ye old fighting-men more!

Francis William Bourdillon

The Chantry Of The Cherubim

O CHANTRY of the Cherubim,
Down-looking on the stream!
Beneath thy boughs the day grows dim;
Through windows comes the gleam;
A thousand raptures fill the air,
Beyond delight, beyond despair.

I will not name one flower that clings
In cluster at my feet!
I will not hail one bird that sings
Its anthem loud or sweet!
This is the floor of Heaven, and these
The angels that God's ear do please.

I walk as one unclothed of flesh,
I wash my spirit clean;
I see old miracles afresh,
And wonders yet unseen.
I will not leave Thee till Thou give
Some word whereby my soul may live!

I listened—but no voice I heard;
I looked—no likeness saw;
Slowly the joy of flower and bird
Did like a tide withdraw;
And in the heaven a silent star
Smiled on me, infinitely far.

I buoyed me on the wings of dream,
Above the world of sense;
I set my thought to sound the scheme,
And fathom the Immense;
I tuned my spirit as a lute
To catch wind-music wandering mute.

Yet came there never voice nor sign;
But through my being stole
Sense of a Universe divine,
And knowledge of a soul

Perfected in the joy of things,
The star, the flower, the bird that sings.

Nor I am more, nor less, than these;
All are one brotherhood;
I and all creatures, plants, and trees,
The living limbs of God;
And in an hour, as this, divine,
I feel the vast pulse throb in mine.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Debt Unpayable

What have I given,
Bold sailor on the sea?
In earth or heaven,
That you should die for me?

What can I give,
O soldier, leal and brave,
Long as I live,
To pay the life you gave?

What tithe or part
Can I return to thee,
O stricken heart,
That thou shouldst break for me?

The wind of Death
For you has slain life's flowers,
It withereth
(God grant) all weeds in ours.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Heart Cry

She turned the page of wounds and death
With trembling fingers. In a breath
The gladness of her life became
Naught but a memory and a name.

Farewell! Farewell! I might not share
The perils it was yours to dare.
Dauntless you fronted death: for me
Rests to face life as fearlessly.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Home Of My Heart

Not here in the populous town,
In the playhouse or mart,
Not here in the ways gray and brown,
But afar on the green-swelling down,
Is the home of my heart.

There the hillside slopes down to a dell
Whence a streamlet has start;
There are woods and sweet grass on the swell,
And the south winds and west know it well:
'Tis the home of my heart.

There's a cottage o'ershadowed by leaves
Growing fairer than art,
Where under the low sloping eaves -
No false hand the swallow bereaves:
'Tis the home of my heart.

And there as you gaze down the lea,
Where the trees stand apart,
Over grassland and woodland may be
You will catch the faint gleam of the sea
From the home of my heart.

And there in the rapturous spring,
When the morning rays dart
O'er the plain, and the morning birds sing,
You may see the most beautiful thing
In the home of my heart;

For there at the casement above,
Where the rosebushes part,
Will blush the fair face of my love:
Ah, yes I It is this that will prove
'Tis the home of my heart.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Night Has A Thousand Eyes

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one:
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When love is done.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Piper

The dews were on the hedges,
The mist was on the mead,
When down among the sedges
I wrought my pipe of reed.
I blew my pipe with power.
Men only cursed the sound
That woke them when the hour
Brought back their labor's round.

The scythe was in the barley,
The sickle in the wheat;
The pipe I made so early
Had lost its tones so sweet.
And weary man and maiden,
Upon the glowing soil,
My reed-pipe fell upbraiding
That lightened not their toil.

The men had left their mowing,
The maids to bind the sheaves;
I took me for my blowing
A wheatstraw stripped of leaves.
And cares all ceased to cumber,
No voice was now upraised;
I piped them all to slumber,
And in their dreams was praised.

Francis William Bourdillon

The Regions Of Love

Who knows the deeps, where the water sleeps
Leagues from the light away?
Who knows the heights, where myriad lights
Fill heaven with endless day?

The earth goes on—seeks and loses the sun,
And men in the changes delight;
Love whirls us away into changeless day,
Or whelms us in changeless night.

Francis William Bourdillon

Two Robbers

When Death from some fair face
Is stealing life away,
All weep, save she, the grace
That earth shall lose today.

When Time from some fair face
Steals beauty year by year,
For her slow-fading grace
Who sheds, save she, a tear?

And Death not often dares
To wake the world's distress;
While Time, the cunning, mars
Surely all loveliness.

Yet though by breath and breath
Fades all thy fairest prime,
Men shrink from cruel Death,
But honor crafty Time.

Francis William Bourdillon