

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Frederick William (FW) Harvey**

**- 21 poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

### **Frederick William (FW) Harvey (26 March 1888 – 13 February 1957)**

Frederick William Harvey was an English poet, known for poems composed in prisoner-of-war camps at Krefeld and Gütersloh that were sent back to England, during World War I.

He was born in Hartpury, Gloucestershire. He was educated at the King's School, Gloucester, where he formed a close friendship with Ivor Gurney, and then at Rossall School. Gurney and Herbert Howells, another local composer, would set a number of his poems to music.

He started on a legal career, which would always be somewhat tentative. He became a Roman Catholic convert in 1914, and shortly after joined the Gloucestershire Regiment as a private soldier, as World War I broke out.

Serving in France, he was awarded the D. C. M. in 1915, and returned to England for officer training. He was captured behind the German lines in 1916, where he began to write more seriously.

He returned home in 1919, and married in 1921. He did not enjoy any sustained success as a writer, and never fully settled.

#### Works:

A Gloucestershire Lad At Home and Abroad (1916)  
Gloucestershire Friends (1917)  
Ducks (1919)  
Comrades in Captivity: a record of life in seven German prison camps (1920)  
(war memoirs)  
Farewell (1921)  
September and Other Poems (1925)  
In Pillowell Woods (1926)  
Forest Offering  
Gloucestershire (1947)

## **A Christmas Wish**

I CAN NOT give you happiness :  
For wishes long have ceased to bring  
The Fortune which to page and king  
They brought in those good centuries,  
When with a quaint and starry wand  
Witches turned poor men's thoughts to gold  
And Cinderella's carriage rolled  
Through moonlight into Fairyland.

I may but wish you happiness :  
Not Pleasure's dusty fruit to hnd,  
But wines of Mirth and Friendship kind,  
And Love, to make with you a home.  
But may Our Lord whose Son has come  
Now heed the wish and make it true,  
Even as elves were wont to do  
When wishing could bring happiness.

Frederick William (FW) Harvey

## **A Rondel of Gloucestershire**

Big glory mellowing on the mellowing hills,  
And in the Uttle valleys, thatch and dreams,  
Wrought by the manifold and vagrant wills  
Of sun and ripening rain and wind ; so gleams  
My country, that great magic cup which spills  
Into my mind a thousand thousand streams  
Of glory mellowing on the mellowing hills  
And in the httle valleys, thatch and dreams.

O you dear heights of blue no ploughman tiUs,  
O valleys where the curling mist upsteams  
White over fields of trembhng daffodils.  
And you old dusty little water-mills.  
Through all my life, for joy of you, sweet thrills  
Shook me, and in my death at last there beams  
Big glory mellowing on the mellowing hills  
And in the Uttle valleys, thatch and dreams.

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## **Autumn in Prison**

Here where no tree changes,  
Here in a prison of pine,

I think how Autumn ranges  
The country that is mine.

There — rust upon the chill breeze—  
The woodland leaf now whirls ;

There sway the yellowing birches  
Like dainty dancing girls.

Oh, how the leaves are dancing  
With Death at Lassington !

And Death is now enhancing  
Beauty I walked upon.

The roads with leaves are Uttered,  
Yellow, brown, and red.

The homes where robins twittered  
Lie ruin ; but instead

Gaunt arms of stretching giants  
Stand in the azure air,

Cutting the sky in pattern  
So common, yet so fair,

The heart is kindled by it.  
And lifted as with wine.

In Lassington and Highnam—  
The woodlands that were mine,

Frederick William (FW) Harvey

## **Ballad of Army Pay**

In general, if you want a man to do a dangerous  
job : —  
Say, swim the Channel, climb St. Paul's, or break  
into and rob  
The Bank of England, why, you find his wages  
must be higher  
Than if you merely wanted him to Fight the kitchen  
fire.  
But in the British Army, it's just the other  
way.  
And the maximum of danger means the minimum  
of pay.

You put some men inside a trench, and call them  
infantrie,  
And make them face ten kinds of hell, and face it  
cheerfully ;  
And hve in holes Uke rats, with other rats, and  
hce, and toads,  
And in their leisure time, assist the R.E.'s with  
their loads.  
Then, when they've done it all, you give 'em each  
a bob a day !  
For the maximum of danger means the minimum  
of pay.

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We won't run down the A.S.C., nor yet the  
R.T.O.  
They ration and direct us on the way we've got  
to go.  
They're very useful people, and it's pretty plain

to see  
We couldn't do without 'em, nor yet the

A.P.C.  
But comparing risks and wages, — I think they all  
will say  
That the maximum of danger means the minimum  
of pay.

There are men who make munitions — and seventy  
bob a week ;

They never see a lousy trench nor hear a big shell  
shriek ;

And others sing about the war at high-class music-  
halls

Getting heaps and heaps of money and encores  
from the stalls.

They ' keep the home fires burning ' and bright  
by night and day.

While the maximum of danger means the minimum  
of pay.

I wonder if it's harder to make big shells at a  
bench,  
Than to face the screaming beggars when they're  
crumping up a trench ;

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I wonder if it's harder to sing in mellow tones  
Of danger, than to face it — say, in a wood like  
Trone's ; \*

Is discipline skilled labour, or something children  
play ?

Should the maximum of danger mean the mini-  
mum of pay ?

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## Ballade

Bodies of comrade soldiers gleaming white  
Within the mill-pool where you float and dive

And lounge around part-clothed or naked quite;  
Beautiful shining forms of men alive,  
O living lutes stringed with the senses five

For Love's sweet fingers; seeing Fate afar,  
My very soul with Death for you must strive;

Because of you I loathe the name of War.

But O you piteous corpses yellow-black,

Rotting unburied in the sunbeam's light,  
With teeth laid bare by yellow Hps curled back

Most hideously; whose tortured souls took  
flight

Leaving your limbs, all mangled by the fight,  
In attitudes of horror fouler far

Than dreams which haunt a devil's brain at  
night;  
Because of you I loathe the name of War.

Mothers and maids who loved you, and the wives  
Bereft of your sweet presences; yea, all

Who knew you beautiful; and those small lives  
Made of that knowledge; O, and you who call

For life (but vainly now) from that dark hall  
Where wait the Unborn, and the loves which are

In future generations to befall;  
Because of you I loathe the name of War,

l'envoi

Prince Jesu, hanging stark upon a tree

Crucified as the malefactors are  
That man and man henceforth should brothers be;

Because of you I loathe the name of War.

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## **Christmas in Prison**

Outside, white snow  
And freezing mire.  
The heart of the house  
Is a blazing fire !

Even so whatever hags do ride  
His outward fortune, withinside  
The heart of a man burns Christmastide !  
Frederick William (FW) Harvey

## Ducks

*(To E.M., Who drew them in Holzminden Prison)*

I

From troubles of the world I turn to ducks,  
Beautiful comical things  
Sleeping or curled  
Their heads beneath white wings  
By water cool,  
Or finding curious things  
To eat in various mucks  
Beneath the pool,  
Tails uppermost, or waddling  
Sailor-like on the shores  
Of ponds, or paddling  
- Left! Right! - with fanlike feet  
Which are for steady oars  
When they (white galleys) float  
Each bird a boat  
Rippling at will the sweet  
Wide waterway ...  
When night is fallen *you* creep  
Upstairs, but drakes and dillies  
Nest with pale water-stars.  
Moonbeams and shadow bars,  
And water-lilies:  
Fearful too much to sleep  
Since they've no locks  
To click against the teeth  
Of weasel and fox.  
And warm beneath  
Are eggs of cloudy green  
Whence hungry rats and lean  
Would stealthily suck  
New life, but for the mien  
The hold ferocious mien  
Of the mother-duck.

II

Yes, ducks are valiant things  
On nests of twigs and straws,  
And ducks are soothy things  
And lovely on the lake  
When that the sunlight draws  
Thereon their pictures dim  
In colours cool.  
And when beneath the pool  
They dabble, and when they swim  
And make their rippling rings,  
O ducks are beautiful things!  
But ducks are comical things:-

As comical as you.  
Quack!  
They waddle round, they do.  
They eat all sorts of things,  
And then they quack.  
By barn and stable and stack  
They wander at their will,  
But if you go too near  
They look at you through black  
Small topaz-tinted eyes  
And wish you ill.  
Triangular and clear  
They leave their curious track  
In mud at the water's edge,  
And there amid the sedge  
And slime they gobble and peer  
Saying 'Quack! quack!'

### III

When God had finished the stars and whirl of coloured suns  
He turned His mind from big things to fashion little ones;  
Beautiful tiny things (like daisies) He made, and then  
He made the comical ones in case the minds of men  
Should stiffen and become  
Dull, humourless and glum,  
And so forgetful of their Maker be  
As to take even themselves - quite seriously.  
Caterpillars and cats are lively and excellent puns:  
All God's jokes are good - even the practical ones!  
And as for the duck, I think God must have smiled a bit  
Seeing those bright eyes blink on the day He fashioned it.  
And he's probably laughing still at the sound that came out of its bill!

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## **In Flanders**

I'm homesick for my hills again -  
My hills again!  
To see above the Severn plain,  
Unscabbarded against the sky,  
The blue high blade of Cotswold lie;  
The giant clouds go royally  
By jagged Malvern with a train  
Of shadows. Where the land is low  
Like a huge imprisoning O  
I hear a heart that's sound and high,  
I hear the heart within me cry:  
'I'm homesick for my hills again -  
My hills again!  
Cotswold or Malvern, sun or rain!  
My hills again!'

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## **LONELINESS**

On Where's the use to write ?

What can I tell you, dear ?

Just that I want you so

Who are not near.

Just that I miss the lamp whose blessed light  
Was God's own moon to shine upon my night,  
And newly mourn each new day's lost delight  
Just — oh, it will not ease my pain —

That I am lonely

Until I see you once again,

You — you only.

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## **Solitary Confinement**

No mortal comes to visit me to-day,

Only the gay and early-rising Sun  
Who strolled in nonchalantly, just to say,

' Good morrow, and despair not, foolish one ! '  
But like the tune which comforted King Saul  
Sounds in my brain that sunny madrigal.

Anon the playful Wind arises, swells  
Into vague music, and departing, leaves

A sense of blue bare heights and tinkling bells,  
Audible silences which sound achieves

Through music, mountain streams, and hinted  
heather,

And drowsy flocks drifting in golden weather.

Lastly, as to my bed I turn for rest,  
Comes Lady Moon herself on silver feet

To sit with one white arm across my breast,  
Talking of elves and haunts where they do  
meet.

No mortal comes to see me, yet I say

' Oh, I have had fine visitors to-day ! '

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## Sonnet

Comrades of risk and rigour long ago  
Who have done battle under honour's name,  
Hoped (living or shot down) some meed of fame,  
And wooed bright Danger for a thrilling kiss, —  
Laugh, oh laugh well, that we have come to this !

Laugh, oh laugh loud, all ye who long ago  
Adventure found in gallant company !  
Safe in Stagnation, laugh, laugh bitterly.  
While on this filthiest backwater of Time's flow  
Drift we and rot, till something set us free !

Laugh like old men with senses atrophied,  
Heeding no Present, to the Future dead,  
Nodding quite foolish by the warm fireside  
And seeing no flame, but only in the red  
And flickering embers, pictures of the past : —  
Life like a cinder fading black at last.

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## **The Bond**

Once, I remember, when we were at home  
I had come into church, and waited late,  
Ere lastly kneeling to communicate  
Alone : and thinking that you would not come.

Then, with closed eyes (having received the Host)  
I prayed for your dear self, and turned to rise ;  
When lo ! beside me like a blessed ghost —  
Nay, a grave sunbeam — you I Scarcely my eyes  
Could credit it, so softly had you come  
Beside me as I thought I walked alone.

Thus long ago ; but now, when fate bereaves  
Life of old joys, how often as I'm kneeling  
To take the Blessed Sacrifice that weaves  
Life's tangled threads, so broken to man's seeing,  
Into one whole ; I have the sudden feeling  
That you are by, and look to see a face  
Made in fair flesh beside me, and all my being  
Thrills with the old sweet wonder and faint fear  
As in that sabbath hour — how long ago ! —  
When you had crept so lightly to your place.  
Then, then, I know  
(My heart can always tell) that you are near.

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## The Bugler

God dreamed a man;  
Then, having firmly shut  
Life like a precious metal in his fist  
Withdrew, His labour done. Thus did begin  
Our various divinity and sin.  
For some to ploughshares did the metal twist,  
And others—dreaming empires—straightway cut  
Crowns for their aching foreheads. Others beat  
Long nails and heavy hammers for the feet  
Of their forgotten Lord. (Who dares to boast  
That he is guiltless?) Others coined it: most  
Did with it—simply nothing. (Here again  
Who cries his innocence?) Yet doth remain  
Metal unmarred, to each man more or less,  
Whereof to fashion perfect loveliness.

For me, I do but bear within my hand  
(For sake of Him our Lord, now long forsaken)  
A simple bugle such as may awaken  
With one high morning note a drowsing man:  
That wheresoe'er within my motherland  
That sound may come, 'twill echo far and wide  
Like pipes of battle calling up a clan,  
Trumpeting men through beauty to God's side.

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## **The Hateful Road**

Oh pleasant things there be  
Without this prison yard :

Fields green, and many a tree  
With shadow on the sward,

And drifting clouds that pass

Saihng above the grass.

All lovely things that be

Beyond this strong abode  
Send comfort back to me ;  
Yea, everything I see

Except the hateful road ;  
The road that runs so free

With many a dip and rise,  
That waves and beckons me  
And mocks and calls at me  
And will not let me be

Even when I close my eyes.

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## THE OLDEST INHABITANT HEARS FAR OFF THE DRUMS OF DEATH

Sometimes 'tis far off, and sometimes 'tis nigh,  
Such drummerdery noises too they be !  
'Tis odd — oh, I do hope I baint to die  
Just as the summer months be coming on,  
And buffly chicken out, and bumble-bee :  
Though, to be sure, I cannot hear 'em plain  
For this drat row as goes a-drumming on.  
Just like a little soldier in my brain.

And oh, I've heard we got to go through flame  
And water-floods — but maybe 't isn't true !  
I alius were a-frightened o' the sea.  
And burning fires — oh, it would be a shame  
And all the garden ripe, and sky so blue.  
Such drummerdery noises, too, they be.

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## **To R.E.K.**

Dear, rash, warm-hearted friend.  
So careless of the end,  
So worldly-foolish, so divinely-wise,  
Who, caring not one jot  
For place, gave all you'd got  
To help your lesser fellow-men to rise.  
Swift-footed, fleeter yet  
Of heart. Swift to forget  
The petty spite that life or men could show you :  
Your last long race is won.  
But beyond the sound of gun  
You laugh and help men onward — if I know you.  
Oh still you laugh, and walk,  
And sing and frankly talk  
(To angels) of the matters that amused you  
In this bitter-sweet of life,  
And we who keep its strife,  
Take comfort in the thought how God has used  
you.

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## **To The Old Year**

Old year, farewell !

Much have you given which was ill to bear :  
Much have taken which was dear, so dear :  
Much have you spoken which was ill to hear ;  
Echoes of speech first uttered deep in hell.

Pass now like some grey harlot to the tomb !  
Yet die in child-birth, and from out your womb  
Leap the young year unsullied ! He perchance  
Shall bring to man his lost inheritance.

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## **To the Unknown Nurse**

Moth-like at night you flit or fly  
To where the other patients lie ;  
I hear, as you brush by my door  
The flutter of your wings, no more.

Shall I now call you in and see  
The phantom vanish instantly ?  
Perhaps some sixteen stone or worse.  
Suddenly falling through my verse !

Nay, be you sour, or be you sweet,  
I'd see you not. Life's wisdom is  
To keep one's dreams. Oh never quiz  
The lovely lady in the street !

I knew a man who went large-eyed  
And happy, till he bought pince-nez  
And saw things as they were. He died  
— A pessimist — the other day.

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## **To You, Unsung**

How should I sing you ? — you who dwell unseen  
Within the darkest chamber of my heart.  
What picturesque and inward-turning art

Could shadow forth the image of my queen.

Sweet, world aloof, ineffably serene  
Like holy dawn, yet so entirely part  
Of what am I, as well a man might start

To paint his breathing, or his red blood's sheen.

Nay, seek yourself, who are their truest breath,  
In these my songs made for delight of men.

Oh, where they fail, 'tis I that am in blame.  
But, where the words loom larger than my pen.  
Be sure they ring glad echoes of your name,  
And Love that triumphs over Life and Death.

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## Warning

A man there was, a gentle soul,  
Of mild enquiring mind,  
Who came into this neighbourhood  
Its wonders for to find [ ... ]

They told him who had put the lid  
On Lydney; who the ale  
Misspelt in Aylburton. And he  
Delighted in the tale.

And still, like little Oliver,  
He softly asked for more;  
And with the utmost courtesy  
Was answered as before.

Until one sleepy summer's eve  
He came all unaware  
Unto a place called Ruardean,  
And asked 'Who killed the bear?'

The man arose and punched him flat;  
Another punched his head,  
And when the rest had done with him  
Our gentle friend was dead.

The moral of this simple tale  
Is plain. Dear friend, beware!  
If you should visit Ruardean  
Don't mention any bear.

If you should climb to Yorkley Slad  
Pause not to question why  
They put a pig upon the wall  
To see the band go by.

And if your feet so far should stray  
As Dymock, lest some hurt  
Befall you, make no mention of  
The man without a shirt.

Nine lives have cats, and you but one:  
Risk not that gift of God!  
It's better to be ignorant  
Than dead beneath the sod.

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## **What we Think of**

Walking round our cages like the lions at the

Zoo,  
We think of things that we have done, and things

we mean to do :  
Of girls we left behind us, of letters that are due,  
Of boating on the river beneath a sky of blue,  
Of hills we climbed together — not always for the  
view.

Walking round our cages like the lions at the Zoo,

We see the phantom faces of you, and you, and  
you,

Faces of those we loved or loathed — oh every one  
we knew !

And deeds we wrought in carelessness for happi-  
ness or rue.

And dreams we broke in folly, and seek to build  
anew, —

Walking round our cages like the lions at the Zoo.

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