

Classic Poetry Series

Richard Corbet
- poems -

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Richard Corbet(1582 - 1635)

Was born in 1582, the son of a nurseryman at Ewell, Surrey. At Oxford, to which he proceeded from Westminster school in 1597, he was noted as a wit. On taking orders he continued to display this talent from the pulpit, and James I., in consideration of his "fine fancy and preaching," made him one of the royal chaplains. In 1620 he became vicar of Stewkley, Berkshire, and in the same year was made dean of Christchurch, Oxford. In 1628 he was made bishop of Oxford, and in 1632 translated thence to the see of Norwich. Corbet was the author of many poems, for the most part of a lively, satirical order, his most serious production being the Fairies' Farewell. His verses were first collected and published in 1647. His conviviality was famous, and many stories are told of his youthful merrymaking in London taverns in company with Ben Jonson, who always remained his close friend, and other dramatists. He died at Norwich on the 28th of July 1635.

Aan Elegie On Dr. Ravis, Bishop Of London

When I past Paul's, and travell'd in that vvalke
Where all our Britaine sinners svveare and talk,
And then beheld the body of my Lord
Trood under foote by vice that lie abhorr'd,
It wounded me, the Landlord of all times
Should let long lives and leases to their crimes,
And to his springing honour did afford
Scarce soe much time as to the prophet's gourd.
Yet, since swift flights of vertue have apt ends,
Like breath of angels, which a blessing sends,
And vanisheth withall, whilst fouler deeds
Expect a tedious harvest for bad seeds;
I blame not fame and nature if they gave,
Where they could give no more, their last, a grave.
And wisely doe thy grieved friends forbear
Bubbles and alabaster boyes to reare
On thy religious dust ; for men did know
Thy life, which such illusion cannot show;
For thou hast trod among those happy ones
Who trust not in their superscriptions,
Their hired epitaphs, and perjured stone,
Which oft belies the soul when she is gone;
And durst committ thy body as it lyes
To tongues of living men, nay, unborne eyes.
What profits thee a sheet of lead ? what good
If on thy corse a marble quarry stood ?
Let those that fear their rising purchase vaults,
And reare them statues to excuse their faults ;
As if, like birds that peck at painted grapes,
Their Judge knew not their persons from their shapes
Whilst thou assured, through thy easy dust
Shalt rise at first; they would not, though they must.

Richard Corbet

An Epitaph On Doctor Donne, Dean Of St. Paul's

He that would write an epitaph for thee,
And do it well, must first begin to be
Such as thou wert; for none can truly know
Thy worth, thy life, but he that hath lived so.
He must have wit to spare, and to hurl down;
Enough to keep the gallants of the town.
He must have learning plenty; both the laws,
Civil and common, to judge any cause;
Divinity, great store above the rest,
Not of the last edition, but the best.
He must have language, travel, all the arts,
Judgment to use, or else he want thy parts.
He must have friends the highest, able to do,
Such as Maecenas, and Augustus too.
He must have such a sickness, such a death,
Or else his vain descriptions come beneath.
Who then shall write an epitaph for thee,
He must be dead first! Let it alone, for me.

Richard Corbet

The Distracted Puritan

Am I mad, O noble Festus,
When zeal and godly knowledge
Have put me in hope
To deal with the Pope
As well as the best in the college?
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

In the house of pure Emanuel
I had my education,
Where my friends surmise
I dazel'd my eyes
With the sight of revelation.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

They hound me like a bedlam,
They lash'd my four poor quarters.
Whilst this I endure,
Faith makes me sure
To be one of Foxes martyrs.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

These injuries I suffer
Through antichrist's perswasion.
Take off this chain!
Neither Rome nor Spain
Can resist my strong invasion.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

Of the beast's ten horns (God bless us!)
I have knock'd off three already;
If they let me alone
I'll leave him none;
But they say I am too heady.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

When I sack'd the seven-hill'd city
I met the great red dragon;
I kept him aloof
With the armour of proof,
Though here I have never a rag on.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

With a fiery sword and target,
There fought I with this monster;
But the sons of pride
My zeal deride,
And all my deeds misconster.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

I un-hors'd the Whore of Babel
With the lance of Inspiration;
I made her stink,
And spill the drink,
In her cup of abomination.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

I have seen two in a vision

With a flying book between them.
I have been in despair
Five times in a year,
And been cur'd by reading Greenham.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

I observ'd in Perkins' tables
The black line of damnation;
Those crooked veins
So stuck in my brains,
That I fear'd my reprobation.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

In the holy tongue of Canaan
I plac'd my chiefest pleasure,
Till I prick'd my foot
With an Hebrew root
That I bled beyond all measure.
Boldly I preach, I hate a cross, hate a surplice,
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

I appear'd before the Archbishop
And all the high Commission;
I gave him no grace,
But told him to his face
That he favour'd superstition.
Boldly I preach, hate a cross, hate a surplice
Mitres, copes, and rochets!
Come hear me pray nine times a day,
And fill your heads with crotchets.

Richard Corbet

The Fairies Farewell

FAREWELL, rewards and fairies,
Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
Do fare as well as they.
And though they sweep their hearths no less
Than maids were wont to do,
Yet who of late for cleanness
Finds sixpence in her shoe?

Lament, lament, old Abbeys,
The Fairies' lost command!
They did but change Priests' babies,
But some have changed your land.
And all your children, sprung from thence,
Are now grown Puritans,
Who live as Changelings ever since
For love of your demains.

At morning and at evening both
You merry were and glad,
So little care of sleep or sloth
These pretty ladies had;
When Tom came home from labour,
Or Cis to milking rose,
Then merrily went their tabor,
And nimbly went their toes.

Witness those rings and roundelays
Of theirs, which yet remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days
On many a grassy plain;
But since of late, Elizabeth,
And later, James came in,
They never danced on any heath
As when the time hath been.

By which we note the Fairies
Were of the old Profession.
Their songs were 'Ave Mary's',

Their dances were Procession.
But now, alas, they all are dead;
Or gone beyond the seas;
Or farther for Religion fled;
Or else they take their ease.

A tell-tale in their company
They never could endure!
And whoso kept not secretly
Their mirth, was punished, sure;
It was a just and Christian deed
To pinch such black and blue.
Oh how the commonwealth doth want
Such Justices as you!

Richard Corbet

To His Son, Vincent Corbet

What I shall leave thee none can tell,
But all shall say I wish thee well:
I wish thee, Vin, before all wealth,
Both bodily and ghostly health;
Nor too much wealth, nor wit, come to thee,
So much of either may undo thee.
I wish thee learning, not for show,
Enough for to instruct and know,
Not such as gentlemen require
To prate at table or at fire.
I wish thee all thy mother's graces,
Thy father's fortunes, and his places.
I wish thee friends, and one at court,
Not to build on, but support,
To keep thee, not in doing many
Oppressions, but from suffering any.
I wish thee peace in all thy ways,
Nor lazy nor contentious days;
And when thy soul and body part,
As innocent as now thou art.

Richard Corbet