

Classic Poetry Series

**Francis Ledwidge**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# Francis Ledwidge(19 August 1887 – 31 July 1917)

Francis Edward Ledwidge was an Irish war poet from County Meath. Sometimes known as the "poet of the blackbirds", he was killed in action at the Battle of Passchendaele during World War I.

## <b>Early Life</b>

Ledwidge was born at Janeville, Slane, in Ireland, the eighth of nine children in a poverty-stricken family. His parents, Patrick Ledwidge (the Ledwidge family, from Shropshire, was granted land in Meath after the Norman invasion) and wife Anne Lynch (1853–1926), believed in giving their children the best education they could afford. But when Francis was only five his father Patrick died prematurely, which forced his wife and the children out to work at an early age. Francis left the local national school aged thirteen, and while he continued to self-educate himself, he worked at what work he could find, as farm hand, road mender and supervisor of roads, as copper miner (sacked for organising a strike having been a trade union activist since 1906) and shop assistant. Appointed secretary of the Slane branch of the Meath Labour Union (1913–14) he had aspirations of permanent white-collar work. His politics were nationalist as well as left-wing.

## <b>Young Poet</b>

Strongly built, with striking brown eyes and a sensuous face, Ledwidge was a keen poet writing where ever he could – sometimes even on gates or fence posts. From the age of fourteen his works were published in his local newspaper, the Drogheda Independent reflecting his passion for the Boyne Valley. While working as a road labourer he won the patronage of the writer, Lord Dunsany, after he wrote to him in 1912, enclosing copybooks of his early work. Dunsany, a man of letters already well-known in Dublin and London literary and dramatic circles, and whose own start in publishing had been with a few poems, promoted him in Dublin and introduced him to [W.B. Yeats](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-butler-yeats/) with whom he became acquainted.

Dunsany supported Ledwidge with money and literary advice for some years, providing him with access to and a workspace in Dunsany Castle's Library where he met the Irish writer Katharine Tynan, corresponding with her regularly. Dunsany later prepared his first collection of poetry Songs of the Fields, which successfully appealed to the expectations of the Irish Literary Revival and its social taste for rural poetry.

## <b>Home Rule and World War I</b>

Ledwidge was a keen patriot and nationalist. His efforts to found a branch of the Gaelic League in Slane were thwarted by members of the local council. The area organiser encouraged him to continue his struggle, but Francis gave up. He did manage to act as a founding member with his brother Joseph of the Slane Branch of the Irish Volunteers (1914), a nationalist force sworn to defend the introduction of Home Rule for Ireland, by force if need be.

On the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, and on account of Ireland's involvement in the war, the Irish Volunteers split into two factions, the National Volunteers who supported John Redmond's appeal to join Irish regiments in support of the Allied war cause and those who did not. Francis was originally of the latter party. Nevertheless, having defended this position strongly at a local authority meeting, he enlisted (24 October 1914) in Lord Dunsany's regiment, joining 5th battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, part of the 10th (Irish) Division. This was against the urgings of Dunsany who opposed his enlistment and had offered him a stipend to support him if he stayed away from the war. Some have speculated that he went to war because his sweetheart Ellie Vaughey had found a new lover, John O'Neill, whom she later married, but Ledwidge himself wrote, and forcefully, that he could not stand aside while others sought to defend Ireland's freedom.

## <b>Poetry and War</b>

Ledwidge seems to have fitted into Army life well, and rapidly achieved promotion to lance corporal. In 1915, he saw action at Suvla Bay in the Dardanelles, where he suffered severe rheumatism. Having survived huge losses sustained by his company in the Battle of Gallipoli, he became ill after a back injury on a tough mountain journey in Serbia (December 1915), a locale which inspired a number of poems.

Ledwidge was dismayed by the news of the Easter Rising, and was court-martialled and demoted for overstaying his home leave and being drunk in uniform (May 1916). He gained and lost stripes over a period in Derry (he was a corporal when the introduction to his first book was written), and then, returned to the front, received back his lance corporal's stripe one last time in January 1917 when posted to the Western Front, joining 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, part of 29th Division.

Ledwidge continued to write when feasible throughout the war years, though he

lost much work, for example, in atrocious weather in Serbia. He sent much of his output to Lord Dunsany, himself moving on war assignments, as well as to readers among family, friends and literary contacts.

On 31 July 1917, a group from Ledwidge's battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were road-laying in preparation for an assault during the Third Battle of Ypres, near the village of Boezinge, northwest of Ieper (Ypres). While Ledwidge was drinking tea in a mud hole with his comrades, a shell exploded alongside, killing the poet and five others. A chaplain who knew him, Father Devas, arrived soon after, and recorded "Ledwidge killed, blown to bits."

The poems Ledwidge wrote on active service revealed his pride at being a soldier, as he believed, in the service of Ireland. He wondered whether he would find a soldier's death. The dead were buried at Carrefour de Rose, and later re-interred in the nearby Artillery Wood Military Cemetery, Boezinge, (where the Welsh poet Hedd Wyn, killed on the same day, is also buried). A stone tablet commemorates him in the Island of Ireland Peace Park, Messines, Belgium. His work as "peasant poet" and "soldier poet", once a standard part of the Irish school curriculum, faded from view for many decades of the 20th century. Its intensity, coupled with a revived interest in his period, has restored it to life.

#### **Publications and Reception**

Much of Ledwidge's work was published in newspapers and journals in Ireland and the UK. The only work published in book form during Ledwidge's lifetime was the original *Songs of the Fields* (1915), which was very well received. The critic Edward Marsh printed three of the poems in the Georgian Poetry series, and remained a correspondent for the remainder of Ledwidge's life. A second volume, *Songs of Peace* was in preparation when Ledwidge died; patron and friend Lord Dunsany wrote the introduction while both were in Derry in September 1916.

Following the war, Dunsany arranged for more of Ledwidge's work to be published, first in a third and final new volume, *Last Songs*, and then later in an anthology in 1919; he commented on the work with words such as:

*"[I was] astonished by the brilliance of that eye and that had looked at the fields of Meath and seen there all the simple birds and flowers, with a vividness which made those pages like a magnifying glass, through which one looked at familiar things for the first time."*

Some of Ledwidge's poetry was put to music by the British Composer and songwriter Michael Head, most notably in the very well received song cycle published

in 1920, "Over the rim of the moon". This includes the well-known song, "The Ships of Arcady".

**Quotes**

*Oh what a pleasant world 'twould be,  
How easy we'd step thro' it,  
If all the fools who meant no harm,  
Could manage not to do it!*

- From a personal letter.

*He shall not hear the bittern cry  
in the wild sky, where he is lain,  
Nor voices of the sweeter birds  
Above the wailing of the rain*

*Nor shall he know when the loud March blows  
Thro' slanting snows her fanfare shrill,  
Blowing to flame the golden cup  
Of many an upset daffodil.*

*But when the dark cow leaves the moor  
And pastures poor with greedy weeds  
Perhaps he'll hear her low at morn  
Lifting her horn in pleasant meads.*

- Lament for Thomas MacDonagh

**Documentary film**

Ledwidge was the subject of an RTÉ documentary entitled *Behind the Closed Eye*, first broadcast on January 18, 1973. It won awards for Best Story and Best Implementation Documentary at the Golden Prague International Television Festival.

# A Fairy Hunt

Who would hear the fairy horn  
Calling all the hounds of Finn  
Must be in a lark's nest born  
When the moon is very thin.

I who have the gift can hear  
Hounds and horn and tally ho,  
And the tongue of Bran as clear  
As Christmas bells across the snow.

And beside my secret place  
Hurries by the fairy fox,  
With the moonrise on his face,  
Up and down the mossy rocks.

Then the music of a horn  
And the flash of scarlet men,  
Thick as poppies in the corn  
All across the dusky glen.

Oh! the mad delight of chase!  
Oh ! the shouting and the cheer !  
Many an owl doth leave his place  
In the dusty tree to hear.

Francis Ledwidge

# A Little Boy In The Morning

He will not come, and still I wait.  
He whistles at another gate  
Where angels listen. Ah I know  
He will not come, yet if I go  
How shall I know he did not pass  
barefooted in the flowery grass?

The moon leans on one silver horn  
Above the silhouettes of morn,  
And from their nest-sills finches whistle  
Or stooping pluck the downy thistle.  
How is the morn so gay and fair  
Without his whistling in its air?  
The world is calling, I must go.  
How shall I know he did not pass  
Barefooted in the shining grass?

Francis Ledwidge

# A Mother's Song

Little ships of whitest pearl  
With sailors who were ancient kings,  
Come over the sea when my little girl  
Sings.

And if my little girl should weep,  
Little ships with torn sails  
Go headlong down among the deep  
Whales.

Francis Ledwidge



# A Rainy Day In April

When the clouds shake their hyssops, and the rain  
Like holy water falls upon the plain,  
'Tis sweet to gaze upon the springing grain  
And see your harvest born.

And sweet the little breeze of melody  
The blackbird puffs upon the budding tree,  
While the wild poppy lights upon the lea  
And blazes 'mid the corn.

The skylark soars the freshening shower to hail,  
And the meek daisy holds aloft her pail.  
And Spring all radiant by the wayside pale  
Sets up her rock and reel.

See how she weaves her mantle fold on fold,  
Hemming the woods and carpeting the wold.  
Her warp is of the green, her woof the gold,  
The spinning world her wheel.

Francis Ledwidge

# A Soldier's Grave

Then in the lull of midnight, gentle arms  
Lifted him slowly down the slopes of death  
Lest he should hear again the mad alarms  
Of battle, dying moans, and painful breath.

And where the earth was soft for flowers we made  
A grave for him that he might better rest.  
So, Spring shall come and leave it set arrayed,  
And there the lark shall turn her dewy nest

Francis Ledwidge

# Aarstiderne

Francis Ledwidge

# After Court Martial

My mind is not my mind, therefore  
I take no heed of what men say,  
I lived ten thousand years before  
God cursed the town of Nineveh.

The Present is a dream I see  
Of horror and loud sufferings,  
At dawn a bird will waken me  
Unto my place among the kings.

And though men called me a vile name,  
And all my dream companions gone,  
Tis I the soldier bears the shame,  
Not I the king of Babylon.

Francis Ledwidge

# Ardan Mór

AS I was climbing Ardan Mór  
From the shore of Sheelin lake,  
I met the herons coming down  
Before the water's wake.

And they were talking in their flight  
Of dreamy ways the herons go  
When all the hills are withered up  
Nor any waters flow.

Francis Ledwidge

## At A Poet's Grave

When I leave down this pipe my friend  
And sleep with flowers I loved, apart,  
My songs shall rise in wilding things  
Whose roots are in my heart.

And here where that sweet poet sleeps  
I hear the songs he left unsung,  
When winds are fluttering the flowers  
And summer-bells are rung.

Francis Ledwidge

# At Currabwee

Every night at Currabwee  
Little men with leather hats  
Mend the boots of Faery  
From the tough wings of the bats.  
So my mother told to me,  
And she is wise you will agree. .

Louder than a cricket's wing  
All night long their hammer's glee  
Times the merry songs they sing  
Of Ireland glorious and free.  
So I heard Joseph Plunkett say,  
You know he heard them but last May.

And when the night is very cold  
They warm their hands against the light  
Of stars that make the waters gold  
Where they are labouring all the night.  
So Pearse said, and he knew the truth,  
Among the stars he spent his youth.

And I, myself, have often heard  
Their singing as the stars went by,  
For am I not of those who reared  
The banner of old Ireland high,  
From Dublin town to Turkey's shores,  
And where the Vardar loudly roars?

Francis Ledwidge

# Autumn

Now leafy winds are blowing cold,  
And South by West the sun goes down,  
A quiet huddles up the fold  
In sheltered corners of the brown.

Like scattered fire the wild fruit strews  
The ground beneath the blowing tree,  
And there the busy squirrel hews  
His deep and secret granary.

And when the night comes starry clear,  
The lonely quail complains beside  
The glistening waters on the mere  
Where widowed Beauties yet abide.

And I, too, make my own complaint  
Upon a reed I plucked in June,  
And love to hear it echoed faint  
Upon another heart in tune.

Francis Ledwidge



# Behind The Closed Eye

I walk the old frequented ways  
That wind around the tangled braes,  
I live again the sunny days  
Ere I the city knew.

And scenes of old again are born,  
The woodbine lassoing the thorn,  
And drooping Ruth-like in the corn  
The poppies weep the dew.

Above me in their hundred schools  
The magpies bend their young to rules,  
And like an apron full of jewels  
The dewy cobweb swings.

And frisking in the stream below  
The troutlets make the circles flow,  
And the hungry crane doth watch them grow  
As a smoker does his rings.

Above me smokes the little town,  
With its whitewashed walls and roofs of brown  
And its octagon spire toned smoothly down  
As the holy minds within.

And wondrous impudently sweet,  
Half of him passion, half conceit,  
The blackbird calls adown the street  
Like the piper of Hamelin.

I hear him, and I feel the lure  
Drawing me back to the homely moor,  
I'll go and close the mountain's door  
On the city's strife and din.

Francis Ledwidge

## Ceol Sidhe

When May is here, and every morn  
Is dappled with pied bells,  
And dewdrops glance along the thorn  
And wings flash in the dells,  
I take my pipe and play a tune  
Of dreams, a whispered melody,  
For feet that dance beneath the moon  
In fairy jollity.

And when the pastoral hills are grey  
And the dim stars are spread,  
A scamper fills the grass like play  
Of feet where fairies tread.  
And many a little whispering thing  
Is calling the Shee.  
The dewy bells of evening ring,  
And all is melody.

Francis Ledwidge

# Dawn

Quiet miles of golden sky,  
And in my heart a sudden flower.  
I want to clap my hands and cry  
For Beauty in her secret bower.

Quiet golden miles of dawn—  
Smiling all the East along ;  
And in my heart nigh fully blown,  
A little rose-bud of a song.

Francis Ledwidge

# Fairies

Maiden-poet, come with me  
To the heaped up cairn of Maeve,  
And there we'll dance a fairy dance  
Upon a fairy's grave.

In and out among the trees,  
Filling all the night with sound,  
The morning, strung upon her star,  
Shall chase us round and round.

What are we but fairies too,  
Living but in dreams alone,  
Or, at the most, but children still,  
Innocent and overgrown ?

Francis Ledwidge

## Had I A Golden Pound (After The Irish)

Had I a golden pound to spend,  
My love should mend and sew no more.  
And I would buy her a little quern,  
Easy to turn on the kitchen floor.

And for her windows curtains white,  
With birds in flight and flowers in bloom,  
To face with pride the road to town,  
And mellow down her sunlit room.

And with the silver change we'd prove  
The truth of Love to life's own end,  
With hearts the years could but embolden,  
Had I a golden pound to spend.

Francis Ledwidge

## In A Cafe

Kiss the maid and pass her round,  
Lips like hers were made for many.  
Our loves are far from us to-night,  
But these red lips are sweet as any.

Let no empty glass be seen  
Aloof from our good table's sparkle,  
At the acme of our cheer  
Here are francs to keep the circle.

They are far who miss us most-  
Sip and kiss -how well we love them,  
Battling through the world to keep  
Their hearts at peace, their God above them.

Francis Ledwidge

# In France

THE silence of maternal hills  
Is round me in my evening dreams;  
And round me music-making rills  
And mingling waves of pastoral streams.

Whatever way I turn I find  
The path is old unto me still.  
The hills of home are in my mind,  
And there I wander as I will.

Francis Ledwidge

# Ireland

I called you by sweet names by wood and linn,  
You answered not because my voice was new,  
And you were listening for the hounds of Finn  
And the long hosts of Lugh.

And so, I came unto a windy height  
And cried my sorrow, but you heard no wind,  
For you were listening to small ships in flight,  
And the wail on hills behind.

And then I left you, wandering the war  
Armed with will, from distant goal to goal,  
To find you at the last free as of yore,  
Or die to save your soul.

And then you called to us from far and near  
To bring your crown from out the deeps of time,  
It is my grief your voice I couldn't hear  
In such a distant clime.

Francis Ledwidge



# June

Broom out the floor now, lay the fender by,  
And plant this bee-sucked bough of woodbine there,  
And let the window down. The butterfly  
Floats in upon the sunbeam, and the fair  
Tanned face of June, the nomad gipsy, laughs  
Above her widespread wares, the while she tells  
The farmers' fortunes in the fields, and quaffs  
The water from the spider-peopled wells.  
The hedges are all drowned in green grass seas,  
And bobbing poppies flare like Elmo's light,  
While siren-like the pollen-stained bees  
Drone in the clover depths. And up the height  
The cuckoo's voice is hoarse and broke with joy.  
And on the lowland crops the crows make raid,  
Nor fear the clappers of the farmer's boy,  
Who sleeps, like drunken Noah, in the shade  
And loop this red rose in that hazel ring  
That snares your little ear, for June is short  
And we must joy in it and dance and sing,  
And from her bounty draw her rosy worth.  
Ay! soon the swallows will be flying south,  
The wind wheel north to gather in the snow,  
Even the roses spilt on youth's red mouth  
Will soon blow down the road all roses go.

Francis Ledwidge

# Lady Fair

Lady fair, have we not met  
In our lives elsewhere ?  
Darkling in my mind to-night  
Faint fair faces dare  
Memory's old unfaithfulness  
To what was true and fair.  
Long of memory is Regret,  
But what Regret has taken flight  
Through my memory's silences ?  
Lo ! I turn it to the light.  
'Twas but a pleasure in distress,  
Too faint and far off for redress.  
But some light glancing in your hair  
And in the liquid of your eyes  
Seem to murmur old good-byes  
In our lives elsewhere.  
Have we not met. Lady fair ?

Francis Ledwidge

# Lament For The Poets: 1916

I heard the Poor Old Woman say:  
"At break of day the fowler came,  
And took my blackbirds from their songs  
Who loved me well thro' shame and blame

No more from lovely distances  
Their songs shall bless me mile by mile,  
Nor to white Ashbourne call me down  
To wear my crown another while.

With bended flowers the angels mark  
For the skylark the place they lie,  
From there its little family  
Shall dip their wings first in the sky.

And when the first surprise of flight  
Sweet songs excite, from the far dawn  
Shall there come blackbirds loud with love,  
Sweet echoes of the singers gone.

But in the lovely hush of eve  
Weeping I grieve the silent bills"  
I heard the Poor Old Woman say  
In Derry of the little hills.

Francis Ledwidge

# Lament For Thomas Mcdonagh

He shall not hear the bittern cry  
In the wild sky, where he is lain,  
Nor voices of the sweeter birds,  
Above the wailing of the rain.

Nor shall he know when loud March blows  
Thro' slanting snows her fanfare shrill,  
Blowing to flame the golden cup  
Of many an upset daffodil.

But when the Dark Cow leaves the moor  
And pastures poor with greedy weeds  
Perhaps he'll hear her low at morn  
Lifting her horn in pleasant meads.

Francis Ledwidge

# My Mother

God made my mother on an April day,  
From sorrow and the mist along the sea,  
Lost birds' and wanderers' songs and ocean spray,  
And the moon loved her wandering jealously.

Beside the ocean's din she combed her hair,  
Singing the nocturne of the passing ships,  
Before her earthly lover found her there  
And kissed away the music from her lips.

She came unto the hills and saw the change  
That brings the swallow and the geese in turns.  
But there was not a grief she deemed strange,  
For there is that in her which always mourns.

Kind heart she has for all on hill or wave  
Whose hopes grew wings like ants to fly away.  
I bless the God Who such a mother gave  
This poor bird-hearted singer of a day.

Francis Ledwidge

# Old Clo

I was just coming in from the garden,  
Or about to go fishing for eels,  
And, smiling, I asked you to pardon  
My boots very low at the heels.  
And I thought that you never would go,  
As you stood in the doorway ajar,  
For my heart would keep saying, 'Old Clo',  
You're found out at last as you are.'

I was almost ashamed to acknowledge  
That I was the quarry you sought,  
For was I not bred in a college  
And reared in a mansion, you thought.  
And now in the latest style cut  
With fortune more kinder I go  
To welcome you half-ways. Ah ( but  
I was nearer the gods when ' Old Clo'.'

Francis Ledwidge

# Pan

He knows the safe ways and unsafe  
And he will lead the lambs to fold,  
Gathering them with his merry pipe,  
The gentle and the overbold.

He counts them over one by one,  
And leads them back by cliff and steep,  
To grassy hills where dawn is wide,  
And they may run and skip and leap.

And just because he loves the lambs  
He settles them for rest at noon,  
And plays them on his oaten pipe  
The very wonder of a tune.

Francis Ledwidge

# Soliloquy

When I was young I had a care  
Lest I should cheat me of my share  
Of that which makes it sweet to strive  
For life, and dying still survive,  
A name in sunshine written higher  
Than lark or poet dare aspire.

But I grew weary doing well.  
Besides, 'twas sweeter in that hell,  
Down with the loud banditti people  
Who robbed the orchards, climbed the steeple  
For jackdaws' eyes and made the cock  
Crow ere 'twas daylight on the clock.  
I was so very bad the neighbours  
Spoke of me at their daily labours.

And now I'm drinking wine in France,  
The helpless child of circumstance.  
To-morrow will be loud with war,  
How will I be accounted for?

It is too late now to retrieve  
A fallen dream, too late to grieve  
A name unmade, but not too late  
To thank the gods for what is great;  
A keen-edged sword, a soldier's heart,  
Is greater than a poet's art.  
And greater than a poet's fame  
A little grave that has no name.

Francis Ledwidge



# Spring

Once more the lark with song and speed  
Cleaves through the dawn, his hurried bars^;  
Fall, like the flute of Ganymede  
Twirling and whistling from the stars.

The primrose and the daffodil  
Surprise the valleys, and wild thyme  
Is sweet on every little hill,  
When lambs come down at folding time.

In every wild place now is heard  
The magpie's noisy house, and through  
The mingled tunes of many a bird  
The ruffled wood-dove's gentle coo.

Sweet by the river's noisy brink  
The water-lily bursts her crown,  
The kingfisher comes down to drink  
Like rainbow jewels falling down.

And when the blue and grey entwine  
The daisy shuts her golden eye,  
And peace wraps all those hills of mine  
Safe in my dearest memory.

Francis Ledwidge

# Spring And Autumn

Green ripples singing down the corn,  
With blossoms dumb the path I tread,  
And in the music of the morn  
One with wild roses on her head.

Now the green ripples turn to gold  
And all the paths are loud with rain,  
I with desire am growing old  
And full of winter pain.

Francis Ledwidge

# Spring Love

I saw her coming through the flowery grass,  
Round her swift ankles butterfly and bee  
Blent loud and silent wings ; I saw her pass  
Where foam-bows shivered on the sunny sea.

Then came the swallow crowding up the dawn,  
And cuckoo-echoes filled the dewy South.  
I left my love upon the hill, alone,  
My last kiss burning on her lovely mouth.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Call To Ireland

We have fought so much for the nation  
In the tents we helped to divide;  
Shall the cause of our common fathers  
On our earthstones lie denied?  
For the price of a field we have wrangled  
While the weather rusted the plow,  
'twas yours and 'twas mine and 'tis ours yet  
And it's time to be fencing it now.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Dead Kings

All the dead kings came to me  
At Rosnaree, where I was dreaming.  
A few stars glimmered through the morn,  
And down the thorn the dews were streaming.

And every dead king had a story  
Of ancient glory, sweetly told.  
It was too early for the lark,  
But the starry dark had tints of gold.

I listened to the sorrows three  
Of that Eire passed into song.  
A cock crowed near a hazel croft,  
And up aloft dim larks winged strong.

And I, too, told the kings a story  
Of later glory, her fourth sorrow:  
There was a sound like moving shields  
In high green fields and the lowland furrow.

And one said : ' We who yet are kings  
Have heard these things lamenting inly.'  
Sweet music flowed from many a bill  
And on the hill the morn stood queenly.

And one said : ' Over is the singing,  
And bell bough ringing, whence we come ;  
With heavy hearts we'll tread the shadows,  
In honey meadows birds are dumb.'

And one said : ' Since the poets perished  
And all they cherished in the way,  
Their thoughts unsung, like petal showers  
Inflame the hours of blue and gray.'

And one said : ' A loud tramp of men  
We'll hear again at Rosnaree.'  
A bomb burst near me where I lay.

I woke, 'twas day in Picardy.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Find

I took a reed and blew a tune,  
And sweet it was and very clear  
To be about a little thing  
That only few hold dear.

Three times the cuckoo named himself,  
But nothing heard him on the hill,  
Where I was piping like an elf  
The air was very still.

'Twas all about a little thing  
I made a mystery of sound,  
I found it in a fairy ring  
Upon a fairy mound.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Lanawn Shee

Powdered and perfumed the full bee  
Winged heavily across the clover,  
And where the hills were dim with dew,  
Purple and blue the west leaned over.

A willow spray dipped in the stream,  
Moving a gleam of silver ringing,  
And by a finny creek a maid  
Filled all the shade with softest singing.

Listening, my heart and soul at strife,  
On the edge of life I seemed to hover,'  
For I knew my love had come at last,  
That my joy was past and my gladness over.

I tiptoed gently up and stooped  
Above her looped and shining tresses,  
And asked her of her kin and name,  
And why she came from fairy places.

She told me of a sunny coast  
Beyond the most adventurous sailor,  
Where she had spent a thousand years  
Out of the fears that now assail her.

And there, she told me, honey drops  
Out of the tops of ash and willow,  
And in the mellow shadow Sleep  
Doth sweetly keep her poppy pillow.

Nor Autumn with her brown line marks  
The time of larks, the length of roses,  
But song-time there is over never  
Nor flower-time ever, ever closes.

And wildly through uncurling ferns  
Fast water turns down valleys singing,  
Filling with scented winds the dales,



Setting the bells of sleep a-ringing.

And when the thin moon lowly sinks, '  
Through cloudy chinks a silver glory  
Lingers upon the left of night  
Till dawn delights the meadows hoary.

And by the lakes the skies are white,  
(Oh, the delight!) when swans are coming,  
Among the flowers sweet joy-bells peal,  
And quick bees wheel in drowsy humming\*

The squirrel leaves her dusty house  
And in the boughs makes fearless gambol,  
And, falling down in fire-drops, red,  
The fruit is shed from every bramble.

Then, gathered all about the trees  
Glad galaxies of youth are dancing,  
Treading the perfume of the flowers,  
Filling the hours with mazy glancing.

And when the dance is done, the trees  
Are left to Peace and the brown woodpecker,  
And on the western slopes of sky  
The day's blue eye begins to flicker.

But at the sighing of the leaves,  
When all earth grieves for lights departed  
An ancient and a sad desire  
Steals in to tire the human-hearted.

No fairy aid can save them now  
Nor turn their prow upon the ocean,  
The hundred years that missed each heart  
Above them start their wheels in motion.

And so our loves are lost, she sighed,  
And far and wide we seek new treasure,  
For who on Time or Timeless hills  
Can live the ills of loveless leisure ?

(' Fairer than Usna's youngest son,  
O, my poor one, what flower-bed holds you?  
Or, wrecked upon the shores of home,  
What wave of foam with white enfolds you ?

' You rode with kings on hills of green,  
And lovely queens have served you banquet,  
Sweet wine from berries bruised they brought  
And shyly sought the lips which drank it.

' But in your dim grave of the sea  
There shall not be a friend to love you.  
And ever heedless of your loss  
The earth ships cross the storms above you.

' And still the chase goes on, and still  
The wine shall spill, and vacant places  
Be given over to the new  
As love untrue keeps changing faces.

' And I must wander with my song  
Far from the young till Love returning,  
Brings me the beautiful reward  
Of some heart stirred by my long yearning.')

Friend, have you heard a bird lament  
When sleet is sent for April weather ?  
As beautiful she told her grief,  
As down through leaf and flower I led her.

And friend, could I remain unstirred  
Without a word for such a sorrow ?  
Say, can the lark forget the cloud  
When poppies shroud the seeded furrow ?

Like a poor widow whose late grief  
Seeks for relief in lonely byeways,  
The moon, companionless and dim,  
Took her dull rim through starless highways.

I was too weak with dreams to feel  
Enchantment steal with guilt upon me,  
She slipped, a flower upon the wind,  
And laughed to find how she had won me.

From hill to hill, from land to land,  
Her lovely hand is beckoning for me,  
I follow on through dangerous zones,  
Cross dead men's bones and oceans stormy.

Some day I know she'll wait at last  
And lock me fast in white embraces,  
And down mysterious ways of love  
We two shall move to fairy places.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Little Children

Hunger points a bony finger  
To the workhouse on the hill,  
But the little children linger  
While there's flowers to gather still  
For my sunny window sill.

In my hands I take their faces,  
Smiling to my smiles they run.  
Would that I could take their places  
Where the murky bye-ways shun  
The benedictions of the sun

How they laugh and sing returning  
Lightly on their secret way.  
While I listen in my yearning  
Their laughter fills the windy day  
With gladness, youth and May.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Lost Ones

Somewhere is music from the linnets' bills,  
And thro' the sunny flowers the bee-wings drone,  
And white bells of convolvulus on hills  
Of quiet May make silent ringing, blown  
Hither and thither by the wind of showers,  
And somewhere all the wandering birds have flown;  
And the brown breath of Autumn chills the flowers.

But where are all the loves of long ago?  
O little twilight ship blown up the tide,  
Where are the faces laughing in the glow  
Of morning years, the lost ones scattered wide  
Give me your hand, O brother, let us go  
Crying about the dark for those who died.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Rushes

The rushes nod by the river  
As the winds on the loud waves go,  
And the things they nod of are many,  
For it's many the secret they know.

And I think they are wise as the fairies  
Who lived ere the hills were high,  
They nod so grave by the river  
To everyone passing by.

If they would tell me their secrets  
[: I would go by a hidden way,  
To the rath when the moon retiring  
Dips dim horns into the gray.

And a fairy-girl out of Leinster  
In a long dance I should meet,  
My heart to her heart beating,  
My feet in rhyme with her feet.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Shadow People

Old lame Bridget doesn't hear  
Fairy music in the grass  
When the gloaming's on the mere  
And the shadow people pass:  
Never hears their slow grey feet  
Coming from the village street  
Just beyond the parson's wall,  
Where the clover globes are sweet  
And the mushroom's parasol  
Opens in the moonlit rain.  
Every night I hear them call  
From their long and merry train.  
Old lame Bridget says to me,  
"It is just your fancy, child."  
She cannot believe I see  
Laughing faces in the wild,  
Hands that twinkle in the sedge  
Bowing at the water's edge  
Where the finny minnows quiver,  
Shaping on a blue wave's ledge  
Bubble foam to sail the river.  
And the sunny hands to me  
Beckon ever, beckon ever.  
Oh! I would be wild and free,  
And with the shadow people be.

Francis Ledwidge

# The Sylph

I saw you and I named a flower  
That lights with blue a woodland space,  
I named a bird of the red hour  
And a hidden fairy place.

And then I saw you not, and knew  
Dead leaves were whirling down the mist,  
And something lost was crying through -  
An evening of amethyst.

Francis Ledwidge



# The Wife Of Llew

And Gwydion said to Math, when it was Spring:  
"Come now and let us make a wife for Llew."  
And so they broke broad boughs yet moist with dew,  
And in a shadow made a magic ring:  
They took the violet and the meadow-sweet  
To form her pretty face, and for her feet  
They built a mound of daisies on a wing,  
And for her voice they made a linnets sing  
In the wide poppy blowing for her mouth.  
And over all they chanted twenty hours.  
And Llew came singing from the azure south  
And bore away his wife of birds and flowers.

Francis Ledwidge

# Thoughts At The Trysting Stile

Come, May, and hang a white flag on each thorn,  
Make truce with earth and heaven; the April child  
Now hides her sulky face deep in the morn  
Of your new flowers by the water wild  
And in the ripples of the rising grass,  
And rushes bent to let the south wind pass  
On with her tumult of swift nomad wings,  
And broken domes of downy dandelion.  
Only in spasms now the blackbird sings.  
The hour is all a-dream.

Nets of woodbine  
Throw woven shadows over dreaming flowers,  
And dreaming, a bee-luring lily bends  
Its tender bell where blue dyke-water cowers  
Thro' briars and folded ferns, and gripping ends  
Of wild convolvulus.

The lark's sky-way  
Is desolate.  
I watch an apple-spray  
Beckon across a wall as if it knew  
I wait the calling of the orchard maid.  
Inly I fell she will come in blue,  
With yellow on her hair, and two curls strayed  
Out of her comb's loose stocks, and I shall steal  
Behind and lay my hands upon her eyes,  
'Look not, but be my Psyche! '

And her peal  
Of laughter will ring far, and as she tries  
For freedom I will call her names of flowers  
That climb up walls; then thro' the twilight hours  
We'll talk about the loves of ancient queens,  
And kisses like wasp-honey, false and sweet,  
And how we are entangled in love's snares  
Like wind-looped flowers.



# To A Sparrow

Because you have no fear to mingle  
Wings with those of greater part,  
So like me, with song I single  
Your sweet impudence of heart.

And when prouder feathers go where  
Summer holds her leafy show,  
You still come to us from nowhere  
Like grey leaves across the snow.

In back ways where odd and end go  
To your meals you drop down sure,  
Knowing every broken window  
Of the hospitable poor.

There is no bird half so harmless,  
None so sweetly rude as you,  
None so common and so charmless,  
None of virtues nude as you.

But for all your faults I love you,  
For you linger with us still,  
Though the wintry winds reprove you  
And the snow is on the hill.

Francis Ledwidge

# To An Old Quill Of Lord Dunsany's

Before you leave my hands' abuses  
To lie where many odd things meet you,  
Neglected darkling of the Muses,  
I, the last of singers, greet you.

Snug in some white wing they found you,  
On the Common bleak and muddy,  
Noisy goslings gobbling round you .  
In the pools of sunset, ruddy.

Have you sighed in wings untravelled  
For the heights where others view the  
Bluer widths of heaven, and marvelled  
At the utmost top of Beauty ?

No ! it cannot be ; the soul you  
Sigh with craves nor begs of us.  
From such heights a poet stole you  
From a wing of Pegasus.

You have been where gods were sleeping  
In the dawn of new creations,  
Ere they woke to woman's weeping  
At the broken thrones of nations.

You have seen this old world shattered  
By old gods it disappointed,  
Lying up in darkness, battered  
By wild comets, unanointed.

But for Beauty unmolested  
Have you still the sighing olden ?  
I know mountains heather-crested,  
Waters white, and waters golden.

There I'd keep you, in the lowly  
Beauty-haunts of bird and poet,  
Sailing in a wing, the holy

Silences of lakes below it.

But I leave you by where no man  
Finds you, when I too be gone  
From the puddles on this common  
Over the dark Rubicon.

Francis Ledwidge

# To One Dead

A blackbird singing  
On a moss-upholstered stone,  
Bluebells swinging,  
Shadows wildly blown,  
A song in the wood,  
A ship on the sea.  
The song was for you  
and the ship was for me.

A blackbird singing  
I hear in my troubled mind,  
Bluebells swinging,  
I see in a distant wind.  
But sorrow and silence,  
Are the wood's threnody,  
The silence for you  
and the sorrow for me.

Francis Ledwidge

# To One Who Comes Now And Then

When you come in, it seems a brighter fire  
Crackles upon the hearth invitingly,  
The household routine which was wont to tire ,  
Grows full of novelty.

You sit upon our home-upholstered chair  
And talk of matters wonderful and strange,  
Of books, and travel, customs old which dare  
The gods of Time and Change.

Till we with inner word our care refute  
Laughing that this our bosoms yet assails,  
While there are maidens dancing to a flute  
In Andalusian vales.

And sometimes from my shelf of poems you take  
And secret meanings to our hearts disclose,  
As when the winds of June the mid bush shake  
We see the hidden rose.

And when the shadows muster, and each tree  
A moment flutters, full of shutting wings,  
You take the fiddle and mysteriously  
Wake wonders on the strings.

And in my garden, grey with misty flowers,  
Low echoes fainter than a beetle's horn  
Fill all the corners with it, like sweet showers  
Of bells, in the owl's morn.

Come often, friend, with welcome and surprise  
We'll greet you from the sea or from the town;  
Come when you like and from whatever skies  
Above you smile or frown.

Francis Ledwidge



## Two Songs

I will come no more awhile,  
Song-time is over.  
A fire is burning in my heart,  
I was ever a rover.

You will hear me no more awhile,  
The birds are dumb,  
And a voice in the distance calls  
' Come,' and ' Come.'

Francis Ledwidge

# Una Bawn

Una Bawn, the days are long,  
And the seas I cross are wide,  
I must go when Ireland needs,  
And you must bide.

And should I not return to you  
When the sails are on the tide,  
'Tis you will find the days so long,  
Una Bawn, and I must bide.

Francis Ledwidge

## With Flowers

These have more language than my song,  
Take them and let them speak for me.  
I whispered them a secret thing  
Down the green lanes of Allary.

You shall remember quiet ways  
Watching them fade, and quiet eyes,  
And two hearts given up to love,  
A foolish and an overwise.

Francis Ledwidge

# Youth

She paved the way with perfume sweet  
Of flowers that moved like winds alight,  
And never weary grew my feet  
Wandering through [the spring's delight.

She dropped her sweet fife to her lips  
And lured me with her melodies,  
To where the great big wandering ships  
Put out into the peaceful seas.

But when the year grew chill and brown,  
And all the wings of Summer flown,  
Within the tumult of a town  
She left me to grow old alone.

Francis Ledwidge