

Marian's Verse

The Complete Poetic works

of a

20th Century

Working Class Mother

**By Marian May Bell,
née Lawson (1910-1993)**

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DEDICATION

**In loving memory
Of the Author**

**And thanks that
“God made me”**

Healing is to laugh at oneself. (Winter 1984)

It is 7.45pm, time to fill the cauldron (one, which mother used to boil her head in (sheep's)). This is to fill her three hot water bottles. I go upstairs to plug in my shoulder heat pad, open the top window, making sure as I leave, that the door is closed, to avoid being blasted from the down stairs settee. Put milk on hob; mix Horlicks and cocoa (but not together). Now, the water is hot enough for two enough for two bottles, (mine, of course.) Take these up, placing one eight inches from the bottom of the bed, the other two and a half feet up. Now three points of energy are left to do their work. Go down to complete nightcaps with the remaining milk made after the rest made a quick get away. ^α Nine-o'clock news is bed time gong. Third bottle is filled with water not quite hot enough now, but being hubby's it doesn't matter. After counting out tomorrow's rainbow pills into their pot of gold, we check back and front door locks three times. Lights out, then up to land of forgetfulness, I going on all fours while hubby carries flask and dried milk. If he forgets a spoon, we use a peg from the bathroom. Pull chain, close bedroom window, flick on fire-light, and divest one set of clothing for a slightly thicker one. Pink nighty with collar, blue long johns with lace coming away from bottom, hubby's brick-red cardigan with elbows out, New Zealand air socks in green and blue stripes, and soft woolly headscarf for pinking scalp. After anointing palms and pulling on cotton gloves, I wriggle into hibernation. "Oh! You lucky, lucky squirrels! Wish I could digest nuts and the same time save all those fuel bills." Foot bottle gropes for right knee-cap, (drat it,) centre bottle moves to outer perimeter, large woollen sausage under left shoulder blade, smaller sausage to right of neck. Forget to unplug heat-pad. Off go blankets. At last, wonderful warmth and peace; for two minutes flat. Forgot to Vick nostrils. Off comes right glove, and on to little finger goes toilet roll bandage, and as Vick does its rounds, I eye the sleeping tablet placed strategically on small mirror. I sleep better when I think two are waiting.

Peace again for four minutes then hubby tussles with his woolly bonnet buttons – (nothing to miss in the silence of the night hours) grabs for sniffer just rolling under drawers, then thumps his five pillows instead of me. Gliding through space, I reach the penultimate sheep, when hubby's megaphone call comes, "Hey! I'll have to be up early for vegetables for that broth you promised, and mind, you have no suet!"

Out comes poem pad and pen.

^α [*The author always boiled the milk over! Ed.*]

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Preface

THE EGOTIST

Someone to me said recently
On hearing me weave rhyme,
"I fail to see why, decently
To heights you should not climb"
Then I replied, "Back out of sight
Like owl, I've watched each caper
But, unlike owl, mothed left and right
My verse. 'Twas not on paper"
Had I, like Jumbo, memorised
Each stanza, line and ditty
Who knows? May once have realised
The freedom of the city!

Plate 1 Opposite

The Author in 1990.

1. LOVE IS GOD

I think that some-one
 Lied to me
 'Cause teacher said that
 God made me.
 Now Billy, (he is
 Older some)
 Says my dad only
 Loved my mum
 It's all, oh! such a mystery
 Suppose I'll have to wait and see.

2. FAIN WOULD I TO SEE

Alone in the spinney, as oft I was
 Knee-high brackened, nigh blazing gorse
 Vermilion kissed hips just out of reach
 No clamour beyond could me impeach
 Or so I thought, Till brush-wood shuddered
 Ash corpse screeched and terror thudded
 From encroaching limbs that would be gone
 "Hop it, lads! For here's King John"
 I should, I would, have kept in pace
 But, 'King John?' I must, must, see his face
 And more, his crown and snow-white steed
 With flowing mane, Oh! Joy indeed!
 Till farmer loomed, his name? John King
 'Cept staff in hand, bore not a thing,
 And the tear-dew bracken sapped for long
 Not for passing Kings, but childhood gone.

3. THE CLIP MAT

This rectangular plain, as yet
Of virgin purity
An untouched tiny acre
Limbs wracked by frames security
Is braced, and solid now
'Gainst the furrows onslaught
Of steel prodders glinting, as
Chunky coal with hissing log is fraught.
The scene is set. Six faces eye
The tossed, turned, shuffled mounds
Of two-inch clippings - Vesuvian
And Etna, poised for stomachs gouged.
Etna is the broody one, dark,
Of navy serge fattened
Too shabby far the King's navy
But borders need no pattern!
Sides and mitred corners meet
With set-square precision
Files muster, warm and sturdy
And creep along the hessian
Who could know what love,
What banter and repartee
Each clippy locks unto the next?
The gay joviality?

(continued....)

(The Clip Mat continued.)

This multi-coloured petticoat
Once bounteous 'kerchief - a
Sticky fingers' recipient and
Sheet anchor to baby grief!
And for centre-piece
A flannel belt, rosy still
Tho' demoted from dimpled, pimped buttocks
To comfort bare-foot chill.
Imaginary fragrance rises
From a bunch of pansies
Deep purple dyed, from
Dew-drop cuffed, slate-wiping ganzies
Yet a little digging, a little planting
And it's quiet at last
Fingers tingle, neck and dorsal
Co-ordinate, this clambering ache to cast.
Soon, eight legs, eight arms
Will flail for the first wild melee
The cat will burrow and curl
And purr the night away.

4. LITTLE GIRL LOST

My! My! how these years whizz me by
Can't slow them down, though slow am I
Thought I, once, would never be five
And ponder, those years to re-vive.
Wooden dolly on a stool
Tom Thumb pages in a pool
Wishing then that I was ten
Owning trike like cousin Gwen
Fourteen, I, before I knew it
Baking bread, and grating suet
Brothers, sisters, some were younger
But we all knew that word "hunger"
Buttoned boots and steel heel-plates
White-washed hearth and black-lead grates
Pride of place was tidy betty
Had no cistern, just a netty
There, the walls were always pretty
As us pondered on our "sitty"
Up I grew with sighs and simpers
Curled my hair with mother's crimpers
Mentioned that I'd met my Prince
How dad's eye-brows made me wince.
Anyhow, the years went by
Earning dues and did I cry!
Half-a-crown, and that un-sceptred
Discipline was just accepted.
Now, my purse is much much fatter
But buys less, does this, the latter
Wars between, political storms
"Work less, claim more" - forms and re-forms
How I wish to be five again
Before I knew distrust, disdain.

5. DEAF MARJI

'Twas visiting day at the Hospice
 The hour had come to leave
 When three steps bridged an abyss
 Of fifty years. I did perceive
 A dented pillow who's well
 Cradled soft a feature
 I'd sojourned with. This tale I tell.
 The stage it was an old coupe-cart
 Dung, hid 'neath shaggy mat
 And never a note from tin whistle flat
 Did she hear, but swang this way and that.
 She taught us all by thumb and finger
 The alphabet, and we would linger
 The more to learn
 How to discern
 A tune from a mute singer
 How we laughed! daft Marji!
 But loyalty and love, in our crude way
 On all pursuits, could ne'er gainsay
 Clayhole Cavern
 Hairy man's Hole
 The fairy steps
 Plantation Bowl
 Charlie's Bank
 Ginger's Field
 Eden Beck and
 King John's Mead
 We gathered walnuts furtively
 O'er parson's wall
 Then fleet of foot she'd beat us all

(continued...)

(Deaf Marji continued)

Fifty years! So could it be
 Those purple eyes again knew me?
 Not purple, darker more
 Till recognition brighter bore
 Then knuckles twined and softly felt
 But softer still the words I spelt,
 'R.E.M.E.M.B.E.R. M.E.?'
 "REMEMBER ME?"
 And I'd take an oath a tin whistle sounded
 And a muted voice rebounded,
 "When I enter into Paradise".

6. TAMER TAMED

Table-cloth tassels fringed my brow
 As I mouthed the toothsome bite
 From massive hand. I remember now
 The bars. The lion-tamer's height,
 Corduroy-clad long, long legs.
 They marched to warring races
 But time returned to me the dregs
 'Twas he and I changed places.

Opposite, Plate 2: The Author and her father in 1952 at Carlton, Stockton-on-Tees. Here pictured aged 76. Ernest Alfred Lawson lost his leg and had his arm shattered in the battle of the Somme, 1916 such that he was unable to use two crutches.

7. THE TOBACCO JAR

It's like a beacon from afar
 This old baccy jar
 All I need is, lift the lid
 It's scent propels me, I'm a kid
 "It's beaten brass", he said, my dad
 Is he reached for his tobacco.

I'm a lion or a pig
 And he passes me a fig
 Cracks a whip, (always missed me)
 Puffed a cloud just as he kissed as
 "Sit and beg", he said, (my dad)
 While he shredded his tobacco.

He knew his scriptures through and through
 Caleb, Aaron and Abihue,
 We dubbed him 'Solomon' wise was he
 To all our queries, held the key
 "This, my incense is", he said
 And belched out blue tobacco.

The structure of this gleaming bowl -
 So Fashioned, must contain his soul,
 All I need is, lift the lid
 I'm with him once again, a kid
 "Clouds are stairs to heaven", he said,
 May they savour his tobacco!

Opposite, Plate 3: The actual tobacco jar.

8. SUMMER MORN

Take me yet to the bridle-path
That leads to a carpet blue
'Neath silver birches' canopy
With blue stars peeping through
We'll pluck the woodruffe - loose our hearts
Within it's fragrant power
And separate the wild rose walls
To our honeysuckle bower
'Tween garlic-studded mossy banks
We'll skip the stepping-stones
Which all day through, laze, undefiled
By streams deep undertones
Of hawthorn blossoms flushed, mature
And speedwell eyes winking
We'll weave a girdle, twine a crown
To bless our souls' linking.

9. MY OLD OAK

I've loved her all my days
 And laughed with her in Spring
 When the magic touch of waking sun
 Of dew, her diamond slippers spun
 Soft green her robe would cling.

I've climbed into her lap
 And swung in ecstasy
 From arms which could, would not retard
 And chanted with the birds' aubade
 My vain supremacy.

I've known her every mood
 Have seen her fingers chance
 To shelter lambkins where they grazed-
 Defiant toss of head nor dazed
 'Gainst storms exuberance.

On bosom firm I've leaned
 Two hearts were pierced there
 Indelibly, while the acorns danced
 A minuet, end moonbeams glanced,
 Silver combs through her hair.

I've watched her dying soul
 Uprooted, naked, slain
 By man's design. What vanity
 Hath wrought this vast profanity!
 With her, my heart is lain.

Opposite, Plate 4: The Site of the Old Oak

10. GOLDEN SUMMER

This summer eve, sweet and mellow
Carpet-strewn with cowslips yellow
Heavy boughs of laburnum gold
Drooping, too proud their weight to hold
Is God's good gift of golden hue
To those who see, for me, for you.
This haunting glade where shadows cool
Creep gently o'er that limpid pool
Where once we culled those kingcups gay
Rearing their heads in proud array
Dandelions too, not so grand
Disdained by ruthless, childish hand.
On yonder bank 'neath sunset's glare
Proclaiming with audacious stare
The gorse-bush keeps his yearly pledge
Triumphant in his heritage
With warbling trills and golden voice
The songsters of the dell rejoice.
All gold, pure gold, but not of man
No earthly being ever can
Create such glorious heav'nly beams
Yon sunlight makes in endless streams
Kissing the earth from fiery nest
Where head he hides far down the west.

11. DOWN BUT NOT UNDER

Girl and boy at Sunday School

Voices ringing

Service over,

Bound for clover

Feet and laughter winging.

Lass and lad at Sunday School

Busy teaching

Doors are wide

They're outside

Hands and eyes are reaching.

Youth and Maid at Sunday School

Faithful ever

Woodland walks

Shadow stalks,

Silent, through the heather.

Youth tells maid he'll emigrate

To 'Down Under'

Just one year,

Return For her

Sharing ev'ry Sunday.

Organist at Sunday School

Plays her 'Castle Eden'

Wafts a prayer -

"Lord, may I share

His life, so much I need him?"

12. THE LITTLE BANK

I saw three stars on a bank of green
 Diademed each by morning sheen
 Inquisitive sun from horizons rim
 Deemed worthy to add a kissing-crust brim
 White crocus
 Yellow crocus
 Purple crocus.

I saw two stars on a bank of grey
 Pearls they wore at the dying day
 Moon's non-analeptic eyne
 Mocked Madonna and dark Magdalene
 White crocus
 Purple crocus.

I saw a star spilled out. 'Twas gold,
 And stilled."Twill come again", the heavens told
 Sun, moon and Galaxy
 Moved on again, complacently
 To greet the star above all stars
 The Yellow crocus.

13. WHAT IS A SMILE?

A sudden flash of pearly teeth
 Prompted by a touch of humour?
 An elongated gap, the golden mean
 Of Feast and consumer?
 The Sparkle of a maiden's eyes
 When thinking on her trysting-day?
 Then making dewy lips twin columbines
 As modal phantoms play?
 An aperture of advocate
 Whispering relief far his cause?
 Or wide, accomplished mould of Potentate
 When subjects roar applause?
 Kings, Primates and Commanders - all
 Faces, (with exceptions, sadly)
 Create this fine contour, a smile we call
 Accepted so gladly.
 Yet, it seems, a path uncharted
 Radiant is, through infant's sleep
 Sanctuary depths where man ne'er bartered
 Where lips and dimples meet.
 Mystic nimbus, hushed and lowly
 Guided softly by angels wing
 The innocent babe with smile so holy
 Passes where Angels sing.

14. MY SON

"No-where to be found"
 I stagger 'gainst felled
 Trunk and feel nothing
 Winter's biting gale
 Warmer far than this
 Heart-beat, seething, mad
 Churning, in me bound.
 Church door beckoning
 So scared am I, past
 Mounds and granite arms
 Yew-trees' menace black,
 Bat's eerie diving
 And owl's harsh siren
 This, my reckoning?
 Ah! golden pathway
 Coke-stove's cavity
 Throws. Dear heart of Heaven!
 To oaken doorway
 Where I stand, transfixed
 To see little boy
 In the flaming ray.
 Close by, old Rector
 Scintillating hair
 Like halo on heed
 Straining, to see more
 His boy 'Samuel'.
 The Angels and I
 Sing, "Hail, Protector!"

Plate 5. William Trevor and John Cedric aged two years six months.

Plate 6. Redmarshall Church

15. SILENCE

Not the death-agony of forsaken pendulum
Feebly demanding an hour more to live
Or the sweated leather, supplanted
By soft-padded soles, hushed
Like insane world by nocturnal draught of sleep!
Not the fear of Watchman by mortal couch
Listening, listening with expectant ear
For the Mighty Thief with ebonised wing-span
Beyond slatted window
Peering, peeping.
Not the Double Diapason and Trumpet
Brought to muteness through ebbtide of sound
Or the departed breath of a thousand songsters
Under hemispherical canopy.
But, the captive in a wilderness of nothing
Who's dome echoes not its nothingness.
Eyes see the searing sword of lightning
And flinch not at it's counterpart
He caresses the warm egg and hears no cackling
Brushes the raindrops but hears no pattering
Rustle of homing pigeons warns him not
Of their coming or going -
Seeing silver wings shrink to
Little stars in the distance
Knows spring by the green leaf
By tendron and tendril

(continued....)

(Silence: continued)

Sol smiles into his eyes but melts not the fetters
 Cuckoo's call, lark's cadenza
 Bleat of lamb and belfry clarion
 Have no place in his wilderness
 He seems happy!
 Oh! Give me an understanding
 Of the guttural sounds
 That he may understand!

16. OFF THE CUFF

"How cold, how dark is this place"
 Said one cuff-link to the other.
 "Dost think that you and I will grace
 His cuffs again dear brother?"
 "Not till red wine gels,
 And crystal melts,
 And cast-iron bells
 The Moonbeam smelts."
 "Then, slender necks and diamond eyes
 'Neath dust will lie in state?"
 "Ne'er fear! this bier-bound merchandise
 For a surety, aye'll appreciate."

17. DEATH-PANGS

Fickle is she
Who would a maiden bear
In furrowed womb, umbered,
And vandyke glaze
Papaver slumbered
In verdured haze
Who would dare
To wrench from umbilical copse
Of beech and aspen
And horse-chestnut tops
To drop her, gasping,
(Oh! sad insanity)
To cineritious suburbanity.

18. REVELATION AT WHITTON

Two heads peered through hawthorn hole
At lapping mare with steaming foal.
"Do you think it's belly split?"
"Don't be daft! She vomited it."

19. LESSON TAKEN

So silently the stroke he bore
 From just reproof so quickly dealt,
 “How naughty of you twinny Don!”
 Oh! anguish mine! I’d punished John.

20. AS I LOOK DOWN

So often it rises,
 The candle-wick's tang
 From splutt'ring wax
 At the toll-bell's clang.
 Dead need no candle-light
 To guide the pathway
 Towards their resting
 For true Light of Day
 Is theirs; Are they not free
 And in His image?
 But Father! not me
 In organ loft cage!

Plate 7. The Author at the piano c1972. She was an accomplished organist, often playing as relief organist at several churches in Stockton-on-Tees, especially during weekdays. Poem 20 refers to the former organ loft at Stockton Parish Church before the present organ was built above the west door.

21. SEPTEMBER THOUGHTS

Come! Oh counterpart, explore with me
 The wealth of September's treasury
 Out! to the stubble, row on row
 They, wounded sentinels, by dying, know
 That living man might richer be.
 And where the wind blown ash-tree cleaves
 Lugubrious fingers, the reaper leaves
 Unknowingly, an offertory plate
 And accentors find it, and luxuriate
 And pluck dropped pearls of the gathered sheaves.
 But not unseen, though loathe to tell
 Of greedy revellings, the pimperl
 With bright eye gleaning and grave thoughts privy
 Shrinks in solitude, that tantivy
 May yet trace crimson her lowly dell.
 See! on wings of zephyrs warm
 Yon solitary thistle-down, lost, forlorn,
 Or else philandering, for his lips
 Scarce touch the blushing briar-hips
 While blackberry hearts bleed 'neath the thorn.
 Way beyond the groaning hedge-rows
 Where the rusty bracken grows
 Tread with care, lest, in surprise
 The wooing partridges may rise
 Like startling whirlwind, from their foes,
 Ere the deepening sky shall mould
 Her golden lune, soft hands unfold
 With fine discretion, their misty veil
 To hide earth's fulsome breast, then trail
 Away to seek the distant wold.

22. TIME

Had I wings to hover
 Suspended, o'er ocean wide
 Ships long since passed
 And nought else beside
 As comparator
 That is time's measure
 A pendulum hung
 For eternal erasure
 Of Almanac throng.

23. SYCAMORE WINGS

A seed looked up one Autumn day
 'Don't leave me here to rot away
 These wings were made to fly up high
 Don't leave me here, I'll only die."
 'You'll die in any case", I said
 But first you live, then you're dead"
 Never-the-less I held it's wings
 And marvelled at the shape of things.
 "So, not for you a pauper's grave,
 A decent burial shall have."
 But now, like stunted Chinese feet
 Sycamore toss curl stunted seat.
 Yet still it grows and aims to touch
 My upper window-sill and such.
 Enduring frame of joy, a door
 Wide-ope' for songbirds, to adore
 All season's friend, oasis lush
 From night-shade paths and urban rush
 "How long tho', shall you live, my friend?"
 "So long as you do, in the end."

24. HERE'S A HEALTH

Sunday mornings without fail
Lined we up, I and three male
Just like steps my mother plied
'Cept they looked like on their side
Father held a metal spoon
Made me went to die or swoon
Tilted up the meat-dish sink
Reached the juices oiled and pink
"Life-blood, this, for you. I know
Drink it up, reach ninety-four"
Now the years are getting by
Once, 'twas sirloin, now 'tis fry.
Shall I reach my ninety-sixer
Having lost that pink elixir?

25. MY GUEST

Each day, twice, thrice he called on me
P'raps o'er threshold or 'neath the tree
A perfect beau, breast rusty red
Eye-ing the crumbs and broken bread
While greedy starlings, sparrows, tit,
Fought, and wrested each tiny bit.
And only then would he advance
To cock his head with hungry glance
Or venture through the open door
Towards the table and its store.
I named him 'Ray', he did impart
Such warmth to my poor lonely heart
But came the day I missed my guest
(perhaps providing for a nest?)
Or chirping to his would-be spouse?
Important, far, than my poor house!
In pensive mood I scanned the verge
(And even yet he may emerge)
But, russet leaf of Autumn gone
Was missing Robin, bleeding, torn.
In tears I turned from battered life
There! on my step, his little wife!

26. NOSTRUM

No garden gate to lean across
 Tho', in times past, even now
 Heaven-bound life-threads through the moss
 Lode-stones are. Pave-stones I eschew
 From ramblings
 And amblings
 Return anew, and new.

27. EVERYTHING IN THE GARDEN

Lover: "If, dear heart, we get a garden,
 Which flowers would you choose?"
 Loved: "Chrysanthemums and lavender -
 All the pinks and blues,
 But, tell me dear, your favourite dish?"
 Lover: "Oh! suet! suet! cook as you wish!"
 Loved: "Then out! Out! through the door
 For suet's a thing I just abhor!"

28. AS IT WAS, IS NOW -

Do you believe in pre-ordination?
 Or are you an inveterate optimist,
 Punching fate in the nose
 As I have done, enjoying the impact?
 Until today, that is.
 This vision came to me
 (*Continued...*)

(“As it was is now.” Continued)

In a dingy corner of our back-yard.
 A dirty spot, if I must be honest.
 The lowest place on this humble domain.
 Dank leaves, straw and bird-droppings
 Make a miniature stable.
 And it is the last day of November.
 The time for sighing and crying
 Shivering and snivelling.
 Over the wall, like huge loosely
 Twined ball of brown string
 Hangs the faithful honeysuckle
 A Veteran, bald at the top
 Its' gnarled, rough sinews
 Almost reach this dismal corner.
 And there it is! The basket-work
 Woven into a secret cradle.
 Ah! but wait! Five little pink fingers
 Beckon over the wicker-edge;
 Winter's love-baby, conceived
 In the dark depths. A mystery
 Honeysuckle flower. "Out of the depths" but no!
 That comes at the dying, not the birth.
 Yet strangely it seems, as portent,
 Just above the crib, emerging from
 The shadows, hangs a clump of woodbine berries
 Blood-drops like a crown of thorns
 That even the sparrows dis-own.

“Out of the depths” from Psalm 130. Ed.

29. IF I STAY

If perchance the days will find
 No masculine piece of kind
 Upon the floor, no tide-mark grim
 In porcelain bowl, or ought of him
 In any place, 'cept in mind
 Will I say
 As I lay
 E'er the night
 Blends with day
 "That rattled snore
 We battled o'er
 Was music had I known it?
 Regretfully do own it?"

30. THE CLOUDS TELL

Roll on and increase, you obese storm-riders
 Muster your armies for the assault course
 Your shining cap badges
 Belie you. Your boots are iron-clad
 And steeped in pitch. Not tears, yours
 That splash this battle-ground
 Where-on I stand. Yours the bullets
 Poised for the battle cry. So! I'm ready!
 "And what," says General Cumulus,
 "The grievance of this feline recruit
 With talons out that she dare to
 Challenge the whole army?
 (*Continued....*)

(30 "The Clouds Tell" continued)

Advance: that we may hear"

"Education passed me by,
My brain seeths but the tongue
Cleaves to its chain-cuffs"

"Ho! Ho! says the General. "How old are you? - What?
'A wasted life', I'd say!"

Now my talons itch, all ten of them.

"Life wasted? Life wasted?"

In the beginning the brush and shovel

Were my forceps. The alarum

Fed me well to keep me going.

I hungered for children.

For children I hungered.

I can sew and cook, wield a hammer

And dress a wound. Art I love

And music I'd die for. Wasted?"

"Oh! you've knowledge enough", he tells me

And to his adjutant, with tail up

Raring to go, I hear, "And she tells me

She knows not education!"

Then comes the volley.

"You can write, can you not?"

Then set down your blessings.

I tell you, your talons

Are ten talents."

As I, feeling abashed, consider this,

I notice a group in the rear

On the double, no doubt for the long

Untidy hair that floats behind them.

"Take your punishment, I say,

"Without it, you'll never take command."

31. JUSTIFY

Like pink wild rose the silk hair-band
As two small feet came skipping round
A little twirl, takes 'strangers?' hand
A little laugh, oh! blessed sound!
The park gate near he takes the lead
"Forgive me, Lord!" I trail them near.
Who's whip is this I always heed?
Who drives me? thou? or Lucifer?

32. THE LITTLE BELL

I found it down among the dust
Where pins and buttons darkly rust
A little tarnished, still its heart
Is strong, as ever was at start
It brings to me, from bridled deer
Prancing pony and bucking steer
With tinkle rich and jubilant
The new born lambs and birds in chant
Like orb, I warm it in my hand
And orbit through to baby-land.

33. MARTHA

Martha! come hither!

What, beneath that pomegranate form

Hidest thou?

"A million links, deep stamped and scarred

And a halter too."

Woman! Come hither!

What, in pack on angled hanger

Bearest thou?

"Ten million gros points and gathered yokes

Straws and bodkins too."

Hither! Old Martha!

Why, serfdom bent and chappy nailed

Slinkest thou?

'Tm log-wood stained and bramble-thorned

Linen white I'd hue."

Martha! Come hither!

Where, on knarred limbs and soles' callosity

Speedest thou?

"My way's to Jordan to sink and rise

Clean and new."

Ah? Old Martha!

Then, on wrinkled brow there'll be another

Name to bear?"

"Yes! Master! from now on

I, Mary, your life will share.'

34. MY WORLD

What is wrong with the world?

Well! What is wrong with the world?

The world is not wrong. Light gave it birth

It's peaks reach for the throne where they kneel

Wearing tiaras of Innocence. It was ever so.

The waterfalls and riverlets leave their source

As Holy water, gathering dress in their journeyings

Till they become sewers of anthropic greed.

The putrifying salmon cry out, 'We leapt for joy.

Now our roe is of lead-pellets. Your leaping

Far exceed our greatest achievement.

You plunge into the maelstrom called 'Destruction'."

Was the lichen wrong to veil, so gently,

The stark nudity of rock, and to embalm

The corpses of arboreal tombs?

Marshlands echo the spirit voices of waders:-

"Iron squatters invade our ancestral homes.

Their chimneys spit out adder's tongues

Heaven and Earth are half full of Thy glory

The little rills de-voice on every side."

What is reclamation? Annihilation!

What was wrong with marshlands'

What is wrong in the world?

It's the little ants, scurrying to bear the burdens

In, not on, their alvine coffers.

And the coffer-fishes, safe in their scales of Egotism.

My sad, beautiful world, let me go with you

To the mount of Olives

Ere the multitudinous cry come;

"Crucify: Crucify!"

Underlining as in the original. Ed.

35. DOWN TO EARTH

I thought I'd wash the outer bowl
Around my fav'rit flow'ring plant
The pot I needed to cajole
'Twas stubbornly determinant.

When freed at last, I, horror-bound
Did glimpse the largest worm I'd seen
Slide up the side. 'Twas flat, not round
Not normal as it should have been.

The salt! The salt! I'll have his tail.
My feet at last began to move
But when it turned and looked at me
Remorseful I, it should reprove.

What right had I to take a life?
Poor thing had had none anyway.
"I'll bury you, to take a (wife?)
Who'll fatten you, earth to allay.

36. FEET WITH WINGS

How I hate my ankles, mum,
How I hate my feet.
Ev'ry time I'm walking out
Kids yell in the street,
"Knock-knees,
Fun-ny feet."
How I hate my feet!

How I love your singing child,
How I love your voice.
Ev'ry time a cadence trills
Hearts and souls rejoice.
Song-thrush,
Night-in-gale,
How I love your voice!

Plate 8: The Author's second daughter, Irene Walters

37. AND THE SEQUEL

This was the embarrassing part,
The praises and compliments,
The hand-shakes, for this songstress
Who released from her inmost self
The power and the glory.
The permeating radiance
From all sides was praise enough.
She moved between the trolleys
And wheel-chairs at Marske
Cheshire Homes, and at last
Reached the little lady, so keen,
Obviously, to offer her felicitations.
"I remember you from years ago!
By your feet and legs,
Which are so beautiful!
You see, I have none at all."
With what impact! What pathos!
What so innocent a reproof!
Was met by one, who, looking at her own feet
Had rebelled from childhood
Against so small
An orthopaedic misdemeanour!

38. THE OLD SEA-WALL

'Old Sanny slept here.'
Idly I scrape the pebbles
And tufts where, long years past
The old sea-wall cottages of Hartlepool
Braved the lashings and splashings
Of winter's rage. The cottages are no more.
She gave me a glass of milk,
Old Sanny. It was very sour,
Though I told her it was lovely.
Sanny was blind, I was four,
Born in the age of chivalry.

'Old Sanny' was Mrs Saunders, a family friend, and wife
of the Ferry-keeper.

Original footnote by the author. Ed.

39. WAIT A LITTLE

If you knock upon a door -
Ring the bell, what-ever for
Wait a moment if you please
Your impatience to release
Maybe that the washer's swishing
Or the bottom teeth are missing
Grubby apron to be shed
(Etiquette is not quite dead)
P'raps the coalman's at the back
Taking money for his "slack"
Maybe junior's hands are glued
When he gets the jar unscrewed
Twenty reasons then, the case
Why that lady lost the race
To the door, then cursed like thunder
She's not lightning, so no wonder!

(What-ever) Sic. Ed.

40. INTRODUCTION

I had a very favourite aunt
 Who had a very definite baking-day.
 I knew it, and the very hour
 My 'sort'-cake would leave the
 Coal oven. I could smell the
 Mouth-watering pies as I went
 Up the garden path, past the
 Pinks and London Pride bordering
 A fragrant pink rose-bush
 In a diamond-shaped centre.
 Aunty Liz was the only person
 Who spelt 'Feet' with three 'Es'
 'Wipe your fee-et!" was the
 Inevitable welcome.
 Into the passage where the walls
 Wore, (inevitably) the large orange flowers.
 I always think of Aunty Liz
 When I see a glorious sunset.
 Some-times the 'sort'-cake wore jam,
 Some-times only butter, lovely real
 Butter, but never both.
 But one thing for which I never
 Forgave aunty. She introduced me
 To my First caraway seed.
 I can see the funereal walk
 Home-wards, over the green.
 One bite, and the whole contents
 Of my belly just heaved
 And seethed. The mark
 Of Cain was there for all time.
 (*Continued...*)

("Introduction" continued)

Yet I was fascinated,
Picking frantically, one by one,
The vermin which the hot oven
Had killed. Or else -
But Aunt Liz had never
Never mentioned having mice?
Like Gretel, I, lost to the hissing
Of Granny Shuggy-boat's geese
And one-leg Jack's dripping
Paraffin tank, left a trail of
Lumps and crumbs, each one
Growing a black eye,
Narrowed with venom
Just like mine. How cruel
That a happy little maiden
Should, in so short a span
Learn frustration, distrust,
Doubt, sadness, disappointment
And soul destroying Hatred!

41. ELEGY TO A FAMILY DOCTOR

Amongst the condolences
 Bearing silver lilies embossed
 On crosses, and entwining
 Sacred writings,
 A little piece of cheap note-paper;
 "Dear doctor's wife,

I am sad

About the doctor.
 I never felt the needle go in
 Because he showed me a
 Big picture with the horse
 Jumping over a fence.

Yours true-ly
 Anthony King."

42. TAKE AND GIVE

First mother: "How many children have you?"

Second mother: "I've had four, but I got five,
 One thrown in so to speak. And you?"

First mother: "I've had one, but I got three,
 So my husband was thrown out, so to speak."

Plate 9: "Had four, got five." Photographed 1992.

43. SCYTHER AND THE MAN

To his native villagers, and those
 Of neighbouring hamlets,
 It was always 'Old Jack', 'Young Jack'
 And 'Young Jack's son'.
 At three-score years and eleven
 'Young Jack's son' looks back,
 Ever more clearly, to rural life,
 Activities and events,
 During his varied span. A true
 Country-wise, village-wise,
 Weather-wise, family-wise,
 Animal-wise, but chiefly,
 Church-wise, philosopher
 Of elementary education.
 School archives prove his
 Inability to keep silence.
 To the Rector's wife, was boy-hood
 Messenger, stick-chopper,
 Grate-polisher and emery-paper fiend.
 Kissed the kitchen-maid
 And earned an ear-boxing.
 Could weave a tale, fascinating
 Or lurid, ad libitum.
 No listener even now, can
 Decide when truth and fiction
 Merge. He grew to wield a
 Scythe 'better-nor-ony-on-em'.
 Mowed lawns and church-yard
 Plot. Layed hedges, ploughed,
 Sowed and reaped,
 Turnip-snagged and 'taty'-picked.
 (*Continued...*)

(Scythe and the Man....continued)

Could harness for trap or field labour.
Heaved massive steel buckets
Of water, and packs of evergreen
For church thanksgiving.
Was campanologist of
Pre-Norman St. Cuthbert's.
His mighty bell-strokes
Proclaimed Matins, Evensong
And Nuptial Declarations.
Life-span of a departed soul
Pealed desolately at
One-stroke-per-minute
Were the soul a nonagenarian
It meant a late dinner.
He was sexton and grave-digger,
Each grave a hard-earned
Fifteen shillings, augmented at times
By the Rector's kind offering of
Two shillings, his burial fee,
'For you who laboured'.
And what labour!
The top three feet lifted
Fairly easily, having been
A previous burial plot.
But how the tree-roots
Intertwined and resented
The human struggle to
Cleave another resting-place!
(Continued...)

(Scythe and the Man....continued)

And where the dank, forbidding
 Water lay, how tenderly
 Did he camouflage with
 Mounds of hay and laurels
 To soften the coming anguish!
 He was Uncle Jack to every child,
 Whose own offspring to this day
 Own him 'Old uncle Jack"
 I, Jill, know this, as, with him,
 I climb the last hill, to
 Look downwards as
 'Young Jack's son's son
 Puts in the scythe.

Plate 10: Jack Bell with scythe at age 82.

Plate 11: the younger Jack Bell in Redmarshall Churchyard c1960

Plate 12: Portrait at age 83

John Harold Bell,

born 15th August 1908 died 30th March 1993

The Author was married to Jack for 63 years.

44. THE BLACK-BERRIES DRIP

Sing, sing for black-berry time
The hedgerows dip and fruit is prime
Sing, sing at the Autumn noon
Soon they'll meet 'neath harvest moon.

Sing, sweet Bess and fill your can
Pies to bake for your beau man
Sing, dear Tom and aim your gun
Marksman true when rabbits run.

Cry, cry for black-berry time
Gate? or hedge for Tom to climb
Cry, sweet Bess while rabbits run
Hedgerow's pall veils Tom and gun.

45. THE LAST LOG

A milk bottle jars the enveloping silence.
 A moment's hesitation; A bolt shoots home.
 Another day gone. Lady Repose drapes
 Her healing curtain, but, for this night,
 I must keep watch, alone-
 A Thing will die, leaving as
 Monument to soul of this home,
 A stark, dumb, blind end soul-less
 Chimney-stack. The fire, sinking,
 Craves sustenance; I lay,
 Reverently, the last hawthorn log,
 Then cavity, for a brief hour
 Will re-live for me, the very
 Core of Friendship,
 The loving comforter,
 The listening ear,
 The singing companion,
 Compatriot of the East wind
 Stubborn enemy of
 The sodden West wind.
 Pear and apple-tree censer,
 Dance instructress to the ash bough.
 Cave of whimsicality.
 Land of caverns and castles
 Witches and woods
 Peaks and peris.

(continued....)

(...continued: The Last Log.)

Muffin toaster and napkin warmer.
Oh! my fire! my log-wood fire!
A knotty salute showers
With a million garnets,
The warmed hearth, sending
Turquoise tongues of agonised
Breath along the heat-white bricks
On their last journey to the stars.
Log-heart splutters weaker,
Casts a pale shaft in
Supplication, disintegrates
In little layers, down,
Down, from its inner body.
A lazy pall gathers, blue-grey,
Veined with saffron
To shroud the bark-skin.
Sadly, I lift the rounded shoulder;
On its turning, a fleeting smile,
Eye-to-eye, whispers;
"Life was so exciting."
Clean-air Acts?
Smoke-controlled area?
Smoke-less zone?
Nothing matters now.
It is so cold.

46. PROSPECTING

Two colours, most precious to me
Each one so complimentary
Paint my vision. All I can see
Is gold and blue. I dream a dream
Of sixty years, tho' it would seem
Such span of mists and sunshine haze
Would dim some-what the backward gaze
To burnished meadow, swaying rich
From tip of hill to very ditch
With buttercups, circumjacent
The hillock's rise. With slow ascent
Trace I a path, the Midas mark,
Lustre-footed and routing stark
Pawnshop insignias, sharp thrust
Too circum-gyrating gold dust.
Thus, shrouded, reach the rim of blue,
Sky's crinoline, brushing gold shoe.
Then I see it, the little house,
Ivy skirt, terracotta blouse
Bedded down in the dip, wood-smoke
Curling signals, "My peace to folk
Who venture here." When small I vowed,
"I'll live down there;" But now I'm bowed.
Through sixty years I'm seeking still
My buttercups, and cot, and hill.

47. PIANISSIMO PASSENGER

Out into myriads of goose-down floatage
 Step I. At the tickle-some contact
 With sensitive nostrils, the odd
 Philanderer is gone, as if
 Earth-drawn passage had never been.
 But determinate rear-guard of
 Farinaceus tapioca brings sharply
 Into line an umbrella here,
 A quickly upturned collar there.
 Head shrinks into muffled neck
 As the darkening sky compresses,
 And dresses, her floor below
 With Burdon of snow-berries,
 Surveyor and sanctifier of
 Highway and byway, making
 White bear-skin guards,
 My avenue palings. One
 Large Styrax family honours
 This dromos, where slink
 The looming ghost-forms
 As diminuendo bids their passing.
 A cotton-wool vehicle whispers by,
 Red rear-lights spilling a crimson wash.
 Purity and Blood!
 Inseparable,
 Incomprehensible!
 These two thousand years!

48. GAN FETCH HER

Run fer Mrs Lundy
 Bet yer arl a pund-y
 The nipper due on Wednes-dy
 Wi'ner cum till Mun-dy.

Send fer Mrs Lundy
 The bairn has caused a shun-dy
 Cinder-watter 'n carraway
 That'll shift the wund-y!

Watch fer Mrs Lundy
 Swank to Chapel Sun-dy
 Starchy Chriss-nun-gown and cyek
 And a half-a-crun-dy.

Run fer Mrs Lundy
 To lay Bill out on Mun-dy
 She'll be first behind the hearse
 Black veil ower bun-dy.

Yer knar Mrs Lundy
 An arl that she has dun-dy?
 Ar saw and heer'd it arl at yam
 Me ma was Mrs Lundy.

Plate 13: Clara Lawson (née King.) the author's mother.

49. ON THE SHELF

Through day-school and night-school
 Board-school and college
 Four of us vowed that we'd further our knowledge,
 Peter read History, and David Biology
 Bill studied art and I took Theology,
 To wiles of fair women we'd never succumb
 But swat in our study, or den, or spare-room,

Then Peter met Em in her ancient simplicity
 David kissed Betty and aimed at felicity
 Bill wed his sitter and painted the town
 But what about me in my flowing black gown?
 To wiles of fair women we'd never succumb
 But swat in our study, or den, or spare-room.

Those couples I married, to love was their wont
 I've kissed all their babies they brought to the font,
 Have buried their troubles, and given new life
 You wonder just why I've not got a wife?
 To wiles of fair women we'd never succumb
 But swat in our study, or den, or spare-room,

I'm the one who is left on the shelf
 Washing and cooking I do for myself
 Holes in my stockings, I do need a wife
 So who'd love a parson and take him for life?
 To wiles of fair woman, I hope to succumb
 To share my study, or den, or spare-room,

50. RETREAT.

I know of people who, by taking
A quiet stay in some retreat
And, through daily joys for-saking
Gain the added strength to meet
Life's temptations come what-ever
Be it gossip, theft or pride
But my very own endeavour
At the tender age of five
Came about because, pangs having,
Filched a turnip, I, 'neath hedge.
When, from cottage came witch, raving
"Throw in prison", she did pledge,
So, beneath the mangle, heaving,
Sitting cold till it was night
Made my own retreat, believing
Jesus loved me, come what might,

51. WISKY BOY

You think you know best,
Retriever boy!
Imperative quest!
Radiant joy!
Your rear-end skyward
And brush-like flag
As, sniffing downward
Does wider wag,
Then soil comes flying
From lab'ring paws
As deeper prying
With drooling jaws
Think of furry ball
Low cowering
And ignore my call,
Earth showering
The baréd sinews
At hedgerow's floor,
As search continues
Frantic, yet more
You encroach on haunt,
Deaf to my call
Or ought else to daunt
Your certain fall.
Then comes a yelping
To pierce the air
You need my helping,
Now, retriever?

(continued...)

(Whisky Boy...Continued)

Your wriggles and whines
 Enunciate
 From the hedge-hog's spines
 Your fear innate.
 Now, your tawny eyes
 Plainly relent
 And apologise
 In dumb lament
 Your wild waywardness.
 Come! Rub your snout
 All over my dress.
 You'll learn, no doubt!

<p><i>Plate 14: Whisky (sic) died 1969 aged 16 years.</i></p>

52. RAIN, COME AWAY

Day after day I came home wet
 The weather was despairing
 So mother said that she would get
 A mack that I'd be wearing.
 The day she bought that oil-skin coat
 The weather it got better
 The sun came out to gloat and gloat
 My handkerchieves got wetter!

53. SEA'S CALL

Through velvet cave of consciousness
When sky to light inclined
Came muffled roar, continual,
Aquainted, undefined,
Then senses backward into world
Of other things once knew
Sojourned, besprayed by salt sea-fret
Where anemonies once grew,
Alert then, I, to thoughts of day
Of shops, and meals and clocks
Un-earthed my brogues and sandwich tin
And aimed for Blackhall Rocks.

54. WARMING UP

A sweet old lady, flustered
Had not the courage mustered
To take the flight to floor above
So shop assistant made the move
To aid this red-faced mater
Who said, "Your percolator
Saves me a lot,
But makes me hot!"

55. HESLEDEN SPECIAL

From infant school upon the green
Home-time bell comes ringing
Then through the gate, free, can be seen
Arms and legs wild flinging,
All in all, one destination
Before, from Ferryhill
Steams the three-five through the station,
And legs the bridge must fill,
So sitting down, legs a-dangling
Through holes the trellis makes
At the signal-box notes' jangling
Engine's rocking train snakes
Around the Castle Eden bend
"Hurrah! hurrah ! She's here!"
And as the smoke-box would impend
Our faces, in mock fear
Would squeal in anticipation
At warmer, whiter spray
That hides, lifts in exultation
Up, and up, and away,
To very vault of heaven we are
For a short duration,
"Hurrah for N.E.R! Hurrah!"
Down hill to Hart station.

56. LIFTED

She stirred the coffee slowly,
Seeing the creamy froth encircle higher.
The spoon handle, lifting her eyes
Self-consciously, and scanning,
Intermittently, the surrounding tables,
Loneliness in a crowd was, she thought,
Worse than loneliness at home,
Reared with lots of brothers and sisters
Then rearing her own brood, who,
One by one, had spread their wings
And gone, she felt on the out-side
Looking in. If only some-one would
Start a conversation! Her inherent reserve
Bound her like a vice. "Stuck up",
Someone had said. Then she was conscious
Of being watched. She felt rather than
Saw it. Bravely, she lifted her face
Again, to find a pair of deep blue eyes
Boring unwaveringly through her,
Noting her silver hair, the
Gleam of wrist-watch, the hand
Putting cup to lips. At last
Their eyes met, his holding the
Gaze the longer. "Honest, straight,
With a purity not of this world,"
Was her silent summing up. "If he
Smiles, then, by jingo, I shall acknowledge it,"

(Continued...)

("Lifted"...continued)

Then, at the featurely dilation,
 All Heaven was freed. Joy
 Was sealed in their spontaneous hand-clasp,
 At last she counted!
 The lady with him whom she had scarcely
 Thought of, turned to her and
 Sweetly murmered, "He cut his first tooth
 Yesterday, but then, he is always so good!"

57. ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

The gospel passage was being read
 As candle-flame burnished auburn head
 "A little while and you will not see me
 Again a little while, you will see me,"
 Once, a smallish boy with face all bright
 By lighted candles did me affright,
 Punished I him, for danger there withal
 Quickly sent him running ere fire befall,
 Extinguished I the threatening flame
 Then saw below a crude altar frame
 All draped in blue, with bible opened there
 My pierced heart of pain was most aware,
 "A little while and you will see me"
 More'n twenty years! He stands before me
 As candle-flame burnishes auburn hair
 And my heart of joy is so, so aware.

*Plate 15: The Author and the Editor (subject of poem 57) at
 Ruswarp in 1951.*

Plate 16: The Editor in 1995

58. DA CAPO

Once I lost a shilling,
 So hardly earned was it
 That sighs and tears spilling
 Seemed poor reward for grit.
 Then, I found a shilling
 'Neath bridge they call "Horse-shoe"
 What avalanche came spilling
 At owning one, not two!

59. SHADOW ON THE LAKE

Were the whole world as this still place!
 Closed in by birch and copper-beech,
 Lilac bustles and cherry lace,
 Rhododendrons within my reach,
 The lake be-mirrors willow's gold,
 Emblazening yet again her crown;
 Fledgelings twitter, they, still more bold
 Go gather crumbs by children thrown;
 Then round the curve I stumble on -
 A lonely man with fishing-reel -
 Firmly holding, intent upon
 His coming conquest seeking meal.
 Beside him, writhing bait I see
 Two thousand crucifixions full,
 To take two thousand lives; ah! me!
 This dream-world's now Golgotha's Scull.

60. MIGHT AND MANE

The draught-horse pulled her mighty load
Firmly, happily, until
The downward slope of Hesleden Road
Reached towards steep Blackhall Hill.
No word, or curse, or whip-at-play
Could move that stiff quadruped
Until a dainty Galloway
Was yoked. How they forged ahead!
I hear a voice most emphatic
"Grandma you'll not never die? ---
Toss my mane round neck rheumatic
"Take my reins, boy, no hill's too high,"

61. DOWN THE WIND

One o'clock, two o'clock,
 Three o'clock, four,
 Roseate winds
 On children blow.
 Five o'clock, six o'clock,
 Sev'n o'clock eight
 Hands on plough-tree
 Manipulate.
 Nine o'clock, ten o'clock,
 'Leven o'clock, twelve,
 To furrows deep
 Do dig and delve.
 One o'clock, two o'clock,
 Three o'clock, four,
 Life's foot a wedge
 In garner-door,
 Four o'clock, three o'clock,
 Two o'clock, one,
 Cold wind listeth,
 A season gone.

62. MINGLING SCENTS

"Get well soon", says each card and flower
 Of every shade, who's fragrant power
 Plucks and lifts from dromos dark
 A soul to sing as lightsome lark.
 Yet, grant me one most holy hour
 To smell a bean-field in full flower.

63. LAST DAY OF SEPTEMBER

You stand at the open door
 Glorious Mother of the variant seasons
 Misty-eyed, as your babies,
 Your little sunburnt, crinkled,
 Wizzened little babies
 Cling to the end, sinking,
 Shuddering to your golden feet,
 They gather like frightened sheep,
 As that door relentlessly beckons.
 They skip the umber furrows
 And find each other again
 Lying low in the hedgerow
 Cheek on cheek, to await that
 Unfamiliar blanket which
 Mother's comforting arms never needed.

(Note by author "In hospital 1984")

64. OCTOBER

October, you mixed up one
 You wily one, and fickle
 Your cool breath fans the seedy bramble
 But calls to dance the Michael-blue daisy,
 Your birthday sign.
 Round sun is hazy above the ploughs
 Where fat sea-gulls wild in combat
 Swoop on vulnerable banquet to gouge.
 Woollens, thermal, pom-poms and wraps
 All need an airing for humans so weak
 While cat-haw and apple shake all the day
 With laughter from round healthy cheek.

65. TRUE SISTERS

We passed at times and smiled "Hello"
 She came from the other ward
 Then conversation, as you know
 Began with one accord.
 "The children now are doing fine"
 (Our private lives on view)
 "I suckled mine" or, "What a time
 lactation was for two."
 And then we knew it; surgeon's skill
 Had deemed we be as one
 The seeking mouth, the joy to fill,
 Had gone, gone, - gone.

66. THE BRIDGE I CANNOT CROSS

Oh! Brother mine, what did you do
 When you held me up-side down
 In the water-butt? Only I, knew
 The hellish fear; "I'll drown, drown, drown!"

Henceforth through my whole life
 Of water I am petrified.
 At thoughts of paddling, fear is rife,
 I wriggle, squirm, and knot inside.

The breaking wavelets, bubbling stream
 Oh! Brother mine, what have I missed?
 To row, and swim is both a dream
 And nightmare. And won't be dismissed.

67. THE LAST APPLE

There it hung above my wall
The very last apple before the fall
Branches about it almost bare
Appearing darkly everywhere.
Still that globe of red and gold
Drew me, fascinated at strength of hold:

Ever watchful swirled the starlings
Poised to repel the lesser darlings
Who, at every chance would spear
And set in motion that wondrous sphere,
Tilting, swinging like Carousel
Bare-backed they rode, their pangs to quell.
I did not see its downfall, though;
What has an apple to tempt one so?

February 18th 1987. *Dated by the Author*

68. FREEDOM UNKNOWN

Though many times we tramped that road
 Two miles to the sea and golden shore
 Yet one day so impressed and bode
 No memory since, or yet before,
 Or so sharpened in a childish mind
 Such wonder, when at last begot
 The first e're glimpse of the mining kind
 Of ponies, as I learnt their lot
 "It's through the miners you see, course
 Big sister, knowing more, responded.
 They never ever saw this lea
 Before today: underground were bonded"
 How those hooves were set a thunder!
 Pony tails and nostrils high!
 Sniffing more the sea frets' wonder
 And the new mown hay close by!
 How the blinkered faces jolted,
 Stretched to greater heights unknown
 Others from the boundaries bolted
 Some were rolling, some lay prone.
 They never saw the golden sunlight
 Just followed blindly where it shone,
 Whence, in my own dark span of night
 Lead me, warming, to Thy Throne.

(Dated 9th November 1988 by the Author. At first the line above read "It's through the miners' strike, you see," and was amended and initialled by the author.)

69. FLIGHT

From the sun's rising and at its noon
 I seek the meadows and tread the soft dune-
 Savour the west wind, the lime and the woodruffe
 Onward and outward, I can't get enough!
 Fair land and bare land, bush and plantation
 I'm a guest of many a nation
 Highways and Skyways, and over the main
 Blessed by sun-ray, and quenched by rain,
 My journeyings, strangely, are perfectly free
 All the whole world is mine to see
 I just sit and stare, or close my eyes
 While Fantasy bears me alone to the skies,
 My journeyings, true, are perfectly free
 All the whole world is mine to see
 With books, pictorials and brochures bright
 The bedroom's my world, but thank God for Sight!

70. THE TEMPTRESS

My cousin Con had got the mumps
 All puffy-up with great big lumps
 And I was left to go to school
 Play truant? Disobey the rule?
 Then she had a brilliant thought
 "Come through back, you'll not be caught -
 I'll breathe out as you breathe in,
 You're sure to catch this smitten' thing,"
 And smit I was, but far, far worse
 My throat, impossible to curse!
 Had I mused and gone to classes
 The name we caught would not be asses.
 (*Dated Jan 30th 1989 by the Author.*)

71. THE WINDS I LOVE

There's a chink somewhere in this old house
 That South-West zephyrs conscious are
 And enter moodily as mouse
 Or Banshees wailing, bent on war
 They welcome are, what e'er their trait
 As slinking, creeping, thrusting, strong
 Into my mind push wide a gate
 To cornfields, ripe, near path along
 Where little breezes at the edge
 Would make their waves across the field
 Whispering, lapping to the farthest hedge
 Then rise again their bounteous yield
 Scarlet poppies button-holed
 That golden robe which constant veered
 To sway their faces glad and bold
 To pave my path and heart, so cheered.

(Dated Jan 1989 by the Author.)

72. SPARED WAS I.

"Phyllis" was to be the name,
 Up to my fore-head's signing
 Then Holy Spirit moved my folk
 To stay a life-time's whining
 They put "May" in second place
 (The first, below, I'm known by)
 So why the Merry month of May
 When I was born in Ju-ly?

Nov.1981. Marian M. Bell

(All original poems were signed by the Author. Ed)

Biographical.

Marian May Bell was born 14th July 1910 to parents Ernest Alfred and Sarah Anne Lawson in Front Street, Heselden, near West Hartlepool, County Durham. She was seventh of eleven children. Her father was a council labourer, and who was gifted in music and painting. The family were faithful Methodists. The family were also proud of the family link with Jack Lawson (later Lord Lieutenant of County Durham)

The awful injuries to her father in the Somme left a lasting impression on the then six year old, but the later financial strain on the family of eleven, coping with an invalid father was to be an embittering experience for Marian. Though gifted and intelligent, her scholarship to Henry Smith's Grammar School in West Hartlepool could not be taken up because the uniform could not be afforded. During her childhood, her love of music was not to be held back by the lack of money. After only three months of lessons, she continued alone to teach herself. Her later dreams of becoming a nurse like her sister Jenny were shattered when her mother arranged for her to go into service on MacLaren's farm in Thorpe Thewles.

By then, the family had moved to Stillington, near Stockton-on-Tees, and her older siblings were leaving home. There was also bereavement when her sister Clara died. She married November 15th 1930 to John Harold Bell (Jack), a marriage that was to last over 62 years, They moved house many times, always renting, until they eventually afforded their own home in Stockton-on-Tees in October 1967. Their children were born in different houses; (excepting the twins, of course) so often did they move. Hazel was born in

Whitton, 1931; Irene in Morrison Street, Stillington, 1933; John and Trevor in Rectory Cottage in 1938, and Tony in Lawson Street, Stillington in 1947, after Jack had returned from army service during the war.

In her memories, she was always happiest at Redmarshall. Jack and Marian fondly remembering Mr. Rust, the Rector who died in 1942, shortly after Jack had been called up. So strong was their love of that village, they returned to the same (enlarged) cottage in 1957, Their love of the adjacent St Cuthbert's Church was apparent. Jack was churchwarden for many years, caring deeply for its fabric and appearance, always scything the grass twice annually, and digging the graves for at best, five shillings.

Marian was deputy organist. Frank Battersby, the resident organist held faithfully to his post for well over fifty years. During the second stay at Redmarshall, Marian at last afforded real organ lessons, until a tragic accident at the Women's Institute Hall at Carlton when a falling table broke her toe. The move to Greatham, near Hartlepool in 1962 was to benefit the family financially because Marian was to be caretaker of the Church institute, the Church, and the Hospital Chapel. By then the girls had married and left home, as had one of the twins.

Her poetry, occasional until the 1960s, became much more expressed in Stockton, as did her painting. By 1979, however, cancer had begun its assault on her, and she fought and recovered from four various cancers before her death fourteen years later, along with other serious illnesses, including arthritis, two heart attacks, two mild strokes and salmonella. This was her period of most prolific writing.

Jack, to the surprise of the family, was the first to die. Unfortunately, when he collapsed with his final illness, he fell on the frail Marian and broke her arm. She was taken to hospital with him, only to return home for a brief visit for his funeral. She spent several weeks in hospital, during which she became confused and anxious. She died just over two months after Jack.

Selective comments on poems 1. - 72. **(The canon).**

Numbers below refer to poem numbers, not pages in this book.

(2) John King was the grown son of a farmer in Heselden.

Marian recalls here a true incident in which she, with a group of children, was playing in the fields of said farmer, This was the first time she heard the nickname. (3) The recession years of the 30s, the war years, and the austerity years took 25 years of Marian's marriage. Though Jack was never unemployed, in the days when mothers never worked, money was never plentiful. 'Make do' was her ingrained mentality for the rest of her life. When clothes or other materials could no longer be handed down, mended or 'recycled' further, they were made into clip mats. (4) 'Gwen' would probably be her cousin

Connie, with whom she was a close confidant. Marian was very nostalgic for her years of innocence before the hard life began helping at home to look after so large a family, and then bringing up her own. That nostalgia extends to her childhood dreams as in (46). (5) In the years when she suffered cancer, she was a regular visitor, indeed, one of the first, at the

Butterwick Centre in Stockton. John Butterwick lived only a few yards away in Hartburn Lane, where he died, and where Mary Butterwick first founded the hospice in his memory. (6)

(7) Clear reference to her father's return after hospitalisation following his wounding in the Somme when Marian was six years old, and remembering being in awe of him in earlier times of childhood. All the family, both her siblings and her own who were old enough remember could sense the feeling of awe about 'grand-da'. He also had a playful sense of humour that Marian captures here. (8) One of the poems of the 1950s.

Marian was always a country girl at heart. (9) C1962 the Oak was removed to facilitate road improvements between

Redmarshall Crossroads and Redmarshall Bank on the Whitton

road. She was very upset at its loss to her skyline from home and where she walked Wisky. (10) (12) (21)

Marian's model poets would have been those she learned at school, such as Wordsworth, but in later years she appreciated Gerard Manley Hopkins and others. (11) Largely fanciful, but perhaps based on a crush she had on a farmer's son called John Cowan. (13) With all the children she held, her own, and generations following, her mother's grasp of the smile as profound is not surprising. She was not just a sentimental, however. She, of the two, was the disciplinarian and upholder of the moral parameters. (14) In a time when children could roam freely and always come home without fear, Marian was nonetheless a worrier regarding latecoming children. This incident is true, and goes back to a time when John, (called Cedric by the family until his teens) was found in the church at Redmarshall with the Rector, beside an old coke stove which was removed in the 1950s. (15) (29) Jack Bell snored.

(16) Country girl in a town? Marian was from 1967. (17) A true incident. Recalling a real conversation on the sight of a birth in a field by her twin sons in infancy. (18) Another true incident involving the twins, using the name 'Don' because 'Trevor' wouldn't rhyme. Donny was a playmate of the twins who lived in nearby Carlton. She forever reproached herself for punishing the wrong twin, but it broke her heart the more that the twin she punished (for some long forgotten misdemeanour of many) was so totally loyal as to take the punishment for his brother without complaint. (20) Recalling an incident at the old organ loft in Stockton St. Thomas' Parish Church, before the new organ was installed there in the late 1970s. Possibly a power-cut. (22) This is found in her handwriting at the end of a long essay entitled 'Graves and Staves' (23) Marian grew a seed and placed it in an old washing machine bowl. It grew in her backyard until her death, when it was removed. She

identified her life span with that of that tree, which had no further root space at the end. (24) Marian had memories from childhood of brimstone and treacle, given on a spoon from her father. Meat juices sound a rather more pleasant medicine, (25) the robin actually came into the house at Redmarshall in the early 1960s until its death on the road. Its mate, however, was much more nervous. (27) One of the family jokes. Jack loved suet dumplings. Marian was heartily weary of them. (28) After the fashion of (10) etc above, but with the Christian symbolism very prominent. (31) See the comments at (13). In a time when children can be at risk from predatory evils, seeing a child come into the company of a male worried her. Was it really the child's father? And what of her own motives. (32) I remember little bells on items of clothing when I was an infant. (33) Given her life of physical work and motherhood, and her yearning to be a 'Mary', not surprisingly, she personifies herself as Martha in this 1980s poem. (34) More theological images crept into her work as life progressed. She was conscious of the 'green' issue before the movement was invented. She grieved the loss of hedgerows and trees (as 9). (35) is more whimsical, recalling the worm in the plant pot. Another true incident. (36), (37) Other family based poems, this time her second daughter, Irene, who complained about her legs in teenage years. True incident at a Cheshire Home, where Irene was singing to entertain the residents. (38) The footnote is by the author. (40) Auntie Lizzie was Marian's aunt, and the mother of her cousin Connie, who spent her final years in Bradford. Earlier years were spent at Middleton-one-Row. (41) Doctor MacMahon, one of the several legendary Irish doctors who served the villages northwest of Stockton so faithfully. Poetic licence regarding "Anthony King", who is the editor. King is the author's mother's maiden name. I do remember writing a thank-you letter to the doctor after a six-

week bronchial illness when six years old. I also remember the horse on an old calendar, which was a profile of a horse's head, (not jumping) which the doctor used to distract children before injections. Children are not so easily fooled, however, as I well remember when I was given my diphtheria immunisation in his surgery when about three years old. These incidents are all fused together in this poem. Doctor MacMahon died in the 1950s. (42) Whimsical version of a conversation, possibly on a flight to Malta to see Hazel in the 1960s. (43) Admiration for Jack's dedication to work, and his wisdom in many things, though Jack and Marian had very contrasting characteristics. Poetic licence in some aspects, though Old Jack could have been Jack's uncle (Jack). None of we sons of Jack actually took up the scythe as a regular way of life. Jack had learned its use on his father's farm in childhood, and worked after marriage for Stockton Rural District Council as a lengthsman until (apart from war service) 1949. (44) Depicting a mythical but possible shooting accident. (45) Marian always longed for a log fire in wintertime. Father and sons spent many hours in Redmarshall sharing a crosscut saw to meet the need. (47) Many of those who knew Marian are fascinated by her extensive vocabulary, since she never seemed to use words like 'farinaceous' in speech, and reading, due to a lack of time, was rarely her pastime in earlier years. What a way of describing a car in snow, and to weave into it a Christian image! (48) is modelled on her mother, who, in Heseldon, before regular and regulated midwifery, was the local 'hands-on' midwife and the resource person for laying out bodies. There were occasions when Marian laid out bodies when asked by a villager, but the images have long since disappeared from our culture. The dialect words are out of character from her normal usage. Heseldon 'pit-matic' is evident. (49) is the lyrics from a song she wrote in the 1970s, possible based on four theological

students who were on placement with the incumbent at Redmarshall in 1950, though the names have been changed. (50), (52), (53), (55), (58), True childhood incidents, and nostalgia revisited. Heseldon, Crimdon Dene and Blackhall Rocks were frequent day trips in later years for her young family, when holidays or summer days by bus could be afforded. Horseshoe Bridge on the Hartlepool to Castle Eden line on her walk to school. (51) Wisky was abandoned by neighbours as a puppy, but was adopted and loved as a faithful family pet until he was put to sleep in 1969, aged 16. Truly, the dog never learned that the hedgehog was always going to come off best. The spelling of the dog's name is accurate, reflecting the nametag I bought when I was a seven-year-old. (56) True incident of eyeball contact with an infant. (57) Most poignant for the editor, since I remember my childhood "playing at churches." I am not sure which incident she is recalling from my adult life. I was ordained in 1972. She was present at many of my services, including several funerals for which she was relief organist. (59) True incident by Ropner Park Lake, Stockton-on-Tees on seeing the maggots. (60) Juxtaposition of childhood memory of two equines which she recounted to me, and the true question from one of her grand or great-grand children. (61) Begins the Graves and Staves essay which 'Time' (22) ends. (62) The country girl at heart in old age during one of her many hospital stays. (63) Noted at the top of this page in her own handwriting is "in hospital. 1984." This is her most productive year, and September a recurring theme in her verses over the years. October would have been a time for ploughing in her childhood before the genetically engineered seeds, which produce a July/August harvest, and a much earlier ploughing. (65) Marian breast-fed her children, including the twins, grown up and away. She also suffered a mastectomy. Another poignant juxtaposition. (66) Another true incident,

probably her brother Len, adult when she was a five-year-old, upending her over a barrel of water. She recalled the screaming of her own voice reverberating deafeningly in the barrel, and seeing the reflection of her own terrified face. Both Marian and Jack had phobias about water. (67) A sonnet. From the rear window of her Stockton home, she could see the apple tree in the rear garden of the Hartburn Lane garden opposite. She always fed and watered the birds. Her own footnote dates the poem, as with (68). This was another true incident of one of the miners' strikes when the ponies were brought up to the daylight they had never seen. Which strike is open to conjecture, since she had moved from Heseldon by 1926. She was again ill at the time of writing, as with (69), when her freedom was achieved in imagination. (70) Recalls an incident with Cousin Connie. Connie died some years earlier than Marian. The later poems are precisely dated; this one on January 30th, 1989. (71) The country girl again remembers cornfields, though the remembering is in January. She absolutely hated draughts in any of her homes, as all the curtains on doors and draught excluders we fell over verified. This draught was greatly honoured in Jan 1989. (72) Whimsical end to (her) canon recalling the machinations which led to her naming. Poems outside the canon, with separate commentary, follow on.

Poems outside the Canon

SLIPPERS (Christmas 1986)

Slippers slippers everywhere,
Bedroom floor and shelf and chair.
Red, I keep for Sunday's parlour,
The colours match, when I've a caller.
The dressing gown of azure hue
Hangs beside a pair of blue.
Pretty mauve, still in their packet
Pushed in a case with lace bed-jacket.
Furry mules without a back
To comfort her with spinal wrack..
Little bits of peep-toe lace
For a bride with rosy face.
In the kitchen, kicked aside
Some down-at-heel, and once brown hide,
But I'll tell you this; if unprepared
For morning callers – first, second, third,
They'll spot a pair of bald old slouchers,
With no toes, or heels, - just pouches
Where the bunions, corns and swelling
Find a haven for their dwelling.

PULL A CRACKER

Pull a cracker, Gran, with me
 Let us share the bang and see
 Who with faces puckered tight
 Shows the most outrageous fright..

Know this, my boy, as breathless we
 Wait the explosion soon to be
 My life-long troubles disappear
 Behind the mask of abject fear.

(Christmas 1985)

By Christmas 1985, Marian had ten grandchildren, the eldest aged 28 and the youngest, perhaps the best bet for this poem, Alex, aged 6, the editor's son. She also had 7 great grandchildren by then. Ed.

WASHING DAY

There's a gentle sound from the floor below,
 The children whisper in dismay
 'Tis early yet for rising, so
 It must be mother's washing day.

The smoke is belching thick and black
 Against the sky, just turning light,
 From out the laundry chimney stack
 Sparks are dancing clear and bright.

(Continued...)

(Washing Day continued.)

Hundreds, hundreds, and yet more,
Leaping, skipping whirling higher,
Fighting, scurrying, all at war,
As more fuel feeds the fire.

Hurry children, make a dart,
They daren't do other than obey.
Mother wants to make a start,
For rain is prophecied today.

Shoes to clean, hair to brush,
Tears and tidemarks, quite a lot.
Breakfast now, all in a rush,
Hurry up, the water's hot.

Ah! At last. Now where to start?
Table cloths or pillow slips.
Piles enough to break one's heart,
Sheets enough to sails three ships.

Possing, scrubbing, wringing, sweating,
Turning, twisting, breathing hard,
Now these shirts will need a wetting,
Also curtains by the yard.

Steam, and froth, and running water,
Misty eyes, and tired brain,
Slaving for that dirty daughter
Causes many an ache and pain.

(Continued...)

Petticoats, all frills and laces,
 Dresses neat, and cambrics fine,
 Lingerie with airs and graces,
 Dancing gaily on the line.

Bolster slips the wind is swelling,
 Shirts, with striped and checked design.
 Some with patches, but all telling
 Of a mother's stitch in time.

Twelve-o'clock, the time is flying,
 Children must be fed, you know,
 Here they come. Why Tommy's crying,
 Someone's trod upon his toe.

Little son you'll learn your lesson,
 Pain is hard when you are young.
 But when manhood takes possession
 You will bear it with a song.

Probably the earliest of Marian's poems, since it is subscribed in the original "By Mrs. M.M. Bell, Redmarshall." The family lived at Redmarshall twice, leaving Rectory Cottages in 1942 when the twin boys were 4 years old, and the girls 11 and 9. The return to the same cottage, the two cottages made into one, was in 1957, no longer with a poss tub, and after the girls had married. The images of heating the copper were of the early stay at the cottage. Tommy is mythical. Perhaps the last stanza is a veiled war reference. Jack Bell was in the army by then.

Plate 17: *The Author outside Rectory Cottage in 1961.*

Plate 18: *Rectory Cottage from the churchyard in 1995.*

Both photographs by the editor. Site of Washing Day and (possibly) Prospecting.

Her twins were born here in 1938.

THE HUMBUG

When you are urged to take a cat-nap
While other eyes are more aware
The laden dish with twisted gay-wrap
Which all the hard boiled humbugs wear
First, provide two reliant ear-muffs
And perhaps an added head scarf
Into the largest cushion, head, stuff
Assuring the noise is cut by half.
From every direction, cunning, first
Come paper pellets rolled through palm
Aimed at fire-place tho' they never burst
But rebound on carpet without harm.
Now then, the serious gun-fire crackles
Straight from jaw if teeth are strong.
Here, the marauders raise your hackles
You hope that the warr will not be long.
Crunch! Like thundering tank on rocky plain.
Crack! Suck! Like army tank in mire.
Champ! Grind! Beslobber and suck again
Offenders not yet to retire.
You will wriggle, squirm and move about,
But the platoon will take no hint.
You will yawn, stretch and push your neck out –
Eye the dish; “Have you not left a mint.?”
Marian M. Bell. Boxing Day 1987.

All the work after “Spared was I” is not in Marian’s original canon. She did once refer to her “Washing Day” disparagingly as not a particularly serious effort, and implying that it was immature. I do not remember her original words, but clearly she did not think it worthy of publication. In fact it gives a clear verbal snapshot of a domestic working class washing day in the 1940s. She was answering my question as to her earliest poem. Why “The Humbug” is not in her canon is not known. Perhaps this is an oversight.

It is more understandable why the poem following was not considered by her for publication, since it was such a personal missive. The whole family was stunned in 1980 by the death of baby Richard, son of her godson and nephew Robin and wife Angela. Richard was born on St. Valentine’s Day, (the day after Ash Wednesday that year) and died on Good Friday, a profound challenge to a Christian’s faith. His life was Lent. In another sense, so is ours.

To Robin and Angela. On Richard’s Illness. March 14th 1980.

WHAT DOES ONE SAY WHEN THE SUN GOES IN?

What does one say?

We find a nook

And a book –

Wait for that Ray

True confidence brings; the sun’s returning.

Capitals and underlining are original. The reference is to sun behind clouds here though she was one of those to see the total eclipse of 1927, and often enthused about it.

The following “Fireman’s Prayer” was published in St. James’ Church, Hardwick, Stockton-on-Tees magazine, May 1986. I do not know the poem’s origin, supplied by Wally and Miriam Murgatroyd, but Marian’s poem following was by way of a review a month later. It was described as ‘an original and spontaneous response to “The Fireman’s Prayer” in last month’s Wildfire by Mrs Marian M. Bell.’

Fireman’s Prayer

When I am called to duty, God, wherever flames may rage,
 Give me the strength to save some life, whatever be the age,
 Help me embrace a little child before it is too late,
 Or save an older person from the horror of that fate.
 Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout,
 And quickly and efficiently to put the fire out.

I want to fill my calling and to give the best in me,
 To guard my every neighbour and protect his property,
 And if, according to my fate I am to lose my life,
 Please bless with your protective hand my children and my wife.

THE ANSWERING LIGHT.

With Wordsworth’s “Skylark” have I flown,
 And smelt his “Daffodils” full blown;
 With “Solitary Reaper” sung my lay,
 Touched the depths of “Lucy Gray.”
 But “Fireman’s Prayer” must surely fan
 And burn with love the heart of man.

[Miriam Murgatroyd died the following month of cancer, aged 43. Her Husband Wally was the Chief Fire Officer at Teesside Airport. Marian was again fighting cancer herself, seven years after her mastectomy. Miriam and Marian met many times at the Butterwick Hospice in Stockton-on-Tees.]

CHIN UP

Troubles have a habit of sneaking behind you
Worry seeks you out and it's easy to find you
So turn up your face, and nose and eye them
And lift up your head with pluck to defy them.

June 1986

[This poem was discovered in one of the Author's work books, but she does not include it in her 72. It is immediately followed by "The Answering Light." Ed.]