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POEMS

CLIVE BELL

THE HOGARTH PRESS



1862

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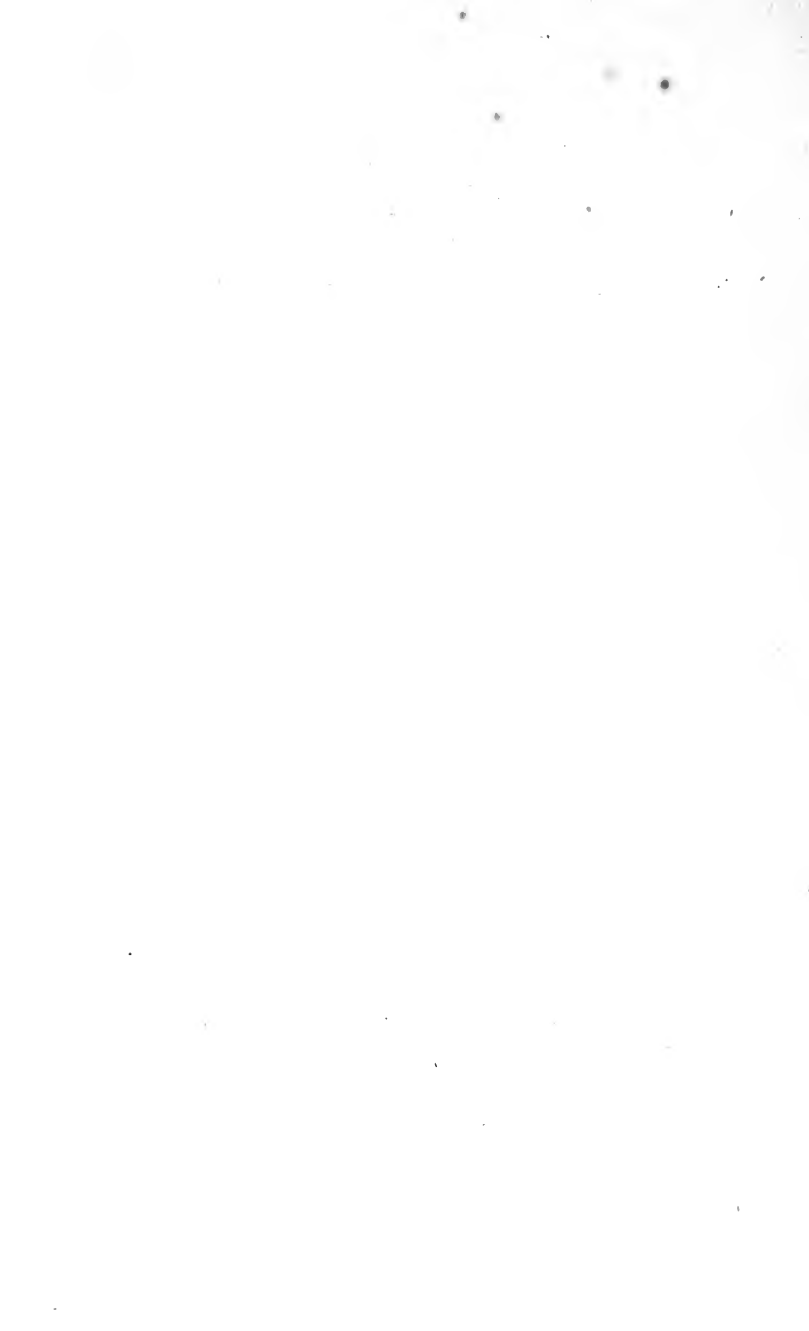
# POEMS

CLIVE BELL

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*Printed & published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf  
at the Hogarth Press, Richmond, Surrey.*

1921



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Most of these verses have appeared in the papers—*The Nation*, *New Statesman*, *Cambridge Magazine*—to the editors of which I tender customary dues. Also, in 1917, a dozen were brought together to make a little book, *Ad Familiares*, of which a hundred copies were printed privately. Of these seventy were immediately distributed amongst my friends, while the remaining thirty have drifted into the hands of curious amateurs who wrote and asked for them. My stock is now exhausted ; but apparently the stock of amateurs is not : for, from time to time, still reach me civil requests for a copy. What can I do? On the one hand, my vanity is outraged by the idea of people anxious but unable to read me ; on the other, I am too mean to print for their benefit at my own expense. What I have done is to accept with joy an offer by the Hogarth Press to publish a complete edition of my poems—seventeen in number. Thus, in future, without being at pains to write a flattering letter, and at a trifling cost, any amateur can acquire the works of an extremely rare poet.

C. B.

(5)



*The* CARD HOUSE

And so he laboured very hard,  
Piled little card on little card  
And laughed to see how well it stood,  
How all his work was sure and good  
And pretty as a minaret.  
He shone with pleasure. "Now I'll set  
A jolly cap to crown the thing."  
He clapped his hands. Perhaps the fling,  
Perhaps the shout was over-daring;  
It toppled down while he was staring.  
One had to titter, willy-nilly,  
To see him look so sad and silly.

1912.

# LETTER TO A LADY

A GLI ALBERETTI

VENICE

APRIL, 1913

Here in a garden under vines  
Translucent in the mid-day sun,  
Washing, green shutters, and the lines  
Of the *Salute*, which is fun  
And pure baroque to men of taste,  
I'm waiting—while the pot-boy chaste  
Or chastish since Ignatius Chowne  
And J. A. Symonds to this town  
Have taught Italian history—waiting,  
I say, while he is regulating  
A "*conto*" of 12.50-Change  
For 50 lire; it is strange  
In "*tutto il viale bello*"  
In which the shops are small but thrifty  
There's not a single honest fellow  
To furnish 37.50.

I'm waiting still, and still I ponder,  
As I have pondered all the morning,  
Out on the blue *Giudecca* yonder,

Under the arches, listless, yawning  
Full-mouthed against precocious summer  
That's sprung this quick surprise upon us,  
And found us out, the sly new-comer,  
Tweed-coated, winter-hosed, astonished—  
I ponder, knowing all the time  
The answer, ponder for the pleasure  
Of fitting fancy into rhyme  
And matching music with the weather,  
What lacks when sea and sky conspire  
With form as thin but more romantic  
Than that which some of us admire  
At Covent Garden,—Transatlantic  
Cousins still call it monumental,  
But we know better—sentimental  
People divine a riddle basking  
Under its marble,—never mind them,  
Be sure they'll come, their tales behind them,  
Safe home to Chelsea. Still I'm asking :  
"What's lacking yet?" The Spring's awake,  
Each palace curtsies to her neighbour,  
Each gondolier's a handsome rake,  
Each mouth-organ a dulcet tabor ;  
What can I want when Venice plays  
And Time's a song, and Fate's a dancer,  
And Life drifts gaily down her ways,  
What's lacking, Madame? Can you answer?

To A. V. S. WITH A BOOK

Books are the quiet monitors of mind,  
They prompt its motions, shape its ways, they find  
A road through mazes to the higher ground,  
Whence to explore the sky-bound marches. Round  
About us lie the open downs. Our days  
Still ask a guide and goad. Wherefore always  
We meditate wise thoughts and passionate lays ;  
Wherefore I send a book.

Books are the mind's last symbol. They express  
Its visions and its subtleties—a dress  
Material for the immaterial things  
That soar to immortality on wings  
Of words, and live, by magic of the pen,  
Where dead minds live, upon the lips of men  
And deep in hearts that stir. Wherefore do I,  
Drawing a little near, prophetically,  
Send you a book.

Books are the heart's memorial. They shall  
measure,  
In after days, our undiscovered treasure,—  
Thrilling self-knowledge, half-divined untold  
Yearnings, and tongueless agonies, shall unfold  
Or half unfold to half-illuminated eyes.  
The cypress shadows creeping gnomonwise



Still stretch their purple fingers down the hill  
That hangs above Fiesole; and still  
Your English fireside glows. Do you most dear—  
Sometimes just guessed at, sometimes very near—  
Yet always dear and fairest friend, do you  
Recall the sunlight and the firelight too?  
Recall the pregnant hours, the gay delights,  
The pain, the tears maybe, the ravished heights,  
The golden moments my cold lines commend,  
The days, in memory of which I send  
A book?

DEC. 1909.

## MYSELF TO MYSELF

It was the thrush's song I heard  
To-day, in March. And you who came  
At life through books, whom poets stirred  
To love of beauty, who the name  
Of art revered and fancy knew  
From earliest days,—why, how should you  
Guess at my feelings when among  
The elms I heard the thrush's song?

For you the country means a mood,  
Recalls a poem, lays a scene ;  
For you its beauties are more good  
Sometimes than paintings : it has been  
Music to calm or move you, still  
A background to your thought and will.

Nothing for me the country means :  
It is. The thrush's earliest song  
In the precocious sunshine cleans  
My soul of culture. Comes along  
The acrid smell of daffodil,  
Hard from the soil still wet and chill.

These do not mean. I am content  
To look or listen, passion spent,  
Far beyond art and thought, and free  
From Vanity and Jealousy,  
As free as flower, or bird, or tree,  
Not to mean anything, but be.

1901.

## SPRING

The sun crept into the peaceful earth  
And troubled her dream of fair content ;  
He tempted the timorous blossoms to birth,  
The poor pink fools that laughing went  
Naked to meet him, their leaves without,  
And the meddlesome bees droned round and about.

The sober grey that shrouded the head  
Of the pensive sea he ravished away ;  
He twitched it from her, and gave instead  
The libertine breezes who ruffle her day ;  
Who tease and tousle and toss anew  
Her mourning garment of exquisite blue.

He cozened the mud-flies out on the heath,  
Ephemeral butterflies opened their wings ;  
The credulous birds from their mates beneath  
Caught up the catch that Eternity sings—  
Sings to the Echoes in Fools' Paradise—  
"Shall not our folly befool the wise?"

APRIL 1903.

# REPLY TO MRS. JOWITT

WHO SENT ME A PIECE OF GOOD NEWS

IN A RHYMED LETTER

*Wittering, April 1915*

When all the world was very good  
(So says the nursery rhyme)  
The fairy Fays and Mays who stood  
As godmothers, from time to time,  
Would give their virtuous picaninnies  
A golden goblet filled with guineas.

That was the golden age: and nurse  
Declared that ours grew worse and worse  
("Don't bite the spoon, Miss Leslie!")  
Yet I believe that fairies still  
Can fill a cup, and over-fill,—  
At any rate in Chelsea.

Telling good news is reckoned kind  
(Except when Germans tell it,)  
To wrap it in a pleasant rind  
Of song was thought angelic  
By the good shepherds, and by me  
A piece of sweet *diablerie*.

One cavil: though it ill becomes  
One who has in his time  
Bedragged the depths and skimmed the scums  
To catch a dubious rhyme,  
To scold a poetess who fell  
And, though she knew she shouldn't,  
Wrote down a name that rhymed with "well"  
Instead of one that wouldn't,  
Yet, frankly, tuneful, erring sister,  
Can one be musical to "Mister"?

A monosyllable, I confess,  
Is what the Muse prefers:  
She cut a queen's name down to Bess  
And yours is worse than hers:  
Meanwhile it takes a better poet  
Than I to deal with Mrs. Jowitt.

To GERALD SHOVE

I like to let my fancy rove  
O'er all the charms of Mister Shoave.  
But oh! how very much above  
Such obvious charms are those of Shuv.

Oh Shuv most intimate! Oh Shoave  
More pompous-fine! Yet interwove,  
How complex-sweet and meet for love  
The compound name of Gerald Shuv.

Oh Gerald dear! Oh Shuv! Oh Shoave!  
My late-found bliss, my treasure-trove;  
My poor heart yearns to counter-prove  
Those double facets that me move  
So strangely; therefore, deign t' approve  
This syncretism—Gerald Shooove.

1912.

## MARCH

If I could catch all the stars in a net  
And make them tell me their Christian names,  
Or snare the dream of a violet,  
Or persuade the squirrels to teach me their games,  
Or quite surprise, on a warm June night,  
The lilac bushes that laugh for delight  
And tremble for fear lest we should hear them,—  
If I could tiptoe breathlessly near them  
And overhear them  
And master so  
Secrets that only the lilacs know :  
If I could feel what a young bird feels  
When first it flutters across the road,  
Or learn at last from the creaking wheels  
Of a wagon that story they tell their load—  
The hillside legend that never grows old :  
If I could be told  
All the subtle, impalpable, exquisite things  
That we just surmise when the country sings,  
That week before they begin the hay :  
If I could contrive to sing, or to say,  
Or to be, what the poets have never invented,  
Should I be contented?  
Was I to-day?

1915.

## APRIL

After so many days . . .  
The moon lies right across the sea,  
The tide's up to the brink,  
A door keeps flapping in the wind,  
I cannot sleep a wink,  
Although I'm sleepy as can be,  
But lie in bed and think  
Of you and all your proud, gay ways.

1915.



## JUNE

They say you are the latest, loveliest jest  
Of some transmigratory ghost,  
The last embodiment, and best,  
Of some small being—tell me, are you most  
Yourself when most  
A squirrel or jerboa?  
Or rather,  
Since you are tender, humorous, and wise,  
Is yours the spirit of some steadier goer,  
A grave, precautious donkey, whose wide eyes  
See, far away, the thin ambiguous towers,  
Nor miss the pebbly road nor truant flowers—  
See farther,  
And less painfully, than ours?  
Or, as I think,  
Have you, like some  
Too curious spirit peering from the East,  
O'erleant the ramparts of your little town  
In Fairyland; and from the brink  
Of The Impossible tumbled down  
To where we now uneasily surmise  
Your vagrant figure, trailing Sirenwise—  
Strayed reveller, from some fairy banquet come  
To sow sedition at our sober feast?

1915.

## OCTOBER

O up the hill and down the hill  
And all across the ferry,  
Avid as bees under the trees—  
Probably they'll be merry :

And back again, under the rain,  
As wild as wind-tossed plovers,  
Wet and chill and enchanted still—  
I fear they must be lovers.

1915.

## DECEMBER

In some few years, when you and I—  
Perhaps in some few months—shall lie,  
Where lie at last everyone must,  
Little will it approve our dust  
That one shall write above our tombs :  
“They gave their days to glums and glooms.”

Much rather had I someone said :  
“They loved to wantonness, these dead.”  
“They kissed too much,” I’d have one say,  
“Until they kissed their souls away.  
Still they were young, and, lip to lip,  
They found a way to make Time skip ;  
And they were bold enough to find  
A way to brave him, mind to mind ;  
And sometimes, by their deadly art,  
They caught and crushed him, heart to heart.”

This elegy methinks becomes  
Us better than our glooms and glums.

1915.

## LETTER TO A LADY

SEPT. 1916.

No: I was not made for love ;  
I was made for easier things,  
Ecstasies on paper wings,  
Agonies that end in laughter  
—Smoke or kisses coming after—  
Not for love.

I was made for airy thinking,  
Nimble sallies, champagne-drinking,  
Badinage and argument,  
Reading's infinite content,  
Ill-considered merriment,  
Friendship, anything but love.

Made for singing little songs,  
Made for righting little wrongs,  
Made to taste whate'er there be  
Of loveliness and gaiety  
On this variegated earth ;  
Made for sentiment and mirth  
And light romance, perhaps just worth  
A smile from Art, a nod from Truth,  
I, apt for a fantastic youth  
Of follies, an old age of thought,

And never thinking to be caught  
As now I am, said "Never mind  
Love; for Love, you know, is blind."  
I was made with eyes to see,  
And taste to choose fastidiously,  
And ears to hear, enough of brain  
To make most matters fairly plain,  
Enough of health for work or play,  
Of wealth enough to pick my way,  
Sense to enjoy, and arts to bring  
Soft nothings off a softer thing,  
A turn of wit, a taste for ease,  
And what had love to do with these?

I was made to revel in  
The viola and violin,  
The broad bassoon and clarinette,  
From every art devised to get  
Its complement of melody:  
Believe me, I was meant to be  
One who smiled back at smiling faces,  
A loiterer in life's pleasant places,  
A well of receptivity.

I was contrived by God to pull  
The noses of the very dull;  
Tweak up as 'twere a cotton gown  
The law most solemnly laid down;  
Expressly charged to mock the great

And weather-cockwise still girate,  
To choose a rose and praise a frill,  
And sometimes cause a tiny thrill,  
To be a lover in my fashion—  
But O! I was not made for passion.

Therefore, dear Lady, if you please  
Deal very gingerly with these.  
Here is our garden: O, take care  
Our passion spoil not our parterre.  
Be gracious, Madame, lest your frown  
Should bake the lawns and burn them brown,  
Be very kind, or jealous showers  
May quite dash down our scented flowers,  
And O! be chary of reproof,  
Remember I'm not made for love.

## TO LOPOKOVA DANCING

Is it true?  
Are Ariel's whims  
Embodied in your artful limbs?  
And Puck, they say, betrayed you all his lore:  
Did he? Are you—  
As now to me at any rate you seem,  
Twisting a Longhi into fun and air,—  
Are you, perhaps, that unpropounded theme  
Of playfulness Mozart forgot to score,  
As lyrical and debonair and new  
And fair?  
The rhythm snaps. Surely I caught you there?  
You are, at least I'm almost sure you were,  
Some truant from the lesser Piero's store,  
A living Procne by a livelier shore,  
Where lustier satyrs ply remorselessly  
More pagan antics by a bluer sea,  
A sea as frankly unmysterious  
As Theocritus.

1918.





## THE LAST INFIRMITY

Then tell me this, how must I praise you, dear  
And desperate doubter of all pleasant things—  
Infidel to yourself—who neither clear,  
Untroubled truth, nor chequered flatteries,  
Nor love's tried tales and trusted sorceries,  
Will hear?

In vain the throstle sings,  
Roses are red in vain, and sunlight fair :  
For all that amorous armoury of words,  
Which poets forge themselves from ecstasy,  
For all youth's uncontrived *niaiseries*,  
Melodious similes of flowers and birds,  
For well-found compliment or unfeigned prayer,  
You do not care.

You are the last word of a thousand years,  
*Fine fleur* of Europe's slow civility.  
All subtlest products of her ceaseless toils,  
The middle ages' mystic gaiety,  
The gorgeous hubris of Italian dawn,  
The slow maturing vintage of its spoils,  
What Titian dreamed of, what Velasquez guessed,  
Rambouillet played with, Versailles half expressed,  
You are the heir to : and to you have gone  
Voltaire's thin smiles and Prévost's prettiest tears.

Listen! You are that mystery,  
That still life that just lies  
Below the surface. Sometimes you'd surmise,

So smooth, so silently, the stream goes by,  
That it were dead : but, peering past the brink,  
An inch below the glass you catch a wink,  
A twist, the thrilling sense of flow.  
And there ! And there ! And see the green weeds  
blow

And strain against the strong, subaqueous wind.  
So, just beneath that faint, diaphanous snow,  
Your skin, it flutters pulsewise : now behind  
That bright brown eye stays frozen ; now afar  
Mocks our dull inquisition that would know  
What life is, what you are.

1921.

ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΓΑΥΚΥΤΤΑΤΟΝ ΜΕΤΑΒΟΛΗ.

Frankly, I do not greatly care  
Always to be my best ;  
I like sometimes to take the air,  
Sometimes to take a rest.

Sometimes, austere philosopher,  
I scan what thought reveals :  
At other times I much prefer  
Silk stockings and high heels.

And sometimes Beauty moves me much,  
And sometimes Pleasure more :  
Great Art seems sometimes Double Dutch,  
And Amabel a bore.

Is God's clock always just at noon ?  
Is Heaven always fair ?  
May angels not adore the moon ?  
Is there no tea-time there ?

Why, then, how blest are we on earth,  
Who know an ampler range,  
With blondes and browns and grief and mirth  
And, above all things, Change.



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