

Poems of the  
Countryside

By Beryl Johnson



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*Author's Profile*

# 1. The Picnic Spot

Brave little daffodil  
blossoming all alone  
in the rotting, dank under-pile  
of the litter-strewn wood.

O shame upon the human race to  
desecrate this picnic place! But  
underneath the garbage pile  
God's nature is at work.

And if all human traces  
were from this place removed, a  
glad array of daffodils  
would shine through the wood.

So, if you're in the countryside to  
while away the hours,  
I trust that you'll remember that  
it's God's world, not ours.

Not ours to ravage and destroy nor  
profligate her treasure store, but in  
harmony with God's design new  
loveliness restore.

## 2. Cupboard Love

All through the Summer,  
since we moved here to Cambridge, a  
small bird shares my breakfast,  
hopping in through the open door  
with expectant gleam in his black eyes,  
the blaze of red on his breast asserting  
his confidence  
in man's goodness and bounty.

But when the harsh winds  
sweep over the roofs and houses  
and doors and windows are shut  
against the cruel fingers of frost,  
where will my friend be then?  
And who will care if he lives or dies?

Do not close your hearts or minds  
against the feathered community  
who grace our woods and fields,  
but ensure that they, too,  
will find each day  
some crumbs of comfort  
in places where they tend to go,  
so that they may live to see another Spring.

### **3. Sonnet**

A pair of swans who hoped to build a nest  
were driven from their natural habitat  
by thoughtless children disturbing their rest,  
teasing and taunting them; who pose no threat  
but that of finding a place of their own  
in which to lay their eggs and raise their young.  
Deserting their kind, they flew off alone  
seeking a place where they would be among  
kindred spirits fulfilling nature's needs.  
Following the river towards the sea,  
a marshy estuary among the reeds  
gave shelter to many birds, wild and free.  
An inshore lake, hidden from prying eyes,  
a haven for wildlife, a paradise.

## 4. Flight of the Condor

High above the mountains  
swaying motionless in the wind-currents,  
kings of a vast empty blueness.

Widespread wings  
high above the grasslands,  
telescopic eyes  
penetrating every movement,  
the soaring downward flight  
claws extended,  
giant shadows  
moving across the terrain,  
sudden fear,  
squeals of terror,  
no escape.

Voracious fledglings  
eager for food,  
a scurry of fur and feathers.  
Rapacious beaks and claws,  
torn flesh,  
replete silence.

Brooding sentinels  
chasing invaders,  
guardians of their territory  
architects of space.

## 5. Hale-Bopp's Comet

In your hurtling passage  
through the aeons of time, you  
graced our planet,  
giving vision of your splendour  
for a brief moment.

At nightfall  
when all the familiar stars  
appeared to welcome you; you  
outshone their glory, your  
dazzling sphere  
trailing vapours of blue light.

Every evening  
your mysterious presence has drawn us to  
gaze heavenwards,  
conscious of your slow traverse  
across our infinitesimal field  
of vision  
your glory burning brighter  
as you race towards the  
outer dimensions.

We are the poorer  
knowing we shall never see you again, though  
others may  
if you do pass this way  
in another 2000 years or more.

## 6. Blots on the Landscape

See the birds  
encircling the wastelands,  
uttering their harsh cries,  
following the bulldozer  
shovelling the mountainous loads of rubbish  
and discarded black nylon bags  
into the gaping hole  
carved out of the flatlands, rich  
pickings  
for the gulls and carrion crows.

Where does it all come from  
and where will it all go?  
These soil-covered mounds concealing  
a macabre burial ground protruding  
like monstrous carbuncles on the once-  
fertile landscape,  
unsavoury objets-d'art for future souvenir hunters!

In some far off places,  
a shocking replica of our times, it  
is not only the birds  
who encircle our rubbish tips  
and await the emptying of dust-carts; it  
is old people dressed in rags, children,  
barefoot and hungry,  
who search the remnants  
of other people's affluent and wasteful extravagance.  
Poor pickings for a deprived and abandoned race!



When nature's once bountiful resources no longer satisfy the burgeoning demands of the world's ever-increasing population; when pollution has overtaken and thwarted nature's capacity to restore earth's natural balance and order, will a 'holocaust' be the outcome? Or will there be a few survivors scrabbling a living from a no-longer viable planet?

## 7. Breakthrough

It's in the little things  
that love sends out its warming rays.  
In the dark-soft gleam  
of a rising dawn,  
tinting the pale-pink petals to a magentian glow.  
Streaming light  
creeping across the dank-dark shadows of the night  
disperses the shades of gloom,  
'til the glory of the golden sun  
bursts through the portals of the bonded soul and  
loosening the bands  
raises the heart and mind  
beyond the finite  
to the touch of the Creator's hands and  
the promise of life incarnate.

## 8. The Colours of Love

Red is for kisses and cupid bows,  
for roses that hang round the trysting bower,  
for wine drunk deep and secrets disclosed, for  
passion and poetry and glorious prose.

Blue is for womanhood, babies and breasts,  
for halcyon days and for skies that bless,  
for seas and boats and gulls riding high,  
for gentleness, healing and holiness.

Green is for gardens and parks and fields, for  
forests of firs and vegetation that yields an  
abundance of riches in flowers and fruits, and  
all living things that nourish the earth.

Yellow is the moon shining on high  
beaming a light through the shades of the night.  
Golden the sun, blazing at noon,  
ripening the corn to be gathered in soon.

All these colours reflected you'll see  
in the rainbow that hangs like an arc in the sky, a  
sign of God's love for you and for me  
and the bond that is sealed in the colours of love.

## 9. Greensyke

Sometimes in dreams

I go back

to a lofty, grey mansion

standing in green fields,

by a little running ditch.

Ancient trees

spread their leafy branches,

giving shade in summer

and gnarled, protective strength

in winter.

And in the Spring,

a glorious array of narcissi and daffodils

border the drive.

Solitary cows browse in the fields,

the sheep nibble in the pastures,

rooks caw from their highest nests

and the white fantail pigeons

circle and swoop close to the Home Barn.

Greensyke, Greensyke,

harbouring your ghosts from the past,

we laid them to rest

with our laughter,

our love and our prayers.

But a part of me remains

and often returns

to your strange, mysterious, silent walls

intimate with the lives of so many

gone before.

Adieu, Adieu.

## 10. My Secret Haven

To escape from –

Incessant clamour,  
shrill, demanding voices,  
mind-jarring inconsistencies,  
pain-wracked weariness.

To follow-

The winding path through the woods  
to the grassy banks  
above the stream.

To lean my back  
against the smooth bark  
of the tree's infolding stem,  
to feel the sun  
strongly warm on my face  
seeping into the very marrow of my bones.

To feel the clutter  
slowly ebbing away  
caught up in the stream  
flowing ever outwards,  
matter disintegrating  
freeing my mind.

My secret haven,  
my arbour of delights,  
refreshment,  
healing,  
solitariness,  
ME

## 11. Love of the Cowherd

Daisy dreaming in the fields, her  
gentle eyes are moonshine, her  
breath sweet  
with the scent of grass and clover,  
her cheeks moving in sublime rhythm munching  
buttercups with careless abandon.

In the heat of noonday  
she lies down and takes her rest.  
In the evening she gives of her best,  
her swollen udders streaming whiteness and purity,  
bidden to flow,  
she gives in her meekness  
warmth and nourishment.

The naughty village boys  
envious of other's good fortunes,  
scornful of those of lesser mien  
throw stones and sticks,  
leading thoughtless, mindless, empty lives.

Can life be so empty  
that they must throw stones, shatter  
illusions,  
mock what is sacred, drag  
pride in the dust? All life  
is sacred!

Time enough  
when the hide is stripped oft; the  
flesh consumed,  
the carcass empty,  
a pathetic thing to drag by the tail!

For now,  
I lie in the long lush grass  
watching her tail swish away the flies.  
The sun is warm on her velvet hide, long  
lashes cover her languorous eyes and I  
am content.

## **12. Childhood Memories**

Gathering shreds of dirty fleece  
caught on barbed wire or hawthorn hedges, teasing  
it out to remove the lumps,  
feeding it through the fingers on  
a homemade spindle, washing  
the hanks  
to a soft, white woolly thread,  
knitting it into a homespun garment to  
display my handicraft.  
Sadly,  
they don't teach them these ways anymore.

### 13. Thoughts on Afterlife

What will it be like  
in that other realm unknown,  
when death has closed my  
eyelids and the breath of life has  
flown? Will there be shining  
light beckoning from the dark  
beyond,  
will there be a garden, flowers, trees,  
voices familiar or strange?

Will He be there to welcome me,  
the One I have trusted so long,  
or will he just look at me  
as He once looked at St Peter,  
knowing my innermost thoughts.  
Will there be love and forgiveness  
and a sense of coming home?

Will they be there,  
the friends I have known and loved,  
my father and mother  
who gave me birth,  
the people I once cared for,  
and those I have failed.  
Will they be there to greet me  
in loving friendship joyfully renewed?

I have so greatly loved  
morning skies, blue and rain-washed,  
sunsets, blazoned with the colours of the dying sw1,  
snowcapped mountains, hills strewn with bracken,  
waterfalls cascading off the Fells,  
and the little streams  
where we scooped up the water with our hands,  
quenching our thirst.



I remember with joy,  
primrose-filled woods with violets growing on shady banks,  
carpets of bluebells where we gathered armfuls,  
etched for ever on my memory.

All those places where we walked and talked  
amidst the kindly company of four-footed  
friends, prancing and dancing over the turf.

Will it be better even than these?

## 14. The Daisy Chain

There are many ordinary little flowers like the daisy. People get so used to seeing daisies by the wayside, they take them for granted. But some people, especially children, like to sit down by the wayside and gather daisies and make them into daisy-chains, to crown their heads and hang round their necks. Then joy, happiness and laughter comes.

Bury me with the daisies  
growing in my secret place,  
let the children gather them  
to make garlands of grace.

Let me hear the sounds  
of their laughter and tears,  
as I rest in your peace  
through the long-waiting years.

When winter draws near  
and earth-time is done,  
let there be garlands of daisies  
around heaven's bright throne.

## 15. Flash of Blue

Walking along a footpath  
by a stream  
one Spring morning,  
I saw a flash of blue  
against the bushes  
bordering the stream,  
and repeated at  
intervals  
as I made my way along.

Was it possible to find in the soiled hedgerow  
by the litter-defiled stream  
a Kingfisher hunting for its prey?  
No other blue  
could so aptly cloak a royal King,  
no darting speed  
so reflect their lightning skills.

It made my day  
that one perfect Spring morning.

## 16. Margaret Cropper (1886-1980)

How can I write of one  
whose poetry  
transports me with delight  
to places  
where I, too, once scrambled  
among the tufted grasses and mowltain paths  
of the Lakeland Fells,  
and viewed from the mowltain top  
the little lakes  
lying like shining mirrors  
beneath the hills around.

How can I write of one  
whose love of country folk,  
among whom she dwelled,  
inspired her to write  
in homely terms  
their simple ways,  
their hopes, their dreams,  
their joys, their sorrows,  
which found an echo  
in my own heart-aches and longings.

How can I write of one  
whose serene faith  
endowed her with  
wisdom and understanding,  
compassion and gentleness  
beyond the sphere  
of ordinary mortals  
and aroused in me  
a similar vein.

She may have left this mortal life,  
her words will never fade or die;  
they will be the companions  
of my old age,  
and lift my spirits  
when darkness pervades.

And whoever discovers  
this treasury of golden poems  
will find a true answer  
to all their heart's desires.  
They will be richly rewarded  
throughout all their days.

## 17. God's Fingerprint

Pick the scattered seeds,  
for in them you will find the mark of God;  
plant them deep in the brown earth  
which needs no other tilling  
than the hand of God.

Watch them grow in the sunlight,  
springing up in the rain,  
for they have known the touch of God.  
See them blossom in the sunshine  
seeking their fulfilment  
in the smiling face of God.

In the same way  
God feeds his people,  
bringing them nourishment,  
strength and comfort,  
a gentle touch on the shoulder,  
a guiding pressure in the right direction  
pointing the way.

God's fingerprint is everywhere,  
seen and unseen.

## **18. The Sun's Eclipse**

(Cornwall, August 11th 1999)

On a certain Day at a certain Time  
the earth was plunged in darkness  
as the moon's shadow raced across the sun  
obliterating for one instance  
the shining light of the sun's orb,  
allowing us brief glimpses  
of a heavenly spectacular.

At the totality of the moon's shadow  
across the face of the sun  
was seen the fiery halo of the sun's corona,  
and as the shadow slipped across  
a bright glow appeared at one corner  
like a sparkling diamond ring  
proclaiming the Sun's reappearance.

On earth, darkness rushed into daylight,  
strange colours were seen  
dancing on the globe's surface  
summoned forth by the sun's rays.  
Then the curtains of clouds came down,  
the Show was over.

Another Day, another Time,  
but most of us will never see it again.

## 19. Ode to the Moon

New moon, I bow to you,  
be my lucky lunar break,  
turn the silver in my palm  
into all my dreams come true.

Quarter-moon, you wink at me,  
revealing none of your intentions,  
what message do you bring for me  
beneath your lowered lids?

Half-moon lying upon your back  
pretending all is well,  
can you make me change direction  
change my life for good or ill?

Full moon gazing down at me,  
let me look upon your face.  
Mother moon with silvery beams  
make a changeling child of me.



## 20. Running with the Waves

That morning,  
looking from the window,  
the corrugated surface of the blue sea  
was dotted with white flecks of foam.  
Nearer the shore  
the swell was visible,  
huge waves breaking  
in rhythmic splendour  
as they streamed over the sands.

We leaped from our beds,  
seized our surfboards  
and dashed down to the beach.  
The breakers were huge now,  
and wading through them we cast out  
to where the waves mounted before they broke.

Choosing the largest of the swells,  
we placed ourselves in its path,  
balancing a moment  
on the crest of the wave  
before plunging downwards  
into the green depths below.

We clung to our frail craft  
tossed in the foaming breakers,  
bucketing and bouncing, then steadying  
in the surge of the smoother water  
streaming towards the shore  
'til we were beached in the shallow waters.

Once again,  
seizing our boards,  
dashing back into the spray  
for another "run with the waves",  
sometimes losing our boards  
buried in the green depths,  
dragging ourselves onto the beach  
with seaweed around our ankles  
and pebbles in our swim-suits,  
but game for another go.

## **21. The Hang-glider**

(seen from Beachy Head 1986)

Like some gigantic bird  
daring to leap from the cliffs,  
he charges top speed to the edge.  
Launching himself into vacant space  
the wind catches his wings  
propels him upwards  
to soar and dive  
caught in the prevailing currents of air,  
steering his ship  
high above cliffs and sea.  
Captain of his fate  
borne on the wings of the wind.

## 22. The Cornflake Cycle

(say very fast)

The plough prepares the ground,  
the farmer sows the seed,  
the earth generates the growth,  
the rain swells the grain,  
the sun ripens it,  
the wind caresses it,  
the combine harvests it,  
the granary stores it,  
the profiteer markets it,  
the factory-hand processes it,  
Kellogg's packet it,  
we eat it,  
we ate revitalised.  
Now we can start all over again,  
"The plough prepares the ground."

## 23. Festival of Spring

On a new morning  
the sky  
dressed in blue  
spreads her billowing folds  
over woods, fields and hillocks.

Tendrils of warm air  
ushered in by the southern breeze  
gently caress the folded green shoots  
still under the spell  
of winter's long sleep.

A bright and comely sun  
steps out from her bower  
welcoming the buds and blossom,  
unfolding their petals  
in the warmth of her smile.

Early aconite,  
golden-budded in their splendour,  
carpet the woodland glade;  
orange and purple crocuses  
proudly erect in their new attire,  
stand like soldiers on parade;  
slim blue scillas  
dance and sway in the breeze  
making conversation;  
yellow daffodils and white narcissi  
nod their heads in greeting;

blackbirds, sparrows, robins and starlings  
sing, chirp and twitter,  
foraging in last year's litter  
to line their nests.

Hedgehog,  
cacooned in womb-like protection,  
emerges from his tunnel of leaves,  
patters across the grass  
eager to satisfy an aching void;  
inquisitive snails  
making their debut,  
disregarding dangers,  
are easy prey for hungry hunters.

This is nature's celebration  
welcoming the new-born Spring.

## 24. Invading our Territory

The male Tit  
displayed  
in front of the patio windows  
daring me to come out,  
hovering on wings  
beating  
innumerable times a second.

A pair of Great Tits  
had made their nest  
in the hollow base  
of our ornate patio wall,  
swooping in and out  
of the tiny space between  
the layers of stone supports.

Hopping among the branches  
of the purple lilac tree  
overhanging the wall,  
they chattered their defiance,  
darting to the nest-site  
when the coast was clear  
of cats and humans  
and predatory magpies.

In the house  
we watched  
like anxious parents  
willing their survival,  
guarding their privacy,

chasing off unwanted visitors,  
longing for the first glimpse  
of the fledglings  
and ensuring their flight to freedom.

But suddenly  
busyness ceases,  
the birds have flown.  
The nest is empty  
cleaned and tidied  
for another year.  
We miss them.

## 25. Lady with a Black Dog

You would see her most days  
walking the lanes with her black dog,  
a black rook following overhead  
flying from one side to the other.  
Some said she was a witch,  
others were more benevolent  
and allowed her, her eccentricity.

They had found Meg  
as they named her,  
sitting on a grass verge  
under the tall trees  
sheltering a rookery.  
Her leg was twisted backwards  
probably the reason why  
others had tumbled her out of the nest

She was taken to their home put  
in a box in the living-room  
and fed through a pipette.  
Later she became more active,  
jumping about and flapping her wings  
and was put outside.  
She would respond to mealtime calls  
swooping down with a harsh caw  
and sucking the food  
off an extended finger.

One day in the late summer  
she joined a flock of birds  
foraging in the fields.



She never returned.  
Meg had found her own kind,  
possibly a mate.  
She could now "hold her own"  
with the best.

## **26. Sailing with Spike and Dee**

When I go sailing with Spike and Dee  
we skim through the water and soar like a bird  
and the wind's in my hair, and my spirit is free  
as we sail down the river and out to the sea.

And all of a sudden the wind fills the sails  
and we're bowling along clinging fast to the rails,  
then the boat keels over as we change tack  
and I feel the water stream down my back.

Then out with the canisters and bailing like mad,  
while Spike takes the tiller on a long smooth glide,  
Dee and I grasp the gyb ropes, one on each side  
keeping her steady as we spin along.

River banks rushing by, familiar landmarks behind us,  
dodging the cruisers bearing down on our course,  
we're kings of the river and it's our right of way,  
but as often as not, they don't know it of course.

Then it's time for tea and a bit of respite,  
we cruise down the side to look for a site,  
We nose in the rushes and tie up the boat,  
let down the mainsail to keep us gently afloat.

Then strong mugs of tea, currant buns and ripe peaches,  
we're fair game for the swans that nose all around  
and fight with the gulls with their loud raucous screeches,  
then it's time to get ready and homeward bound.

When days get shorter and storm clouds are lowering,  
the boat's tied up and made safe in her mooring,  
sails folded all shipshape, bedded down with care,  
and it's biding time 'til next year is here.

When the days get lighter and my thoughts turn to Spring,  
I eagerly await for the 'phone bell to ring;  
every time that it does, I hope that it's Dee,  
"Will you come sailing again with Spike and me."

## 27. The Mystery of Silence

God made the mountains,  
their silence and mystery,  
inviting us to explore  
their unknown territory,  
to pit our puny strength  
against their mighty precipices,  
their towering peaks  
and soaring edifices;  
e'en to rest awhile  
in a shady place  
of overhanging boulders  
or in a forest glade  
knowing for a space  
uninhibited silence.

So why drive 'macho' cars  
along forbidden tracks,  
send noisy motorbikes  
hurtling through the silent glens,  
with loud transistor radios  
shattering the silence?

God gave us eyes  
that we may look  
deep into each other's souls,  
that we may confess  
our dearest thoughts  
without saying a word.

God gave us hands  
That we may touch  
feel and explore  
sensations of delight,  
to give each other pleasure  
guarding all that we forswore.

So why all this talk  
bandied between folk  
in words so vulgar, cheap and crude,  
in ways distasteful and rude,  
leaving the mind soiled  
and sensation eroded?

God made a perfect baby  
conceived in a virgin's womb,  
God's plan for redemption  
of a world bent on doom.  
He didn't tell us how  
nor did any witness the birth,  
in the mystery of silence  
God's Son came to earth.

## 28. Crop Circles

Is there anyone out there  
targeting our planet?  
Why choose cornfields  
to send coded messages,  
or as landing pads  
for alien spaceships  
under cover of darkness,  
never seen  
except in the imagination.

Look again  
at the wonderfully swirled patterns  
geometrically designed;  
not one blade is damaged  
except by those  
exploring their magic and mystery.  
Even clever hoaxers  
who attempt to imitate  
have their limitations.

Nature herself  
is more adept  
at producing beautiful patterns.  
Consider a snowflake,  
a spider's web  
sparkling in the dew,  
hoarfrost on the branches  
of trees in winter.  
Are there atmospheric conditions  
we are not yet aware of?

The answer is out there!

Eyewitnesses have testified  
to a whirlwind,  
a vortex of spinning air  
electrically charged  
imprinting symmetrical shapes  
of dazzling perfection  
on croplands and grasslands;  
swirl patterns, starbursts,  
some with spiked effects,  
air-pressured tramway lines.  
This is nature's response  
to highly imaginative tales  
of visitor's from outer space!  
The scientists, the meteorologists,  
the true researchers,  
let them have the last word.

## **29. An Evening at Denny Abbey**

Old, old, old,  
hard-rock stone walls still standing  
bleached by the sun.

Flat, flat, flat,  
all around the cornfields  
broken by occasional trees.

Red, red, red,  
the sky  
glimpsed through an archway.

Ghosts of Spirits  
long since gone  
and peace, peace, peace.

### 30. A Silhouette on the Hillside

Old Mill,  
a silhouette on the hillside,  
you stand as a gracious symbol  
of a long-gone age.  
Your arms lifted skywards  
no longer turn  
at the bidding of the wind,  
no callers at your doors  
to hump away the sacks of flour;  
only tourists who pay  
to view your ancient workings.  
I gaze on your artistry  
and rest in your shadow.

Like you,  
I find no words to turn my sails.  
The words that tumble  
from my wheel-grinders  
are few and lifeless.  
I have become  
a silhouette on the sidelines.  
I rest in my shadow.

## 31. Nuts

It was so still  
this early autumn day.

No breath of wind  
stirred the leaves;  
only the bushy tail  
of an angry squirrel  
disturbed the vision.

The full green fruit of the old chestnut tree  
dropped slowly onto the grassy bed below  
and splitting open  
revealed its glossy brown nuts  
with pale artless faces.

No local lads pestering for possession,  
shaking its branches  
and throwing missiles.

They have all grown up.

They no longer play their "conkering games".

Only sometimes in another sphere  
they challenge each other  
choosing the brightest and the best  
to split them open, then discard.

After all, it's only a game!



## 32. Sighs

The wind sighs,  
then dies.

The waves break on the shore,  
then withdraw.

The flames leap in the fire,  
then expire.

In the ebb and flow of life,  
I'm carried 'til I'm 'beached'.  
Then other hands will carry me.  
I don't care, I won't be there.

## **Author's profile**

I started writing poetry in 1973 when we were living in Cumbria. To discover this gift was a surprise and a delight. I joined the Cambridge Poetry Group in 1989. We write poems on a monthly theme and sharing ideas and reading poems aloud with other poets I have found very beneficial. I won a National Poetry Award in 1984, and have had many poems selected for publication in Anthologies and magazines. I am happily married with three children and six grandchildren.

I am also a Licensed Lay Minister and assist the Clergy. This collection of poems reflect my love of nature and affirm my belief in a loving God who is active everywhere in his creation.

My thanks go to David McLeary of CCVS who has taught me desktop publishing. To my sister, Mrs Joyce Griffith for proof-reading and to the late "Bill" Thompson of the CPG for his earlier encouragement.

All proceeds from the sale of this Collection will go towards "Franciscan Aid", the Charitable Trust of the Third Order SSF, to relieve poverty and advance education of deprived people from Third World Countries.

Beryl Johnson

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