By A. R. D. Fairburn

A. R. D. Fairburn
Collected Poems With a Foreword by Denis Glover
Pegasus

This volume first published 1966
Printed in New Zealand
By Pegasus Press Limited
Oxford Terrace, Christchurch

Contents

Foreword

This book contains all the poems Fairburn might have wished to include in a collected volume, and few (I think) that he would have omitted. My principle has been this: anything that Fairburn himself chose to include in books for the first time, or for re-printing, will have been a deliberate choice at that time. The authority of the collection is therefore his own, with exceptions I record.

He never reprinted 'The Sea', an important long poem which Allen Curnow and others re-discovered with surprise. He never reprinted 'On a Bachelor Bishop' first privately printed by me then put in the Arts Year Book of which he was poetry editor. A mordant bucolic from 1931, 'The County', he may have thought irrelevant to the New Zealand temper, though there are other poems written in England that are less pointed.

I have added three epigrams that amid such a spontaneous outpouring, he may have forgotten. These few additions I would like to think worthwhile.

The Disadvantages of Being Dead I selected from papers and clippings he left. (Horse Pansies was very much 'in preparation'.) It is no more than a sampling of lighter pieces: there are many listed by his bibliographer A. R. D. Fairburn, 1904–1957, A Bibliography of his Published Work, by Olive Johnson, F.L.A., the University of Auckland Monograph Series No. 3. 1958.

of which there were no clippings.

Two poems appear twice. 'Laughter' was originally in both Strange Rendezvous and The Rakehelly Man, a fuller version. 'Hymn of Peace' from The Rakehelly Man I repeated in The Disadvantages, I can't think why.

I have placed He Shall Not Rise at the end of this book. (It was at the end of that first work that Fairburn put his then earlier poems.) I did this because he dismissed, or affected to dismiss, this collection. But it belongs to the record; and is not far removed in style or spirit from much of Poems 1929–1941.

A brief look at Olive Johnson's Bibliography will show how many lesser pieces have been left out. She seems not to have missed anything important; though there are fugitive verses that have since turned up, inscribed in books, or on scraps of paper. Many others must exist, but another net is needed to catch such an oceanful of plankton.

I have consulted many of Fairburn's friends and relatives about this collection. They include Miss Olive Johnson, Dr Allen Curnow, Sir Douglas Robb, Mr Harold Innes, the poet's brother, Mr Geoffrey Fairburn, Mr Antony Alpers, Mr John Reece Cole, and, of course, Mrs A. P. Young, the poet's widow.

Denis Glover
Three Poems

Dominion
For Jocelyn

This poem was first published in 1938, and has for some years been out of print. It was written during the winter of 1935. The world was then recovering from the worst economic depression it could remember, and the poem bears the imprint of that period. For the benefit of those critics who have discussed it as a satirical poem I should like to say that I have always thought of the satire as being somewhat incidental to the main theme, which emerges in the last three sections, and which will, I hope, be found to have a relationship with the two later poems.

The Voyage

This was written in 1948. The broadcast presentation of the poem (in a slightly different version) was introduced with the words: This is a poem about faith, and works. In particular, it is about what Keats called "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. …" It is a romantic poem against Romanticism.

The reference, towards the end, to hand-weaving may seem obscure. I borrowed it from an account I was given of the Commander of one of our New Zealand warships, who had a hand-loom in his cabin, and worked on it in his spare time. It suited my purpose to use this as a symbol.

Since writing the poem I have come across two interesting passages, quoted by Geoffrey Grigson in an article in the English Listener on 'Images in English Romantic Painting'. One is from A. H. Clough:

'Where lies the land to which the ship would go?
Far, far ahead, is all her seamen know.
And where the land she travels from? Away,
Far, far behind, is all that they can say.'

The other is from Melville's White Jacket:

'The port we sail from is far astern and though far out of sight of land for ages and ages we continue to sail with sealed orders and our last destination remains a secret to ourselves and our officers. And yet our final haven was predestined ere we stepped from the stocks of creation.'

But I abjure the implications of the last sentence.
To a Friend in the Wilderness

This poem, which was written in 1949, has been broadcast in the same form in which it appears here.

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A.R.D.F.

Strange Rendezvous Poems 1929–1941 with additions

Jack the Ripper

Full Fathom Five
To a Millionaire

Yes Please Gentlemen

Lines For a Rebel

Remembered Cowardice

The Builders

These have their temples, citadels and schools, builded by those of old who toiled and wrought new gods to guard the world, nor comfort sought nor honour in their day. But we whose tools inherit that vast labour, no smooth rules nor laws have we, no sure foundation, naught but our own hard, bitter faith. Betrayed and caught in the engines of our kind, we are made the fools of time and chance. But surely we are brave who know our gods are false, yet make them true, toiling with shape and vigour to imbue the lie, the truth enwombed. The world to save, we take and eat the lie: the truth we give. These others live, and die: we die, yet live.

Milton

Good and Ill

Evil is to be conquered by absorption, not by rejection.

Disquisition on Death

(From an unfinished poem, 1929)
A Naked Girl Swimming

Night Song

Tapu

Song For a Woman

Well Known and Well Loved

Epithalamium

Love Song

Poem

The Cave
A Farewell

Wild Love

The Revenge

Country Pleasures
A good eye must be good to see whatsoever is to be seen, and not green things only.
MARCUS AURELIUS

Landscape with Figures
(Memories of England, 1930)

Deserted Farmyard

On Entering a New Abode

Winter Night

Love in the Night

Empty House

Gall
Lemonade for the old gentleman coming home hot from church.
OLD COOKERY BOOK
Epitaph for a Trilogist

Two trilogies, ten good-sized buckets full of novels for the middle-class, all much alike one another, capable and dull, and many clever articles and such-like—these were the excrement of his long toil. And so for twenty years or more he kept old men and women at their midnight oil, and old maids at their candles, ere they slept, with records of suburban loves and hates, garnished with sentiment, and spiced with lust; hatched out a Book Club; lectured in the States; and still spewed book on book, till in disgust a dozen bored reviewers took to drink. And when he died, they say, his very grave yawned; while the worms, forgathered by the brink, fond welcome to a fellow-creature gave.

Street Scene

On a Democratic Representative

Among the workers he was bright vermillion, among the gentry white, pure white, this fellow; he wore the rainbow, vied with the chameleon, yet through it all retained his native yellow.

The Rationalist

Niemeyer

The heart is gold, the name is Otto, 'Women and children first' the motto.

On a Georgian Lady Poet

With eager eye good Mistress Lot picks out the spires of Camelot.

Epitaph For a Public Man
His fame is quickly gone, but not his meat:
the worm, fastidious wretch, declines to eat.

For the Gravestone of a Politician

We asked for bread, he gave us stones:
may this one press upon his bones!

Additional Poems

Europe 1945

For an Amulet

The Encounter

Song

The Estuary

Now

Logos

Song for a Girl
Noon Song

Sea-Wind and Setting Sun

Tom's a-Cold

Epitaph

In Enemy Territory

To Daphnis and Chloe in the Park

Solitude

The Fallen

I'm Older than You, Please Listen

To the young man I would say:
Get out! Look sharp, my boy,
before the roots are down,
before the equations are struck,
before a face or a landscape
has power to shape or destroy.
This land is a lump without leaven,
a body that has no nerves.
Don't be content to live in
a sort of second-grade heaven
with first-grade butter, fresh air,
and paper in every toilet;
becoming a butt for the malice
of those who have stayed and soured,
staying in turn to sour,
to smile, and savage the young.
If you're enterprising and able,
smuggle your talents away,
hawk them in livelier markets
where people are willing to pay.
If you have no stomach for roughage,
if patience isn't your religion,
if you must have sherry with your bitters,
if money and fame are your pigeon,
if you feel that you need success
and long for a good address,
don't anchor here in the desert—
the fishing isn't so good:
take a ticket for Megalopolis,
don't stay in this neighbourhood!

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Discarding even the bag of chocolates and the novel
I climbed into that hovel
on wheels the second-class smoker
praying that Fate the irrepressible joker
would grant me release
permit me the hypnotic peace
of wheels clicking on rails for a few
beautiful hours but by God who
should be there who by God's grace
but the fat spent woman with a face
bitter as a holy war
she whom so often before
I had met in my stifling crayfish dreams
(waking with screams)
and with her the grim
wolf-jaw (husband escort paramour or fifth limb)
with the orange-and-chocolate blazer
and the smart-alec shoes.
Her voice was like a razor
at the throat of quiet. She was slanging
the foes of Justice. The trouble was there hadn't been a hanging
and when it came to murder she was no latitudinarian
and definitely not a vegetarian
the faintest stink of blood
made her feel good
and even her mental picture of the gallows' action
appeared to give her some (strictly biological) satisfaction
but a spoil-sport Cabinet had stepped in and stopped the fun
Doncher reckon they ought to put him on the end of a string
the murdering bastard doncher reckon and let him swing
I'd like to do the job with me own hands the slob
and by God if they'd let me so I would
I'd fix his lordship I'd fix him good
and proper and let him rot
but they havn't got
the guts to slip a noose
round his dirty ears
hell in twenty years
he'll be running around again loose
and none of us
safe at night he'll have the run of us
just because of a few bastards in Wellington….

And you
you don't believe in religion do you? wheeling
on me with acid relevance and I feeling
I was in some sense conniving at a threat
to this poor woman's life and honour I couldn't get
a word out of my mouth and felt very much to blame
and overcome with shame.
Oh Mr Tennyson, your dream of fair women,
how it echoes remotely, at this late date, a lemon!

Terms of Appointment

Song at Summer's End

To an Expatriate

Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

JEREMIAH 22:10

Mr Pyrites

Beggar to Burgher

The Woman to her Lover
Laughter

The Power and the Glory

Any Poet to his Mistress

Americo-Anglican

Self-conscious and facetious at full-face, prolific with his profile in the prints, he writes his verse at such a reckless pace his muse is far behind, both legs in splints.

On a Promising Politician

The eye was keen (we thought) that looked straight at you, the stance was firm, the tongue would never garble … Now that all's done, let's run him up a statue, the feet of clay, the head a block of marble.

The Demagogue

On an Intellectual

I don't know whether he's in touch with God, or lost in cloud; I only know he talks too much, and much too loud.

Lunch-Hour Concert

I dozed at last (although the chair I sat on
was hard, and I had gone without my luncheon) and dreamed that X threw down his broken baton and beat up Mozart with a rubber truncheon.

The Rakehelly Man

The Rakehelly Man
   For F. H. Worsfold, esprit fort

Walking on my Feet

Latter-Day Love-Song

Away From It All

My Pretty Maid

Hymn of Peace

Modern Love

Boarding House
Laughter

Cupid

The Impetuous Lover

Poetry Harbinger

Not Understood
U and Non-U: Fundamental basis of classification of New Zealanders, devised by the poet T. Bracken.
(For the Secret Brotherhood, with a bouquet of ragwort and bracken)

Glum Summer
(Dedicated to Frank Sargeson)

Ron, I'd say.
What is it, Eth? he'd say.
And then I'd say, Ron.
And instead of answering he'd just have a sort of faint grin on his face.
Ron, I'd say.
But I never could get further than just saying Ron.
I wanted so say something, but I didn't know what it was, and I couldn't say it.
Ron, I'd say.
And he'd sort of grin. And sometimes I'd take his hand and hold it tight, and he'd let it stay in my hand, and there'd be the faint grin on his face.
Ron, I'd say.
I'm all right, Eth, he'd say. I like it, Eth.

Elegy at Month's End
(For James K. Baxter)
Kowhai Poem
(Dedicated to Mr Fairburn, the Plain Man's Poet)

On a Bacchic Poet

Jack and Jill
(For Allen Curnow)

The Enchanted Garden

Grande Chatelaine

Deep South

To a Fiend in the Wilderness

Who'd have guessed it from his lip
Or his brow's unaccustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship...?
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet
That wrote the book there, on the shelf...
He was prouder than the Devil:
How he must have cursed our revel!

—Browning, Waring.

2000 A.D.

Conversation Piece
To an American Tourist at Whakarewarewa

Reflection on the Recollection of First Hearing 'William Tell' Overture (Arr. for Military Band) Played at the Age of Nine by the Royal Artillery Band in the Band Stand at the Auckland Exhibition 1913

As Man to Man

Since we live, dearest boy, in this terrible age of Anxiety, what can we do for relief, what drug can we find? It's a little too late for Karl Marx. A réchauffé piety might fill the bill. Put Sigmund right out of your mind. It was such a shock to discover that old Uncle Joe had hairs on his body and stank so of stale cabbage soup; we wouldn't go back to that now, dear boy—a bad show; it would look altogether too much like looping the loop.

Frank Buckman is out, I'm afraid—a nice enough fellow, but look at that perfectly dreadful cosmopolite circus he carts around with him. We need something just a bit mellow—psychological nudists and chatter of morals might irk us.

On the whole I suggest something cosy and utterly private—just you and I meeting at breakfast and drinking our coffee, agreed on whatever opinions we jointly arrive at, and living in harmony, sharing our books and our toffee.

Poem Addressed to Mr Robert Lowry on the Occasion of the Birth of his Fourth Daughter

How lucky we are, Mr Lowry, to live in the land of the kauri. Just think what, between us, our commerce with Venus would have cost in the days of the dowry.

The Secret Maiden
TO A LITERARY JOKER, ON ANOTHER

You have three kids, I have four kids.
Jones, I hear, is growing orchids.
Thus the floral queen is regnant,
Though his muse is never pregnant.

Poem on the Advantages of Living at the Remuera End of the North Shore
or
See Devonport and Fry

The Hon. Mrs Tweedscantie

Her bridge? Gad, sir, rotten.
Her golf? Best forgotten.
Her fishing? Well, frantic.
Her hunting? An antic.
Her shooting? Oh, nervy.
Her archery? Scurvy.
Her billiards? Just pokey —
But crikey, her croquet!

Idyll

Ikon

The Little Fishes

The little fishes in the sea
are guilty of idolatry:
they think the great big ships are gods,
the ferry-boats Olympic bods.

Poeta Nascitur Non Fit
or You don't need a Telescope to Tell When a Poet is a Misfit

God Bless the Electric Shaver, Friend of Man
Philosophy For Beginners

The Bars and Gripe

Oh, come to the Land of the Free! You'll find that you're free to agree with whatever conforms to the ethical norms of descendants of dumpers of tea.

Political Jotting

Bluestocking

We'd cheer to see the lady cast her hose into the tub, by gosh, were we but sure the dye was fast and wouldn't run through all the wash.

Euphues

This efflorescence of pink and white! This gongorism, out-blossoming Spain's! Poets of the world, unite — you have nothing to lose but your daisy chains!

Uncollected

The Sea

Mr Fairburn to his Bibliographer

O Live! Give Dewey innocence, false pride, Lot's wife in mind, no backward-longing look: Invoke the gods—take Bacchus for your guide,
Venus for chaperone. And may you not
Ever be brought to book.

**On a Bachelor Bishop**

**The County**

**Note on the State Literary Fund**

Here is a piece of wisdom
I learnt at my mother's knee:
The mushroom grows in the open,
The toadstool under the tree.

**On R. A. K. Mason**

Here's Mason, who would greet us
With some damned tag from Epictetus.
His belly was so full of Latin
He fouled the very chair he sat in.

**The Disadvantages of Being Dead**

**The Disadvantages of Being Dead**

*On reading that Sir Ernest Fisk, Managing Director of Amalgamated Wireless, considers it may be possible before long to get into communication with the dead.*

**Now that You've Found the Way, You Must Come and See us Again**

*Canon for two voices*

**Hymn of Peace**
Oh —! Oh Hang!

‘If at the end of a year we have not made worth-while progress I will resign,’ said Mr E. R. Cuzens at a recent meeting of the South Canterbury Regional Planning Council. …The chairman (Mr George Dash) said: ‘If I am chairman of this body for twelve months, and at the end of that time we have not made progress, I will hang myself.’

Footnote to Matthew X, 29

When playing from the first tee in a tournament at the Lochiel Club’s links, Mr A. E. McDonald, of St. Andrew’s Club, Hamilton, hit a sparrow on the wing. The bird was killed.

Coal Comfort

The collier ‘Wingatui’, which left Wellington for Westport to get coal for Wellington, arrived back in without the cargo of coal but having circumnavigated the North Island.

The Ends of Man

The Auckland Metropolitan Drainage Engineer gave it as his opinion that one might almost think that Providence had provided Brown’s Island specially for the purposes of the drainage scheme.

Political Science

The Tourist

To my Butcher

On having a pound of steak delivered in the ‘Sunday Express’.

The 105 Per Cent Loaf

On bakers protesting when they were compelled to wrap bread.

Matchless Beauty

‘Bus, Otahuhu, 6 p.m., Wednesday, Young Lady in single seat, black dress, asked for match. If interested,
Song of the Open Road

A Phoenix in the Fowl-Run

The Art Gallery Committee of the Christchurch City Council rejected 'The Pleasure Garden', by Frances Hodgkins, on the advice of three experts. (It was later bought by public subscription and now hangs, without much civic honour, in the MacDougall Gallery.)

Bredon Hill

With a wink at Mr Housman

The Most Unkindest Cut

On reading that protests have been made against the dissection of cats at a School of Biology.

Talking of Talking

'Verbosity in Parliament' — Newspaper headline.

Reverie in Rat Week

News from the World

'A new and happy day has dawned!' cried the loudspeakers. God just yawned.

Any Book-of-the-Month Club

The virgin marks her calendar, and still goes undefiled; she menstruates most regular, and never has a child.
A Note on the Depressing Effect of Abdominal Disturbances

People who have the colic
Don't frolic.

Down on my Luck

Horse Pansies
A Garland of Beautiful Thoughts Some in the Manner of Mr Ogden Nash, and others with no Manners at All by A. R. D. Fairburn who, for the purposes of this outing, wishes to be known as Horace Papjoy.

It’s my Laugh or Yours

An Old Tale Re-Told

I once knew a girl with a heart like an icicle
Who used to go riding around on a bicycle;
She never would stop when I called out or whistled:
If her eye caught mine she just pouted or bristled.
I loved her red hair and her bright blue socklets,
I wooed her with flowers and I wooed her with chocolates,
I sent her an apple, I sent her a book,
But she never would give me so much as a look.
I fell to despairing, but just at that juncture
I found her one day trying to fix up a puncture;
She had wrestled for hours and had given up trying,
She was just sitting there by the roadside and crying.
I patted her hand, said, 'There's no need to bellow,'
And mended her tyre like a chivalrous fellow.
Then just like a woman, perverse and mercurial,
She smiled a sweet smile and said, 'Please call me Muriel.'
She flung her arms round me and gave me a kiss,
And said she'd been waiting a long time for this.
She said, 'I'm all yours, you can take what you like.'
So I thought for a while — then, of course, took the bike.

Roll Out the KnightcartA Ballad for the Times
To the tune of 'Waltzing Matilda'

Sociological Jotting
It's been Keeping me Awake in the Afternoons

If wharfage
Is what you pay for using a wharf,
And haulage
Is the cost of getting things hauled,
And railage
Is the charge for using the railway.
Why isn't cabbage
What you give to the taxi-driver,
And garbage
The money you eventually hand over to your tailor?

We've Got the 'Herald' in the Morning and the 'Star' at Night

Try this over on your piano

An Open Invitation to all Decent, Tea-drinking New Zealanders—Take Glover Apart!

[Inscribed on a heavily visceral anatomy chart]

Then Come, Lads, tear him limb from limb
And tripe by tripe unravel him,
Let's catch him Bending, fix the Date
When he shall meet his well-earned Fate.
Your vegetable Hate should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to prise
His Eyelids from his bloodshot Eyes,
Two hundred to unlock his Chest,
But thirty thousand to the rest.
An Age at least to Light and Lung,
And the last Age should show his Bung.
For Glover he deserves this State—
Up-end him, Lads, and fix his Date!

He Shall Not Rise

This book is for my Mother

Later Poems

Wandering Willie's Song

All I have Desired
The Runner

Diogenes

Amarantus

Odysseus

Evening

Night on the Water

The Stoic

Odysseus

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Tea-Tree

The Pomegranate Tree
The Old Man

Dead Man’s Tale

An Old Woman

In the Younger Land

Kowhai

Early Poems

Cold June

Twilight

For a Young Girl

The Sun has Spread his Shining Wings

Rhyme

Kings and Queens
The Flowers

After

Song

Hellas

Near a Growing Town

A Woman in the Street

Wish

Release

The Old Bridge

The Seasons

Sunflowers
Apple Trees

Blind

Autumn Piece

Pagan Prayer

Nightfall

Earth and Sea

Love Poems

Change

Oh, were I turned all suddenly
into a star,
in the cool wilderness of space
to dwell afar;
or should they make of my body moondust,
magical, white,
and scatter me about the silent roads
of the world, at night;
or burn me in flame until I was but smoke
upon the air …
still should my shadowy heart tremble a little,
exquisitely,
at the words your voice spake, crying as of old
in the dark to me.
Meeting

Song at Dawn

When She Speaks

Song

Since that Zenophila

The End

The Lover Grows Old

After-Times

Choice

Winds

Return
Loss

Byways of Love

Let us Make an End

He Shall Not Rise

Rhyme of the Dead Self