

SPIRITS  
IN BONDAGE



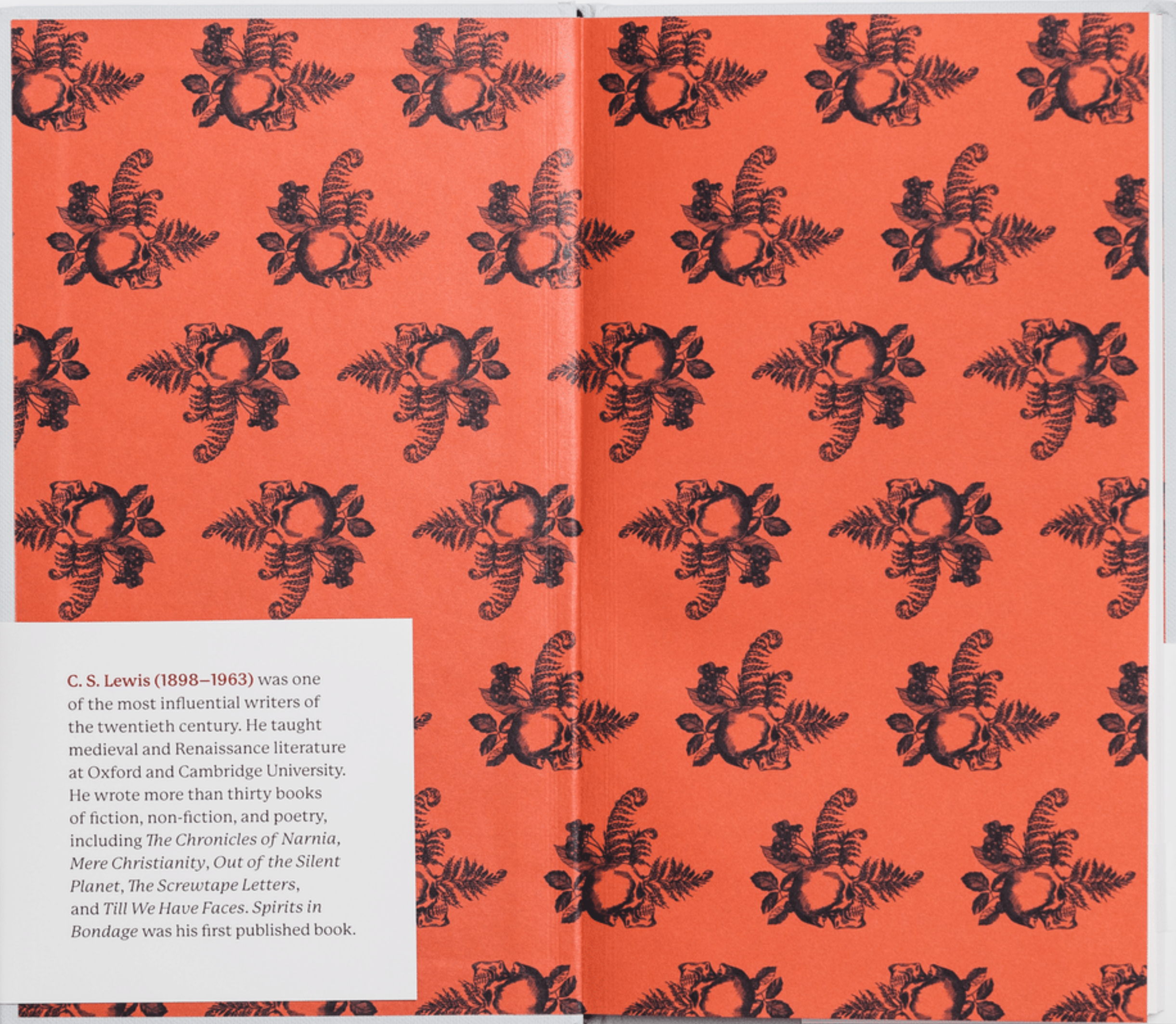
"The author of these poems had already heard the summons of divine joy but was not yet ready to believe it, and could scarcely have imagined all that it portends."

BEN MYERS

*The Millis Institute, Australia, author of 'The Apostles' Creed'*

C.S. LEWIS

*Introduced by  
Karen Swallow Prior*



C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) was one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. He taught medieval and Renaissance literature at Oxford and Cambridge University. He wrote more than thirty books of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Mere Christianity*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *Till We Have Faces*. *Spirits in Bondage* was his first published book.

PROLOGUE

THE PRISON HOUSE

PART I

# THE PRISON HOUSE



## PROLOGUE

As of old Phoenician men, to the Tin Isles sailing  
Straight against the sunset and the edges of the earth,  
Chaunted loud above the storm and the strange sea's wailing,  
Legends of their people and the land that gave them birth—  
Sang aloud to Baal-Peor, sang unto the horned maiden,  
Sang how they should come again with the Brethon treasure  
    laden,

Sang of all the pride and glory of their hardy enterprise,  
How they found the outer islands, where the unknown stars  
    arise;

And the rowers down below, rowing hard as they could row,  
Toiling at the stroke and feather through the wet and weary  
    weather,

Even they forgot their burden in the measure of a song,  
And the merchants and the masters and the bondsmen all  
    together,

Dreaming of the wondrous islands, brought the  
    gallant ship along;

So in mighty deeps alone on the chainless breezes blown  
In my coracle of verses I will sing of lands unknown,  
Flying from the scarlet city where a Lord that knows no pity,  
Mocks the broken people praying round his iron throne,  
—Sing about the Hidden Country fresh and full of quiet green.  
Sailing over seas uncharted to a port that none has seen.

## SATAN SPEAKS

I AM Nature, the Mighty Mother,  
I am the law: ye have none other.

I am the flower and the dewdrop fresh,  
I am the lust in your itching flesh.

I am the battle's filth and strain,  
I am the widow's empty pain.

I am the sea to smother your breath,  
I am the bomb, the falling death.

I am the fact and the crushing reason  
To thwart your fantasy's new-born treason.

I am the spider making her net,  
I am the beast with jaws blood-wet.

I am a wolf that follows the sun  
And I will catch him ere day be done.

## FRENCH NOCTURNE

(MONCHY-LE-PREUX)

LONG leagues on either hand the trenches spread  
And all is still; now even this gross line  
Drinks in the frosty silences divine,  
The pale, green moon is riding overhead.

The jaws of a sacked village, stark and grim,  
Out on the ridge have swallowed up the sun,  
And in one angry streak his blood has run  
To left and right along the horizon dim.

There comes a buzzing plane: and now, it seems  
Flies straight into the moon. Lo! where he steers  
Across the pallid globe and surely nears  
In that white land some harbour of dear dreams!

False, mocking fancy! Once I too could dream,  
Who now can only see with vulgar eye  
That he's no nearer to the moon than I  
And she's a stone that catches the sun's beam.

What call have I to dream of anything?  
I am a wolf. Back to the world again,  
And speech of fellow-brutes that once were men  
Our throats can bark for slaughter: cannot sing.

### III

## THE SATYR

WHEN the flowery hands of spring  
Forth their woodland riches fling,  
    Through the meadows, through the valleys  
Goes the satyr carolling.

From the mountain and the moor,  
Forest green and ocean shore  
    All the faerie kin he rallies  
Making music evermore.

See! the shaggy pelt doth grow  
On his twisted shanks below,  
    And his dreadful feet are cloven  
Though his brow be white as snow—

Though his brow be clear and white  
And beneath it fancies bright,  
    Wisdom and high thoughts are woven  
And the musics of delight,

Though his temples too be fair  
Yet two horns are growing there  
    Bursting forth to part asunder  
All the riches of his hair.

THE SATYR

Faerie maidens he may meet  
Fly the horns and cloven feet,  
    But, his sad brown eyes with wonder  
Seeing—stay from their retreat.



## IV

# VICTORY

ROLAND is dead, Cuchulain's crest is low,  
The battered war-gear wastes and turns to rust,  
And Helen's eyes and Iseult's lips are dust  
And dust the shoulders and the breasts of snow.

The faerie people from our woods are gone,  
No Dryads have I found in all our trees,  
No Triton blows his horn about our seas  
And Arthur sleeps far hence in Avalon.

The ancient songs they wither as the grass  
And waste as doth a garment waxen old,  
All poets have been fools who thought to mould  
A monument more durable than brass.

For these decay: but not for that decays  
The yearning, high, rebellious spirit of man  
That never rested yet since life began  
From striving with red Nature and her ways.

Now in the filth of war, the baresark shout  
Of battle, it is vexed. And yet so oft  
Out of the deeps, of old, it rose aloft  
That they who watch the ages may not doubt.

## VICTORY

Though often bruised, oft broken by the rod,  
Yet, like the phoenix, from each fiery bed  
Higher the stricken spirit lifts its head  
And higher—till the beast become a god.

## IRISH NOCTURNE

Now the grey mist comes creeping up  
From the waste ocean's weedy strand  
And fills the valley, as a cup  
Is filled of evil drink in a wizard's hand;  
And the trees fade out of sight,  
Like dreary ghosts unhealthily,  
Into the damp, pale night,  
Till you almost think that a clearer eye could see  
Some shape come up of a demon seeking apart  
His meat, as Grendel sought in Harte  
The thanes that sat by the wintry log—  
Grendel or the shadowy mass  
Of Balor, or the man with the face of clay,  
The grey, grey walker who used to pass  
Over the rock-arch nightly to his prey.  
But here at the dumb, slow stream where the willows hang,  
With never a wind to blow the mists apart,  
Bitter and bitter it is for thee, O my heart,  
Looking upon this land, where poets sang,  
Thus with the dreary shroud  
Unwholesome, over it spread,  
And knowing the fog and the cloud  
In her people's heart and head  
Even as it lies for ever upon her coasts

IRISH NOCTURNE

Making them dim and dreamy lest her sons should ever arise  
And remember all their boasts;  
For I know that the colourless skies  
And the blurred horizons breed  
Lonely desire and many words and brooding and never a deed.

## VI

### SPOOKS

LAST night I dreamed that I was come again  
Unto the house where my beloved dwells  
After long years of wandering and pain.

And I stood out beneath the drenching rain  
And all the street was bare, and black with night,  
But in my true love's house was warmth and light.

Yet I could not draw near nor enter in,  
And long I wondered if some secret sin  
Or old, unhappy anger held me fast;

Till suddenly it came into my head  
That I was killed long since and lying dead—  
Only a homeless wraith that way had passed.

So thus I found my true love's house again  
And stood unseen amid the winter night  
And the lamp burned within, a rosy light,  
And the wet street was shining in the rain.