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Coleridge's Poem in Solitude

France and

Frost at Midnight.



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1715

# FEARS IN SOLITUDE,

WRITTEN IN 1798, DURING THE ALARM OF AN INVASION.

To which are added,

FRANCE, AN ODE;

AND

FROST AT MIDNIGHT.

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WRITTEN IN 1798, DURING THE ALARM OF AN INVASION.

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## FRANCE, AN ODE; AND FROST AT MIDNIGHT.

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BY S. T. COLERIDGE.

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LONDON:

Printed for J. JOHNSON, in St. Paul's Church-yard.

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1798.

REVISED EDITION

THE HISTORY OF THE

FRANCE, AN ONE

AND

PROST AT MIDDLETOWN

BY A. D. COLLEGE

LONDON:

Printed and Sold by J. Johnson, in St. Paul's Church-yard.

1794.



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# FEARS IN SOLITUDE.

WRITTEN, APRIL 1798, DURING THE ALARMS OF AN INVASION.

A GREEN and filent spot amid the hills!  
 A small and filent dell!—O'er-filler place  
 No finging sky-lark ever pois'd himself!  
 The hills are heathy, save that swelling flope,  
 Which hath a gay and gorgeous covering on,  
 All golden with the never-bloomless furze,  
 Which now blooms most profusely; but the dell,  
 Bath'd by the mist, is fresh and delicate,  
 As vernal corn field, or the unripe flax,  
 When thro' its half-transparent stalks, at eve,  
 The level sunshine glimmers with green light.  
 O 'tis a quiet spirit-healing nook,

B

Which all, methinks, would love ; but chiefly he,  
 The humble man, who in his youthful years  
 Knew just so much of folly as had made  
 His early manhood more securely wise :  
 Here he might lie on fern or wither'd heath,  
 While from the singing lark (that sings unseen  
 The minstrelsy which solitude loves best)  
 And from the sun, and from the breezy air,  
 Sweet influences trembled o'er his frame ;  
 And he with many feelings, many thoughts,  
 Made up a meditative joy, and found  
 Religious meanings in the forms of nature !  
 And so, his senses gradually wrapp'd  
 In a half-sleep, he dreams of better worlds,  
 And dreaming hears thee fill, O singing lark !  
 That singest like an angel in the clouds.

My God ! it is a melancholy thing  
 For such a man, who would full fain preserve  
 His soul in calmness, yet perforce must feel  
 For all his human brethren—O my God,  
 It is indeed a melancholy thing,

And weighs upon the heart, that he must think  
 What uproar and what strife may now be stirring  
 This way or that way o'er these silent hills—  
 Invasion, and the thunder and the shout,  
 And all the crash of onset; fear and rage  
 And undetermined conflict—even now,  
 Ev'n now, perchance, and in his native Isle,  
 Carnage and screams beneath this blessed sun!  
 We have offended, O my countrymen!  
 We have offended very grievously,  
 And have been tyrannous. From east to west  
 A groan of accusation pierces heaven!  
 The wretched plead against us, multitudes  
 Countless and vehement, the sons of God,  
 Our brethren! like a cloud that travels on,  
 Steam'd up from Cairo's swamps of pestilence,  
 Ev'n so, my countrymen! have we gone forth  
 And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs,  
 And, deadlier far, our vices, whose deep taint  
 With slow perdition murders the whole man,  
 His body and his soul! Meanwhile, at home,  
 We have been drinking with a riotous thirst.

Pollutions from the brimming cup of wealth,  
 A selfish, lewd, effeminated race,  
 Contemptuous of all honourable rule,  
 Yet bartering freedom, and the poor man's life,  
 For gold, as at a market! The sweet words  
 Of christian promise, words that even yet  
 Might stem destruction, were they wisely preach'd,  
 Are mutter'd o'er by men, whose tones proclaim,  
 How flat and wearisome they feel their trade.  
 Rank scoffers some, but most too indolent,  
 To deem them falsehoods, or to know their truth.  
 O blasphemous! the book of life is made  
 A superstitious instrument, on which  
 We gabble o'er the oaths we mean to break,  
 For all must swear—all, and in every place,  
 College and wharf, council and justice-court,  
 All, all must swear, the briber and the brib'd,  
 Merchant and lawyer, senator and priest,  
 The rich, the poor, the old man, and the young,  
 All, all make up one scheme of perjury,  
 That faith doth reel; the very name of God  
 Sounds like a juggler's charm; and bold with joy,

Forth from his dark and lonely hiding-place  
 (Portentous sight) the owlet, ATHEISM,  
 Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,  
 Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,  
 And, hooting at the glorious fun in heaven,  
 Cries out, "where is it?"

Thankless too for peace,  
 (Peace long preserv'd by fleets and perilous seas)  
 Secure from actual warfare, we have lov'd  
 To swell the war-whoop, passionate for war!  
 Alas! for ages ignorant of all  
 It's ghastlier workings (famine or blue plague,  
 Battle, or siege, or flight thro' wintry snows)  
 We, this whole people, have been clamorous  
 For war and bloodshed, animating sports,  
 The which we pay for, as a thing to talk of,  
 Spectators and not combatants! no guess  
 Anticipative of a wrong unfelt,  
 No speculation on contingency,  
 However dim and vague, too vague and dim  
 To yield a justifying cause: and forth  
 (Stuff'd out with big preamble, holy names,

And adjurations of the God in heaven)  
 We send our mandates for the certain death  
 Of thousands and ten thousands! Boys and girls,  
 And women that would groan to see a child  
 Pull off an insect's leg, all read of war,  
 The best amusement for our morning meal!  
 The poor wretch, who has learnt his only prayers  
 From curses, who knows scarcely words enough  
 To ask a blessing of his heavenly Father,  
 Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute  
 And technical in victories and defeats,  
 And all our dainty terms for fratricide,  
 Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues  
 Like mere abstractions, empty sounds, to which  
 We join no feeling and attach no form,  
 As if the foldier died without a wound;  
 As if the fibres of this godlike frame  
 Were gor'd without a pang: as if the wretch,  
 Who fell in battle doing bloody deeds,  
 Pass'd off to heaven, *translated* and not kill'd;  
 As tho' he had no wife to pine for him,  
 No God to judge him!—Therefore evil days

Are coming on us, O my countrymen!  
 And what if all-avenging Providence,  
 Strong and retributive, should make us know  
 The meaning of our words, force us to feel  
 The desolation and the agony  
 Of our fierce doings?—

Spare us yet a while,  
 Father and God! O spare us yet a while!  
 O let not English women drag their flight  
 Fainting beneath the burden of their babes,  
 Of the sweet infants, that but yesterday  
 Laugh'd at the breast! Sons, brothers, husbands, all  
 Who ever gaz'd with fondness on the forms,  
 Which grew up with you round the same fire side,  
 And all who ever heard the sabbath bells  
 Without the infidel's scorn, make yourselves pure!  
 Stand forth! be men! repel an impious foe,  
 Impious and false, a light yet cruel race,  
 That laugh away all virtue, mingling mirth  
 With deeds of murder; and still promising  
 Freedom, themselves too sensual to be free,  
 Poison life's amities, and cheat the heart

Of Faith and quiet Hope, and all that sooths  
 And all that lifts the spirit! Stand we forth;  
 Render them back upon th' insulted ocean,  
 And let them tofs as idly on it's waves,  
 As the vile sea-weeds, which some mountain blaff  
 Swept from our shores! And O! may we return  
 Not with a drunken triumph, but with fear,  
 Repenting of the wrongs, with which we stung  
 So fierce a foe to frenzy!

I have told,  
 O Britons! O my brethren! I have told  
 Most bitter truth, but without bitterness.  
 Nor deem my zeal or factious or mistim'd;  
 For never can true courage dwell with them,  
 Who, playing tricks with conscience, dare not look  
 At their own vices. We have been too long  
 Dupes of a deep delusion! Some, belike,  
 Groaning with restless enmity, expect  
 All change from change of constituted power:  
 As if a government had been a robe,  
 On which our vice and wretchedness were tagg'd  
 Like fancy-points and fringes, with the robe



Pull'd off at pleasure. Fondly these attach  
 A radical causation to a few  
 Poor drudges of chastising Providence,  
 Who borrow all their hues and qualities  
 From our own folly and rank wickedness,  
 Which gave them birth, and nurse them. Others,  
     meanwhile,  
 Dote with a mad idolatry; and all,  
 Who will not fall before their images,  
 And yield them worship, they are enemies  
 Ev'n of their country!—Such have I been deem'd.  
 But, O dear Britain! O my mother Isle!  
 Needs must thou prove a name most dear and holy  
 To me, a son, a brother, and a friend,  
 A husband and a father! who revere  
 All bonds of natural love, and find them all  
 Within the limits of thy rocky shores.  
 O native Britain! O my mother Isle!  
 How should'st thou prove aught else but dear and holy  
 To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,  
 Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks, and seas,  
 Have drunk in all my intellectual life,

All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,  
 All adoration of the God in nature,  
 All lovely and all honourable things,  
 Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel  
 The joy and greatness of its future being?  
 There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul  
 Unborrow'd from my country! O divine  
 And beautiful island, thou hast been my sole  
 And most magnificent temple, in the which  
 I walk with awe, and sing my stately songs,  
 Loving the God that made me!—

May my fears,

My filial fears, be vain! and may the vaunts  
 And menace of the vengeful enemy  
 Pass like the gust, that roar'd and died away  
 In the distant tree, which heard, and only heard;  
 In this low dell bow'd not the delicate grass.  
 But now the gentle dew-fall sends abroad  
 The fruitlike perfume of the golden furze:  
 The light has left the summit of the hill,  
 Tho' still a sunny gleam lies beautiful  
 On the long-ivied beacon.—Now, farewell,  
 Farewell, awhile, O soft and silent spot!

On the green sheep-track, up the heathy hill,  
Homeward I wind my way; and lo! recall'd  
From bodings, that have well nigh wearied me,  
I find myself upon the brow, and pause  
Startled! And after lonely sojourning  
In such a quiet and surrounded scene,  
This burst of prospect, here the shadowy main,  
Dim-tinted, there the mighty majesty  
Of that huge amphitheatre of rich  
And elmy fields, seems like society,  
Conversing with the mind, and giving it  
A livelier impulse, and a dance of thought;  
And now, beloved STOWEY! I behold  
Thy church-tower, and (methinks) the four huge elms  
Clust'ring, which mark the mansion of my friend;  
And close behind them, hidden from my view,  
Is my own lowly cottage, where my babe  
And my babe's mother dwell in peace! With light  
And quicken'd footsteps thitherward I tend,  
Rememb'ring thee, O green and silent dell!  
And grateful, that by nature's quietness

And folitary mufings all my heart  
Is foften'd, and made worthy to indulge  
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

Nether Stowey, April 20th, 1798.

F R A N C E.

A N O D E.

---

I.

YE Clouds, that far above me float and pause,  
Whose pathless march no mortal may control !  
Ye ocean waves, that, wherefoe'er ye roll,  
Yield homage only to eternal laws !  
Ye woods, that listen to the night-bird's singing,  
Midway the smooth and perilous steep reclin'd ;  
Save when your own imperious branches swinging  
Have made a solemn music of the wind !  
Where, like a man belov'd of God,  
Thro' glooms, which never woodman trod,  
How oft, pursuing fancies holy,

My moonlight way o'er flow'ring weeds I wound,  
 Inspir'd beyond the guesses of folly,  
 By each rude shape, and wild unconquerable found!  
 O, ye loud waves, and O, ye forests high,  
 And O, ye clouds, that far above me soar'd!  
 Thou rising sun! thou blue rejoicing sky!  
 Yea, every thing that is and will be free,  
 Bear witness for me wheresoe'er ye be,  
 With what deep worship I have still ador'd  
 The spirit of divinest liberty.

## II.

When France in wrath her giant limbs uprear'd,  
 And with that oath which smote earth, air, and sea,  
 Stamp'd her strong foot and said, she would be free,  
 Bear witness for me, how I hop'd and fear'd!  
 With what a joy my lofty gratulation  
 Unaw'd I sung amid a slavish band:  
 And when to whelm the disenchant'd nation,  
 Like fiends embattled by a wizard's wand,  
 The monarchs march'd in evil day,  
 And Britain join'd the dire array;

Though dear her shores, and circling ocean,  
 Though many friendships, many youthful loves  
 Had swoln the patriot emotion,  
 And flung a magic light o'er all her hills and groves;  
 Yet still my voice unalter'd sang defeat  
 To all that brav'd the tyrant-quelling lance,  
 And shame too long delay'd, and vain retreat!  
 For ne'er, O Liberty! with partial aim  
 I dimm'd thy light, or damp'd thy holy flame;  
 But blest the pæans of deliver'd France,  
 And hung my head, and wept at Britain's name!

### III.

“ And what (I said) tho' blasphemy's loud scream  
 “ With that sweet music of deliv'rance strove;  
 “ Tho' all the fierce and drunken passions wove  
 “ A dance more wild than ever maniac's dream;  
 “ Ye storms, that round the dawning east assembled,  
 “ The sun was rising, tho' ye hid his light!”  
 And when to sooth my soul, that hop'd and trembled,  
 The dissonance ceas'd, and all seem'd calm and bright;

When France, her front deep-scar'd and gory,  
 Conceal'd with clust'ring wreaths of glory;  
 When insupportably advancing,  
 Her arm made mock'ry of the warrior's ramp,  
 While, timid looks of fury glancing,  
 Domestic treason, crush'd beneath her fatal stamp,  
 Writh'd, like a wounded dragon in his gore;  
 Then I reproach'd my fears that would not flée,  
 " And soon (I said) shall wisdom teach her lore  
 " In the low huts of them that toil and groan!  
 " And conqu'ring by her happiness alone,  
 " Shall France compel the nations to be free,  
 " Till love and joy look round, and call the earth  
 " their own!"

## IV.

Forgive me, Freedom! O forgive these dreams!  
 I hear thy voice, I hear thy loud lament,  
 From bleak Helvetia's icy caverns sent—  
 I hear thy groans upon her blood-stain'd streams!  
 Heroes, that for your peaceful country perish'd;  
 And ye, that fleeing spot the mountain snows



With bleeding wounds; forgive me, that I cherish'd  
One thought, that ever bless'd your cruel foes!  
To scatter rage and trait'rous guilt  
Where Peace her jealous home had built;  
A patriot race to disinherit  
Of all that made their stormy wilds so dear,  
And with inexpiable spirit  
To taint the bloodless freedom of the mountaineer.—  
O France! that mockest heav'n, adult'rous, blind,  
And patriot only in pernicious toils!  
Are these thy boasts, champion of human kind:  
To mix with kings in the low lust of sway,  
Yell in the hunt, and share the murd'rous prey;  
T'insult the shrine of liberty with spoils  
From freemen torn; to tempt and to betray!

V.

The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,  
Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game  
They burst their manacles, and wear the name  
Of freedom graven on a heavier chain!

O Liberty! with profitless endeavour  
 Have I pursued thee many a weary hour:  
 But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever  
 Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human pow'r.  
 Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee,  
 (Nor pray'r, nor boastful name delays thee)  
 Alike from priesthood's harpy minions,  
 And factious blasphemy's obscener slaves,  
 Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,  
 To live amid the winds, and move upon the waves!  
 And then I felt thee on that sea-cliff's verge,  
 Whose pines, scarce travell'd by the breeze above,  
 Had made one murmur with the distant fudge!  
 Yes! while I stood and gaz'd, my temples bare,  
 And shot my being thro' earth, sea, and air,  
 Possessing all things with intensest love,  
 O Liberty, my spirit felt thee there!

February 1798.

## FROST AT MIDNIGHT.

---

THE Frost performs it's secret ministry,  
Unhelp'd by any wind. The owlet's cry  
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.  
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,  
Have left me to that solitude, which suits  
Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs  
And vexes meditation with it's strange  
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,  
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,  
With all the numberless goings on of life,  
Inaudible as dreams! The thin blue flame  
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not:

Only that film,\* which flutter'd on the grate,  
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing,  
 Methinks, it's motion in this hush of nature  
 Gives it dim sympathies with me, who live,  
 Making it a companionable form,  
 With which I can hold commune. Idle thought!  
 But still the living spirit in our frame,  
 That loves not to behold a lifeless thing,  
 Transfuses into all it's own delights  
 It's own volition; fometimes with deep faith,  
 And fometimes with fantaftic playfulness.  
 Ah me! amus'd by no fuch curious toys  
 Of the felf-watching fubtilizing mind,  
 How often in my early fchool-boy days,  
 With moft believing fuperftitious wifh  
 Prefageful have I gaz'd upon the bars,  
 To watch the *ft ranger* there! and oft belike,  
 With unclos'd lids, already had I dreamt  
 Of my fweet birthplace, and the old church-tower,  
 Whofe bells, the poor man's only mufic, rang

\* *Only that film.* In all parts of the kingdom thefe films are called *ft rangers*, and fupposed to portend the arrival of fome abfent friend.

From morn to evening, all the hot fair-day,  
 So sweetly, that they stirr'd and haunted me  
 With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear  
 Most like articulate sounds of things to come!  
 So gaz'd I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,  
 Lull'd me to sleep, and sleep prolong'd my dreams!  
 And so I brooded all the following morn,  
 Aw'd by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye  
 Fix'd with mock study on my swimming book:  
 Save if the door half-open'd, and I snatch'd  
 A hasty glance, and still my heart leapt up,  
 For still I hop'd to see the *stranger's* face,  
 Townsman, or aunt, or sister more belov'd,  
 My play-mate when we both were cloth'd alike!

Dear babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
 Whose gentle breathings, heard in this dead calm,  
 Fill up the interspersed vacancies  
 And momentary pauses of the thought!  
 My babe so beautiful! it fills my heart  
 With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
 And think, that thou shalt learn far other lore,

And in far other scenes! For I was rear'd  
 In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim,  
 And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.  
 But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander, like a breeze,  
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
 Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,  
 Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
 And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear  
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
 Of that eternal language, which thy God  
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
 Great universal Teacher! he shall mould  
 Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
 Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
 With greenness, or the redbreasts fit and sing  
 Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
 Of mossy apple-tree, while all the thatch  
 Smokes in the sun-thaw: whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,

Or whether the secret ministry of cold  
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet moon,  
Like those, my babe! which, ere to-morrow's warmth  
Have capp'd their sharp keen points with pendulous  
drops,  
Will catch thine eye, and with their novelty  
Suspend thy little soul; then make thee shout,  
And stretch and flutter from thy mother's arms  
As thou would'st fly for very eagerness.

February 1798:

THE END.

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