



WHEN I DIE

When I die

I don't want to be surrounded by family and friends

But all alone

On a country lane

Or rather, a forgotten footpath

Off a country lane

Amongst fields,

Full of brightly-coloured wildflowers

With majestic trees dotted here and there

And ancient hedgerows, hiding the nests of birds

And the homes of all manner of wild creatures.

I don't want the inane chatter around me
As people make a show of saying their final farewells.
Give me, instead, the songs of blackbirds,
The distant bleating of sheep,
And the occasional buzzing of bees
As they flit by, looking for pollen to collect.

And when it is known that I've gone,
I don't want any sobbing -
Far too late for that -
But the sounds of happiness
As people remember my achievements
And hopefully turn a blind eye to my failures.
There will be plenty of time later to dwell on these,
And to curse me for all the things I should not have done.

Some people who have died
And then returned to this life
Speak of travelling through a tunnel towards the light,
Followed by being greeted by loved ones
Who have already passed away,
Presumably!

But not everyone has had loving relationships
With their deceased parents, relations and friends.
Do we have to forget all the arguments, the insults and the neglect

Which may have occurred at times?

Do we have to erase from our memory the violent behaviour

Shown by some parent towards their children?

Do people really want to be reunited with them?

And what about loved ones who are not in one's own family?

Someone else's husband or wife, maybe.

But it's unlikely that they will be able to meet again here.

Sometimes, it is said, angels appear to guide you through the whole process.

These celestial civil servants are but the warm-up act

To prepare you for a meeting with God himself, or his alter persona.

When or rather, if, this moment comes,

I hope I am not awe-struck

But stand my ground.

"You are supposed to be a loving God", I will say.

"Tell me, then:

Where were you when the Holocaust took place,

Or during the war - any war?

Did you not witness Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, Dresden, Coventry, Srebrenica, Mariupol

And so many other places where atrocities have taken place - Cambodia, Rwanda...

The list is endless.

Why did you not wish to get involved to stop the bloodshed?

Does it not say in the Lord's Prayer:

Deliver us from evil. ?

So many people must have said this over countless centuries

Yet you have turned a deaf ear to them.

People have also prayed for help when ill or in great pain
As well as during the many plagues which have taken place
Like the outbreaks of pandemics,
Or the periods of famine and starvation,
Or during natural disasters of all kinds.
But you have constantly ignored their prayers.
How can we love you, God,
When you patently show that you do not love us?
Is religion therefore nothing but the greatest confidence trick ever?

“Clerics say that you gave man free will.
What this means is that powerful people will enjoy privileged lives,
Making the lives of others, who are less fortunate,
A never-ending time of long drawn-out misery.

Where is the justice in this?
They may pray for help
And earnestly believe you will take pity on them.
But again you ignore their pleas.

Would it not be more accurate, then, to say
That you are a cold, callous, cruel God
Who is indifferent to the sufferings of human beings?
It's either that,
Or you don't actually exist
Except in people's minds.”

With that, the figure vanishes and I “descend” into hell -
If that exists.

Much more likely

None of this will happen

And I may just find myself in a non-existent place,

Bereft of all consciousness, time and space.

Meanwhile, my vacated body will lie undiscovered amongst the foliage

Except by scavengers, as I become part of the food-chain

And provide the source of life for future generations.

At least I can have faith

That that would eventually happen.