

## **Shepherds Law**

In Shepherd country on Northumbrian moor,  
Terraced in former ruins on the hill,  
Four hermit cells, for simple needs appointed –  
Wood-burning stove, a bed, a desk a place  
To cook a meal. Bare bricks and beams. And strung  
From pegs a curtain marks an oratory.  
Each cell of bricks and stone and wood provides  
A shelter from the ever changing weather,  
And one I make my home these seven nights.

One day a vast expanse of land and sky  
(The Universe bends down to touch the Earth)  
In sunlit splendour laying bare the hills  
Where Cuthbert in his youth once kept the flock.  
The next a soft, persistent, gentle rain  
And nothing to be seen beyond those soulful  
Cattle-brown eyes that gaze in at my window.  
Or else the Church engulfed, as through the mist  
I hear the wind and distant bleats of sheep.

The great bell, past an Angelus, swings freely  
In fading repetitions – the French style.  
And, wrapped in many layers against the cold,  
We make our routine way into the Choir,  
The cave-like dark of narthex giving out  
Through gates to space of stained-glass-painted stone,  
Where Abram's guests above the altar call  
(An open chalice-void between the Three)  
Inviting us to join them in the feast.

From lips, as if from censers, rise up clouds  
Of breath like incense hanging in the air,  
While in our concentration we attend  
To neumes of plainsong hymns and antiphons.  
And then in recitation of the psalms  
We join with countless numbers gone before  
In Syria's desert caves and through the years,  
As with them in this 'hour' – this fleeting moment –  
We enter into God's eternal Now.

And this is why I came to Shepherds Law:  
To feel and hear and open wide my eyes,  
To die to false self – find the True – be open  
To wisdom for the journey of my life.  
My daily joys, fears, hopes, preoccupations,  
The thoughts like clouds that drift across the sky,  
Are like the storms and calm upon this hillside  
Which all the while itself stands firm, unchanging,  
Like God from whom we come who calls us home.

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6<sup>th</sup> May 2014*