

Fall 1980

There's a Simple-Minded translated by Antony Oldknow

Francis Jammes

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THERE'S A SIMPLE-MINDED . . .

For Stephane Mallarme.

There's a simpleminded little cobbler with a hunchback
Who works behind quiet green windows.
On Sundays he gets up and washes and puts on
Clean clothes and leaves his window open.

He's been taught so little that though he's married
He never seems to say anything during the week.
I wonder if on Sundays when they walk
He has anything to say to his bent old wife.

Why would one who walks so little make shoes?
Oh, he plays his part enabling others to walk.
Also, there's something pure about the little fire
That lights up his place and gleams like gold.

And indeed when he dies the people will carry
Him to the cemetary; he enables them to walk,
For God well loves poor folk and stones
And grants them the honor of being carried.

Don't laugh! What good have you done?
You lack the serenity of the green sunbeam
That passes quietly through the half-open pane
Where he trims leather and crosses laces.

Do you really think when you put on jewels
That because you are pleasing to perfumed women
You wear on your face the radiant green
Of quiet sadness serene as a song?

Little cobbler, nail your nails a long time yet!
The birds that pass by in the peaceful spring

Francis Jammes

Will take no more notice of the crowns kings wear
than of your old knife slicing poor black bread.

*Translated by
Antony Oldknow*