

POEMS

by

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(Lady Couchman)

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1942

LINES WRITTEN DURING A TOUR WITH MY
HUSBAND THROUGH BALUCHISTAN INTO
PERSIA, 1918

I



IGHT in those barren hills, a silence
you feel,
Fortified bridges, gates made of steel,
Sentinels with rifles appearing to rest,
Something of majesty stirs in your
breast!

2

Straight up above your head, grand and serene,
(*Never* in England so large is seen!)
Shines the round silver moon
Cold after heat of noon.

3

Here it is very light, almost like day,
The moon casting shadows black whilst they stay.
Sighing, one feels so small,
How can we grasp it all?

4

Once when my husband, young, straight from home,
Sent out by Government a white man alone
To this wild frontier post, woke to behold
All of his native staff murdered and cold!

I

5

Each night hereafter curled up on the bed
Slept his small terrier, raising its head
At the faintest of sounds, its eyes opened wide,
Whilst his master sought sleep with a gun at his side.

6

Fierce, bearded frontiersmen
Haunt each deep rocky glen,
Deadly their rifle aim, sharp are their knives,
Death is but "kismet", so cheap are lives!

7

Yet there is something infinitely grand,
Words fail to picture it, in that far land!
Something immortal, not of this earth,
Reaches the soul of you, gives you new birth!

WRITTEN ON THE WAY TO SEE THE NAVAL
REVIEW, JULY 1935

(A journey of 300 miles in a small and *very*
fast car driven by my husband)

I



ALL the way to Harwich in a racing
car,
From the wilds of Devon near the
Instow Bar,
Driven by my husband with resound-
ing hoots!

My eyes grew fixed and staring, whilst my heart was
in my boots.

2

As we reach a milestone quick as shooting star,
What's the mileage on it? Is the next town far?
As my husband asks me, the wretched sign has fled.
Never mind! he thunders, there's another just ahead.

3

Fast we take the corners on two skidding wheels,
Death seems all around us treading on our heels.
We see both birds and bunnies killed by other cars—
The death roll on our highways must equal that of
"Mars"!

3

My husband as a driver has a licence without stain,
 A nerve that's made of iron and a very active brain,
 But when the Master calls me from this world of woe,
 "Ten to one" the odds are that by car I go!

THE BRILLIANT STARLIGHT NIGHTS
 OF UPPER BURMA

I



N upper Burma once I trekked
 alone
 With native servants, tents and
 gramophone,
 A rifle which my bearer bore with
 pride,
 A tattooed Burman came to be my guide.

2

My tent was pitched beneath the tropic skies,
 The flaps rolled back and tightened were the guys;
 The camp-fire made a brilliant blaze of light
 And warned away the beasts that prowl by night.

3

Happy though tired, stretched upon my bed
 With arms crossed underneath my weary head,
 My glance sped upwards to the glorious skies,
 The stars *so* large their beauty dimmed the eyes.

4

To gaze upon those millions up above,
 Your soul is wafted to a land of love
 Where *only* good and regal beauty reigns,
 And earth has freed you from her prison chains.

5

5

Why does a heavenly star-lit tropic night
Make fragile mortals sense their spaceless might,
Those scintillating orbs of flashing hue
Dwarf worlds like ours and humble me and you?

6

And yet again, how strange it is that we
Should have the power to lift our eyes and see
The mighty view of that bright vast display
Of twinkling stars so very far away!

7

And as I glanced again towards the ground
I heard a tiger make his cough-like sound,
A sambur startled from the forest near,
And in the distance barked a tiny deer.

8

Immortal reigned I for a little while,
No sense of suffering, freedom from all guile,
Then back to earth for just a fleeting span,
This world of sorrow and the trials of man.

9

Yet some day soon my spirit *must* be free,
No earthbound body will encompass me!
And then my dear ones from those heavenly heights
Will meet and guide me through the starry nights.

Sambur—a large species of deer. *Barking deer*—a small, fawn-coloured antelope.

6

THE VAST RANGE OF THE HIMALAYAS, AS
SEEN FROM SIMLA, ARE AWE-INSPIRING IN
THEIR MAJESTY AND MIGHT

I



N Simla's heights I stood and watched
the snows—
Range after range from whence the
cold wind blows.
Eternal peaks in one unbroken span,
Mountains untrodden by the foot of
man.

2

The midday sun enhanced the wondrous glow
Of glaciers grim and vast white fields of snow.
Those mighty peaks above the clouds arise
And shine like polished spear-tips in the skies.

3

And as the setting sun with many hues
Paints those far heights in rosy pinks and blues,
Beneath a sky of green and molten gold
The burning rays light up the icy cold.

4

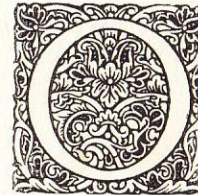
When black clouds gather, angry winds arise,
Forked lightning darts across the darkening skies,
Torrents are raging where before flowed rills,
And growling thunder echoes round the hills.

7

Tall fir trees bend beneath the howling blast,
 You watch awe-stricken till the storm is passed.
 O puny man, when Nature shows her might,
 How weak your body, yet how clear your sight!

TO THE RUINS OF AN ANCIENT McMAHON
 STRONGHOLD IN IRELAND

I



N jagged rocks beside a restless sea
 A ruined castle rears its hoary head,
 It will not bend whate'er its fate
 may be,
 Though age may break it when its
 strength has fled.

2

Time after time with unrelenting blows
 Huge seas have thundered up against those rocks.
 Swept by wild winds and centuries of snows,
 The grand old fortress has defied all shocks.

3

Fearless of death in shining armour clad,
 McMahons have answered to the clarion call
 To guard their rights by risking all they had—
 What matters *when* or *how*? Death comes to all!

4

But when the setting sun casts shafts of dazzling light
 Upon your ancient walls, the remnant of your might,
 The blood-red glow shows up the grandeur of your
 keep
 That guards the hallowed ground where long-dead
 warriors sleep.

9

Thy battlemented heights, though scarred by passing
years,
Can fill my heart with pride or dim my eyes with
tears.

It is the things we *see* that fade and pass away.
The *unseen* soul of man—our great inheritance—will
live for aye!

THE VISION AT GETHSEMANE

1933

I



AFTER some weeks of mental grief
and strain,
Nursing a loved one back to health
again,
My wanderings took me to the Holy
Land,
Through rocky defiles and o'er golden sand.

2

A Scottish Hospice with its open door
Gives shelter to the Pilgrim, rich or poor;
And there awhile I tarried as their guest,
With simple fare, and kindly hearts to rest.

3

Jerusalem, with all its lore of old,
Has many sights and legends to unfold;
Mixed with the ancient is the vulgar new,
Something "unseen" yet "present" puzzles you.

4

The *one* thing that I longed to go and see
Was the Blessed Garden of Gethsemane,
That Holy ground on which our Saviour won
The strength to say not "my" will but "thy" will be
done.

II

5

That garden lies without the city wall
Along a dusty road, where camels tall
In long processions wend their patient way
In silent rhythm as their cargoes sway.

6

And when at last the postern door is found,
The entrance to that enclosed Holy ground,
Franciscan Brothers gladly welcome you
And show you where the ancient Olives grew.

7

They point to one gnarled tree, now centuries old;
Supported are its limbs with care untold.
A monk stretched forth and plucked an olive leaf
And gave to me, an antidote for grief.

8

That tree, he said, was very likely young
When Jesus walked the Olive groves among.
And here, so simply are all things arranged,
That since those days they may be little changed.

9

And whilst my mind with sacred thoughts was blest
I reached the chapel, there a while to rest.
That little church built on the very stone
Where Jesus wrestled, tortured and alone.

12

10

Inside, the church was rather dark and still;
After the world outside you sensed that inward thrill
Of perfect peace that *no one* can explain!
A wondrous calm you seek on earth in vain.

11

And as my eyes grew used to that dim glow
Towards the altar rails I humbly go,
And kneeling there a Vision came to me.
The world forgotten, troubles ceased to be.

12

A foreign artist had a picture made
Of Jesus praying in that garden's shade;
With master hand he did the colours place
Above the altar on the rock's bare face.

13

Between the altar and the altar rails
The rocky surface on the ground prevails,
Where Jesus in those far-off ages prayed.
Oh! Holy ground to which my feet had strayed.

14

A silent monk switched on a shaded light
Above the picture, making dark parts bright.
And there ! beheld I, sitting on a stone,
Our Blessed Saviour, facing me alone.

13

15

The loving look upon that pitying face
Was fixed upon me with no lingering trace
Of condemnation or of stern reproof.
From me, a sinner, held He not aloof!

16

With hands outstretched He seemed to beckon me
To come and lay my troubles at His knee;
The world, my body, all seemed far away!
My Soul it was that longed with Christ to stay.

17

I never can explain that ecstasy,
The wish to leave this earth that came to me,
Those speaking eyes, those outstretched loving arms,
A sure protection from this world's alarms.

18

Myself for those brief moments seemed to be
Something ethereal, full of joy and free!
Apart from body and material things,
It was as though my Soul had taken wings.

19

No brush can paint, no earthly pen indite
The *least* impression of that wondrous sight.
Eternal Love and Lasting Peace were here,
The world far distant, death had no more fear.

14

20

Then someone called me back to earth once more,
My faltering footsteps followed to the door.
Dear loving Father, ere this Vision cease,
Give Absolution, grant to us Thy Peace.

15

When I returned to the Hospice I was asked by my hostess what in Jerusalem had appealed to me most. I at once replied that the picture over the altar in the little chapel at Gethsemane was the most lovely and inspiring thing I had ever seen anywhere. I went on to say what a pity it was that there were no reproductions or even postcards of the painting to be had, as they would make a great appeal to the whole world. She looked very surprised and answered: Oh, yes, the picture was quite well done; it had been painted by an Hungarian artist (I think it was). She then passed on to another subject, evidently thinking poorly of my choice. I tried everywhere to get a copy of the picture. You could get most other pictures of local interest, but none of this marvellous painting. A few years later I happened to be visiting Jerusalem again; for a long time I had looked forward to seeing this soul-inspiring painting once more, and the first place I went to visit was the little chapel at Gethsemane. When I got there the large doors in the chapel opposite the altar had been thrown open, and you could see right across to Jerusalem itself; the dim religious light of the chapel seemed to have gone. I turned at once to the picture over the altar, but to my disappointment I saw that it had been changed. Instead of our Lord sitting with outstretched hands facing the altar rails, He was kneeling in prayer, and the picture gave a side view of Him; if I remember rightly, some of His disciples were in the background. The artist's name, with his coat-of-arms, was still in the corner of the picture, and the whole painting looked very ordinary. I asked one of the Franciscan monks why it had been altered. He looked at me in great surprise and said the picture had *never been altered*, it was the original and *only* painting and was actually painted on the rock, and was exactly the same as I had seen in 1933. Then it dawned on me that what I had seen had been a vision, and this accounted for the look of surprise on my hostess's face when I had formerly tried in vain to describe the appealing loveliness of the picture above the altar.

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