

## CONTENTMENT

'TIS enough to have lived and have waked  
 When the morning stars gleam,  
 To have thirsted and had my thirst slaked  
 At some dawn-lighted stream,  
 'Tis enough to have hungered and found  
 Satisfaction and rest  
 Stretched out on the warm sunbaked ground  
 The earth's healing breast.

'Tis enough to have lived and have heard  
 The forest birds sing.

O, the ecstasy of a bird

In the freshness of Spring!

'Tis enough, when the summer wind blows

To have caught the perfume  
 From the cascades of trailing wild rose  
 In sun-Jaden June.

'Tis enough to have climbed to some height  
 Nearer the sun,

To have watched the dawning of light

And a new day begun,

To have lived closer up to the sky,

To have marked the sun's way,

Till it dips in the West, seems to die  
 And night sanctifies day.

'Tis enough to have suffered and smiled  
 At impotent pain,  
 Enough that life has beguiled  
 Me to laughter again.  
 Enough to have lived and have known  
 Inward peace, inward strife,  
 To have struggled and conquered and grown  
 Into fulness of life.

## HEIGHO

**A** GYPSY'S life is the life for me!  
 A gypsy, in heart, I would always be!  
 Heigho! for the trail that winds  
 Over the mountains and always finds  
 A **Chao** where some cowherd dwells,  
 Heigho! for the sound of cowbells.

**Chao** - a small hut, usually grass, where cattle are sheltered  
 during the summer grazing season.

There is always a shelter in some grass hut  
 Next door to the cows and buffaloes, but  
     Heigho! for a starry sky,  
 Whose magic is such that I all night lie  
 In an ecstasy, sweet and still.  
     Heigho! for the night-dark hill!

A fire that's built of oak and pine,  
 A breeze as heady as choicest wine,  
     Heigho! are the things for me;  
 The top of a mountain from which to see  
 A vista of fresh delights.  
     Heigho! for unconquered heights.

A network of paths binds the whole world round,  
 Into one brotherhood are we bound,  
     Heigho! for the friendly earth.  
 A wanderer's life is a life of mirth  
 And gypsies, a t heart, are one.  
     Heigho! for the impartial sun.

The winding path which I love to roam,  
 Leads at last to the place called 'home'.  
     Heigho! for that well-loved spot  
 And the flowers that nod in my garden plot!  
 Yet-I know that soon I'll be gone again,  
     Heigho! I belong to a gypsy train.

## MY FRIENDS THINK ME STRANGELY MAD

**W**HAT a delightful day!  
 There's a coaxing breeze  
 Through the laughing trees.  
 I'll take to the steep, rough way.

Excitement is in my blood,  
 The mountains alluringly fair  
 Bid me breathe the clear, fresh air.  
 I shall climb the Himalayan khud.

I care not a rap, not a whit  
 That my friends think me strangely mad,  
 I'm afire within, and I'm glad  
 That by Beauty those fires are lit.

I'll tramp all the great world round?  
 I'll climb every glorious height,  
 With my face to the wakening light  
 I will bless the good, firm ground.

While I tramp, I will sing and I'll say,  
 Life is sweet, yea, e'en bitter is sweet.  
 How blessed the rhythmic beat  
     Of the feet.  
 God above! What a wonderful day.

**Khud** - steep hillside.

## AND I AM FIFTY -ONE

(Reader! You'll smile!  
 But after all, age is but a false  
 concept of the human mind  
 Nothing more!)

**I** CLIMBED a tree, a tree to day,  
 And I am fifty-one!  
 And oh! delight to feel the sway  
 Of trees and little winds at play  
 Beneath the gentle sun!

A pirate from my watch tower, I,  
 And skilled, at fifty-one,  
 I captured beauty with my eye,  
 Made captive, sweeping slopes and sky,  
 Ensnared the golden Sun.

I was a sailor at the mast,  
 My voyage well begun;  
 In joy I shook the branch I clasped,  
 I hailed an eagle flying past,  
 I'm bold at fifty-one!

Yet scorn me not, I must confess  
 The good, contenting sun  
 Had-smile not-only ten feet less  
 To travel, for my head to bless,  
 I'm fifty years and one.

And this at middle age? Quite so,  
 Why should I have done  
 With trees that sway and winds that blow  
 And heights and hills that dearer grow  
 Because I'm fifty-one?

Why should I not, if so I feel,  
 Find a leafy bastion high  
 Where mild adventure I can steal,  
 And firmly grind my sandalled heel  
 On dull covention? Why?

## MY HOLIDAY

**I** HAVE longed for this hour!  
 And now with a leaping heart  
 The hillside I'll scour.

Up and up, I will climb  
 Where butterflies dart,  
 Forgetful of passing time  
 Of Nature, a part.  
 O sweet is the scent of grass  
 Burnt by the sun,  
 Here where few humans pass  
 My joy has begun.

With grass both for shield and lance  
 Grasshoppers creep  
 And waiting their favoured chance  
 Out on me leap.  
 They provoke me to laughter,  
 And invite to the chase,  
 And though Nature's own daughter,  
 I am last in the race.

Insects and creeping things  
 Inhabit my home,  
 And creatures with radiant wings, ~  
 I am never alone.  
 Flowers like candle flames  
 Flicker and blow  
 Playing their golden games,  
 With light overflow.

High on my castled seat  
 I look o'er the land,  
 Look far down where mountains meet  
 And clasp hand in hand  
 Making a cradle where  
 Young streams can flow,  
 Deep in the valley there  
 Onward they go.

Oh! this is luxury,  
 Here joy is found.  
 This is God's treasury,  
 Beauties abound.  
 Basking in sunshine  
 Amid odours sweet,  
 Comfort and peace are mine  
 And I rest heart and feet.

O the sweet scent of flowers,  
 It clings to me still,  
 Haunting those hours  
 When I am not on my hill.

## NIGHT OUTSIDE

I slept outside.  
 The air was fresh, and the dark sky, wide.  
 Clouds meshed the stars and sped all night  
 In the veiled moonlight.

The mountains high,  
 Mysterious and dark seemed to touch the sky.  
 A bird call dimpled the silence, then  
 It was quiet again.

The winds at play  
 Tried hard to snatch my bed-clothes away,  
 But I chuckled with glee as I tucked them in  
 Well under my chin.

A sleep as light  
 As the dance of fairies on such a night  
 Invaded my eyes, ~ a magical rest  
 On my eyelids pressed.

Yet I was aware  
 Of the stirring wind, and the night-cool air,  
 The mixture of clouds and golden stars  
 Through those tranquil hours.

## HAN BHA!\*

**T**WO tired travellers, we hailed with zest  
 The **dharamshala** opening out to sight,  
 Rejoicing in the thought of peace and rest  
 And quiet night.

A gush of water made us music sweet  
 As up we climbed the narrow, perilous stair.  
 A little room, mudfloored, to stay our feet  
 For us, was there.

But one wall showed the worse for monsoon weather  
 A wide crack zig-zagged down and we could hear  
 The voices of men-travellers met together  
 Loud and clear.

Fresh straw made beds sweet-scented. We lay  
 Hearing those voices and the waterfall,  
 Watching a dancing thread of firelight play  
 Through the cracked wall.

Then the many voices ceased and one arose  
 That chanted forth for those enthralled ones  
 Tales of romance, brave rajas, conquered foes,  
 Tall, princely sons.

\* *HAN BHAI* - Yes Brother.

**Dharamshala** - a little wayside rest room.

Of chivalry and damsels sore distressed  
 He chanted, and of courage lifted high,  
 While every golden episode he stressed  
 With " Han, Bhai !"

" Han, Bhai !" he cried, till drowsy sleep  
 Besieged us as the starry hours slipped past  
 And tired eyes were closed In slumber deep  
 At last.

### IN PRAISE OF CLIMBING

**G**REY are the rocks and blue the sky,  
 The 'ridge is treeless, the sweet grass dry,  
 And the untamed winds of the northern height  
 Speed the track of the eagles' flight.

This sun-drenched wilderness weaves its spell

O'er us who down in the valley dwell,  
 And lost is peace and fled content  
 Till our feet on the upward path are bent.

Toil is sweet in the crisp, clear air  
 And courage is high to do and dare.  
 While the narrow path and precipitous hill  
 Our hearts with the joys of adventure fill.

The snows loom high in a radiant chain,  
 The Custura flutes its morning strain;  
 The misty dew on the browning grass  
 Leaves us wet, as our footsteps pass.

So up and up with the sun we climb  
 Unheeding the moments of fleeting time,  
 Till we panting rest on the rock-strewn height,  
 Bathed in the splendour of noontide light.

Then lo! a thrill both strange and sweet  
 Creeps over us, for at our feet  
 Serene and dewy, gentians lie  
 Open to the wide, blue sky.

Ever to our expectant eyes  
 Comes some form of sweet surprise;  
 But who could guess, this crag that towers  
 Gaunt and bare, was blue with flowers?

Who could see, while distant yet  
 Against the grey, blue's coronet?  
 Is climbing then, too hard a price  
 To pay to enter paradise?



## TO BEAUTY ON THE RIDGE

**B**EAUTY! in your relentless flight  
You still pursue me.

The mountain height

With beckoning arms allures me

And I flee, grasping her tresses, up and up.

The Ridge! its very name enchants.

O winds! blow free within me

As I stand, flanked by your mountain plants

And flowers and the rolling mist

That sometimes rises like a curtain

To discover a patch of valley, golden kiss'd

With sunshine. As I rest

On your long, narrow summit, pressed

On every side with longings and with pain

That after long, dry months of sorrow

I am here again,

Here on the top of everything

I will renew my troth with you,

And whether skies are black

With stormy threat or blue

With summer glory, I will come

To rain-wet beauty or perhaps

To sit in lazy joy beneath the sun,

To soak into my very soul, your beauty.

True, relentless, pursuant!

You, O beauty! never let me rest.

You disturb me to the depths

Of my poor being.

Should I, from your dear love, play truant

I find it but a useless ruse

For the very weeds that grow before my door

Cry out, " It is no use,

For Beauty from the cradle bore

In mind your vassalage. Climb heights!

Revel in her glories, in her atmosphere

Of splendour, space and multitudinous delights.

Truant one, - up! Pursue! "

## SPRINGTIME ON THE RIDGE ABOVE BALI

**B**ECAUSE. of stray sunshine

And in spite of weather

Away to the pine woods

We tripped down together.

Down through the **khets** of still wet wheat

That heedless washed our rough shod feet.

We burst our way through a hedge of thorn

For what cared we for a stocking torn?

And precariously slid on the moist clay soil

Like the fools that we were, making pleasure

of toil.

**Khet-Field**

But oh! the joys of expanding mind  
 When, a-tiptoe, at last on a hill you find  
 A beautiful world stretched out at your feet!  
 Ah! a wanderer's life is passing sweet!  
 Yes, sweet, when beacons of burning flame  
 'The red rhododendron's presence proclaim  
 Aglow 'gainst the blue~ of the distant chain  
 Of mountains, fresh with the recent ram.  
 Sweet when the tall pines whisper low  
 As the vagrant winds through their branches blow,  
 And woody scents from the earth arise.  
 Is it a matter for much surprise  
 That Edith sat and swiftly drew  
 A charming likeness of the view?  
 While I, with gypsy blood afire  
 Gathered twigs to heart's desire?  
 Two bags full, for our fire at night,  
 To keep our cowshed warm and bright.

But all unseen, - O traitor rain!  
 Clouds came creeping up again  
 And rushing swiftly up the vale  
 Reached us, pelting us with hail,  
 Forcing us to seek retreat  
 At a rhododendron's feet.

Yet it was a glorious sight  
 To watch the shadows chasing light,  
 And light in turn with magic beams  
 Transmuting rain to silver streams,  
 While over all, the Nag aloof,  
 Inscrutable, beneath his roof  
 Of thunder - gathering cloud, stood high  
 Reared 'gainst the moody sky.

What lovelier drama could be wrought  
 Than this, with sunlit cloud. stuff fraught?  
 No wonder though our Clothes were wet  
 And having no umbrellas, yet  
 We loitered, wandering from the track  
 That to our thatched roof led us back.

Once there, see us crouching low  
 And o'er the **chula** blow and blow  
 Until the sleeping embers wake  
 And into flame the pine logs break.  
 Two well-smoked rods were slung on high,  
 On these we hung our clothes to dry,  
 And meanwhile supper was prepared,  
 Cabbage washed, potatoes pared,  
 With bacon sizzling in the pan.  
 And what could be a better plan  
 Than making some excuse to go  
 And catch a glimpse of distant snow,  
 E'en though in vain? But coming night  
 Staged a sky of pure delight,  
 And we, in slippered feet, defied  
 The sodden earth, and stood outside  
 Gazing, drinking in our fill  
 Of stars and beauty and good will.

**Chula** -Fireplace

## WHERE THE AGLAR FLOWS

HERE is a wide valley. where the Aglar flows,  
 Ovalled like a gem amidst vast hills,  
 Where the cool breath of mountain wind soft blows  
 And murmuring waters, all the clear air fills.

Two streams noisily flow down and meet  
 The quiet Aglar, where white boulders gleam  
 In brilliant sunshine. Oft my burning feet  
 I've laved in the delicious coldness of that stream.

I have paddled forth sometimes and seen  
 A startled fish, disturbed, with gleaming flash  
 Dart by and disappear where depths are green,  
 And safe from the invader's ruthless splash.

Sun-drenched terraced fields spread wide and far,  
 Where man-diverted runlets quiver through,  
 Murmuring busily past grass and flower,  
 Dyed brightly with the sky's reflected blue.

Flooding the fields they flow and one may see  
 Women, ankle deep, skirts tucked up high  
 In bulging twist behind, stoop patiently  
 Transplanting shoots of paddy 'neath a summer sky.

White travellers so seldom tread these ways  
 That should one pass, the toilers straightening stand,  
 And leisurely and long, they curious gaze,  
 Dark eyes shaded with a dripping hand.

They'd giggle coyly should you stop to speak  
 And tell them they looked charming standing so  
 Graceful and poised, dark eyes and smooth brown  
 cheek,  
 Their images upon the water's flow.

The water's murmuring increases as the night  
 Hushes all human sound, while fireflies blink  
 And pierce the darkness with their pale, green light  
 Tranquillity descends. The heart has time to rest  
 and think.

## JHINSI

DOWN, down; far down the rugged steep  
 Upon a jut of hill  
 Hushed in night's arm - and fast asleep  
 Lies Jhinsi - shadowy - still.  
 Stars keep watch, then one by one  
 Snuff out - and night is done.

Jhinsi merges from night's dewy lap  
 Close huddled, sombre, grey.  
 Light's finger pierces a mountain gap  
 And lo! broad, shining day  
 Strides in. The mountain fastness won  
 Day's morning is begun.

Life stirs; the very roofs, slate-tiled,  
 Awake with glint and gleam,  
 Dusky women are beguiled  
 Down to the bubbling stream.  
 Brimming jars are carried back  
 Along the narrow track.

Lean cattle move and lumber down  
 To graze on hard-found grasses.  
 Milkmen toil the hill, to town.  
 So morn to noon-day passes,  
 Stillness descends. Only the stream'  
 Flows on. All others dream.

Green fields cool the heated eye,  
 Walnut trees spread wide;  
 Jhinsi stands picturesque and high  
 Upon the other side.  
 Scarcely ~ dozen huts in all  
 Straggling and small.

The mud walls, yellow ochre, catch  
 And fling the sunshine wide.  
 A bodice makes a crimson patch  
 Rinsed clean and thrown outside.  
 I hear the women threshing grain,  
 Life is a-foot again!

Pestle and mortar husk the rice,  
 Silver bracelets jingle,  
 Beckconing fingers us entice  
 With gossiping tongues to mingle.  
 Charming faces, lovely eyes!  
 But, - time flies!

And while the farmer ploughs his land  
 His bullocks urging on,  
 And curious women lift a hand  
 To shade their eyes, we're gone.  
 And up and up we climb and then  
 We're in Mussoorie once again.

## PERORA

**W**ITH night upon our heels we press along  
 Up the steep valley;  
 Murmuring waters with a quiet song  
 Our jaded feet rally.  
 Carefully we choose the path between  
 Rice fields all flooded.  
 Swaying plantain trees look shadowy green;  
 Our steep path is rugged.

Distant orange flames, and the smell of burnt oak  
 Are a stimulant strong  
 Perora awaits us enshrouded in columns of smoke.  
 We stumble along.  
 Then we're there! And sooner than tongue can recite  
 Dusky forms gather round,  
 All curious and eager, glad to idle young night,  
 Squatted down on the ground.

What questions! what laughter! what possessed us  
to walk those hard miles?  
Just to climb the Nag's height?  
"Well! Well! that is strange!"- with wagging of  
heads and sage smiles.  
"You're mad,-but quite right,  
From the Tibbah you'll view all the world unrolled at  
your feet;  
You'll see England from there!  
But the gods disapproving your venture in anger  
and heat  
May send hailstorms. Beware!  
"Well we remember, long past, when a **Raja** rode forth  
From his palace one day  
With wives and with servants to climb this dread  
peak of the North,  
He was proud and was gay.  
And there rose quite a village of tents on the summit,  
but wait!  
At dead of the night  
A storm, like wild fury, lashed forth, the god's  
anger and hate,  
And blindingly bright,  
"The lightning ripped heaven while thunder crashed  
cruel and loud,  
- It the god's furious tread,  
Hailstones as large as one's fist hurled themselves  
on the proud  
"Till in terror they fled."  
We listen enthralled, but we're tired and long each  
for bed,  
Yet our friends still remain  
In a shadowy circle warmed to dull, dusky red  
By our wood fire's flame.

**Raja** - a king

But at last they slip off into darkness by twos  
and by threes.  
The sky has grown light,  
The pipal's astir dangling heart-shaped leaves  
in the breeze,  
It is full moon to-night  
Sleep flees us, for who can sleep well when  
streams of bright gold,  
Silvery gold, liquid, bright,  
All the world, the tall hills, bubbling streams  
and yourself, sweet unfold  
In glamorous night?

At four in the morning, flitting quietly down  
to the brink,  
Go the women folk past  
To fill fat-bellied earthen jars, with water to drink  
With their morning's repast.  
The moon's waning light gleams on wet, dripping  
sides  
Of jars shoulder high,  
As back to her hut each braceleted maiden  
swift glides,  
Stars are quenched in the sky.

We soon are both up and our coolies are well  
on their way,  
Up the valley they strain,  
The sun leaps the hill, seems to promise a  
sweltering day.  
We start climbing again.

## SONG OF THE COWSHED

UNDER the chin of the towering Nag  
 Did we dwell, she and I.  
 Nor feared we the tales of leopard, -  
 the " bagh ",

There we dwelt, she and I.  
 Our palace a cowshed, thatched with  
 leaves overhead,  
 Through which peeped the stars as we  
 each lay in bed.

There were but two walls built of stones  
 dark and grey,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I,  
 Space curtained the rest with night and with day,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I.  
 So we woke with the blush of the wakening snows,  
 The song of the birds, and the scent of wild rose.

The great, cumbersome buffaloes came every morn,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I,  
 To stare at us, wondering when we'd be gone,  
 How we came, she and I.  
 They would sniff at the bed clothes, then  
 lumber away  
 To graze on the mountain till close of the day.

Every day, with fresh vigour, we left the  
 thatched hut,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I,  
 Conquered new heights, brewed tea and ate, - but  
 Always returned, she and I,  
 With our old, sooty kettle, her paints and my pad,  
 A posy of flowers, and both our hearts glad.

Then a crackling wood fire, and eye-burning smoke,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I,  
 Bacon for supper, sweet milk and a joke,  
 Where we dwelt, she and I.  
 Then a walk on the grass in the starry night  
 Where the scented, white clover made circles of light.

Four glorious days by the forest-clad Nag,  
 Did we dwell, she and I.  
 We saw a black bear, though we met not  
 the " bagh ",  
 Where we dwelt, she and I.  
 But since all we saw would fill a great book,  
 Go yourself, climb ten thousand feet, -  
 LOOK!

## MULES ON THE ROAD TO DHANAULTI

**T**HE morning was hot as we tramped along  
 The Dhanaulti road;  
 The way was winding and wearily long,  
 But water flowed  
 Collecting itself in a peaceful pool  
 That was to the fingers, wondrous cool.

Mules, that passed in a patient string  
 Halted to drink,  
 Soft sensitive lips still lingering  
 On the crystal brink.  
 Then a shout and they filed in obedient chain,  
 With the jingle of bells, to the road again.

Laden with sacks of charcoal, they  
 On the winding road  
 To Mussoorie plod, all the long, hot day,  
 With their heavy load.  
 Ungroomed are they but their necks are hung  
 With bells and blue beads together strung.

As from our vision they disappear  
 Rounding the hill,  
 The rhythmic jingling we can hear  
 Echoing still.  
 The muleteer shouts his travelling song  
 As he urges his beasts, and tramps  
 along.

## LIFE IN THE MOUNTAINS