

THE DOON FROM MUSSOORIE

Is it an enchanted city drowned
 In the days of long ago,
 Or is this an illusion found
 In the sun's bright glow?

Whate'er it is, it seems to me
 As though I looked beneath the sea,
 And saw a country wondrous fair,
 Strangely lovely, strangely bright,
 Drowned in clear, translucent light,
 Haunting beauty lingering there.

In the far beyond the plain
 Is girdled by a mountain chain,
 The Swaliks clothed in distant blue,
 Through clouds and sunshine changing ever,
 And in effortless endeavour,
 Creating colour schemes anew.

The great wide plain in deep blue green, -
 Broad silver rivers flow between
 Fair fields and forests. Cities lie
 Dreaming, peacefully at rest
 Upon that rich and ample breast,
 Gazing at the open sky.

Moody. temperamental, bright,
 Changing with the changing light,
 The Doon now lowers, dark with storm
 Or quickly melts in laughter gay'
 In her captivating way.
 Or clouds descend and swiftly form
 A billowing ocean. Then it seems
 To drown anew my land of dreams.

When the skies are starred at night
 And the crystal atmosphere
 Makes the stars and lights appear
 Scintillating, clear and bright,
 Then smiles my heart, my heart is glad
 To watch those miles in sable clad;
 For or: the darkness I see flung
 A radiant, diamond necklace strung
 With twinkling stars or shining eyes,
 And as I look, what should I see?
 A point of light move steadily, -
 Perhaps a car, perhaps a train
 Cleaves the darkness of the plain.
 I know that life is stirring there
 Inhabiting my city fair.

MUSSOORIE

HOUSES clamber up and down high hills
 Dappling the oak-green forest slopes,
 Or perch triumphantly some ridge where fills
 The wind each nook, and ardent hopes
 Are all fulfilled, for every side
 Affords a glorious panorama vast and wide.

Happy Valley, buttressed on the west
 By calm Ben Oagh ~ holds outstretched hands
 With gay Mussoorie, where crowds in quest
 Of pleasure, bargain at rickshaw stands,
 Take dandies, ponies, join the fevered rush
 Jostling through the holidaying crush.

Impulsive and self-willed Landour breaks away
 From parent town and creeps along
 Through squalid odours, bright bazaar display,
 A crooked lane, a motley throng,
 Struggling up eight thousand feet,
 To rest at last in fir-wood forests sweet.

North, east and west tall mountains rise
 Range beyond range, until the gleam,
 That glimpse of eternal snows against pale
 skies,

Rewards brave visitors who stream
 Along the **Chakar**; those who puff and blow
 But still determined, panting onward go.

The south looks down upon an endless sight
 Of plains unrolled in mighty length,
 Lost in the distant sea of mellow light;
 While pressing on in lordly strength
 The Ganges and the Jumna grow
 In volume as their sacred waters onward go.

O stragglng town, where blind hearts oft reside,

Be comforted. – Some day we will arise
 Beholding your fair beauty, spacious, wide,
 And read the Eternal in your eloquent eyes,
 For all who have upon your heights
 Must grow in spirit fed on these delights.

Chakkar - ride or walk

JULY EVENING IN MUSSOORIE

GREY mist and pale, continuous drizzle
 Like fine spray;
 Mussoorie's streets are wet;
 Small children play
 In pools, while anxious mothers tug
 Them safely out.
 The rickshaws, darkly hooded o'er
 Twist in and out
 The maze of black umbrellas,
 Large and small.
 The brown, bare legs
 Of coolies, fly
 In rhythmic speed; rain-soaked,
 The coolies cry
 And shout, scattering pedestrians
 Left and right,
 While on the rickshaw speeds,
 And in its flight
 The wheels squelch water
 On the passers-by.
 Evening falls and lights
 Make darkness gay
 With golden ladders splashing
 On the grey
 And worn macadam. Windows
 Laugh right at you
 As they show a bright array
 Of scarves, bright blue,

And red and orange, furs,
 All lovely things,
 Banaras sarees bright,
 Tibetan silver rings,
 And urns and jugs of copper,
 Gleaming brass,
 These tempt poor, reckless buyers
 As they pass
 Through pools of light that rain-bright fall
 Through open doors.
 Gay throngs leave wind and rain
 For dancing floors,
 Or just perhaps a cup
 Of steaming tea,
 Ham-banjo or an ice
 From Kwality.
 Oh ! In spite of rain and mist
 And Monsoon weather,
 Gay sarees and bright western gowns
 All move together,
 Flitting to and fro along the Mall
 Laughing carelessly,
 Why fret, when lights are gay
 And thoughts agree?
 And so the clock goes round,
 And chequered life
 Is one day nearer to that sleep
 Where neither strife,
 Nor gaiety nor laughter.
 Vex again our mortal mind.

THE SACRED TRAIL

Any day
 From April to October, you may meet
 Pilgrims, padding the winding, sacred way
 With tired, bare feet.

In white
 Or saffron clad, unjewelled, save the flame
 Of deep desire in zealous hearts alight
 In Rama's name,

They file,
 Women and men, the gleaming heights their goal,
 To wash away those things that do defile
 The human soul.

Sacred fire!
 For years these poor have scraped, and saved and
 striven
 To satisfy the burning heart's desire
 To be forgiven;

For who,
 They feel, but those who tread that difficult course
 That leads on to the glaciated cave, Gau Mauk,
 The Ganges' source,

Can feel
 True peace? Surely the wrathful gods forgive!
 Surely the gods must hear their heart's appeal;
 To them peace give.

Gangotri lies
 Cradled in majesty, where tower in serried form
 White ridges, radiant under sunny skies
 Cruel in storm.

THE JAUNTY ROSE

Behind one ear
 To herald the dawn of summer here!
 With jaunty grace
 Is a wild rose hung. His lean brown face
 Gleams as he sweeps dry leaves together, -
 Paharies love fires in every weather.
 It kindles apace.

From the wild rose
 A summery fragrance outward flows.

The pahari folds
 Bare feet beneath him and out-holds
 His hands to the warmth of the flickering blaze,
 His face impassive. Perhaps he prays
 To his gods, who knows?

NIGHT ON THE TEHRI ROAD

SEE him on a pony
 With a lantern in his hand,
 Jogging through the dark
 And mist-enveloped land,
 A **baniya** winding eastwards
 To his small abode,
 Winding through the white mist
 Along the Tehri Road.

Klop ! Klop ! Klop!
 The dying hooves I hear
 As I watch his tiny lantern light
 Grow faint and disappear.
 The road grows very lonely,
 Now only I am there,
 The street lights all are blinded.
 With the mist's thick swathing hair.

I love the quiet solitude,
 I love the mountain road,
 That leads me, winding westward,
 To my own and dear abode.

Baniya - a grain merchant.

THE COOLIE LAD

O I can smell the sweetness
 Of the pale wild rose,
 And a sense of life's completeness
 Overflows, - overflows.

Poetry steals the breast
 Of a brown pahari lad,
 In dirty, ragged vest,
 Poorly clad, - poorly clad.

His coolie basket is
 Embroidered with wild flowers;
 His slim, deft hands wrought this
 In idle hours, - idle hours.

Shoppers in the street
 O I know he will beguile'
 When they see his basket sweet'
 They will smile, - softly smile.

And delighted at the thought
 Of some coppers, with a will
 He will carry all they've bought
 Up the hill, - up the hill.

Then they will smell the sweetness
 Of the pale wild rose,
 Till a sense of life's completeness
 Overflows, - overflows.

BASANT - CHILD OF SPRING

I MET her, - just a tiny mountain child,
 As I was wandering
 In haunts of fern and flower wild,
 And it was Spring.
 In quaint full robe that touched her small bare feet,
 A kerchief round her hair,
 She looked a thing of grace and sweet
 Standing there.

Long-lashed hazel eyes set wide apart,
 Danced with golden light;
 Tiny hands quick fluttered to her heart
 In shy delight
 As I bent down to ask what name was hers,
 Hand on her head,
 Soft as the wind that touched the forest firs,
 "Basant," she said.

Bewitching child! in sombre native dress
 And silver hoops that lie
 About your childish neck, in mute caress,
 Love, I descry,
 Has pressed a dimple in your olive cheek,
 That comes and goes
 Betraying mischief, - and I thought you meek!
 Ah! who knows
 What elfin influence is shed by Spring;
 What lovely flame
 She kindles in young hearts, inspiring
 Those who bear her name?

HAPPY IN HER GIVING

I HEAR the whispering of grassy
 sheaves;
 A grass-cutter is mowing earth's green
 hair;
 And as each dewy bunch is cut, it
 leaves
 A fragrant sigh to quiver in the air.
 Yet, not of longing or of sad regret,
 For in the giving up of self, each gains
 Another life. Next summer will beget
 As rich a harvest in the monsoon rains.
 Earth's big heart remains untouched and blithe;
 She does not fear the keen and shining scythe
 That swiftly sweeps across her fragrant tresses,
 But, happy in her giving, always blesses.

PAHARI LIFE

I. IT is dark upon the quiet hill.
 Upon my back I lie and gaze
 Upon night's sky. All, all is still;
 The stars are all ablaze;
 Sometimes I see a falling star
 Shoot swiftly bright across the blue,
 While in response a bead of dew
 Glints briefly on a pale wild flower.

Far, far away, pin-points of light,
 Make twinkling fairy chains where lies
 Mussoorie, hidden in the night.
 Some jungle creature sudden cries.
 All the while the sighing trees
 Form shadowy masses huddling close
 Like conspiratorial ghosts,
 Shivering with laughter in the breeze.

Below, within a hollow, dwells
 A group of huts, and I can hear
 The fairy chime of soft cow bells,
 Upon the night air clear.
 A shadow flits before a door;
 Then I see a sudden spark
 And lo! a fire mocks the dark!
 My gleaming watch dial points to four.

Soon the spasmodic quiet thrum
 Of milk into a wooden pail,
 Tells of a milkman's work begun.
 The stars begin to pale;
 Grey dawn stirs the world to prayer;
 Dimly trees take shape and form ;
 Birds salute the early morn
 Smoke of fires fills the air,

II. EACH teki filled is straightway slung
 With a bag of strong webbed rope
 Then on the milkman's shoulder flung,
 He hurries down the rugged slope.

He sings aloud and strides along,
 His small gold ear-rings trembling;
 Echo steals his mountain song
 His pahari strain dissembling.

He meets a laughing, tramping throng
 Of milkmen westward tending.
 They gaily join his shouted song,
 Their way to Landour wending.

Tomatoes, vegetables, cream,
 And milk to town they're bringing;
 Though long miles there and back, they seem
 Undaunted in their singing.

teki - country milk can

THE GRASS-CUT

A LONG and patient line pads slowly by,
 On soft and yellowed dusty roads.
 Each pahari on his back has grass plied high.
 Fragrant loads,

Cut from sun-girt hillsides, bare of trees,
 Yellowed by long basking in the sun,
 Swept low and bent and tossed by the
 encircling breeze;
 Their day's now done!

The grass-cut on the lonely heights has swept
 With flashing stroke his sickle through,
 And twined with flowers each bundle lies
 still wet
 With last night's dew.

He sang the while, then stacked the
 bundles high
 All strung upon a stout, rough pole;
 Then rested, gazing at the blue expanse
 of sky. -
 Had it touched his soul?

He lifted up his load, was hid from sight;
 He soon his mountain haunts forsook.
 He reached the road. The grass was touched
 by wind and light
 And shimmering shook.

EXODUS

(Pahari folk on their way to Dehra Dun)

I N Indian file they walk. Bare feet
 Pad the thick dust with rhythmic beat;
 Long skirts, black and full and wide,
 Swing gracefully from side to side;
 Large hooped earrings softly jingling,
 With shy laughter intermingling
 Make a music silver sweet.

Tight bodices of brilliant dye
 For precedence in colour vie
 Each with one another Hair,
 Glossy with oil and dressed with care,
 Has a kerchief bound about;
 A silver mesh twines in and out;
 Bright necklets on their bosoms lie.

Lovely teeth flash when they smile,
 Dark lashes veil dark eyes the while.
 Full of curiosity yet shy,
 They question eagerly the what and why.
 With a firm possessive tread
 Their husband lords tramp on ahead
 Down to the valley of the Doon.

There, where waters flow and roses bloom,
 In the warmth they'll sun their hearts,
 Until dread winter slow departs,
 When Spring shall on the mountains tread
 And primulas and violets sweet
 Up-leap where touch her dancing feet.

HIGHLANDERS

IN a narrow valley Magra sleeps,
 Hedged round about by craggy heights,
 Late o'er whose peaks the morning sunlight creeps;
 Then sounds and sights
 Impress the eye and ear. Goat bells chime,
 And mules well laden, strenuously climb
 The winding road that leads
 To far Mussoorie.

Opposite the small **dak bungalow**, spreads
 An apple orchard. A straggling stream
 Of dusty travellers and cattle treads
 The highway wedged between.
 Rushing waters fill the air with sound,
 And where they overflow and drench the ground
 The road is cool that leads
 To far Mussoorie.

I remember well a week-end spent
 One warm November in that vale,
 When sound of numerous bells was gently sent,
 As night grew pale,
 Upon the breeze, and we rushed out to see
 What early travelling cattle these could be
 Upon the dusty road that leads
 To far Mussoorie.

dak bungalow - a Government rest house.

The stars were hardly quenched and dew lay thick
 As jewels on the wayward grass,
 When out we ran, - we must be quick
 If we would see them pass.
 O how we laughed for happiness, for lo,
 A clan of mountain goats was there below
 Climbing the winding road that leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

How picturesque those long-haired highlanders!
 With bearded Chins they looked so wise.
 Some had their long hair matted with brown burrs;
 Their topaz-gleaming eyes
 And, tilted heads asked questions as they paused to wait
 Until we chose to stay our flying gait,
 To greet them on the road that leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

Small saddle bags were carried on each back.
 Can you guess what cradled lay
 Tucked in the pleasant warmth of each brown sack?
 Kids born on the way.
 From far Tibet, where winter howling blows
 Across the plateau. The fleeing herdsman goes
 Travelling the difficult road that winding leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

I have seldom seen a prettier sight.
 Laughing, did I straightway run
 To lift a wee one up in sheer delight.
 The morning sun

Had touched the hilltop. Now the valley grew
 Much brighter and the narrow sky was blue.
 The whole clan rested on the road that leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

I kissed the kid, then gently put it back.
 Its anxious mother ceased to bleat
 When once again it filled the small brown sack.
 Soon pattering feet
 Clove the soft dust. The **Bhotiya** herdsmen, dressed
 In robes of dull magenta, urged and pressed
 The patient creatures up the road that lead
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

Theirs is a weary way. When falls the night
 They'll camp on some broad flat below
 The road and in the flickering pine fire's light
 Row upon row
 Of white forms huddled close will dimly gleam,
 And tired feet will rest. I wonder, will they dream
 Of fresh green valleys where the long road leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie ?

Next spring they will return and then each sack
 Will carry back plains' rice and grain
 Balanced carefully across each little back.
 When they're home again,
 The herdsmen on those plateau heights will sow
 And harvest and for six months think no more
 Of that far reaching road that winding leads
 Down to the Doon, beyond Mussoorie.

Bhotiya - an inhabitant of Bhot, Himalayan region bordering
 Tibet.

IN THE DOON VALLEY

A valley wide
 Stretches green and rich on every side.
 Tall clumps of feathery bamboos groan and creak
 As winds and sunshine streak

And filter through.
 Forests veiled in misty cobalt blue
 Creep on every side to hills that stand
 Like guardians of the land.

A long road sweeps
 From high Mussoorie and its rocky steep,
 Down and across the basin of the Doon,
 Where huts and houses strewn

Amid the trees, gleam white,
 And watch the ever-moving sight
 Of buses, tongas, cars, o'erburdened beasts,
 Pilgrims and priests,

Travelling to and from Mussoorie,
 Where plains-dwellers in the summer flee;
 For there the air gives life, the wasted frame
 Takes substance once again.

THE WILD GEESE

SOME night when spring is very young, I'll hear
 The honking cry
 Of wild geese voyaging the heavens clear,
 And then I'll lie
 Awake and dream sweet unimagined things,
 In time to that swift rushing of strong wings.

They've left the plains, - its glimmering, burning heat
 And thirsty **jheels**.
 They shake scant water drops from wings and feet,
 While longing steals
 And pours swift urgency through every bird,
 Until the sound of whirring wings is heard.

An unseen Pilot guides them as they fly
 High o'er the hills,
 Up-far closer to the stars than I,
 And crying fills
 The night with questions and with quick, replies,
 In V -formation as they cleave the skies.

Do they not tire? Perhaps, but visions fair
 Supplant dull pain;
 They only long, the fresh Himalayan air
 To taste again.
 They press right on, and dream their quiet dreams
 Of cool green sedges, mountain lakes and streams.

jheels - lakes or ponds.

Of snow-clad peaks that gaze enchanted down
 And mirrored lie
 On sunlit waters, wherein at night do drown
 Stars of the sky.
 Here, bending reeds make nests for brooding geese,
 This is a paradise for birds, a place of peace.

These are the dreams-those unimagined things
 That haunt the night,
 As bravely on, those dark green shadowy wings
 Pursue their flight.
 O unseen Pilot, as they adventure forth
 Guide Thou them safely to the cool-breathed north!

*HARSIL APPLES.

I T'S apple time and laden mules come down
 From the interior orchards, sheltering hid
 In northern valleys where the towering crown
 Of snow-capped shining mountains, bid
 The heart look up. There where the **amul** thrives
 And threads brown twigs with golden berries,
 Where every apple orchard bravely strives
 To rival June's red cherries,
 There will you find the Ganges' nursery bed;
 Pale jade, the quiet waters gently flow,
 And in and out the silver sands they thread
 To the broad vales below.

***HARSIL** - a village in a Himalayan valley near Gangotri.
amul - a bush with bright golden berries.

Dark forests spread from vale to bristling brow,
 And rich with resin, swaying in the breeze,
 Long cones dangle from the needled bough
 Of tall pine trees.

Bhuddist temples, gay with fluttering flags,
 Stand white and isolated on the plain.
 God of all peoples! Heed those pathetic rags.
 Heal the heart's pain!

And when poor men with superstitious awe
 Bow humbly and their folded hands upheave,
 And strew wild marigolds on the temple floor,
 Their childlike hearts receive!

Meanwhile, apples redden on the tree
 And brown hands pluck and pack them row by row,
 Mellow and sweet-scented. Ah! could I but once
 more be
 Where Harsil apples grow!

DOWN FROM MUSSOOIRIE

A pale grey road, like some gigantic serpent
 Twists and winds its smooth and sinuous length
 Around the girth of mighty, massive mountains,
 Until the Doon, that wide and rich green vale,
 Is reached, and then straight on it goes, between
 Tall trees thick bamboo clumps, wide fields, estates
 Where gardens flourish; till at last is reached.
 The smoke and noise of engines, where long trains
 Move restlessly and puff and steam and blow
 Like chafing horses, anxious to be gone.

Down, in quick succession, buses speed,
 Until the railway terminus is filled
 With hordes of boys and girls, red-cheeked.

red-lipped;

Distracted **babus** grapple valiantly
 With **maunds** of luggage to be weighed and booked
 To diverse stations linking India's miles.
 The rasp of trundling trollies, barking dogs,
 Loud cries, of vendors, mingle with the rush
 Of snorting engines shunting back and forth.
 At last with bump and grind the train is made.
 Excited children shout and headlong rush
 To enter, mistletoe and holly in their arms,
 Jostling each other they hang a placard out
 Where writ are magic words, "We're homeward
 bound."

It's nine at night and now the train is off,
 Like sweating Cyclops, with a steadfast eye,
 A blazing headlight in black forehead set.
 Slowly the engine gathers steam and speed,
 Cheers from a hundred young and lusty throats
 Burst forth and wild enthusiasm reigns.
 From out the galaxy of Dehra's lights
 The train moves out, swift, like a meteor,
 Into the darkness, its unwinking eye
 Awake and vigilant; the engine sparks
 Rain out like bursting rockets.
 Homeward Bound!

Babu – a clerk.

Maund - about 80 pounds weight.

INVOCATION

Guard this lovely mountain land,
Above it keep
O Lord, the shadow of Thy Hand.

Lord, who dwellest everywhere,
Mid mountains steep,
These simple people need Thy care.

Theirs is a hard, exacting lot;
Christ and Lord, forget them not!

“ Not till

I have conquered

All these hills, . . .”