



by
Una
Marson

*Towards
the Stars*

Helen Jacobs.

TOWARDS THE STARS

Poems by
UNA MARSON
" "

With a foreword by
L. A. G. STRONG

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FOREWORD

SOME years ago I received a letter from the West Indies containing a few poems. The personality revealed in the letter made an immediate appeal to me, and it was manifest also in the poems. Other letters followed, with more poems. Then the correspondence ceased, and I heard no more of Una Marson till, to my great surprise, she wrote from the B.B.C. and invited me to broadcast for her to the West Indies.

Since then we have worked together many times in the studio, and now she asks, with that diffidence which is one of the many charming things about her, if I will write a foreword to her book of poems.

I do so the more gladly, because they have a quality which is rare in the modern world. Do you by any chance remember the scene in *Porgy* where a negro in the courtyard of a tenement began rhythmically to hammer a box, and in a few seconds dozens more had begun to clap their hands and sing to the rhythm of his strokes? To say of a poet that his work is artless is a doubtful compliment; but there is a spontaneity, a joy of living, which when it is married to simple and musical words can give, now and then, something which only the greatest artists can achieve consciously.

*What is the good of living
If you don't hear the wild birds sing?*

*What is the good of seeking
If you don't see the flowers in Spring?*

*And what is the good of breathing
If you miss the perfume they bring?*

*What is the good of dreaming
If your soul never goes on the wing?*

This at a glance may seem too easy, too quick. But if one speaks it aloud—and all Una Marson's verses should be spoken aloud—it will be found to have all the spontaneity of the

scene in *Porgy*, plus an integrity which is hard to define, and breathes in these pages as naturally as a perfume. The poets are not alike, but I am reminded from time to time of Padraic Colum and that mysterious quality of simplicity in verse which made him the favourite poet of cottagers and farm labourers in his own country.

Una Marson is not always gay and childlike in her verse

*Forgive me if I weary you,
Love knows no shame,*

and

*. . . love me not
Lest naught be left
In life worth my desire.*

and

*Love's not for fools
Tho' mating be for all—*

and the very moving *Is Love Wise?*, too long to quote; they are not the speech of inexperience.

At her best, Una Marson has a simplicity and dignity which make one listen, and listen with respect. Here is a stanza about death:

*I had seen him
Sitting in the anteroom
Eager to be summoned,
So when I heard
You had received him
I was silent.*

This is an individual voice, and we would like to hear more of it. Some of the poems in this book have come too early and miss their mark; but the best reveal a sincere and courageous personality, and sound a tone that our modern orchestra has lacked.

L. A. G. STRONG

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TO
MY FRIEND
STELLA MEAD

POEMS OF NATURE

June

O MY heart, be glad and sing,
It is June!
Hear the music songbirds bring
All in tune!
See the roses rich and rare,
Smell the fragrance everywhere,
O what joys beyond compare
Come in June.

Riding up to Ballaugh

RIDING up to Ballaugh
On the little Manx train
I saw a host of lovely things
That in my heart remain.

The April sun was shining
Adding splendour to the gorse,
And Primroses and Daisies
Kissed the feet of cow and horse.

I saw the snowy lambkins
Skipping by the sheep,
And a sow with white pigs
Startled out of sleep.

Riding up to Ballaugh
Leaving seas behind,
Climbing up to Gorseland
Treasures rich to find.

My heart joined the rhythm
Of the little Manx train
As it whistled up the hillside
And whistled down again.

Yet still of that sweet chorus
Sent up in praise of Spring
The song my heart was singing
Seemed far the dullest thing,

For I thought, O Ellan Vannin,
Of your many gallant Sons
Slain in far-off countries,
Prone beside their guns;

How they would ne'er go riding
In sun or April rain,
Riding up to Ballaugh
On the little Manx train.

Darlingford

BLAZING tropical sunshine
On a hard, white, dusty road
That curves round and round
Following the craggy coastline;
Coconut trees fringing the coast,

Thousands and thousands
Of beautiful coconut trees,
Their green and brown arms
Reaching out in all directions—
Reaching up to high heaven
And sparkling in the sunshine.
Sea coast, rocky sea coast,
Rocky palm, fringed coastline;
Brown-black rocks,
White sea-foam spraying the rocks;
Waves, sparkling waves
Dancing merrily with the breeze;
The incessant song
Of the mighty sea.
A white sail—far out,
Far, far out to sea
A tiny sailing boat—
White sails all glittering
Flirting with the bright rays
Of the soon setting sun,
Trying to escape their kisses,
In vain—and the jealous winds
Waft her on, on, out to sea
Till sunset, then weary
Of their battle with the sun
The tired winds
Fold themselves to sleep
And the noble craft,
No longer idolised
By her two violent lovers,
Drifts slowly into port
In the pale moonlight;

Gone are the violent caresses
Of the sun and restless winds—
She nestles in the cool embrace
Of quiet waves
And tender moonlight.
Southern silvery moonlight
Shining from a pale heaven
Upon a hard, white, dusty road
That curves round and round
Following the craggy coastline
Of Jamaica's southern shores.

In the Glade

I WILL sit under the myrtle tree
And sigh my life away,
What else would you have me do
In the blinding heat of the day?

Scorching tropic summer's heat
Burns into my soul;
I am worthless, limp and weak
I cannot reach the goal.

Curse me, I deserve your curses,
Pity me, merciless sun,
Parched is the land and warm the air,
I wish the day were done.

I will go down to the river's side
And lay me down in the glade,
Till the sweet birds' songs are heard no more
And lights forever fade.

May Rains

I DID not know
There were so many ruts
On the hard tarred road
Until the rains came drizzling down
All through the long May day,
And the motor cars dashed by,
Making a yellow spray
Of water on the road.

I did not know
There were so many Buttercups
In the green meadows
Until the raindrops came,
Kissing each gentle bud to life,
Bidding them laugh and sing,
And now the byways are gold fringed—
Golden glory that lingers in the heart.

I did not know
That leaves on the Sour Sop tree
Were shaped to treasure pearls
Until the quiet lingering rain
Left drops to sparkle there,
Bringing the tenderness of tears
That come from out the swelling heart,
Tears that fill the eyes yet do not overflow.

Deep Peace

I CARE not for the city's roar,
The hum of busy marts;
Give me the quiet countryside
And simple human hearts.

I care not for the song and dance,
The gay lights and the laughter;
Give me the mountain's sweet romance,
For deep Peace follows after.

To the Hibiscus

FAIR Hibiscus, long you linger
In the gardens of the poor,
Bringing joy and cheer and brightness
To the peasant's lowly door.

There your blossoms bloom in splendour,
Telling all that pass you by
That earth's beauty and earth's gladness
To the poorest heart are nigh.

Fair Hibiscus, you are frailer
Than the blooms of roses rare.
In our homes you fade imprisoned;
Free, you grow without a care.

Fairest cup of reddest radiance,
Joy comes with you to my heart;
Teach me your own joyful message
That I may such cheer impart.

Winged Ants

WINGED ant,
The rains have come
And your house of wood
Is watersoaked and cold,
So you and your friends
Have come to my house.

I am sorry you thought fit
To fly on my paper
To see what I had written,
Because a sudden impulse,
An irresistible desire
Came over me, I had to find
How many wings you had
Folded into one
As you crawled about
On my white sheet of paper;
I put my finger
On your frail gossamer wings
And suddenly you walked away,
Leaving your precious wings
Under my fingertips.

Now I repent in grief
For, little creature,
You will fly no more.
And now I feel your woe;
Has not life's hard caress
Forced from me glad wings
That bore me to the stars

When first I saw the wonder
And beauty of the world?

Little winged ant,
Forgive my erring hands,
I should have known that wings
Are frail and delicate unearthly things.

Primroses

I HAVE gathered to my heart
A colourful posy of wild flowers.
I wish I knew their names,
But that scarce takes from me
The joy I share in their being.

Let me see—Primroses I know:
Pale gold—with long slender stems
When they grow in shady places,
A brighter gold and sturdier stem
When they look up at the sun.

Both breathe tenderness
And a delicate beauty
Beyond all wild flowers;
But here, I found a secret
That Primroses keep.

Where bloom the loveliest
Here I found, as I reached out

To pick a lovely flower,
That, keeping guard by her,
Sharp, armed and vigilant the nettle grew.

This, I found to my sorrow
And as I sat me down
By the little whispering stream
To name my wild flowers—
A sadness stole over me.

And I sat long with Primroses
In my hands and in my heart ;
I thought how, as I reached out
To gather a little joy from life,
The nettle keeping guard had hurt.

A Primrose felt a tear fall on her cheek,
And she smiled up at me and said
“ Do not weep—when the nettle’s sting has gone
You’ll recall the joy of this fair hour
Until I come again to herald Spring. .

“ Laughing I come each year to earth,
And many love and call me fair;
But since you let me see into your heart
I’ll tell you this my secret: come near,
Look deep into my heart, there too you’ll find
A tear.”

Invitation

COME here, where April shines,
My love—
Come here—where April sings.

Come, see the waves' fair dance,
My love,
Come, see the rushing springs.

Come where the birds build fast,
My love,
Their nests in leafless trees.

Come, hear their sleepy songs,
My love,
Fall sweet on sunset breeze.

Come, seek the gay Primrose,
My love,
Their clusters of rich gold.

And shy wild Violets,
My love,
Hiding from sunbeams bold.

Come to this lovely land,
My love,
Of golden gorse and purple hills.

Come where war's din comes not,
My love,
And Peace the lone heart fills.

“ *Eyes have they . . .* ”

WHAT is the good of living
If you don't hear the wild birds sing?

What is the good of seeking
If you don't see the flowers in Spring?

And what is the good of breathing
If you miss the perfume they bring?

What is the good of dreaming
If your soul never goes on the wing?

The Strife

ALL day long
And all night long
The salt waves dash
Against the rocks.

Do they never grow weary
Of dashing themselves against the rocks?

All day long
And all night long
My spirit strives
Against my flesh.

Spirit of mine, do you never weary
Of mightily striving against adamant flesh?

“ They also Serve ”

THEY were just a dozen privates
With an hour or two to spare,
They lunched on the grub in the canteen
And they didn't seem to care

About war or hate or women,
About guns and bombs and blast,
Nor for that about a commission
Or how long the war might last.

They didn't belong to the Grenadier Guards
Or some far-famed highland clan,
They were simply men of the Pioneer Corps
In the lovely Isle of Man.

And what did they do—on this April day,
These lads in brown with an hour to spare?—
They came strolling down to the warm seafront
Along the beach as far as they dare.

The sun was hot, and the tide coming in,
So they did what I had been longing to do—
Took off their boots and wandered out
To meet the waves—for a dance or two.

Not much glamour about it all,
But the Army boots slog on just the same—
The cool of the sand and sea was a call,
And to kiss their feet the wild waves came.

Farewell

FAREWELL to thee,
My lovely Ellan Vannin,
The time has come
For me to leave your shore.

Farewell to thee,
My lovely Ellan Vannin,
My heart is sad
To say farewell once more.

Oh, how I love
Your vales and hills and meadows,
Your lovely glens and bluebell-bordered streams,
Your sheltered coves where oft I fondly wandered
And thought that wars and evils were but dreams.

Farewell to thee,
My lovely Ellan Vannin,
I'll come again
To claim you for my own.

Farewell to thee,
My lovely Ellan Vannin,
I will be true
To you, and you alone.

Home Thoughts in June

JUNE comes again. The Poinciana trees
Now blossom in my sun-kissed isle.
I am here in London, and the flowers
Of dainty shades and delicate perfumes
Stir my heart and wake my love.

But it is to the flaming glory
Of Poinciana trees in fair Jamaica
That my lone heart is homing.
I might sing of fragrant myrtle blossoms
Whiter than snow and sweeter than honey,
Of pink and white June roses,
Of Jessamines, Hibiscus, Begonias,
Of Bougainvillea and Cassia,
But the flaming Poinciana
Calls to me across the distance,
Calling, calling me home.

O pride and glory of our tropic Isle,
As thy red and golden petals
Drip blood-drops on the sod
That thou mayst bring forth
Mighty pods of fertile seed,
So children of your tropic land,
With broken hearts that bleed
In foreign lands afar,
Strain every nerve to bring forth
Fruit that may enrich the race,
And are anew inspired
With hope and loyal longing—

Hope that thy red and golden banners
Now unfurled through all the land
May call men's hearts
To bow at Beauty's shrine—
And loyal longing that awakes
And claims the best thy sons and daughters give.

POEMS OF LOVE

My Beloved

I WILL make you my Beloved!
I will sing to you
Songs that are sweet;
I will send to you
Thoughts that are beautiful.

I will give to you
Smiles that are tender;
I will smooth for you
Paths that are rough;
I will paint for you
Exquisite pictures;
I will play to you
Music divine;
I will comfort you
When you are weary;
I will cheer you
When you are sad.

I will be near you
When you are lonely;
I will send to you
Sweet dreams at night;
I will make for you
Days of delight.

And all—
And more than all—
You ask of me
I will do for you—
I will make you my Beloved.

Nightfall

HOW tender the heart grows
At the twilight hour,
More sweet seems the perfume
Of the sunless flower.

Come quickly, wings of night,
The twilight hurts too deep ;
Let darkness wrap the world around,
My pain will go to sleep.

My Need

SPEAK to me—
For when you speak
I am strong and well and awake.

Smile on me—
For when you smile
I am thankful that I am alive.

Hold my hands—
For at your touch
The world becomes a magic land.

Be near to me—
For at your side
I find my best and truest self.

Live on forever
That I may live
And love that spirit which thou art;

But love me not
Lest naught be left
In life worth my desire.

The Impossible

YOU ask me just to be a little wise,
To half subdue the ardour in my eyes,
To find some unseen power that can restrain
The heated blood that rushes to my brain.

Ask then the wild wind on its furious course
To half subdue its mighty unspent force,
And ask the troubled sea that she no more
Will dash her waves against the placid shore.

Ask of the fire that blazes ever higher
Of its consuming appetite to tire,
And ask the sun that moves towards the west
To stay its course, subdue its heat and rest:

Ask on, your chiding is so sweet to me
I have no wish to seek for clemency.

Love's Call

WHY should love call to me again
To follow her o'er paths of pain?

Have I not followed her before
To see her close on me the door?

Have I not wept enough of tears
To satisfy the hungry years?

Why should love call to me again
To follow her through paths of pain?

Twilight

HERE in the calm of the twilight
There is no murmur save the sigh
Of quiet waves as wearily
They whisper that night is nigh.

Here in the depth of my heart
There is no murmur save a quiet tear
Wishing so tenderly
That you were near.

Forgive Me

FORGIVE me if I weary you,
Love knows no shame ;
Forgive me if I wander wearily
Sighing your name.

Forgive me if I dream too much
About your smile, your eyes, your touch;
To others love returns, it seems,
I only have my dreams.

Voices

“TAKE down thy harp from the willow
And sing.”

“Of what shall I sing?
To whom shall I sing?”

“I will tell thee,
I will show thee,
Trust me.”

“I trust not voices,
They deceive me.”
“Trust me, I am worthy;
He awaits your coming
And longs for you
To sing your songs
To him.”

“But will he answer make
Or shall I sing
To unresponsive ears?”
“He will not answer make,
But you will bless his soul
And warm your heart
With your sweet songs;
I prithee, sing.”

Love's Poetry

WILL you be the world's beloved
And I the world's lover?
Will you treasure for me
These my songs?
And when I have sung
My heart's full burden—
The love songs of all ages—
For you the world's beloved,
We shall send them
To the lovers who have been
And who shall be,
That they may know
Not just the way—
But the beauty and poetry of Love.

Love Songs

I AM a woman
So I sing of Love,
I sing of Love
Because I am a woman;
Nay, more than this,
Because Love lingers not
But leaves me desolate
I sing of Love
To charm her back
To me.

But will she hear my songs?
Nay, that she will not,
She is deaf and blind,
She will not hear,
She will not see,
She will not come to me.
Even so, let her pass on,
She knows I will no more
Suffer love's pain.

And yet,
I am a woman
So I sing of Love,
I sing of Love
Because I am a woman.

The Madness of Love

THERE is no madness
Like unto the madness of love
When it possesses your brain.

There is no fever
Like unto the fever of Love
When it possesses your body.

There is no fire
Like unto the fire of Love
When it consumes your soul.

There is no folly
Like unto the folly of Love
When it rules your impulse.

There is no sickness
Like unto the sickness of Love
When it lays you low.

There is no hell
Like unto that bottomless pit
Of unrequited Love.

Down to the Shore

COME with me, my beloved,
Let us go down to the shore
In the soft moonlight,
And let us sit on the rocks
And throw pebbles
Into the sea.

Let us sit there
For centuries
Just in quiet worship
Of the mighty ocean,
The waves and seafoam,
The shining coconut palms,
The pale Queen moon
Sailing across high heaven.

And when centuries have passed
And we weary of our vigil

Let us keep court
With Neptune
Under the sea—
Let us sport with
The beautiful mermaids
And dance and sing.

Come, my beloved—
Let us go down to the shore
In the soft moonlight
And dream.

Perfume

I DRINK too deep
Of this rich nectar
That is everywhere.
I am drunk
With the perfume
Of Jessamine,
Tulips,
And Honeysuckle,
I leave the garden
Where I find them.
For to be alone
In a garden
Of Jessamine,
Myrtle,
Tulips,
And Honeysuckle
Is not
To be happy.

I walk down
The country lane,
And the fragrance
Of Logwood blossom
Greets me.
I return home.
I sit on the porch.
Again the perfume
Steals
Into my soul,
And I think,
What can I do
To win
My thoughts
From you?

For you
Are the perfume
Of Jessamine,
Tulips,
Myrtle,
And Honeysuckle.

Inevitable

STRANGE that the fresh sweet image of thy face
Should fondly linger in my memory,
Strange that in all life's beauty I can trace
Thy presence tender as a sigh to me.
More strange that to my weary fevered soul
The thought of thee still warms my heart like wine,

More strange that in the mighty ocean's roll
I hear thy voice still calling unto mine:
And stranger far, and yet still stranger far,
Is this deep ecstasy that thrills me so,
This sighing of the roses for the star,
This prison of thy spell I can't forgo:
Yet strangest of all strange things would this be
Did my fond heart refrain from loving thee.

Wishing

I WISH my heart did not leap
At the sound of your voice;
I wish my blood did not race
At the touch of your hands;
I wish my reason did not fail
At the thought of you.
The fates defend me, I wish—
How I wish I could hate you!

Is Love Wise?

YOU said
It was good for me
That you should love me
No more.
I suppose
You meant it,
I do not know.

Maybe it is good
For the sun
To shine no more
On the earth.
Maybe it is best
For the rain
To nestle
In the embrace
Of the clouds
And never visit
The earth.

Maybe it is wise
For the river
To stop flowing
When rocks appear.
Maybe it is good
For the moon
To return no more
Nor the stars
To shine.

Maybe it is kind
Of the nightingale
To sing no more
Her sweet songs
In the night,
And the skylark
Need mount no more
Towards high heaven
In a mist of melody.

Maybe it is good
For the ship
That rides the ocean
To have no harbour.
Maybe it is good
For the world
To be shrouded
In blackest midnight.

Maybe—but why maybe?
You love me not.
There is no reason
Nor wisdom
Nor goodness
In Love that is not.

The Tree of Love

THE tree of Love
Is not sturdy,
But frail
And delicate.

Stormy winds,
Freezing gales,
Unfriendly heat
And drought
It will not
Withstand.

It must be tended
By lovers
Who know
Its needs
And will obey
Its demands.

A Plea

ALL that I most desire
I shall forgo,
All that thou dost desire
It shall be so.

Life I surrender,
The fairest and best,
If thou wilt render
One eager behest:

Leave me my songs,
Leave me my singing,
That hushed in the throng
My soul may go winging.

Love

LOVE'S not for fools
Tho' mating be for all—
Few for the heights are chosen,
For all the call.

Lullaby

I SAT in the silent room
After you had gone
Enjoying the sweet harmony,
The delicate music,
That your voice left
On my ears.

Sat there a long while
Just thinking of the restfulness
Of the depth in your voice.
I wished again to be a little child
So I could nestle in your arms
And fall asleep with the music
Of your beautiful words
For lullaby.

Conspiracy

LISTEN, little wild violet,
Your heart beats wildly as mine
When you hear the feet of your lover
Stop by the Celandine.

My lover he halts by the wayside,
He works far away from the streams,
And has no time for my music
Or the magic of my dreams.

I'll bide with you, sweet violet,
And we'll banish our loves for aye,
For why should we dream of lovers
Who come not when it is May.

The Heart's Strength

HOW much the heart can suffer and still live,
What depths of anguish, loss and longing know,
How much that's unforgivable forgive
What utmost needs and fairest dreams forgo;
How great the strength of human hearts must be
That still beat on when all earth's hopes are lost,
When eyes with tears are all too dim to see,
And every brave adventure has been crossed;
How often do we see the tender smile
Rise from a heart that life itself has broken,
How often do the cheerful words beguile
The saddest words that still remain unspoken:
This mighty strength, this faith forever thine,
Are fullest proof that man is half divine.

Repose

RETURN, my heart, from wandering afar
Where tempests toss thy unpretentious bark,
Rest thee content to muse upon the star,
At dawn to hear the music of the lark.

Stay home and half forget the prisoned pain
That will not have thee rest in settled peace,
The simple joys of life thou canst retain,
From storms of ocean thou wilt find release;
Rest, then, my heart, thou knowest but too well
How strong and fierce relentless winds can blow;
How frail thy bark when tempests round thee swell,
How thou dost need the peace thou wouldst forgo:
For hearts do not upon the wild rocks break;
They only know deep hurt and ache on ache.

POEMS OF LIFE

Towards the Stars

HALF life's ills
Are born of man's desire
To be attached
To someone,
Or to something.

And this desire
Is born of cowardice.
It is not the feeble,
Not the weak
Nor the incompetent,
Who cling tenaciously—
It is the coward only.

To grow upright,
Steadfast,
Strong,
Man must grow
Like a tree;
Burrow deep
In the soil
Of Humanity,
And reach upwards
To the heights.

Sometimes there needs
Must be
A hand stretched out
To aid—
A smile to cheer,
An understanding heart,
Comrades
For Song and Dance.

But to cheat life
Of its ignominies
Man must stand
Alone,
Firmly planted
In Humanity,
And grow
Towards the stars.

Black Burden

I AM black,
And so I must be
More clever than white folk,
More wise than white folk,
More discreet than white folk,
More courageous than white folk.

I am black,
And I have got to travel
Even farther than white folk,
For time moves on—

I must not laugh too much,
They say black folk can only laugh ;
I must not weep too much,
They say black folk weep always ;
I must not pray too much,
They say black folk can only pray.

I am black,
What a burden lies
Upon my heart—
For I would see
All my race
Holding hands
In the world circle.

Black girl—what a burden—
But your shoulders
Are broad.
Black girl—what a burden—
But your courage is strong—
Black girl, your burden
Will fall from your shoulders,
For there is love
In your soul
And a song
In your heart.

The Guest

SORROW—you have come
To be my guest,
I cannot rise
And bid you go.

When joy comes
I welcome her,
I am loath
To let her go—
Now, though uninvited
You have come,
You are here
My guest.
I must receive you,
I must bow to you,
I must converse with you,
I must embrace you,
And when you go
My eyes must follow you
In gratitude,
Though they be dim
With tears.

Sorrow—you have come
To be my guest,
I bid you welcome,
But this I pray—
When you go
Leave me a blessing.

Interlude

STILL is the night,
The great city sleeps
Wrapped in her black mantle;
The stars keep vigil
And sentries watch
Over a land
Waiting in hushed horror.

Suddenly, out of the stillness,
Out of the silent night,
Down from the infected heights
May come death and desolation.
Meanwhile, silence,
A wakeful sleeping,
And the vigil
Of stars
And sentries.

The Test

THE test of true culture
Is the ability
To move among men,
East or West,
North or South,
With ease and confidence,
Radiating the pure light
Of a kindly humanity.

Sympathy

HEAR you my heart's sorrow,
O little bird that sings,
Do you my own grief borrow
To leaden your light wings?

Now deeper grows my grieving
To hear your anguish start,
This mournful thread aweaving
Will surely break my heart.

Politeness

THEY tell us
That our skin is black
But our hearts are white.

We tell them
That their skin is white
But their hearts are black.

The Secret

I SOMETIMES think
If I could stare long enough
Into the glowing fire
I would discover
One of life's mysteries.

But too soon my feeble brain tires,
My eyelids droop,
I snooze and drowse,
While the fire
Dies with its secret.

In the Darkness

GROPING amid the darkness
In the streets of a city
Once gay with myriad lights
Is a mysterious sensation.
At first I felt afraid,
Then strangely mystified,
And, without thinking,
Almost instinctively
I asked God to take my hand.

Frozen

Winter 1941

EUROPE is frozen.
It is too cold for birds to sing,
For children to make snowmen,
For rivers to splash and sparkle,
For lovers to loiter in the snowlight.

The heart of humanity is frozen.
It is too cold for Poets to sing.

Words

O WORDS, I woo you!
But you flee my embrace.
You never come to me
In all your grace.

Would you but come
I would build you a shrine,
And raise you a temple
Of beauty divine.

But words, you mock me,
You laugh at my plea;
Despising my pleadings
You frown on me.

But long is my patience,
I shall wait at your side.
One day I shall win you
And make you my bride.

Winifred Holtby

THEY do but err who tell me thou art dead
And that thy dwelling lies beyond the skies,
How can the Spring return if thou art fled
And speedwells bloom that mirror'd thy soft eyes!

Thy freshness was the envy of the Spring,
Thine was the joy of summer's radiant noon,

Of thy enchanting ways did song-birds sing,
And can it be that thou art gone so soon?

O valiant woman, author, speaker, friend,
With sympathies as wide as they were true;
Thy heart was like a fount where all might bend
To drink, and find their faith in life anew:

Now well might time itself live but a day
Did radiant souls remain enthralled in clay.

To the I.A.W.S.E.C.

WOMEN of England who in freedom's name
Work with courageous women of all lands,
For women's rights, yet not for women's fame,
I greet you, and to you stretch friendly hands.
In your inspiring work I had my part
For you were more than passing kind to me,
In Istanbul they took me to their heart
Where women of far lands met glad and free.
What courage have fair England's women shown
In public life and in the quiet home,
What bitter struggles have their spirits known
So that just rights to womanhood should come:
For lands can only reach the greater good
When noble thoughts inspire sweet womanhood.

The Stone Breakers *

“ ’LIZA me chile, I’s really tired
Fe broke dem stone,
Me han’ hat me,
Me back hat me,
Me foot hat me,
An’ Lard, de sun a blin’ me.”

“ No so, Cousin Mary, an’ den
De big backra car dem
A lik up de dus’ in a we face.
Me Massa Jesus knows it,
I’s weary of dis wol’—

“ But whey fe do, Cousin Mary,
Me haf fe buy frack fe de pickney dem,
Ebry day dem hab fe feed.
Dem wotless pupa tan roun’ de bar
A trow dice all de day—
De groun’ is dat dry,
Not a ting will grow—
Massy Lard, dis life is hard.
An’ so—dough de work is hard
I will has to work fe pittance
Till de good Lard call me.”

“ ’Liza me chile, I’s really tired
But wha fe do—we mus’ brok de stone
Dough me han’ dem hat me,
Me back it hat me,

* Written in Jamaican dialect.

Me foot dem hat me
And de sun it blin' me—
Well—de good Lard knows
All about we sorrows.”

*My Philosophy **

(As expounded by a Market Woman)

Market woman walking quickly ahead of her friend. She carries the basket on her head. She swings both hands violently as she presses the friend close behind her without turning :)

“ You can tan up talk wid him,
If you and him is companion
Me and him is no companion.”

Second market woman following quickly at her heels :)

“ Me and him is companion, yes,
Me and him is companion,
Me and all de wide worl' is companion
For dere is nobody better dan me
And I is not better dan nobody.”

Sleep

LIFT up your heart
In silent prayer
And give God thanks
For sleep.

Sweet sleep that comes
To soothe earth's cares
And comfort hearts
That weep.

* Written in Jamaican dialect.

The Banjo Boy

BLACK boy,
How you play that banjo!
Gee—it goes right to my toes,
I could dance all night
And through the day again.
How your face beams!
Do you love it?
I'll say you do.

Where did you get that rhythm?
That swing and that motion,
That bubbling laughter
With which you punctuate
Your songs? I have it too,
I can feel it going through me,
But I can't express as you do.

You know it's good to be alive,
Don't you, as long as the sun shines
And the banjo is in your hands?
Maybe you are hungry,
Maybe your shirt is going,
Maybe you are not worth a cent,
But what do you care?

There's your banjo, the boys come
And sing and hum and dance
Round you—they share in your joy,
They respond to your songs—
Those banjo songs that call me.

Dawn

NO more do men
Climb up to lofty heights
To greet the dawn
And chant hymns of praise
To the Eternal
Sun God.

Instead they fly
Like bats and owls
That seek their prey
In darkness—
And in the dawn
They, returning
With the Sun's return,
Cast gloomy shadows
On his radiant face
And dull the splendour
That should gild the dawn.

They come no more . . .

OFLOWERS in beauty,
You blossom so fair,
But fade and die
When winter is near.

But again you rise
When winter is past,
And smile again
Our hearts to outlast.

But men who die
On fields of war
No more will come,
But sleep afar.

Oh grief! Oh woe!
Come weep with me,
That these no more
On earth we'll see;

Oh grief! Oh woe!
Come weep with me,
That men must die
For liberty.

Little Brown Girl

LITTLE brown girl,
Why do you wander alone
About the streets
Of the great city
Of London?

Why do you start and wince
When white folk stare at you?
Don't you think they wonder
Why a little brown girl
Should roam about their city,
Their white, white city?

Little brown girl,
Why did you leave
Your little sunlit land
Where we sometimes go
To rest and get brown
So we may look healthy?

What are you seeking,
What would you have?
In London town
There are no laughing faces,
People frown if one really laughs,
Everyone is quiet,
That is respectable;
There's nothing picturesque
To be seen in the streets,
Nothing but people clad
In coats, coats, coats,
Coats in Autumn, Winter and Spring,
And often in the Summer—
A city of coated people
But little to charm the eye.

And the folks are all white—
White, white, white,
And they all seem the same
As they say that Negroes seem.
No pretty copper-coloured skins,
No black and bronze and brown,
No chocolate and high-brown girls
Clad in smart colours
To blend with the complexion

And wearing delicate
Dainty shoes on dainty feet
That one can admire.
No friendly countryfolk
Parading the city
With bare feet,
Bright attractive bandanas,
Black faces, pearly teeth
And flashing eyes.
No heavy-laden donkeys
And weary, laden women
Balancing huge baskets
So cleverly on their heads
While they greet each other
And tell of little things
That mean so much to them.

Little brown girl,
Do you like the shops
And all the lovely things
In the show windows?
Wouldn't you like a coat
With a fifty-pound tag on it,
Or one of those little hats
In Bond Street?

Little brown girl,
Why do you look so hard
At the Bobbies
And the bookstalls
And the city lights?
Why do you stop and look

At all the pictures
Outside the theatres?
Do you like shows?
Have you theatres
In your country,
And from whence are you,
Little brown girl?
I guess Africa, or India,
Ah no, from some island
In the West Indies,
But isn't that India
All the same?

I heard you speak
To the Bobby,
You speak good English,
Little brown girl :
How is it that you speak
English as though it belonged
To you?

Would you like to be white,
Little brown girl?
I don't think you would,
For you toss your head
As though you are proud
To be brown.

Little brown girl,
Don't you feel very strange
To be so often alone
In a crowd of whites?

Do you remember you are brown
Or do you forget?
Or do people staring at you
Remind you of your colour?

Little brown girl,
You are exotic,
And you make me wonder
All sorts of things
When you stroll about London
Seeking, seeking, seeking.
What are you seeking
To discover in this dismal
City of ours?
From the look in your eyes,
Little brown girl,
I know it is something
That does not really exist.

Where Death was Kind

LONG had I thought
Of Death
And all his mysteries,
And then they told me
You were dead.

I had seen him
Sitting in the anteroom
Eager to be summoned,

So when I heard
You had received him
I was silent.

I went to see you
Lying in death's embrace.
I was afraid—
I thought the sight
Would tear my heart
To pieces,
And my anger would rise
Against death the intruder.

But when I looked
Into your lovely face
And saw the sweet peace
That his kiss
Had implanted,
I could not weep,
And I could not be angry.

Ah, sweet is death,
And kindly
To those who suffer
Unbearable agony:
Sweet was death's kiss
Upon your lips—
Beloved one
To whom
He gave His Peace.

At the Prison Gates

Jamaica, 1937

THEY marched
To the prison walls and knocked at the gates,
And when he who was director came forth
They spoke and said unto him,
“ We are hungry, we need food for our bodies,
We would join your band of prisoners
And work, so be that we are fed.
We are men—we need work, we need food.
Our wives and sweethearts live in poverty,
We have nothing to take to them;
We are strong—we would work—but
No man will employ us.”

And he the director spake unto them
Words that could not comfort,
Words that could not feed,
Words that could not give hope,
Yet they were kind words;
And the sorrowful army
Of Kingston's unemployed marched on—
On with their empty stomachs,
Their empty pockets,
With no hope in their hearts,
With no comfort in their souls.

And I looked,
And behold I saw numerous men,

Wealthy, overfed, over-indulged—
And when they heard this
Their hearts smote them,
And some of these men said,
“Are not these men our brothers?”
And others said, “Indeed they are not—
They are worthless creatures who will not work.”
And one said, “But in other lands,
There are unemployment funds.”
And some said, “Let us arise
And pool ten thousand pounds,
And let us give these men land
And money to assist them.”
And another said, “Nay, let us build us
Great factories and use our raw materials
So we can provide work for them,
For they are men.”
And so they talked the while
Their conscience smote them,
They drank together
And went away happy
For they pledged no wealth
That no more weary and hungry marchers
Would walk to the Prison Gates
Of Kingston, and ask for entrance
So they might be fed.

And so through all the night and day
I see the weary and hungry
Crowds marching—every day
More hungry—every day more sad;
And I hear a great stir of voices

Among those who rule the land
In politics and those who rule in gold.
But the tramp of the weary feet still sound,
On they march—must they march on forever?

Mother

MY Mother,
Come near to me
Back from your world—
I need your comfort,
Your caress,
Your consolation.

I know
That you watch
Over me, ever—
But now—to-night—
The sorrows that I feel
Only you
Can understand.

Come close, close to me,
My Mother,
Let me nestle
Once again
In your tender arms—
Let me feel your comfort
And your strength.

I need
Your love,
Your courage,
Your sweetness,
Your patience
And calm—
Mother—come down
From your heaven
And comfort
Your child.

Heartcry

GOD of the broken-hearted,
Dost Thou see
And dost Thou feel
The grief of Thy children?

If I, in one corner,
See so much of sorrow
That is to-day
And will be to-morrow—

God of the broken-hearted,
Dost Thou see?
Or are Thine eyes
Too dimmed with tears?

There will come a Time . . .

EACH race that breathes the air of God's fair world
Is so bound up within its little self,
So jealous for material wealth and power
That it forgets to look outside itself
Save when there is some prospect of rich gain;
Forgetful yet that each and every race
Is brother unto his, and in the heart
Of every human being, excepting none,
There lies the selfsame love, the selfsame fear,
The selfsame craving for the best that is.
False pride and petty prejudice prevail
Where love and brotherhood should have full sway.

When shall this cease? 'Tis God alone who knows;
But we who see through this hypocrisy
And feel the blood of black and white alike
Course through our veins as our strong heritage
Must range ourselves to build the younger race.
What matter that we be as caged birds
Who beat their breasts against the iron bars
Till blood-drops fall, and in heartbreaking songs
Our souls pass out to God? These very words,
In anguish sung, will mightily prevail.
We will not be among the happy heirs
Of this grand heritage—but unto us
Will come their gratitude and praise,
And children yet unborn will reap in joy
What we have sown in tears.

For there will come
A time when all the races of the earth,
Grown weary of the inner urge for gain,
Grown sick of all the fatness of themselves
And all their boasted prejudice and pride,
Will see this vision that now comes to me.
Aye, there will come a time when every man
Will feel that other men are brethren unto him—
When men will look into each other's hearts
And souls, and not upon their skin and brain,
And difference in the customs of the race.
Though I should live a hundred years,
I should not see this time, but while I live,
'Tis mine to share in this gigantic task
Of oneness for the world's humanity.

Now I lay Me down to Sleep . . .

PLEASE, God, look Thou down
In pity on this tortured world.
Be near the soldiers on the battlefields,
The sailors out at sea,
The airmen as they soar above the clouds.
Comfort those who mourn for loved ones;
Put wisdom into the hearts and minds
Of those who truly fight for justice;
Soften the stony hearts of evil men;
And, O God, speed Thy Peace
To earth again. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Una Marson was born in the parsonage of a small village in Jamaica, British West Indies. At home, and later at Hampton, the high school in her parish to which she won a scholarship, her favourite study was English literature.

Leaving high school she took a secretarial post in Kingston, but soon went on to journalism. Among her books of poems published in Jamaica are "Tropic Reveries" and "Heights and Depths."

She came on a visit to London in 1932. Through her interest in women's problems she was asked to speak at an International Women's Congress in Turkey in 1935. She was also invited to the League of Nations Session that year.

Una Marson returned to Jamaica in 1936, had new poetry published and plays produced, worked on the staff of a daily paper and started a local Save the Children Fund. She returned to London for her paper in 1938 and lectured about conditions in her own country.

She is now on the staff of the Overseas Service of the B.B.C., where she organises and produces programmes to the West Indies.