

M. Louise Haskins

The Gate
of the
Year

London
Hodder and Stoughton

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Title: The Gate of the Year

Date of first publication: 1940

Author: Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957)

Date first posted: Mar. 9, 2015

Date last updated: Mar. 9, 2015

Faded Page eBook #20150333

This ebook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Larry Harrison & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

The Gate of the Year

A book of poems by

M. Louise Haskins

Most of the verses in this book were written before 1906 and were printed privately in a small book named *THE DESERT* in about 1908.

Amongst these was *GOD KNOWS*, which contains the words quoted by the King on Christmas Day.

The remaining verses are selections taken from *THE POTTER* and were written between 1908 and 1917. Of these a few had been printed in magazines, including *WOMEN TO MEN* which appeared in *Punch* in 1916, and was reproduced in *THE POTTER* by permission of the Editor.

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First Printed in this Form, February, 1940
Reprinted March, 1940

*Made and Printed in Great Britain for
Hodder & Stoughton Limited, by Wyman & Sons Limited,
London, Reading and Fakenham*

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GOD KNOWS

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

So heart be still:
What need our little life
Our human life to know,
If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife
Of things both high and low,
God hideth His intention.

God knows. His will
Is best. The stretch of years
Which wind ahead, so dim
To our imperfect vision,
Are clear to God. Our fears
Are premature: In Him
All time hath full provision.

Then rest; until
God moves to lift the veil
From our impatient eyes,
When, as the sweeter features
Of Life's stern face we hail,
Fair beyond all surmise
God's thought around His creatures
Our mind shall fill.

WOMEN TO MEN^[A]

God bless you, lads!
All women of the race,
As forth you go,
Wish you with steadfast face
The best they know.

God cheer you, lads!
Out in the bitter nights,
Down the drear days,
Through the red reeking fights
And wasted ways.

God bring you, lads,
Back to the motherland,
True laurels gained,
Glory in either hand,
Honour unstained.

Women of Britain's race,
As forth you go,
Wish you with proud glad face
The best they know,
God bless you, lads!

[A]

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LORD OF THE RED ROADS

God of the dreadful night and shadowed days,
Lord of the long red roads and bloody ways,
Thou who art one with man, and man indeed,
Thou who art not apart but of his need
Out in this purple night, down through this dark,
Flash forth Thy beacon light, uplift Thine ark,

Thrill us to sacrifice, hearten our prayer;
Fling forth our falsities, chasten our care;
Scourge well with corded whips weakness and sin;
Burn out with whited heat waste things within;
Let us go forth to fight made men of steel,
Wrought by Thy passion white, radiant and real.

A SAILOR-MAN

Oh, I know a sailor-man out on the tide,
A plain sailor-man o' the sea;
A sailor-man made when God's Hand stretched out wide,
And measured not scantily.
He's not young, he's not old, but he's just in his prime,
Weathered brown by the beatings of tide and of time,
Well salted and stormed by the sea.

Refrain

Go compass by walls the wild winds east and west,
And press the wide sea in a sparrowhawk's nest,
And bottle the rays from the furthest dawn
From the wind and the waves in their glee—
And I'll frame you my man—on God's sea.

His eyes are blue flame which would scorch any lie,
My plain sailor-man o' the sea;
And his breath is the wind in which falsehood must die,
And keen as a sword-blade is he:
Yet his voice can be tender as love's summer sigh,
And his heart is so safe that a babe would not cry
Did he make it his cradle at sea.

He may die in the fight—he may live to be old,
This plain sailor-man o' the sea;
Whether living or dying—one tale will be told:
He knew how to do it, did he.
He may sink in the waves or be blown to the breeze,
His spirit is greater than any of these
And he's made for eternity.

SHIPS

Ships come and go,
To-morrow there,
The next day here;
Come weal or woe,
Their freight they bear,
Their course they steer.

Though billows lash,
Though lightnings dart,
And thunders cry:
Nought doth abash
The brave ship's heart
Nor turn his eye.

I wonder if my ship runs so,
And in its course so straight doth go?

THE BEST OF LIFE

Winter is here; the tall torn trees
Stand gaunt and still;
Their strong, brown branches bending
White-clad, on every hill—
Bending, laden and earth-ward
Under the will
Of the grey cold sky
To the grave where the best of life
Has fallen to die—
To the grave where their offspring withered and dead,
In-trodden lie.

Stay! Is the best of life the leaf or the tree?
Is it the fruit that is borne, or the life that bears
That God shall see?
Is it the foliage of beautiful deeds
Which pleases His heart,
Or is it the sap of the strength, which bleeds
Life's grace to impart?

It may be, that looking from heaven above
To the world below,
God values the brown and the bare old branch
With its age of woe
As much, if not more, than the foliage wreaths
Which we treasure so.

THIS YEAR

“Whosoever loseth his life for My sake shall find it.”

We grow by giving, and the love
Which is most prodigal grows most;
We live by losing, and the soul
That spends itself, can truly boast
Of longest life.

So, Lord, take now our lives and loves
And make them move to any heart
Who needs them most; to souls who fail
And struggle in the strife apart—
Alone and tired.

Take this new year, with all its days,
And show us how to fill them each
With life and love which live and grow
In other souls: so help us reach
Maturity.

And give us strength—the strength of those
Who lean on Thee for constant power
Who living but to give, must learn
First how to find in Thee, each hour
Life’s energy.

THE DESERT

PART I

I

Fate led me to a desert bleak and bare,
My back on light and hope, and turned my face
Towards trackless wastes—and bade me journey there
As one apart from all my kind and race.
And so I journeyed—weary and alone
With dull quiescence meeting Fate's decree,
With hands hung limp and heart's flesh turned to stone,
And eyes that sought in vain Love's track to see.
The night came down upon the sandy waste,
The beasts that prowl in darkness passed me by,
God saw and sent the stars to shine in haste,
God saw and stooped Himself to catch my cry:
“I need a lonely place from men's haunts free
To weep,” He said, “Come, walk the plains with Me.”

II

Relentless night—which wraps the plains in gloom,
Relentless day—with noontide's scorching glare,
Relentless everything which makes our doom
And gives us pain of dark or light to bear:
And so—relentless God, we cry at last,
As pitiless the scourge of life we feel,
“Keep off, Thou Infinite,” we faintly gasp,
“And give us time our lives to mend and heal.”
The dull night darkly keeps its funeral pall,
The hot day swiftly trims her burning lamp,
And Doom's black finger grimly touches all
As time moves onward in her steady tramp;
And God—relentless—weeps upon the plain
And leaves the sand red-spotted with a stain.

III

The tears of God and man together flow
For what has been and what has still to be;
Man weeps because he cannot truly know,
And God because He both must know and see.
The woes of ignorance and knowledge meet;
The pangs of doubt and throes of certainty
Co-mingle in the desert air and greet
The footsteps of unfaltering destiny.
The long waste stretches widely on before,
The long waste stretches widely from behind—
God's heart drops blood—and human feet are sore,
Hope lost—and death alone as seeming kind:
But for God's heart no kindly death can wait,
And man with God walks on to meet his fate.

IV

On parchment scrolls the hand of scribe hath writ
The record of the ages which we seek;
On continent and island axe has split
The rocks asunder that the years might speak
On beds of stone the history of men,
Of Nature's travels, and of time's sure tread
When man knew not the way to hold his pen
And earth's deep riches idly kept their bed.
On human hearts the ways of love are burnt,
And human pain lies written on the brow,
From human hands the marks of toil are learnt,
And histories pen down the passing Now—
But on the sand of deserts dimly red
The tale of God's great loneliness lies dead.

V

The desert dawn creeps slowly from the east,
The filtered light falls through the mantled sky,
And shows the track of lonely man or beast,
And finds the place where God sent down His cry.
There—where the green oasis breaks the sand,
Where fountains sparkle in the desert sun,
Is where God's eyes poured water on the land,
And where God's agony earth's fruitage won.
Some weary trav'ler rests beneath its shade,
And drinks its waters ere the day is done,
And eats the fruit which His blood-drops have made,
And finds the sleep which his pain-vigil won:
Yet God moves on—the red marks on His face
To make for man another resting-place.

VI

God speaks: "Go rest in yon green tender shade,
Thy feet are tired with desert days and toil,
Go eat the fruit which I Myself have made
And furnish thy soul-house with heaven's spoil.
This fair oasis was but built for thee
And for thy brothers in the desert way,
This resting-place has but been formed by Me,
To give thy journey one less fevered day."
"Come with me, God, and sleep awhile," I said,
"No traveller can need it more than Thou."
But at my words my kingly Host had fled
With one tired look upon His aching brow:
For sleep is not for God, but only men,
And He makes sleep for us, and then—and then—

VII

I slept: and in my sleep I saw God tired,
With eyes that sought the pain of all the earth
Bent down on men, with Love's warm passion fired
With thought to bring from suffering's womb joy's birth.
No feet e'er walked the desert all alone,
No heart once sobbed in vain for sympathy,
No anguished soul sent once its fevered groan
But found its balm in Love's eternity.
And still God worked while men lay down and slept,
And still God gave that men might still receive,
While He alone the desert vigil kept,
And He alone in solitude must grieve;
And I—in sleep—stretched limbs on blood-red sod
And rested gently on the pain of God.

VIII

I woke—a wounded hand had touched my head,
A voice had pierced the whisper of the trees,
God met me at the borders of my bed,
And smiled that sleep had sent me pain's release.
“Come forth with Me,” He said, “the desert waits,
The day grows old and time is almost done—
Beyond the desert stand the glist'ning gates,
Beyond the plain the vale that I have won.”
I left the green oasis of my rest,
I left the fruit and shelter of the trees,
And walked again my weary feet refreshed,
And in my heart beatitude of peace,
“Would'st thou return, my son?” God said to me;
“I love the desert, God,” I cried—“with Thee.”

PART II

This is the desert's song—sung by its God
In loneliness with me; listen who will
And understand who can—who knows the rod
Of sorrow, knows the balm which meets its ill:
Who once has felt the curse of sin knows best
The crown of Love's forgiveness—who has borne
The brunt of toil finds recompense of rest,
And he whose days embrace the night, greet morn—
But none beside. The desert's song can find
Interpretation in those lives alone
Who left the valley's melodies behind
And waited till slow harmonies had grown
Born from discordant strife and lonely pain
Upon the awful distances of God's wide plain.

THE DESERT'S SONG

Love that gave life, and made the life it gave
To seek beyond contentment, and to crave
The better attitude where passion fires
To heights unreached—where the lone soul aspires
To move beyond the shelter of the vale
T'wards distances where heights grow cold and pale—
This love that gave the life and made the thought
Walks with the life it gave till all is wrought.
He that content, craves not a better thing
Than crawling near the earth can sometime bring,
Finds joy low down, short-lived, and earth-impressed;
To him whom God lends wings at length the best
Reveals itself. After long days of strain
And battles hardly fought and nights of pain,
Struggling with tempest, hurt with wind and hail
The winged soul finds the heights—no longer pale,
But fired with blush of sunlight newly born,
Bathed in the lonely glory of the morn.

But wings to rise are born upon the plains,
Down on the desert sands, where deeply stains,
The earth with God's red struggle, and with man's
Black agony of blighted hopes and plans.
Formed in the bonds of strife and bitterness,
Born from the womb of suffering and distress,
Strengthened by struggle and baptised with tears,
Nurtured with hope, repressed by timely fears,
Those infant wings grow surely towards new powers
Which, when attained, shall make those weary hours
Of slow unfolding, valued for the pain
Which taught the soul to bear and to obtain.

Bear, suffer, agonise, nor think it waste,
Wait through the wearing travail—yea, nor haste
To see the fruits of agony too soon,
Nor find the peace of eventide 'ere noon
Hath done her work, or pain hath paved the way
For righteous ending of the laboured day.
Enough to know that naught of strife is lost,
That what is gained at most tremendous cost
Is thine as cheaper things can never be—
Thine with the strength of all eternity.

Enough to know that when thy wings are born

Thou, too, shalt view the glory of the morn
With God upon the heights—thou, too, shalt see
How worth all agony and stress must be
Which leads to this. Some other soul content
With the warm valley's road, on fulness bent
Crawls through the fruited orchards, clutching food
Fallen to earth to satisfy his mood.
But thou, my son, art made to reach the heights
Through pain, to learn, in upward flights
The mystery which led thee far away
From sympathy and peace and hopeful day.
Fear not—thou too most certainly shalt find
In God's good time food for thy panting mind
And hungry heart—a sustenance of soul,
God-planted on the peaks to make men whole.

Towards their fulfilment things of lovely worth
Are slow to grow—The unresponsive earth
Needs wooing of the storm and sun, the call
Of dark and light, the silent, tender fall
Of night's cool dew, the courtship of man's mind
And over all the One, infinite, kind
And powerful will, before it learns to yield
A fair and plenteous fruitage to the field:
So man's soul-wings are born—and great heights gained
By those who grudged not hours that grimly strained
Towards fuller knowledge—who refused not days
Torn with dissension and bereft of praise,
Who strongly faced the darkness of the night
To learn in solitude the way of right.

O son of mine, spurn not grim sorrow's way,
Shirk not the cross, toil through the glaring day
With bleeding limbs and stricken heart oppressed
Nor count the way of ease and joy the best.
Walk through the night though every star lies hid,
And light of heaven nor earth may kindly bid
Thy footsteps to the smoothly beaten rack
Which leads from this wild wandering desert back
To ways of comfort and of dull repose
Where sleepers weakly miss the pain that knows.
The metal wrought through heats of fire and throes
Of hammer, turned to fitness through the woes
Of battered hours, made flexible through fire—
Hath meaning for thy life: thou must not tire
Of pain, nor of the bruise which blows must bring,
Nor of the days when thy hurt lin can sing

...of the day's when thy heart up turned
No note of triumph, when thy struggling moan
Of anguish rises to a silent throne.
Forth from the blows of circumstance at length
Thy spirit shapen shall have proved her strength;
Out from the fires of sorrow presently
Pass thou refined for Love's eternity.

* * * * *

The voice of God was still. The desert air
Vibrated with the echoes of His song;
A single stone I found me, and in prayer
Knelt in its shadow through the whole day long—
The curious wonder of the day's bare light
Grew round me, but the shelter of the stone
Gave kindly refuge till the tactful night
Drew down the curtain on my altar lone.
Once in the desert I had slept for pain,
Now in the desert wrestled I for strength,
Did Jacob's spirit visit earth again?
Did Jacob's God refuse to bless at length?
There in the lonely East the daylight broke—
There on my altar stone, dead hope awoke.

Mine was the desert: yet no more for me
Should desert ways mean only desert toil,
I triumphed in my pain—eternally,
The voice of God must sound athwart the soil.
My dumb lips found their voice—the victory
Of silence and of struggle should be mine—
These eyes beyond the purple plain should see
Its borders toward the distant hills incline.
Content with all that men had misnamed loss,
Content with failing where I fondly fought
For triumph; glad to follow God's bare Cross
And know the glory of the pain unsought:
No more should sorrow bear the name of ill,
No more should pleasure mean the untamed will.

"I triumph, Lord," I cried, "My desert day
May know its nights of doubt, its hours of woe,
The beasts may prowl across my trackless way,
The waters that I drink may bitter flow:
This thing I trust—that which is life indeed
Lives not in circumstance, nor outward ways,
These are but servants to mine inner need,

These are but ministers unto my days.
Come pain, come anguish, come all kind of ill,
The ill which waits on hate, or deeper yet,
That which attendeth love—combine to kill
My struggling life until this sun doth set—
I fear ye not—God reigns upon His throne,
And I—through bloody struggle—am His own.

“All through my youth I dreamed of loveliness
Of pleasant pathways through the fields of peace,
Of joy that would not weary grow nor less,
Of wealth of sympathy that would not cease.
Yet hath there come to me through pain’s embrace
A full contentment with my stricken lot,
Though fierce her hands not cruel is her face,
The breath of her warm pulsing passion, hot
With meaning and with mystery of strife,
Comes through the lips that cannot all belie
Their truth of tenderness and love of life,
Nor all their still compassion quite deny.
That I may learn, and know, and understand,
I ask no more, Lord, in the life Thou’st planned.

“Strike as Thou wilt—I bare me to the stripes
I can achieve through sorrow that which some
May reach through joy; within the steady grips
Of corded misery, to me may come
A patient strength to live the life I must,
And in that living a sure knowledge find
Of some true thought that makes my journey just,
Of some kind working of a wiser mind.
Stay not Thy hand—nor heed me when the smart
Wrings from my lips a prayer to let me go—
Heed rather my first longing—that the part
Of pain’s pure discipline and sorrow’s woe
May not content me, if through bearing more
Knowledge may grow where struggled doubt before.

“This is my hymn, God; Thou hast made its key,
Thou hast resolved its discords into song,
Thou hast given volume to its melody,
Built up its harmonies and made it strong.
How can I thank Thee for the peace Thou’st lent,
How praise Thee for the lesson of the way,
How love Thee for the sorrow Thou hast meant
To lead me upward to the further day?

Do Thou Who save the desert and the sea

Do Thou who gave me desert and the song,
Do Thou Who willed the darkness and the light,
Do Thou Who'st tempered all the journey long
With glimpses of the distant gleaming height,
Bend low to catch my praise, though poor it be,
And judge its worth in life's reality."

THROUGH BEDS OF STONE

My back sheer 'gainst the Rock; above the sky:
So long the Rock stands, stand and so fight I;
Till I, by God's good grace, pressed close, shall die—
About me, Arms of stone.

There are who say these Arms are stone—no more,
Yet even as I fight, pressed long and sore,
I hear the Rock's deep heart throbs, o'er and o'er—
Flesh compassèd by stone.

And if, for me, in waging on my fight,
My rock seems hard, its keen rough edges bite,
Seems there no rest nor quarter day nor night,
But only firm, cold stone.

Still, if but distantly, I hear the throb
Of my Rock's heart, above the strain and sob
Of warfare, I shall know that surely God
Breathes warm through beds of stone.

FOR THE WOMEN

In this great hour let us pray for the women of our nation;
For the women in the royal homes and those of lower station;
For women honoured most of all as soldiers' wives and mothers;
And the women who send forth their friends, their lovers, and their brothers.

For the women who must stay at home and do the common caring
For the welfare of the little ones and the household burden-bearing;
For the women in whose motherhood the future generation
Must find the nucleus of a new and consecrated nation.

For the women who go forth to work among the sick and dying,
On whose strong heart an army's need is trustfully relying;
For the women who obey the call to share the country's toiling,
While men are saving land and home from hatred's ruthless spoiling.

For girls who have the gift of youth and privilege of beauty;
For those who have the strength to serve in simple ways of duty;
For the aged who have lived their day and found night's gloom far-reaching;
Now hear us as we pray, O Lord, and heed our hearts' beseeching:

That sacrifice may be as bread, and pain as inspiration;
That death may hold no sting of woe, nor graves mean life's negation;
That high ambitions fallen down, and secret hopes long cherished,
May leave no pang of vain regret in hearts where they have perished.

That homes be held a nation's trust for men in peril deadly,
And sacred kept the altar fires where burn love's passion redly;
That weariness may not count much, not waiting wear its longing,
Save in the hope which sees through death to where brave souls are thronging.

That bodies may be strong to work, that hearts be strong for sorrow;
That this day's strength may not be spent in fearing for the morrow;
That there may be no futile hour when will shall be unready,
No shock of adverse circumstance to find the hands unsteady.

That naught which womanhood can do for manhood shall be wanted;
In office, home or hospital may spirits be undaunted.
And with it all a quiet heart, a vision of Love's splendour,
Which keeps within the busy life the woman sweet and tender.
Oh, God of Deborah and Ruth, O Fatherhood far-reaching,
Now hear us as we voice our need and grant our hearts' beseeching.

THE UNKNOWN BRAVE

We read no name
In honoured list of fame
Concerning that brave deed
Which cost you dear.
None other gave you heed,
None other knew your need
Nor sent you heart'ning cheer.

The deed was done,
But not a laurel won,
And not a word was said.
Your covered scar
Ran deep and trickled red:
This serves for us instead,
And God—who was not far.

TO LOVE AS GOD

A blessed thing,
A thought to make heaven's music ring
To love as God loves, and to find
In God-made man an answering mind
To His own thought of love—to know
That as He loves, so man below
Though in a smaller way, loves back
And gives to Him His own.

Oh! glorious bliss,
High heaven itself is only this
Such love to hold—but pain as well:
Such pain! Thou Christ alone canst tell
How cruel it is to love as God
And to be spurned as He—earth trod
By His created ones.

LOVE'S TRIUMPH LESSON

So let me live
That I may not contemptuous be
Of daily things;
Nor fail to catch the thought profound
Which sometimes rings
Through common days. I want to see
God's thought in all,
And all in God's great thought.
O God! I crave to reach this place
Of Love's great triumph lesson
Where nothing more may trivial be,
Where faith, on dullest days can see
The Glory of the common things
When touched and traced by Thee.

MINE

The green hills in the grey dawn
All drenched with dew;
The wide paths, and the smooth lawn,
Crocuses—a few,
The dark trees, rising high
Out of the mist,
The low light of morning sky,
Earth, newly kissed;
A world that is only just beginning,
God gives each morn for His people's winning.

The purple shades of creeping night
Over the hills,
The garden, where the frightened light
Hastily spills
All of its store, in a glowing streak
On the crocus beds,
Splashing some drops in its hurried freak
On the tall trees' heads:
A world that has glory in its ending,
God in His bounty each night is sending.

* * * * *

This world is mine, a day at a time,
Beginning and ending;
This world is mine, its music and rhyme,
All of God's lending;
This world is mine, its glory and gloom,
Silence and singing,
Mine—all mine, with the sky's great room
And all of its bringing:
God gave me hope at its beginning,
At the end—Thy light my tired soul winning.

MORNING

The morning grows into the Eastern sky,
Day springs from out the womb of silent night;
The loveliness of waking meets the eye.
The morning grows; day springs; and I am here
’Twixt darker shadows and the blaze of noon,
Morning is mine; life throbs; for very soon
Must morning make its life earth’s living cheer.
Day’s King! Why else is morning but to grow?
Why hold we life, Creator, save to live?
’Tis morning still—we cannot greatly know;
We will content, if from our morning cries
We learn by noonday how noon’s light to give.

MY FRIEND

Her life was a song, and it sang
With such melody sweet that it rang
Through the portals of heaven, and the host
Sang it back to those needing it most,
Sang it into their hearts.

Her life was a prayer, and it prayed
With such passionate power that it stayed
In the heart of the Hearer of prayer,
Who cherished and answered it there
In the fullness of love.

Her life was in God: that is why
Its praises and prayers, from the sky
Returned to the children of men
With a thought that outstripped human ken,
For it savoured of God.

MY QUEEN

Frail as some smaller flower
Hiding its sweetness in the coolest shade
Fresh as the early dew in yonder glade
 In the day's opening hour—
 Such is my queen;
The one who holds in tender little hands
This human heart of mine: like iron bands
 That are not seen.

• • • • •

She does not live just here—once, long ago,
A greater love than mine was calling, so
She went from me awhile—my sister-friend,
But though we cannot talk, I sometimes send
My love to her through one who sees her often;
And sometimes, when the lights begin to soften,
And the birds, behind their curtains, singing low,
Are hushing all their little ones, I know
That as the Spirit-voices round me gather,
There speaks just one who called my father “Father.”

I wonder if she's changed—as I have done,
If I shall know my sister, when the sun
Has set upon this earth-life?

 I remember

How one bright evening, early in September,
When all the world was just one blaze of gold,
And beauty wore the charms of growing old,
As light was mellowed in the autumn sky,
We two were sitting—just my queen and I—
Holding each other's hands, as children do,
And wondering what the years would bring us.

 ... “You,”

She said, “Will soon grow up and you will see
Much in this big, wide world, perhaps you'll be
Great some day;” then her soft deep eyes would grow
Larger and larger, and the dying glow
Of the great sun-world would linger brightly
Over that broad, low brow, just touching lightly
Her dark, straight locks, splashing with deepest gold,
A few loose hairs, strayed from their tightened fold.
“And you?” I almost whispered; for an air
Of other-worldliness seemed near, I dare

Not speak too loudly. I then she looked at me
And smiled (Ah! then I could not clearly see
Quite what that smile meant!) and she softly said,
Gazing across at the broad sea of red,
“I don’t quite know”; but then she said no more,
And silently we sat—my small heart sore
For something I had missed; I knew that near
Had sounded voices that I could not hear—
. . . I think it must have been
We both had stepped so near to the Unseen,
But for some reason I the angel missed
Who silently my sister’s eyes had kissed
And opened. . . .

Did I tell you she was lame?
Sacred eternally the very name
Of suffering! where’er I see upon the street
A little one with crippled legs or feet,
I love that child for ever, for her sake—
The throbs of crutches on the pavement, make
The noisy city one great, living heart,
Whose beatings make my own pulsations start
To quicker motion—one great power to draw
Forth from life its highest love—a law
Of compensation, to enforce my heart
To give to every life a counterpart
Of love to that which she gave me, and gives
Me still. . . .

. . . Down in the quarry near there lives
A tiny golden flower, bursting its way
Sunny and pure, out of the cold, dark clay.
We used to pick them for her (every year
As summer with her children moved to hear
The distant songs of autumn, she would drop
These in the lap of Mother-earth, not stop
To gather them again, so cooler days
Found summer written in earth’s hidden ways)
And so, as month by month we travel round
I find her memory in the very ground
We tread. . . .

But the March days are very cold;
The winds are blowing keenly, we are old
In March; ten years seems long ago;
Ten years in March she died; thus I know
That so much I am older. We count our years
(We women folk), from when our hearts bled tears:
From when our babies died from when the sound

From when our eyes are dim, from when the beams

Of some strange discord rent the home, and found
A hiding-place in some poor woman-heart—
Thus—thus we know our age.

So time steals on,

And March, bleak wintry March, has come—and gone
And soon the yellow flowers and summer days,
The green, green fields and restful sunlit haze
Will come and go. But I shall most remember
The cold, cold spring, and golden-framed September.

CHILD GRIEF

Lonely little orphan heart,
Quiv'ring still from sorrow's dart,
Woman's pain in childish face,
Woman's strength in childish grace;
 Thou art youth and age in one—
 Youth stood still, and age begun.

Comfort? Do I dare intrude
With my talking, cold and rude
On her childhood's holy grief?
Stands she, trembling like a leaf,
 Lest our hardened, callous age
 Wrongly should its meaning gauge.

Bend the head; 'tis sacred air,
Child-grief wants a woman's prayer,
Woman's silence, too, for oft
Words, however low and soft,
 Are not still enough to go
 To the heart of silent woe.

Lonely little orphan heart,
Bear thy grief, the better part
Of life's chast'ning is to come:
Unmixed joy would make us dumb
 In our praises. Singeth most
 Those whom sorrow stingeth most.

FORGIVE

Little hands are creeping into mine,
Quiv'ring lips are lifted to be kissed,
Bluest eyes through broken tear-veils shine,
As when stars look through an early mist.
"Can it be as if I had not done?
Can I be the same as just before?"
Subtlest question, burdened little one,
Startling me to find my own heart sore.
God! can we be as if we had not done?
And can we win what once we might have won
Had we not erred?

NIGHT SENDS HER WARNING

Night sends her warning dear,
Long shadows fall;
Evening is closing in—
God over all
Shines from His golden throne
Out of the west—
Shines to my old worn heart,
Calls me to rest.

Life's journey's done, dear,
Nay, do not weep,
Love's wings will carry me
Over the deep;
Hope's hand will comfort me,
Swift as they fly,
Death is not death to me—
Souls cannot die.

Tell those who love me well
That they must give
Some of that love to those
Who daily live
Lonely and comfortless,
Crownless and sad;
Tell them to make those lives
Love-crowned and glad.

Old, wearied, worn, dear,
Falling to rest,
Soon I shall sink to sleep
On His dear breast;
Don't cry for me, dear,
Death ushers song;
Go—make some other life
Sweetened and strong.

THE POTTER

I

With cultured eye well wedded to a hand
Instinct with art, a Potter lived and worked,
And fashioned both for beauty and for use
Vessels of loveliness from clay and sand,
Bringing the beauty that had shyly lurked
Within his mind for years, to form,
And life and colour. No poor, nor loose
Unfinished work passed he; full, pulseful, warm,
His figures breathed from out the dust. One day
His hand, his deft right hand which worked and wrought
His various fancies, touched in careless thought
Of self, the moving knife which cut the clay—
And with the clay, flesh quivered in the sand,
Severed for ever from the mind that planned.

II

With open ear, attentive to the call
Of human need, God listened: and He heard
From the still depths of this man's life, a cry,
A bitter cry of fear—the fear of all
The years to come, of hope not just deferred
But dead; his dreams, his life, his strength
In the dull dust did desolately lie,
And nought but barrenness, the end at length.
Yet though God heard He lifted arm nor voice,
Nor pierced the denseness of the awful night
Nor gave unto this man nor place nor light,
Nor anything by which he might rejoice.
Of all things only barrenness abounded,
And only silence through his darkness sounded.

III

And after that one cry the Potter's lips
Were dumb—nor uttered any more his need;
But proudly still, he faced with deathly soul
The darkened way. As one who grimly grips
His own tense limbs when none can give him heed
In danger's hour, so now his straitened heart
He held with struggling strength, and found the goal
Of all desire in conquest of that part
Which Destiny had given for his own.
And God looked on—men said—and left him worn
And wrestling on Life's Highway, conflict-torn
And uncomplaining in the night's long lone,
While He in distant greatness thought in space
And viewed relentless details of the race.

IV

But in the dust this wonder strange was born
Though no light came unto his darkened days,
And though no Presence soothed his throbbing hours,
And though new pain came new each time of morn,
And every moment missed its absent praise,
Yet earth grew strangely warm and near to him,
And e'en the beaten road seemed quick with powers
To make its stony hardness dear to him.
And every tramp upon the beaten track,
And every outcast on the long highway,
And every man in whom Life laid its Nay,
And every child whom childhood's joy did lack
Seemed nearer human—nearer his heart's core.
Than ever they had been in days before.

V

And so the Potter went—the drawn-out road
Finding him often restless, beaten, done;
Yet moving slowly onward through the days,
Each sign of weakness proving but his goad,
And each despair but counting new hope won,
He made at length a man whom striving men
Might know as friend and brother, down the ways:
And yet God entered not into his ken,
And sometimes in the silences of loss,
When man seemed too much nigh, and God too far,
And when some sight of beauty, like a star
But served to show the horror of his cross,
He stretched out hungry arms towards some high throne—
And drew them empty back—untouched—unknown.

VI

Yet still each day the wonder of the earth
Grew softly into him and made him strong,
And every flower that perfumed the long nights,
And every leaf which sprang to vivid birth,
And every songster's note the trees among
All crept into his heart and found a place,
With all the myriad little sounds and sights
Which lighten up the old world's dusty face,
Until at length all Nature seemed to bear
Some solace and some subtlety of good,
And one damp dew-drenched morning, as he stood
Upon the fragrant mould in voiceless prayer,
Lower than he, beneath the watered sod,
He saw the glowing Very Face of God.

VII

It glowed from out the dust and made it fire,
It glowed within the stones and turned them fuel,
It changed the bushes into passioned flame,
And lit the pulsing earth with light entire.
The sky caught light from dust, and kingdoms dual
Became one blaze of unity and hope.
And into this man's heart their glory came
That he no more should through Life's darkness grope:
The God, the Very God, beneath his feet—
Around—within him, throbbed, and breathed, and glowed,
And all his being opened out and flowed
In ecstasy of joy its Lord to greet:
This way was made a Moulder—with new hands,
To mould not clay but souls. And thus he stands.

HELD BY THY CITY

Left far behind are the meadows,
Part of the past are the hills,
Made into memory chain-links
Is the music of streamlets and rills;
All of those sweet-scented flowerbeds
With their splashes of yellows and reds,
All of the songs of the bird choir
As they put their wee chicks to their beds.
O God! I have left them—have pity!
These, these, I have left for Thy city.

The hush of the country at nightfall,
The shadows which lengthen at eve,
The light of the moon on the water,
The hour when the marsh-fairies weave
Web palaces down in the rushes
Which sparkle when rosy morn blushes,
With diamonds brought from the night
To hold the day's glow, as it flushes
The earth with God's blessing of light—
O God! I have left all—have pity—
All this I have left for Thy city.

All the sweet breath of the morning,
The rousing of nature from rest,
All of the charm of the noonday
In the garden that greeted the west;
All of the friends and the faces
Grown dear with the passing of years,
All of those loved country places
Bound up with youth's fancies and fears—
Great God! I have left, have some pity
For Thy country-maid held by Thy city.

And God, let me find in the city
Thy heart as it throbs all beneath
These sorrows, and strivings, and sinnings,
As it throbb'd in the moorland and heath;
As I found Thee in sky and in meadow,
Let me find Thee in garret and street,
Thou didst breathe through the wonder of silence,
Speak now through the tramping of feet.

Lost for awhile is the country,
But found is the city of souls,
Gone is the earth with its sweetness
But come is Life's meaning which rolls
Through the tumult and tear of the people,
Through the strivings, and triumphs, and sin,
Through the hunger for gold or for goodness
Till it reaches this temple within.
And I hear, God, the call of the needy,
And I touch the deep springs of their lives,
And I see that the beauty of service,
Beyond other beauty survives:
So I kneel, and I pray for the pity
And strength which shall serve in Thy city.

UPWARD

The lofty peaks tower upward through the mist,
The storm-shade hangs o'er all the vale below;
The little hollow I have learned to know,
The warmer glade where winter violets grow,
All lie around the pathway I have missed—
And I am sore perplexed; the cold winds blow;
The gloom grows black—I stumble on, for list!
The melodies of higher regions sound,
Above the storm-cloud gleams yon highest height;
Forth I, to climb its circling pathway round.

• • • • •

I know now, why I missed the beaten track;
I know, too, why the storm-clouds gathered black;
I know the reason of the valley's shade,
And all the darkness of my little glade
Which made me lose the well-worn path I made.

• • • • •

Dear God! I know that out upon the hill,
Away from that low valley, warm and still,
I now may find above the storm and strife
A spacious comprehending mountain life;
I thank Thee for the wisdom of Thy will
And all the glory of this endless hill.

MOVING INWARDS TO GOD

Great is the sea, with its stormy waves lashing
Over the boundaries, foam-ships dashing
 On to the rocks, the rough strongholds of earth;
Great when the passion and tempest of ocean
Bound the bare coasts with the magic of motion
 Bringing storm-music to mystical birth;
But greater the sea, a deep calm containing,
Silent in strength, from turmoil refraining,
 Hiding its power in a motionless waste;
Tranquil and tender, blue, almost to wonder,
Peaceful its silver-song, hushed all its thunder—
Lapping the hanging rocks gently in under,
 Showing no wreckage and holding no haste.

Great are the lives, which, impatient and striving,
Throw off restriction, make haste at arriving,
 Wait no convenience of God or man
Grasping the end—stumble on to fruition,
Full of the purpose and strength of their mission,
 Intent on completion of all in their plan.
Yet nobler I hold, are the lives that, far seeing,
Cover with peace all the turmoil of being,
 Strong in surrender, and still, under God.
Bearing with patience each burden He sends them,
Breaking no bounds in the space that He lends them,
Satisfied, knowing that He apprehends them,
 Strength calmed by strength, moving inwards to God.

THY STRENGTH RESERVE

Be patient; he who waits hath sign
Of greater strength reserve than he who works
Lest patience die. The restless sea which beats
Upon the shore hath power to break; but sea
Which holds its might subdued hath strength
To bear, and take its freight away to shores
For which 'tis bound. Bare wreckage and designs
Frustrated are the fruits of actions forced
By impulse premature; but voyages
Accomplished, deeds achieved, and plans fulfilled
Belong to actions held in check till time
Of rightful birth.

GOD'S BEST

Thou could'st not bear God's best
Save, as it were, through veilings;
Thou could'st not love His best
But through the toil of failings;
When thou hast learned, through much disaster
To prove thyself grim failure's master—
Then shalt thou see God's best.

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious printing errors have been silently corrected.

Inconsistencies in hyphenation, spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[The end of *The Gate of the Year* by Minnie Louise Haskins]