THE WIDOW OF THE JEWELS

MOUNTAINS, WATER, AIR, FLOWED WITH A SWIFT RUSH OF COLOUR

THE WIDOW OF THE JEWELS

By
AMY CARMICHAEL
AUTHOR OF
"MIMOSA," "RAJ BRIGAND CHIEF," ETC.

LONDON
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C.2

First Published November 1928, 5,000
Reprinted . . January 1930, 5,000

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

"FAISAL, in speaking, had a rich musical voice, and used it carefully upon his men. To them he talked in tribal dialect, but with a curious, hesitant manner, as though faltering painfully among phrases, looking inward for the just word. His thought, perhaps, moved only by a very little in front of his speech, for the phrases at last chosen were usually the simplest, which gave an effect emotional and sincere. It seemed possible, so thin was the screen of words, to see the pure and very brave spirit shining out."

T. E. Lawrence of "The Revolt in the Desert" makes the foreword for this book. I know that the story is true, and I hope that the screen of words is thin, so thin that, somewhere on a dull and rainy evening, someone, reading the tale, will forget the fog of life because of what shines through.

A. C.

FOR ALL
WHO SAIL THEIR BOAT
IN DEEP WATERS

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE WIDOW OF THE JEWELS

CHAPTER I

LINNET

THE Widow of the Jewels—she was called so not because she had many jewels, for she had very few, but because of the strange and beautiful things to which her handful of jewels were the golden keys. So, at least, she regarded them, as she held them in her outstretched hand after she had recovered them from the Court. They might have been enchanted by some Unseen Benevolence, as indeed in a fashion they were, or made of other substance than mere gold of earth, so lightly did she touch them as she piled them in a little bright heap on a cushion, " In order that the picture-snatching box," as she carefully explained, " may be able to see them with a proper clearness."

But the name is too long for general use, so we call her Linnet, for she was of so tranquil a nature and such a singing bird that the thought of her is like a breath from the isle of Innisfree, with its lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore, and its evening full of the linnets' wings.

Like the other child, Mimosa, with whom so many have made friends, she was a little Indian girl, brown-eyed, black-haired, brown-skinned, with small, beautiful hands and feet, and the simplest of simple

hearts. India is a complex land, and her people are not like the open page of a book, to be read at a glance. But her children are frank, delightful things, and the people have a saying, " The drink of which one never tires is water—the fruit of which one never wearies is a child."

Linnet had no schooling of the kind that comes in schoolrooms of man's building. Her lessons were learned out of doors. She learned early various interesting things about market-gardens, what to plant in them, and the season in which to plant them. She learned, too, a good deal about the soil, and how to enrich it, or, as her speech puts it, strengthen it, and she knew the ways of the flowers that bring forth fruit, and how to protect the fruit from squirrels and birds, and where and how to sell it.

She learned to cook, as every Indian woman-child does, and how to run a cottage upon very little money, and how to do without many things thought to be necessary elsewhere, and to be entirely content without them. She had learned as a mere baby how to be cheery in uncomfortable conditions, for when she was only two or three, holes were made in her ears with a thorn, and then by stalks of maize filled with water to make them swell. Later on fat little wads of cottonwool were pushed into the holes. This was to prepare them for the heavy lead rings soon to be hung in them. When she was older these lead rings would be changed to gold jewels, flower-shaped things made of thin plates of gold hammered over wax. Linnet did not in the least mind the leaden rings; they dangled so nicely. But no child likes the thorn and the stalks and the wads of cottonwool stuffed into the raw hole.

The religious part of her education was the most pleasant. It is always pleasant to scatter flowers on things, and this was the beginning of worship. Then there were annual excursions to one of the very few temples which welcome people of Linnet's caste. This temple is in a palm wood; there is water near it, and many lotus flowers—rosy pink ones which stand high above their large leaves and are so beautiful that people stop to look at them as they pass, and white ones with golden-orange hearts grow there. And in that lotus tank or in a sacred well near by, all must bathe before worshipping the god in the shrine.

The sign of the worship, which is Vaishnavite (the worship of Vishnu, the second great name in the Hindu triad), is a band of white paste drawn with the right thumb straight up from the bridge of the nose to the roots of the hair. The paste is made of a special earth dug from the bed of a river near Cape Comorin. The simple ceremonial required is to bathe, dry oneself and one's garments in the sun, walk round the temple, and worship before the god. Then one receives the white paste, draws the mark on one's forehead, and gives four small silver coins to the priest. After this the worshippers scatter to cook the rice brought for the purpose (the firewood and cooking-pots are supplied by the temple), and all is as sociable and cheerful as sunshine and a good conscience can make it.

It is a pretty thing to see, and, but for the undersense that always haunts one here, it would be a happy thing too. For family parties gather under the trees and light a common fire, and picnic together, and each little group is merry with children. Firelight in shadowy places, bright colours, laughter and gaiety—that is what one sees.

The great day of life for Linnet was, of course, her wedding day. She was young, about sixteen, but a healthy, open-air girl—not fragile like her sisters of the city zenana, who hardly know the wholesome feel of the wind and the rain. She enjoyed being fussed over. There was a charmingly noisy band to bray her and her bridegroom round the village, there were countless pleasing ceremonies, a great abundance of flowers, and much squirting of strong scent (did not the smell of the perfume sprinkled on her linger for fragrant days on her oiled and bedecked hair?) And when she and her bridegroom sat in state and were fed deliciously on the first after-wedding ceremonial food —milk and plantains mashed up and served, so to speak, in the compressed fingers of the presiding relative—was not Linnet happy? She was happy. There was nothing to be unhappy about.

Four daughters were given to her. Not a son? No. And she turns her hands up in a gesture which means such was not the will of the Supreme, and then (for why not?) she smiles contentedly. Not one of the four died, as so many Indian babies die. They all grew up—sturdy little maids of the fields and the good open air.

But her husband died. Fever and vehement drugs had to do with that. Linnet sang no songs that day; the dirge that is chanted when a husband is taken can hardly be called a song. But Time is kind, he has healing in his hands, and her older daughters married and there were children in the house again. And Linnet looked after her land with her new sons' help, and thought of nothing outside the walls of her home and the borders of her fields.

But one day a curious tale floated up from the road

across the fields: a robber band, it was said, was raiding that road, and the paths to the temple folded up in the hills that skirted the road was another haunt of this band whose leader was a clansman of Linnet's, Raj, now called by his men the Red Tiger. He was a bewildering tiger; as time passed there were new stories, often about pleasant deeds, frightened people reassured, their jewels restored; sometimes of fierce lawlessness. The Red Tiger, it was said, would spring from behind a boulder upon a party of rich worshippers proceeding on their way up through the forest to the temple, he would advance to the lavishly laden women with outstretched hand. "Your jewels!" he would say in a voice that no one dreamed of disobeying, though it was never loud like the voices of his followers, whose shouts of "Hai! Ho! the Red Tiger!" shrivelled the hearts of the unfortunate rich wherever they went.

His loot, so the bazaars said, was divided into three heaps. One third was given to a certain powerful man who lived in a neighbouring town. He had been the means of driving Raj into crime, everybody knew about that, and now, for reasons which do not concern this story, he shared in the loot. Another third went elsewhere; no one dared to indicate to whom it was given, though most knew. The rest Raj divided among himself and his men and the very poor.

Linnet's village was a stagnant place, a duckweed pond, as her idiom would put it, but even a duckweed pond can be agitated when a shower of pebbles is thrown into it, and presently Linnet and her kin were talking eagerly over the multitudinous and contradictory stories that, passing from mouth to mouth, lost nothing in the telling. Raj had been caught; had

escaped; had heard something by the side of a lonely little water at the foot of the hills, which had made him want to live a different life; had been trapped and carried off; had escaped again and was up in the forest, down on the roads, out on the plains, robbing; no, not robbing; caught; no, free as the wind; taking vengeance on his betrayers; no, forgiving them.

And Linnet listened and believed the best, for she was made like that; but, though the flurry of talk rippled the shallows of village life, it did not discompose her, and nothing happened to prick her mind to waken and ask questions till, one day, down at the temple by the sea, she was flouted as a rag of less than no account—she, Linnet, who was used to kindlier ways.

CHAPTER II

THE GOD WITH THE STICK ACROSS HIS SHOULDER

FOR, some five years after her husband's death, she made up her mind to give herself a rare pleasure. She would go with a friend to the temple of the Virgin, one of the holiest temples in the land. This temple is built on a rock at the very end of India. It is a wonderful, old, old place—place of memories, magnificent, awful, secret, wicked. No one with the least flicker of imagination in him could stand unmoved at the door of the temple of Cape Comorin.

"I would worship just for once at the temple of the Virgin," Linnet said to herself many times before she proceeded further, for to leave home was always rather a great event, because there was so much to think about and plan for the comfort of others. But at last she was clear that she might give herself this great and solemn joy, and she began to prepare for it. She carefully thought of everybody and everything, from the vegetables and pomegranate trees in the market-garden which supported the household to the well-being of the latest baby, and at last the day came, and she and a friend whom she had invited to join her set forth to walk along the last ten miles of the Great Trunk Road of India.

Those last lovely miles would seem by their beauty to be trying to prepare the traveller for something good beyond. Seen in early morning or just about

sunset—and it is then the people like best to travel—they are one long pageant. There are cool reaches where old trees border the road; there are mountains to the west, keenly carved and changeful as mountains always are, and there are wild bits of cactus-covered country, and great stretches of rice-fields unseparated by hedges, so that in the time of young rice you look at a single emerald carpet. But there are ten different words to describe this grain in its ten stages of growth between seedling and ripened ear, and there are as many varying shades of colour between the first quick green and the time when the countryside is a field of cloth of gold. And the South is at all times a colourful land, for the soil about here is not brown or grey, as it is elsewhere, but a rich soft red, a glowing background for every joyful colour. As you draw near the sea, clusters of cocoanut palms appear, and soon you pass a bathing-ghaut, much used in the days when pilgrims measured their length along this same road on their way to the temple of the Virgin. It is now all but a ruin. Then comes the rise on the road, well known to the children who come this way and to all of the child heart, the place where you stop with a glad cry, "The sea!"

Down to the sea went Linnet and her friend; they glanced at the grim walls of the temple as they passed, but they were not ready for that holy place yet. They must bathe first. The sea, bluer and brighter than Linnet had ever imagined water could be, enfolded all the view, for the southernmost tip of India is just as the map shows it, a real tip, and from the same rock you can watch the sun rise from the sea and set in the sea. Into this encompassing sea Linnet and her friend walked now; warily, for its shores are

THE WALL OF THE
TEMPLE OF THE VIRGIN

steep, but eagerly, for would it not cleanse them from every stain and fit them to worship in the temple of the Virgin?

The welcoming waters received them, absolved them and played with them too, and they went up from the shore jubilant with the joy of the sea. Near the temple door they paused, and dropped their three farthings into an earthen pot through a slit in a cloth tied across its mouth, and received in exchange a pinch of holy powder, which they smeared on their foreheads. From a little stall near by they bought cocoanuts, sign of their lowly homage, and from one of the many flower-sellers who sat about the stone pillars facing the door they bought strings of oleander blossom to lay upon the shrine. Then courageously, but very humbly, they drew near to the door, and Linnet raised her hands in worship and bowed her head.

She stood so for a moment, all her simple soul intent. She did not see the sentinel with his fixed bayonet—a threatening figure who stands there on all important occasions, and at less important hours abides in a recess ready to scurry out, hastily buckling his belt (loosed for comfort's sake) at the approach of the alien. Nor did she see the priest as he came forward and stopped, petrified. For a glance had told him Linnet's caste. It was not a caste allowed to worship there.

"Go, go, go!" he cried, beating his head with both his hands in excess of indignation, and he added a word that meant "Clear out!" as he urgently waved them off. The word hit Linnet like a blow in the face.

"Go, go, go! Clear out!"

And she turned and fled.

Up past the temple walls she ran, blinded by that word, up till she reached the high road, open to all. And her friend followed her. Then she stopped and looked down. She could see the immense wall striped in red and white on the side where the door is—a wall that forbade. Why had she ever thought she might go within that wall? The harsh voice of the affronted priest shook her soul. Why had he been so angry?

A moment and she knew. She had forgotten, used as she was to the tolerant ways of her own temple, that, though there were castes below hers in the land, hers was a caste forbidden in all the greater temples. She might have remembered; but she had so longed to worship there that she had forgotten. Was the goddess offended? Would she take some fearful vengeance? But she, Linnet, bore her name. This little irresponsible detail seemed very large to her simple mind, and filled her cup with confusion. To be repulsed by one whose very name she bore, how strange it was! It seemed unreasonable, unkind. It rankled somehow. Why might she not worship the goddess? The priest had beaten his head with his hands—she had seen just that before she had turned and fled. He had waved her off as a thing unspeakably defiling, then he had beaten his head with both his hands. Oh, what had she done? What awful thing had she done? And what would happen now? Grieved and wounded in spirit, apprehensive, and hurt in a way she had never been hurt before, Linnet hastened home.

And then, though nothing tragic happened, and gradually the fear of a thunderclap faded, something almost as disquieting did begin to happen. Questions began to awaken somewhere within her. What manner of god or goddess is it that refuses the homage of a

worshipper? That was the first question. Why this insufferable offence? Why was her presence such a shock to a fellow human being, albeit an almost divine Brahman priest? Caste? But was not the Divine above all thought of caste? Why, then, this rough rejection?

Among her neighbours was a shepherd, an old, weather-worn man who tended his flocks of several hundred sheep and goats on the foot-hills. She told him of her experience at the temple of the Virgin, and he told her of a new god, a very interesting and friendly god of whom he had heard and whose picture he had seen.

This god might be known by his sign, which never varied. It was a stick carried across the shoulder, and he also carried a sheep across his shoulder. His name was Yessu—he worshipped him.

"But how? What is the ceremonial?" asked Linnet.

"Oh, quite trivial," replied the shepherd. "When one of my sheep strays and I am anxious about it, I call out as loud as I can, 'Yessu, Yessu!' meaning, 'Find my sheep for me.' And soon afterwards my sheep is sure to appear. Then I call out, 'Yessu, Yessu!' meaning by that, 'Thanks.' And that is all there is to it."

"Where is Yessu's temple?" asked Linnet, who was rather attracted by the thought of so useful and kindly and undemanding a divinity.

"Nowhere," said the shepherd—"nowhere particular. He is to be found on the foot-hills, however, because that is the place where shepherds go, and he is the god of shepherds."

"May not others worship him too?" inquired Linnet.

"What would be the use?" said the shepherd testily. "He is not in the least a suitable god for thee and for such as thou. Dost thou keep sheep? The god with the stick like my stick here," and he held it out, "he is the god of the shepherds. He will look after our affairs when we die."

"Will he give thee Release?" (She used the word so often used for the other life, meaning Release from the toils and coils of earth.)

"Certainly he will. Why should he not? Did I not say he was the god of shepherds? Am I not a shepherd? Why should he not give me Release?"

"But is Release a boon that is only for shepherds?" she objected, feeling a little upset by his calm exclusiveness; it was almost as bad as the Brahman priest's.

"The god with the stick across his shoulder and the sheep flung over it too, he is the god for us, not for thee," was all the reply she got, and the old man moved off, shaking his head at the stupidity of womenfolk, who could not see what was obvious to anybody who had any sense.

Linnet still had her god of the temple of the palms. But a restlessness had come upon her. She could not have explained it, for she did not understand it. And she felt disturbed, almost sore about the god Yessu and his aloofness from her and her needs. There was something very disappointing in the story, for she had liked the thought of that god of the shepherds who so good-temperedly helped them to find their lost sheep.

CHAPTER III

JASMINE

THE sea that welcomed Linnet on that day of disillusionment welcomed another widow, bathed her, refreshed her, and sent her up to the temple of the Virgin, shriven and pure. And as she, a Brahman widow, passed through the door, hindered by none, her heart rose in longing and adoration; for she was one whom we seek but do not often find, a true searcher for the God of gods whom she called Him of the Lotus Feet. And as she passed through the door of this ancient famous temple, she had a hope, often disappointed, but ever rising, that she would find Him whom she sought.

She had been married when she was five years old, and widowed when she was twelve. She had cried a child's despairing tears when she was told that her sin of a previous birth had devoured her husband's life even as an evil snake devours its prey. "What sin?" she had asked, and they had said, "Who knows?" and she had cried the more because she could not understand what she had done to bring this woe upon her.

But her father was a man of character, so he refused to let her hair be shaved. "Poor little Jasmine! No, let her wait till she is sixteen years old," he said, knowing that beyond that time he was helpless to defend her from this hard custom of his caste.

So for four years the little girl played happily with other children and learned Sanscrit and Tamil from her father, and almost forgot that she was a widow, even though when she was thirteen her jewels were taken off, and she was not allowed to wear them again.

Her father was priest to Siva, and daily, soon after sunrise, when the priest whose duty it was to prepare the god for the worship of his devotees had finished his work, he would go to the temple, and, passing through the outer court, with its pillars and images, would go to the most holy place, and there, standing before the symbol of Siva, chant the prayers and praises and the incantations required for the morning worship. Again at sunset he led the evening worship, and read from the sacred books, and chanted the praises of Siva. Often he took little Jasmine with him, and she would imitate his every gesture, and repeat the words after him, till she knew them off by heart. Her own simple worship was unvarying in its ritual. Dawn by dawn she turned to the east as she bathed in the river or the waters of a tank, as the shallow meres of South India are called. "O Mother River," her prayer was then, "forgive my sin" (the sin of a previous birth which had slain her husband). "Grant me release. Comfort me. Mine be the refuge of Thy Lotus Feet." Then she worshipped the rising sun; at noon again she worshipped the sun; at night, Siva and other gods and goddesses, and always with the same four petitions which had begun the day.

When the tall brass lamp, with its many little cups, each of which held a wick floating in oil, was adored as symbol of the god Agni, the god of fire, and the fragrant string of pale pink oleander was hung over

it, in token of that worship, her father would open his ancient books, or read to her from long, yellow strips of palm leaves on which stanzas of poetry were written with a steel style. It must have been a tranquil and beautiful picture: the orderly little Brahman room, clean as such rooms invariably are, the polished, flower-decked brass, the quiet light falling upon the face of the father and the loving, intelligent face of his child. Why disturb such a peace with the word which so often brings not peace, but a sword?

Without a pause—merely as a continuation of her last sentence which had told of these quiet evenings—Jasmine, who was recalling her childhood's days, went on, "But very severe were the beatings of my mother. She had fourteen children, seven sons and seven daughters. And my grandfather did not give as many dowry jewels as my father had expected when he married her. She was fourteen when her first child was born, and of her fourteen all died but four. My father was angry because of the lack of sufficient jewels and because of so many deaths, so he beat her continually all through the years when the fourteen were coming and going. Into the inner room he took her when his wrath was kindled and he wished to punish her; and he always shut the door. Not that she would ever have cried aloud—no wife should cry aloud when she is chastised, and my mother was a very good wife and very docile. Beat her he did, and frequently, and with anything that came to hand, and on any part of her body that he felt inclined to bruise, and never, never did she cry aloud, nor would she have been heard if she had, for the doors are of thick wood and heavy. But when I was eight I remember her coming out after one of these punishments, and her head was

streaming with blood. Almost she died that night. So, with much weeping because of his severity, and because of the loss of her children, she faded, and she never went to the temple, because it would have been unpropitious for others—she a mother whose previous sin had caused the death of her children. Only after the death of my father, when her cup was full, she shut herself up for one whole year and then went to the temple to beseech the pardoning mercy of the gods. Never once did my father punish us, his children; only his wife, my mother, he punished, because of the lack of dowry jewels and because of the loss of his children."

Perhaps, after all, there is something left for the Gospel to do, even in the home of a learned Brahman priest.

When Jasmine was fifteen and a half, two white saris were bought and kept in readiness for that sorrowful day when she must receive the brand of the widow. On that day she knew that her silken sari would be taken away, and her luxuriant hair would be cut off. Thereafter once a month till her death she must be shaven by the barber appointed to perform that office. The day came—the sorrowful, dreadful day. Jasmine's relatives gathered round her, embraced her and fondled her—then suddenly, for so the custom ruled it, flung her from them, snatched at her, and unwound the soft silk sari from her shrinking little body, and dressed her in a coarse white cloth that felt rough to her skin. Then the barber came and shaved her, and she drew the white cloth over her poor little naked head and knew that she was a widow indeed.

But with the knowledge, oppressive as it was, came a swift uplifting thought, and she cried aloud to her

parents and her relatives, who listened astonished, "Do not weep for me, O my people! Weep for yourselves. To you belong the burden and the strain of life. You curse me, but I am blessed, for I am free." Then, as they stared amazed, she murmured to herself, as one to whom the gods had spoken, "I see a net, and I can count its threads; they move as though they were alive. I see you whom I love caught in those threads. I too am in the net, for still I live, but the threads that hold me are far fewer. Why do they call me cursed?"

It was an echo of something she had heard from her father, but that day what had been mere words to her before became spirit, and nothing could dismay her. And yet, as they thought of what must be—the days of penance, scanty food, refusal of all that could delight, and always, day and night, the crushing sense of being accursed—some of her people wept, wept for the blossom of her life scattered by a storm of wind and rain. As a bare bough they saw that bright and ardent child, a bough that never would blossom again, and so they wept. And the girl, pitiful and gentle, wiped away their tears with her hands, and comforted them.

So life continued until her father's death. She was then twenty-seven years old.

After that several years passed in penance, prayers and a heartless round of petty observances all directed towards obtaining forgiveness for the sin which had caused such desolation to be, till at last she was old enough to have her heart's desire and go on pilgrimage. "It is not I who protect thee," her father had often said. "It is He, the God of gods, the Creator. Seek Him; He alone can protect." She had not

understood the words when first they were spoken, but he had repeated them often, and they had sunk into her heart, and it was borne in upon her that all the gods which she had seen were impotent. "They speak not. Do they hear? Do they see? Do they live?" she would say to herself, even as she bowed before them. Beyond them somewhere, far beyond, must be One who was supreme, eternal, all-powerful, *alive*. It was He whom she sought. So with ten other pilgrims, Brahman widows of good age—"grannies" she called them—she set out on pilgrimage.

And now she added a fifth prayer to her four. It was a prayer for keeping from the hidden danger of the way, the peril of all perils to the widow, whosoever she be, whithersoever she go in this land of India.

From shrine to shrine she went through all the South, spending money everywhere, for the word at each was "Give." On the day when for the first time she read the Psalm which says, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it," she stopped, and with a quick look through to the Unseen which is so near to us she said, "I would indeed, O Lord of my heart, the only One I ever met who didst first say to Thy worshipper 'Take,' not 'Give.'"

Books have been written about the temples of South India, photographs of their marvellous towers and carven stone courts and corridors can be bought for a few rupees; but no books, no pictures, can give even a breath of the air of those mighty monuments of a people's faith, nor can descriptions show them to one who has never stood alone in the night in the silent space before the sacred symbol far within. There, where a few Brahman widows like herself prostrated themselves and chanted prayers, where only the elect

THEY SPEAK NOT.
DO THEY HEAR? DO THEY
SEE? DO THEY LIVE?

of the elect may tread, Jasmine went and sought Him whom she knew not yet. And always, after her prayer that she might find Him, she added the petition which all good women pray when they walk in the secret places of the temples and the lonely places of the land: "O keep me safe," she prayed. And though there are tens of thousands at the festivals, the widow walks in a solitary way: she has need to pray that prayer.

But was it that no one heard?

In that awful little poem, "Porphyria's Lover," Browning tells of a crime:

> I found
> A thing to do; and all her hair
> In one long yellow string I wound
> Three times her little throat around,
> And strangled her.
>
> And thus we sit together now,
> And all night long we have not stirred,
> *And yet God has not said a word.*

There are things more cruel than the winding of yellow hair round a girl's throat. There is betrayal. The heart is dumb then, with just that unspoken cry and question fiercely raging deep within it, "And yet God has not said a word." But the day will come when He will speak.

Then Jasmine prayed for death, and the voice of the waters of rivers and of wells was one insistent call to her. "Come, come to us, come; come, fall in us and die." But another voice spoke, it held her back from that.

Lovers of little children, have you ever seen a young child, slapped and scolded, perhaps unfairly, turn, not *from* her who hurt it, but *to* her? Have you seen the child's arms flung round the neck of the one whom it knows for its own, till the hands that smote

gather it up and the voice that rebuked comfort it? It was something like that with this poor Jasmine, for she turned to Him who, as it seemed to her, had ignored her cry and smitten her down. Not *from* the Unknown, but *to* Him she turned, and as a bewildered loyal child to its mother or its nurse, she clung the closer to Him. "O Thou of the Lotus Feet, Thou art the thing that I long for."

And He heard. Footsore and worn, and with a grief and patience on her face which still haunt us who saw it, a Brahman widow with shaven, polished head, and the white cloth of the widow wrapped round her, stood waiting in the Dohnavur compound. That was what was seen. What was unseen? The blue air looked as usual, not thronged with shining presences, but thin and clear and blue. And yet, if ever angels walk on earth and lead wayfarers by the hand, surely they were there that day.

For now the search was over, the pilgrim had found rest. "It is He of the Lotus Feet I seek," she said two days later, when she opened her heart to us. "I have sought Him in many temples, but I found Him not, never once have I heard even a whisper of Him. And still I seek Him. They tell me that I shall find Him here."

It was the heart prepared. "It was but a little that I passed from them, when I found Him whom my soul loveth. I held Him and would not let Him go." Down on the floor she fell with outstretched hands as she held Him and would not let Him go. Nor did He wish to go. "Longing, I sought Thy presence, Lord. With my whole spirit and heart did I call and pray; and going out to meet Thee, I found Thee coming to me on the way."

CHAPTER IV

TOO LATE I LOVED THEE

AND now for Jasmine began that rough and thorny experience that no forethought can make smooth. There was the pull of the old life with its subtle philosophy. Is it realized at home that Hinduism, as one of its thinkers has said, is always sitting at the feet of the prophets? "It receives foreign influences and assimilates them so as to become one and continuous with its main body. Thus it preserves its individuality while enriching itself continually with whatever is precious in the religious thought and experience of other lands and races. This never-ending process is vital to Hinduism." These words, lately written by a thoughtful Hindu who stands for all that he believes to be best for his country, show one of the forces which hold the people of India from the vision we would give our lives that they should see—the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Jasmine had found Him of the Lotus Feet. She had not realized that she had found in Him her all, her only all. No words of ours can show to the English reader one tithe of what a true conversion, not to Christianity, but to the Lord Christ Himself, must mean to a pilgrim such as Jasmine. Its renunciations, its acceptances, its throes of mental anguish, its confusions—like some web of fine silken stuff suddenly pulled to pieces, so life must seem at

first—these processes of thought, the emotions to which they lead, are as unimaginable to one who has never trodden that path as is the far more acute anguish of the tearing of the heart-strings which invariably follows; for in this part of South India no orthodox Brahman house has ever allowed a true, living, witness-bearing believer in Christ crucified to dwell in it. And conversion does not kill the heart's affections, it quickens them. Once, on the high road, Jasmine met one of her brothers. She had her Bible with her, a treasured possession. Eagerly, as he was willing to have speech with her, she held it out to him; to her wonder he took it. This has been her nearest contact with her own since that day. She has written to them, but they have not answered. Nothing of earth can effect and maintain the kind of conversion that can stand such a strain. Only the Powers of the world to come can account for it. It is not something done by one human being to another. It is a spiritual thing, and the natural man comprehendeth it not, nor ever can. Through this time of wrestling, sometimes almost unto death, Jasmine passed, not unscathed, for there were days when she all but turned back. But the cords of Love are mighty; and like a thread of tow when it toucheth the fire, so at last were those other cords that bound and drew her.

From the first she had the assured help of being able to read. The Book was open to her. Two of us taught her day by day, one in the morning read with her from the Old Testament, in which her keen mind delighted, for she saw it like the avenue of trees leading up to a temple, as the road of the Great Revelation. In the afternoon, Star, one who had been of old an ardent Hindu, read with her from the New.

On the day she came to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we read the chapter through on our knees. Once, slowly, we read it, and then once more, still kneeling, we read those poignant words. Suddenly she broke down weeping: "I cannot read those words again," she said, struggling to command her voice. "As spears they stab me." That evening she read the story of the Crucifixion as the disciple whom Jesus loved tells it. From that day there was new depth in Jasmine's prayers, and a new note of personal devotion.

Very tender were the times we had with her after that day. "Too late I loved Thee"—it was almost as if she were quoting from that matchless fragment of adoration when she said, as she did one evening, "Ah, if only I had heard all this before! How many years have I lost in not loving Him!" And then to Him she would say, "See me at Thy Lotus Feet, O Lord of my life; see, I clasp them, and Thou dost not bid me go; I hold them to myself; I who am Thy dust embrace Thee. Oh, that I had met Thee sooner on the road!" Who could hear the outpourings of such a heart without recalling the great music of the Confessions? "Too late I loved Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late I loved Thee. And behold, Thou wert within, and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee; deformed I, plunging amid those fair forms which Thou hadst made. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not at all. Thou calledst, and shoutedst, and burstest my deafness. Thou flashedst, shonest, and scatteredst my blindness. Thou breathedst odours, and I drew in breath and pant for Thee. I tasted, and hunger and

thirst. Thou touchedst me, and I burned for Thy peace."

As the days passed and the pure light of His holiness fell upon Jasmine, and she saw herself more clearly in the searching ray, she began to understand what her redemption had cost her Lord. His head was wet with the dew and His locks with the drops of the night—for her. And His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground—for her. They took Jesus and led Him away, and He, bearing His cross, went forth—for her. There were days when it was an all-but-despairing Jasmine who came to the quiet room where we read together; and she came again and yet again to that eternal compassion for pardon and the consolations of peace, and to worship and adore.

From the first she had a desire to tell others of her search and of her finding, and soon she went to witness in the court of one of the temples where she had worshipped as a pilgrim. The Brahman priest listened. It was a moonlight night, and there is something in moonlight which furthers quiet talk in unusual places. The temple courts are open at such times in a way not often attainable by day. Sitting on a fallen pillar, while the priest sat on another facing her, Jasmine told her story, dwelling much on the words that had entranced her from the first, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

I heard Him call—"Come, follow"!
That was all.
My gold grew dim—
My heart went after Him.

I rose and followed—
That was all.
Would you not follow
If you heard Him call?

And with no thought of mockery that Brahman listened, nor had he any answer to such impassioned words.

But for months thereafter Jasmine went no more out. "I heard them calling," she said. By "them" she meant the old gods that once had dominion over her. She felt the need of being more established in the faith before attacking those powers again. And yet, though we talk of attack (because in very truth there are powers that must be attacked, for the lords of the darkness hold in fast and fearful slavery those whom they count their own), our message is not one of defiance to any child of man. It is the good news of water for the thirsty.

At last the time came when Jasmine could go forth, strong though weak, knowing her weakness and so knowing her strength, and she chose herself a life of lowly service. Out in a little jungly village with two English sisters, their loving and unselfish fellow-worker, she has lived for happy years, unknown to the great world, but well known in the place where they sing when lost people are found. The villagers love her, for they know it is love that holds her among them. Caste is forgotten—all is forgotten for the sake of the love that laughs at the trivial distinctions of earth.

And now came the time when, spiritually, the two widows touched. Day by day for many months Jasmine and her English sisters knelt in prayer together, praying for Raj, the one-time brigand captain, and for

his many friends—and Linnet was the first woman won for Christ in answer to that prayer. For to Linnet, Jasmine's fellow-widow, though divided then by abysmal separation, Raj was sent with two cups in his hands, little as he dreamed it, the cup of tears and the cup that was filled with the sparkling wine of joy.

CHAPTER V

THE TAP ON THE DOOR

IT was his strange fate to bring both these cups to many men and women. There can have been few anywhere who have been the cause of so keen a grief and yet of so irresistible a happiness.

Just then, while the countryside shuddered over dark tales of secret killings in the forest, a young man belonging to a posse of police set to watch the mountain paths came full upon Raj in a grove of trees near the path. Taken aback by what he saw of one reputed to be so dangerous, he forgot his duty. The two men were soon fast friends. Raj spoke of a Saviour who can save even a robber, and can keep to the end. " And he spread a deer-skin on the ground and prayed for me and for himself," said the other in telling of this encounter. " And then he said, ' Brother, never do *himsa*.' (The word means anything unlawful and cruel to compel confession.) ' Never do it to anyone, by *himsa* many are caused to become criminals.' But after a while he said, ' Brother, we do wrong, you are taking the Sirkar (Government) money to hunt me and catch me and bring me in, and here you are making friends with me. It's not playing the game.' " (A free translation—we have not exactly that expression in Tamil, but it was what Raj meant.)

Five years afterwards, pursued by these words and this memory, that young policeman found a torn tract by the roadside.

There was enough of the printed matter left to tell him of a Saviour—Raj's Saviour; it confirmed what he had heard on the edge of the forest; and the end of that story was a joy that no man can take away.

But for more people than one cares to count, the times were full of trouble, for just before that policeman found Raj there had been a peculiarly daring robbery, and, though it was madness for Raj to come down to the plains at all at that moment, he did come down, and he found his way to Linnet's village and to her house.

The day that was to change everything for Linnet was, like other days, full of the usual. Her little grandchild who was staying with her was not very well and had to be petted; there was cooking to do, and garden and field work, and the cattle had to be fed and watered. It was evening now. A tap on the door startled her, but it was only an unknown, inoffensive-looking old man, Maya (deception) by name, who said he had come to buy grain. "Go and inquire in the village, for I have none to sell," she answered. "Give me a little cold rice," said Maya, and she gave it. Then he went away. "And if it had not been written on my forehead that he was to return," she says as she tells the story of that night, "should I have drunk of the two cups, the bitter and the sweet?"

Presently the tap came again. Again she went to the door. This time old Maya put a twisted slip of paper in her hand, and, holding her lamp high, she looked at it and at him. Then she shut the door again.

But he had whispered a name that was in every mouth through those strange months, and she got someone to read the note, which was from Raj and

told her he was near, but that she must not have him if she was afraid. She was not in the least afraid at that moment, and she opened her door to him and to his friends. And she did not see the lodger of the night who came in with them then. Nor did she see Another—the Radiant One who waited to come in the morning. The men who were with Raj were soon deep in talk at the other end of the house, but he sat down near the door and made friends with the little grandchild, who was better by that time, and he taught her a chorus beginning, "Lover of souls, Lover of souls, what should I do without Thee?" and he crooned it over and over till the child fell asleep in his arms. "She is like my little Delight," he said to Linnet, and then added sadly, "But I have no child now." Then, brightening up, he told her that his children were safe, and how happy he was about them, and the talk soon turned to the main matter that had brought him to the house that night. Linnet had a young daughter, and he had a plan for her marriage. This plan he unfolded, and she showed him the jewels she had made from her own for the girl's wedding, a gleaming handful of golden things shaped like the mauve flower called calotropis, which grows all over the waste places of South India. She little knew as she held the jewels in her hand and Raj took them up and examined them, how much hung on that handful of toys. Raj approved of them. "Only," he said, "thy little one must have a golden bangle too," and he told her how the wedding was to be conducted, for the bridegroom he recommended belonged to the Vētham (Christian religion).

Then she made a feast for the party, and friends

gathered, and no one thought of danger. But it was dangerous. There had been many robberies committed in the countryside of this story, and it was believed that Raj was leading a band of dacoits. In any case, he had escaped from prison, and if he did not give himself up he must be caught or killed. That, of course, was a fact. It was also a fact that, because no Englishman could possibly be everywhere at once, and no Indian official of sterling character was anywhere about, things happened in the hunt that should not have happened.

A thing that should not have happened was close upon that homestead now. For shortly afterwards Raj was killed, and his friends were caught up among the wheels of that great and mysterious machine, the Law.

One of them was Linnet. Of that night, when her house was searched for stolen property and she herself suffered from such *himsa* * that, for three or four years afterwards, she could not lie with ease on her right side—of that dark night and its dark deeds Linnet rarely speaks. Only she knows that at the end she was ready to swear anything. "I said what they told me to say. I could bear no more. I swore to lie upon lie."

Then came the walk in pain upon the road to the police station, and the forty days of distressed waiting in the lock-up for trial. She will never forget the long and wretched nights, with no bed, no mat, no blanket —nothing to soften the hardness of the cold cement floor of her cell. Bewildering hours in court followed

* It is a pleasure and relief to write that, as this book goes out, things are different. In so far as a strong police officer can crush this iniquitous *himsa*, it is crushed all over the part of South India to which this tale belongs.

these weeks of suspense, and the perplexity of conviction and sentence. She was not sentenced for the crime of which she was accused and to which she had "confessed," for the jewels she had had to swear were given to her by Raj from his loot of stolen property were so obviously newly made that the magistrate turned the case down, and she was sentenced only to a term of one month's imprisonment for "harbouring" Raj.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE RAILWAY STATION

ONLY a month? But it appeared a life-time to the crushed and terrified woman that day as they led her back to her cell. She had no idea, for example, that she would be under the care of a reputable official during that month, and had appalling visions of being at the mercy of men like those who had broken into her little house on that night of fear. A month more. How could she bear it? How live through it? To whom could she turn? She could not see her friends. There was no human help of any sort at hand. Of divine help she knew nothing. She only knew that the god of the temple among the palms was much too far off to hear her cry, or, if he could hear it (and a vague pantheism is at the back of all religion in India, so he was, of course, "everywhere"), how could she be in the least sure that he would pay any attention to it? No words, no description can give any idea of the desperate, desolating sense of forsakenness that comes over one who has no refuge from the storm, no shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

If only that friendly god of the shepherds had been for everybody, how good it would have been to call to him and say, "Yessu! Yessu!" and find one's trouble rolled away. But the god with the stick across his shoulder was not for her.

Oh, that he were ! But she was not as the sheep that the old shepherd said he carried on his shoulder; she was more like the one that lost its way in the jungle on the foot-hills. And there was no one to cry " Yessu ! Yessu ! " and cause her to be found. It seemed like that. And she rocked herself to and fro and lamented till the ache in her side sharpened, and violent movement became too painful. Then she would wait till some great person passed the barred door of her cell, when she would struggle to her knees, and with effort stoop and stretch out her hands to touch his feet, or even prostrate herself on the ground in the abandoned way of the despairing. But no one took any notice of her; and she did not know that the Comforting Saviour of sorrowful people was even then coming to her.

She was sitting forlornly on the flagstones at the Shermadevi railway station when He came. She did not know that He had come. She thought only of her sorrow. There she sat, her white cloth tightly drawn across her face, her form heaving with deep sighs, and on either side of her was a policeman. But they were good-natured lads, and when we asked if we might speak to her (we had come to the station to meet a friend, not knowing that Linnet, of whose *himsa* we had heard, but whom we now saw for the first time, was there), they consented at once, and presently the white cloth was pulled back, the two brown hands were in the two white ones, and the story of that confusion of distress was being told in little gasps, for the poor bruised body could hardly hold itself erect, and the terror lest there would be more *himsa*, and the fear, too, of what might be happening in the little house in the village, were torturing to madness.

Gradually the pitiful talk ceased, and after a while comfort came, and quietness and peace. But who can explain what happens when the healing of the Lover of souls flows over a troubled heart?

Not that we said much. There was not much time —hardly a bare half-hour. But it does not take so long as that for light to shine upon a Face. There are times when all we have to do is to stand out of the way, so that the one with whom we are speaking shall not see us, but only that Face. I think Linnet must have seen Him that day, or at least something of His beauty, for nothing was ever quite the same after that half-hour.

The whistle of a train, and the sleepy station woke. Up sprang passive people, slack people, tired people. There was a rush for the part of the platform where the long string of third-class carriages would probably stop. And with a roar the train was in, and out of the women's carriages women and children were being decanted in bubbling streams (the effect is always as if the bottle were far too narrow-mouthed for its contents). From the mixed carriages came the men first, all but fighting to get out before the train started, as they were well assured it would, long before they were safely down, while from the platform below equally frantic crowds were scrambling up, for well they knew the train would start before they could possibly get in. As most of the people disembarking and embarking, women in the women's only, and men and women in the mixed, were tugging at bundles, cooking-vessels, water-vessels, food-carriers, rolls of bedding, tin boxes (babies in arms were everywhere, too), and as all, without exception and without cessation, were shouting at the top of their voices, the pandemonium of a wayside station, where

it is a fact that the train often starts without due notice, can be imagined.

Linnet had not to push. She had never seen a train before, and would have been incapable of any such thing. Nor had she to shout. This, too, would have been beyond her. She had never seen people in such a hurry (a railway station when the train comes in is one of the few places where India really hurries). So she stood for a moment almost dazed. But a way was made for her, for the sight of her guards—the two friendly lads and an older and much less friendly official who had fortunately been away when first we saw her—scattered the crowd. And Linnet, quick to seize an advantage, was promptly in the corner seat next the door, from whence she could see her new friend over the heads of the mass of struggling passengers who closed round again. Then, as the train started with its usual abruptness, she thrust her head through the open half of the door, and in a voice that pierced the surrounding babel and brought a smile to the faces of the crowd on the platform, she called out eagerly, "To my little greatly beloved grandchild, uncountable hugs and kisses!"

CHAPTER VII

ART THOU A WITCH?

THE town to which they took her now was one near which Raj had, it was said, committed one of his most daring dacoities. So the place still talked of him, and any one who knew anything of him, could tell of him, above all, had known him in the flesh, was sure of an audience. A friend of his was there a week or two later, and the court, which was in session, emptied at the word, the wide enclosure quickly filled with hundreds of men and women, and there was a great chance to give the message that has brought " power to become " to so many. Linnet, therefore, was an interesting prisoner, and when she limped into her cell (for at that time she could not walk without limping) many in the town knew of her arrival, and waited an opportunity to get nearer. For the moment, however, she was utterly alone.

If this story were fiction, even religious fiction, it would tell now of a marvellous exaltation of spirit, for had she not heard for the first time of something good enough to cause the saddest to exult? But truth is very prosaic, and there was nothing of the sort in that cell that night: the lantern burning smokily in the passage outside showed only a blotch of dirty white, and a bowed frame with elbows on knees and head in hands. If there had been anybody to listen, he would have heard the sound of smothered sobbing. For those

dread waves we call depression were sweeping over Linnet. Where was the comfort of that half-hour in the station? Gone? No, not gone, only blotted out for awhile by tears.

Next morning she woke from broken sleep, unrefreshed, and began dully to measure her cell. "It was nine of my feet, and when I lay down flat on the floor and stretched out my hands I could touch one end with my hands and the other with my feet. It had seven iron bars at one end, and the rest was a wall. I counted those seven bars over and over again."

To an Indian woman, torn suddenly from her very full and very noisy little house, there must be something almost dreadful in the emptiness and the quietness of a cell. Then, too, there was its unaccustomed and appalling tidiness. Linnet had kept her little house according to her own idea of order, but the jail's idea was entirely different. Here was an empty order. It was uncanny. It chilled her to the marrow.

Also it was very cold. It was the rainy season, and she shivered in her thin cotton sari. There was, of course, no bed, nor anything that made for comfort to a bruised body. She yearned for the springy cane cot of the villages. How hard the floor was, and how cold!

But she had a kind jailer. When he heard how cold she was, he lent her a blanket, and when she was leaving he wanted her to take it as a present. But she gratefully declined, for it was a black blanket, and it would have been terribly unlucky to carry a black blanket down the road.

For a while, that first morning, she sat on the floor, leaning against the wall, thinking a prisoner's thoughts. Perhaps only one who has been a prisoner can fathom

those thoughts. And He who said long ago, "I was in prison," He who surely says, even now, as He looks into the prisons of the world, "I am in prison still," He knows: He understands: He can comfort: He comforted Linnet now. She could not have told anyone who had asked her why she was there at all; she had not in the least followed the progress of her trial. She had stood at the end of a long room, bigger than any room she had ever been in before; a constable had stood on either side of her, which in itself was alarming, and she had watched with the greatest apprehension the omnipotent being on the raised place at the other end handle her precious jewels—those made out of her own for her daughter's wedding. She had heard much confused talk, which she could not understand any more than she understood the magistrate's comment, "But these are brand new." "Brandu" was an unknown word to her, and she felt a little resentful that those jewels, which she had worn in her own ears since the day of her marriage till she took them off to give them to the goldsmith to be melted down and re-made, should be called by such a queer name. She knew he must be saying this about them, because he held them in his hand, and looked at them as he repeated it two or three times—"brandu, brandu." But had she not sworn that Raj had given them to her? Yes, but he had not. It was the *himsa* that made her do that. Ask the village goldsmith. Oh, perhaps he would be too frightened to tell; for this was a police case, and to go against it meant to go against the Sirkar—mighty word! Who would do that? Not the goldsmith, at any rate. And yet, they told her at the end that she was not going to prison for receiving stolen property, but was having

THE DOOR THAT
OPENED TO JASMINE

a light sentence for "harbouring." What was "harbouring"?

So she puzzled over it, and at last, giving it up in despair, she began to think over her experiences on the way, till she came to the station and the comfort, and to pass the time she sang the words she had heard, fitting them to a vague tune of her own which wandered up and down the scale like a wind that had lost its way in a wood, and this was the song that she sang:

"O Lord Yēsu, are You with me in this cell? Then I will not be afraid. No, I will not be afraid, for You love me, O Lord Yēsu. You will take care of me."

This was enough. She had repeated the name so often the day before in the station, and again in the train as it rumbled along, that she was sure she had it right; also she was sure of the two wonderful things she had heard: this Lord Yēsu, who was such a kind God that He cared for widows, truly did love her and truly was with her. This was not a made-up story "without eyes and nose"; it was a true thing that she had heard. Somehow, as she sang, the cell grew less dreary, she could laugh, and she did laugh (she had always been more given to laughter than to tears), and her guards could not understand it.

What if the temple among the palms were very far away (this was a new verse added to her song), and the Virgin of the temple by the sea rejected her? What if the god to whom her heart had gone out, he with the stick across his shoulder, was not for her? Nothing mattered: she had a God of her own at last. She did not for some time connect the two names Yessu and Yēsu, and though she had met Christians—for there were people of the Vētham in the village next to hers—she did not think of the joy that had come to her as some-

thing that had to do with them and their religion, for their lives were not conspicuously joyful, and they had not drawn her or her neighbours to want to know more of the particular variety of religion to which they belonged.

For awhile she was alone with her joy; but she sang so ardently that her guards, the police, came to find out what she was singing about. Her songs were more crooned and chanted than sung. So they called through the bars, "What is it thou art chanting to thyself? Art thou a witch? Canst thou divine? Wilt thou tell us our fortune?" And this amused her and perhaps a little flattered her simple soul, for wizards and witches are among the powerful of India. However, she truthfully answered that she had no occult powers of any kind, and was only singing about her new Lord Yēsu. Would they like to hear? So they stood and listened, and then they smiled and went away.

Then the magistrate's writer came. He was a very great person, and she wondered why he had come. "Chant thy songs to me," he said, and she did so. After that, one by one, any who could get admittance came, and to them all she sang. The police on guard must have thought her rather extraordinary, for it cannot be often that they have singing prisoners. And yet unusual things did happen through those months. Linnet was not the only bird who sang in a darkened cage.

CHAPTER VIII

LINNET'S VILLAGE

OUT on the bare red plain a Ford car flung itself valiantly into a ditch of muddy water of uncertain bottom. "We'll get through somehow," was its driver's attitude towards most things, but that day it was tried too high, and with a sudden heave and an exasperated grunt it stopped. Then for a while there was a dragging and a pushing, and a battalion of villagers, carrying a branch of a tree hacked off for the occasion, spattered more mud everywhere, as, with triumphant shouts, they levered the beetle out of its bed, till at last, more mud than Ford, it staggered on to negotiate scrub, rock, a saddleback sort of rise on which its middle stuck for a moment, its wheels spinning, and finally reached Linnet's village and her house.

There was a welcome, as polite as it was astonished, and then, when the daughters and the friends knew that we had seen Linnet, there was that eager closing round which meant that formalities were forgotten and we were no more strangers.

For the purpose of this story, which does not want to wade in mud like the bespattered car, it is enough to say that the truth about the *himsa* which had cowed Linnet that day was told in spite of the efforts of some to restrain it. "For may not *she* bear to hear what *she* had to endure?" as one indignantly put it. And Jasmine, the Brahman widow, who was with us that

day, drew me aside as she repeated in rapid revealing words what the women in the crowd were saying when their men stopped them, horrified (for there is chivalry among India's very poor) that a white woman's ears should hear such things.

Then there was talk and a prayer for their comfort, and the Ford had to go, lest it should be caught in the dark in the muddy ditch.

. . . . . .

Two days' journey distant, in her prison cell, Linnet sat, wondering about her people at home, yearning, till the heartache was almost more than she could bear, to know how things were going with them. Her friend had promised to go to see them as soon as ever she could; but, though Linnet knew nothing of the many things that might postpone that visit, she did know the way was difficult to find, and she had a fear that even if that wonderful creation, the Ford car, could find it, it might stick in the ditch. Then it would never reach her village, and she would never hear how her people were. Her cheery spirit failed at the dismal thought.

Soon even greater anxieties about her sons-in-law rolled up. The criminal tribes of India, whose profession is crime, are prepared for all eventualities. There are secret hoards, there are friends made with the mammon of unrighteousness who lend a hand to the relations left in poverty: the imprisonment of the criminal does not of necessity mean the destruction of the home. But the honest castes and clans have no such provision to fall back upon. Should one of a house be entangled in crime, the effect to the whole household is frankly devastating. So when this family became involved they had nothing ready—no money gathered to pay a pleader to defend them, no nest-egg hidden

away in an unsuspected corner. To sell their land would mean starvation afterwards. There was nothing for it, then, but to borrow at the high interest of the country. They borrowed five hundred rupees, and used every anna in the useless defence. Now where were the sons-in-law? In prison, of course. Yes, but where? And for how long? Linnet knew nothing about them, only knew that one of them had been too much hurt by his *himsa* to be able to speak to a friend who went to see him. Not that that rankled, it was his fate; but she grieved over it notwithstanding. And how would the debt be paid, and the interest? It would be a chain on their necks for years and years. Was there anybody, after all, who really cared? Her thoughts reverted to her god of the temple among the palms, him whom she had so long worshipped. No, she could not be sure he did. The shepherd's certainly did not. The Lord Yēsu, of whom she had heard at the station? Truly He had seemed different, but how be sure? She remembered her experience at the door of the temple of the Virgin, and her heart sank. What if this new God kept caste? So the tedious hours wore on and Linnet did not sing.

But He with whom we have to do knows everything. All the threads are in His hands; it is a little thing for Him to direct one and another so that the pattern when we see it afterwards is perfect every way. And on that day when old forces and beliefs were struggling for the mastery, He succoured her again. As she sat grieving, a policeman's voice rang through her cell, "Thine Amma is here; rise and come, for the honourable magistrate has given the order," and Linnet, who was already on her feet, shook down her hair with the village woman's gesture, which means "I must be

tidy," a deft twist and the dark coils were "up," her sari was over her head, and, all one quivering hurry of gladness, she was ready.

Meanwhile in the room of the court-house we waited, and heard what a curious prisoner Linnet was; and everyone seemed friendly and pleased that she should have a little happiness.

So we were left free to talk. A stray policeman wandered in and out, but no one disturbed us. We had just twenty minutes together, but the quickening Spirit was in those flying minutes. After the first eager questions were answered, and her heart was at rest about her home, Linnet listened with a keen intelligence which lost nothing of the little we could give, A wordless book helped. "I who have no learning, yes, I can read these colours, black, red, white, gold." And as we explained the meaning to her, she laughed like a happy child. For to the Mighty a blade of grass is a weapon, and He often uses simple things to illustrate great mysteries.

Back to her cell went Linnet then, a singing bird once more; and, holding the little book with its four square inches of colour in her hands, thereafter to be stored away in her house as a very precious treasure, she added new words to her chant. Among them was one the people understood well:

"By the roadside is the burden-bearer" (this is a slab of stone placed on two upright stones, and the coolie lays his load upon it and rests by the way). "In my heart is my Burden-bearer. Why should I carry my coolie load on my head?"

At last the month was over. One of her relatives had come to be with her when she was released, and together the two, she beaming upon all the world, after

a short journey by rail, called at the house of the magistrate who had sentenced her to that month in jail. They were both full of gratitude because her imprisonment had been only for a month (it might have been for many years, as they now understood), and they wanted to recover the jewels which he had so puzzlingly declared were "brandu" when he had been invited to accept them as stolen goods. He returned them and gave her a rupee for the motor-'bus. So together they journeyed back, stopping where the track forked off to Dohnavur to tell their story and be welcomed and fed and finally forwarded in a bandy to the next place where a motor-'bus started. Thence they went on to a town near the sea, where relatives waited to receive them with affectionate feasting, and next day they were back in their own little village. "And did any one ever get help like this? In the jail the lending of the black blanket and the friendly words of the people, and by the way the returning of my jewels and the rupee for the 'bus; and then Dohnavur and the food and the speeding of us who were weary by reason of journeys in the train and the bandy that says 'tuck-tuck' and shakes" (the motor-'bus, which certainly shakes and has a good deal to say), "who would have expected such things as these? I have made songs about them all."

CHAPTER IX

WITHOUT OBSERVATION

AND yet, if one who did not know her secret had looked into her affairs, I doubt if he would have found much cause for songs. Her two sons-in-law were sentenced to long terms in prison. Their debts became hers, for she accepted them as hers. Five hundred rupees with its interest—the iniquitous interest of the East—is a large sum for a poor widow to take upon herself, helped only by two young women. "But those who lent us the money trusted us to repay it," she says simply. "If they had not trusted us, how could we have got those rupees? If we had not got the rupees, how could we have paid the pleader? Would he defend us for nothing? No, we had to pay the money into his hand before he would defend ús. And something too we had to pay to the men of note in our village to speak for us; but they did not speak, for they feared."

It never seems to occur to her sunny faith that all this money was as water spilt on the ground, for it did nothing whatever for the help of the little family so suddenly bereft. Nor does she think anything of that extortion called interest which the Scriptures, true to Eastern life, continually denounce. All she knows is that till that debt is paid she cannot rest, and should not rest.

But the first months were very hard. Sometimes her pluck and confidence seemed to desert her, the

THE PRIEST OF THE TEMPLE
OF THE VIRGIN RECEIVING
A WORSHIPPER

burden bore her down in spite of her cheery songs. And when she was borne down there was no one to lift her up. Her neighbours thought her a poor, silly creature, her relatives, in spite of their fondness for her, did not in the least understand her. Who would not sometimes have fainted in spirit? She could not read, so could not find nourishment for herself. She had heard very little of the ways of her new Lord—she knew, really, hardly anything of Him. If only she could have come to Dohnavur and been taught, how good it would have been! So we said to ourselves, as we thought of her away in her dull little village with nothing to help her, and no single inspiring or comforting or strengthening influence within a long day's walk. And she could not often spare time for that day's walk because of her grinding poverty now that the debt was upon her, nor could we often go to see her.

Has the heart of the reader of this story ever been wrung for some poor friend shut away behind barred gates, perhaps unjustly accused, perhaps guilty of some crime which justly led to punishment, but now turning towards goodness, and yet in peril of being pushed back into despair and sin? Or is the matter more ordinary, and yet is the one for whom the heart is burdened inaccessible—far away in some other country, perhaps, and fenced off by mountains and seas from the reach of outstretched hands? Does it seem as though there were no way to reach him? Or is the trouble still more poignant? Is the heart its own self-barrier, and does all that utmost love can do fall back, beaten back, baffled by intangible walls of separation, walls as of plate-glass, till the faith that once rose high and strong gives way at times, staggers, breaks down, tired out?

These things that are given to us to see, are not for

us alone. They are for the cheer of all who push off from the shore and sail their boat in deep waters, and so must know the beating of many storms. For them (to change the figure) there is no easy passing by on the other side of anyone suffering or sinful whom they might help. And when people do not understand, and try to divert them with a word that skims the surface of life and never sounds its depths, they only know that it has no voice for them. They are called to another fellowship.

It is for such we write. The Lord of the Mimosas and the Linnets of South India, He is the God of these whom the heart names before Him. He has ways of entering fast-closed places. He has oil and He has wine for the bitter wounds of life. And He has had long practice, too, in binding up the broken, and in keeping hope alive in famine, and in drawing men back to Himself, though they may have wandered far.

One evening, after her day's work was over, Linnet cut seven hundred leaves from her young plantain trees, and early next morning tied them in bundles and piled them in one great load on her head. She walked nine miles to the market, and sold the leaves there for one rupee, and, tired out, walked home again—eighteen miles for one rupee. She had no food that day, except a little rice which she carried in her hand, for she wanted to keep the rupee intact, and she arrived home before sunset, fatigued, but thankful she had that one rupee. There were in her little household the two daughters whose husbands were in jail, her unmarried daughter and two grandchildren; all five were depending on her. They were usually an affectionate family, but that night they were tired together and a chorus of murmurings met her. "Look at our ragged saris, O mother," cried

the shrill voice of her eldest daughter. "How shall we ever live with this debt upon us? Oh, that Raj had never come to this house that night! See, here we are, our men in jail and this debt on us all. *Aiyo, aiyo,* what shall we do?"

Wearier than any of them, she left them to talk, and went into the room where she had feasted Raj on that fateful night, and shut the door. Then in that little room, in the midst of the lumber of the house, she sat and spoke aloud.

"Kindly listen, Lord Yēsu, kindly listen, for I do not know what to do, and I must tell You about it now; it is too heavy for me." And she spread out her white sari (much as Mimosa used to take hers in her hands and hold it out to her Father), and she said, "The debt is a chain and the interest weighs me down. Oh, Lord Yēsu, the debt is five hundred rupees, and the interest on one hundred and fifty rupees of it is three *kotais* of grain" (value fifteen to sixteen rupees a kotai, about 30 per cent. interest). "This I must pay to Little Eyes, the blacksmith, who lent me that one hundred and fifty rupees. And three hundred and fifty I must pay to Form of Beauty, the Shepherd, and the interest is one and a half rupees to every hundred, and it must be paid every month. So the interest on that amounts, O Lord, to five and a quarter rupees every month. *And how am I to do it?*"

With that, quite exhausted, she lay down, the tears still wet on her face.

Then the door opened and a Man came into the room. She could only describe Him by saying He was like the one Englishman whom she had then seen (a Scot really, but Linnet knows nothing of such distinctions). The Stranger sat down on the floor near to where she

was lying, she said. And first He wiped her tears away " very gently with His two hands." (I wondered if she had noticed that they were wounded, but she did not say anything about that.) " Why are you troubled? " He said, and He spoke very gently. " Why do you cry? You must not be troubled," and He held out His hands as one does in giving anything to another, and He said, " See, I will give you the money for the debt."

But, being frightened, she cried, " Oh no, no, no! Please do not do that! The police will come if You give me the money, and they will say Raj came and gave it to me, and there will be more *himsa*. I do not want it. Please do not give it to me," and she cried more bitterly than ever, for the fear of more distress overcame her.

" Am I as Raj was? " the Stranger asked, not rebuking but as if surprised. " Do I come as he came? " Then, as she looked up reassured, " Not as he would give will I give. My coming shall be without observation and My giving shall be without observation," and with this He went away; but how He went she did not see, only, because of those words, she knew Him who had spoken with her.

Then she woke and knelt down and worshipped, and, suddenly aware that she was hungry, she got some food and ate it with thanksgiving, and telling her little family of what had happened, she continued in joyful praise and contentment for some days.

But the fear returned, for the road seemed long and rough. " And you have gone away, Lord Yēsu. I have not seen You since that night. And how can I clear this debt? " It was when the house slept that she brought her burden thus for the second time to Him,

and again He came, as He still comes to His very simple children. He comes by the way they understand. And this time it was as if He were in a motor. She heard the "tuck, tuck" of the car, and, thinking we had come, she went running out to meet us, but saw no one in the car save Him only. This time His word was brief. "There are five chains. They are tangled. I will take them to the blacksmith and get them disentangled." And the car moved on.

It was enough, for she had understood the word. The five tangled chains were her five hundred rupees of debt. She could not disentangle those heavy coils and lay them down in five straight rows on the ground. She could not even lift them up, they were so heavy. But this strong Comforter of the forlorn, He who had cheered her in her cell and caused her to sing Raj's song, "Lover of souls, Lover of souls, what should I do without Thee?" so that the police guard about her wondered and said, "Divine for us, tell us our fortunes," He had this affair in hand, He would somehow straighten out the chains. She would be able to pay her debt, it would not drag her down.

With fresh heart and faith and joy and grit she went to her fields and worked, and immediately things began to happen. A neighbour called her and said, "Do not fret about that heavy debt, I will send my son to help thee in the field." She needed more bulls to get the watering done (a large well at which two pair of bulls could work had been sunk in her land), and another neighbour said, "I can let thee have a pair of good bulls, I will only ask fifty-five rupees. Take them, do not hasten about the payment. And I want no interest on the loan." A pariah—one of the despised of the land, but God's gentleman—heard of these bulls and

came to her house. "I will give thee a cart of fodder. No, I charge thee nothing," And he sent it free of expense to her house. Her married daughter's uncle heard of the matter, and sent another bandy-load free —an amazing gift, she felt it. She planted a thousand young plantains. The price of those thousand young shoots was two rupees, and the cartage, she knew, was two more, but when the carter arrived with his load, not one anna would he take. "No," he said, "I want no hire." (Was it not that He who said, "My coming shall be without observation and My giving shall be without observation," came in the coming of each of them and gave in the giving of each? But who saw Him come and give? "'Without observation,' He said it to me and it was so.") It cost her twenty-five rupees to plant the thousand plants out. If even only half yielded each a full cluster ("and will not He who came to me twice and said, 'Without observation I shall come, without observation I shall give,' see to that?"), then the gain would be one hundred and fifty rupees. Of this, one hundred and eight or one hundred and eleven rupees, according to the price of grain, must go to the interest, leaving thirty-nine or perhaps forty-two towards the debt. It would all be paid off in the end. "But perhaps many more than half will fruit," she added hopefully.

This story, the story of this chapter, was told, as it were, by accident. Linnet had not meant to tell it. Some nice feeling within her had restrained her. She had never once touched on the matter of her debt when we were together. But we had heard of it from others and told of it, and someone at home had sent a few pounds to help her to clear it, and after some hesitation, lest we should spoil this rare flower of a fine independ-

ence, we had told her of this gift, and had put it in her hands.

And she had not looked so much surprised as awed and very glad. She had held it in her two hands outstretched for a minute in silence, and then she had said aloud, " It is just what You promised, my Lord Yēsu. ' My coming shall be without observation and My giving shall be without observation,' did You not say so to me in the little room that night? " And my question about what she meant, for the phrase, which is not easy to translate, was unusual, drew from her the tale I have written here. Is the screen of words thin enough, I wonder, to let the shining of a great love pass through it like fire through gossamer?

CHAPTER X

HOW JASMINE AND LINNET MET

THEY met at the Village of the Reeds. Like many another, English and Indian, Linnet went to that village to see the house which had sheltered and then betrayed Raj. "And not long was he who did that thing left to cumber the earth; did not God scoop him up out of it?" she remarked with conviction as she told of that morning's sight-seeing. The tree where Raj died draws many still, and the bank where he flung away his gun; and there is often prayer under that tree. Back from it came Linnet now, and found herself, to her amazement, welcomed, embraced, made much of by one whom in her simple heart she would have put high among the immortals.

"To think that *she* should embrace me!" It was her first experience of what the Lord Jesus can do even in this land of caste when people care for Him enough to obey Him. That warm embrace over, Jasmine drew Linnet into her kitchen behind a flowery hedge. "Little sister," she began, and Linnet gasped. "Little sister," as if she were Jasmine's own born sister! "I am so glad thou knowest our Lord Yēsu. He is indeed a good Lord to love. 'Lover of souls, what should I do without Thee?'" and Jasmine began to sing Raj's song, so that Linnet, who always wants to join in what is going on, could chant it too. "Now listen, let me teach thee words from our Lord's book," and Linnet

THE PORCH OF THE TEMPLE
OF THE EXPIATION OF SIN

settled down to learn, charmed to be taught by Jasmine; and, knowing well what might be lying before, Jasmine read brave words to her and explained them, so that a week later Linnet rendered them thus: "Even though the pomegranate bushes do not blossom, and the lime trees shall bear no fruit, and the work that I have spent on my thousand plantains fail, and the fields shall yield no rice" ("I have planted a little rice in two of my fields," she interpolated with enthusiasm, for to plant rice in dry land turned into wet by careful irrigation is not a small matter), "and though all my vegetables wither, and though my four bulls should die —I want them for the watering of the fields—and though my one cow and its one child should die, yet I will be very glad in the Lord Yēsu, and I will be much delighted in the God of my salvation."

She was not satisfied, however, without mastering the book words: the fig tree she knew well, and enlarged accordingly—"Though the little leaves of the little flower that comes before the fruit be blown off by the wind or dried up by the sun," and a flutter of the hand showed this perishing of the petals—"well, even so, He will be left to me, so I will continue to be glad, for Jasmine has taught me another verse. It is, 'You are not to live by bread only.'"

"What is bread, Linnet?" we interrupted, for the word in the text suggested what is practically cake to her.

"Something made of a little round stone," was her first attempt. Evidently she had been too much interested in the idea of stones turned into cakes to absorb Jasmine's exposition. A minute later, after she understood, her face shone. "Ah, that is how the Dove came!" was her unexpected comment. "The

white Dove, it came from above and sat on the head of our Lord Yēsu, enlightening Him, so it is with the spiritual food."

"But how, Linnet?" for might she not be running off with some fantastic tale to be told to the wondering villagers as her last lesson in the new doctrine?

But Linnet was quite sure of it, and peacefully she now explained it. "As the whiteness of the shining Dove illumined Him on whose head it sat and became as a light shining within, so is the heavenly food to the spirit that receives it. Not by curry and rice is the heart made strong—that feeds the body only. The words our Lord Yēsu speaks to us, these make light the soul, for they fill it with light, and when there is no dimness, but a happy light in us, then our eyes brighten up, and we are very strong."

They met next time—Linnet and Jasmine—as it seemed by chance, in the casual street of a casual town noted for little save a complete and baffling earthly-mindedness. Go from house to house in the long street, with its common little shops and coffee and rice-cake stalls, go to the smithies where the blacksmiths are hammering noisily, go to the houses in the side streets, big and rich or small and poor, and you find everywhere that impenetrable indifference which seems to resist without effort, much as a feather cushion might turn the thrust of a sword-blade. Even in festival times the town is unlike most others of the South, in that it seems wholly bent on the things of earth. It lights huge bonfires, made in the shape of a gigantic haystack. The mighty flare is reflected in the temple tank, and the god and goddess, who in their heavy palanquins ride on the shoulders of men and gaze at the fire across the water, are illuminated by it. Just then, when, if at any

time, some sense of awe might fall on the crowd, for the enormous upspringing flames and the reflected fire in the water make an impressive picture, there is a wild rush, and every man and boy who can makes a dive for the fiery pillar, and snatches out a bit of charred stick, which, laid in his ploughed field, will ensure a rich crop.

In this town Jasmine met Linnet, and instantly the two were deep in the things that matter most. "Hast learned the Lord's Prayer?" said Jasmine.

"What Lord's Prayer?" asked Linnet; then, quickly recollecting that it could be only the Lord Yēsu's, she begged to be taught it at once.

"Our Father who livest in the heavenly world"—began Jasmine, without a glance at the passers-by, who must have thought the two quite mad, "Thy name be holy." And for the first time Linnet took in what she heard of her Father.

CHAPTER XI

THE SICK PLANTAIN TREE

"O LOVE who ever burnest and never consumest," how beautiful are Thy ways with the children of men! Why do we ever fear while Thou livest, O Love of God?

To this unlearned one was now taught a deep and stilling truth, and it was not taught by man or woman, but by the Spirit Himself.

The neighbours, seeing her struggles to pay off the heavy debt that appeared to them and felt to herself like a millstone round her neck, sympathized with her, saying, as her daughters had said to her once before, "Alas! if only Raj had never come to thy house that night, or if thou hadst refused to feast him, how much happier thou wouldst have been. Thy sons-in-law would have been with thee; then the *himsa* and the trouble and the shame of thine imprisonment would not have been, nor this great debt."

"When first this word fell on my ear it was a pricking thorn to me. If only I had not opened my door that night, how much better it would have been for us all! This thorn entering in embittered me. From my heart the sweetness passed with that word 'If only,' and a grumbling spirit came in and sat down inside of me.

"Then, as I pondered over it, I knew it would not have been better if I had not opened my door that night, no, nor ever could that be so; and I counted up

the happy things to which I opened my door—they are these :

" Firstly, my little daughter has been married to him of whom Raj told me, and he is a Deckun of the Vētham. The honour ! Think of it ! A Deekun of the Vētham ! Secondly, to him and to my child has been given a little child born in the Vētham, called Carunia. Thirdly, to my two sons-in-law in the jail the Lord Yēsu has come, and when they have forgotten these years of desolation, will they not thank our Lord Yēsu for that? Fourthly, to me, even to me "—but here the measured words stopped, and with folded hands and the eager, delighted eyes of a grateful child, Linnet looked up quickly. " O my Lord Yēsu," she said, as seeing Him who is invisible, " do I not say to them, ' You know nothing, O my friends, you know nothing. All was for good ' ? Should I ever have had You but for that night when I opened the door to Raj, and he came in and sat down near the door and took my little one on his knees and taught her his song? It was You who came in at the door, though I did not see You then. No, I am not sorry. I am glad that I opened the door. Do I not tell them so? Do I not laugh when they croak ' If only,' till they laugh too, seeing my happiness? "

And so one who could not read or write or understand the high things of God was taught of Him. It was so that she was always taught. He who ever burns and never consumes met her in many a common bush ; one day it was a plantain.

A plantain (the fruit is called banana at home) is a plant with a succulent stem and large, broad, smooth leaves. It bears one bunch of plantains and then dies, but little plants spring up round it, and these, carefully

cut and planted, carry on the order. It is not a tree, though usually called a plantain tree, for it would be absurd to call it a bush. The fruit often ripens slowly, and when this is the case a stalk is cut from a tree, pointed and thrust up the long, curved flower-stalk. Then the sap rises and the fruit sweetens. If our Lord Jesus had lived in South India and walked through the plantain-fields, even as He walked through the corn-fields of Palestine, would He not have made one of His immortal stories out of that sweetness born of a sharp piercing? But He *is* in South India, and He does walk her fields, and He meets His Linnets there.

One morning, not knowing she was going to meet Him, she went to her field to water her trees, and found one poor tree withered-looking and sad, "Yes, sad, like a sick child;" and, as she told it, she drooped; one could see the sick tree. "Like that, so was my tree. Its leaves hung down as though they were too tired to wave in the wind. No *puchie* (insect) could I find, no evil *puchie* at all, and yet my poor tree drooped."

What was to be done? Her neighbours had no doubt about the only thing that could be done. She must offer eggs or fruit or a cocoanut or a chicken at once at the nearest daemon shrine. If that failed, then more costly offerings must be made to the greater gods. Nothing else could help her now.

Linnet knew that many a harassed Christian does just this, and of course all Hindus. She knew nothing of any cure for blight or disease of any sort, or any way of dealing with *puchies*. Nor would it have been much use to try to deal with them, for to clear one's own field of them is to invite the hungry hordes from the fields all round—Linnet never thought of doing anything so foolish. So, troubled and wondering what was going

to happen, for once a tree sickens hundreds more grow sick, and a whole crop may be swept off in a night, she watered her tree, and sorrowfully cut off the drooping leaves and flung them in a corner of her field. These leaves, so smooth and satiny, are sold for plates, South India's delicately fashioned plates, and it hurt her frugal soul to cut them down and toss them aside like this. Then, perplexed and anxious, she knelt beside the stricken tree and prayed.

By this time she had learnt a little more than she knew on that night of distress when the burden was too heavy for her; but the thought of God as our Heavenly Father was still new, and she felt shy of using the name, and yet drawn to do so. So she began with an apology for troubling One so great, "I beg Your pardon, God, for it is only I and this is only a tree," till, remembering that He was Father as well as God, she grew more confident: "There is the debt and the interest. If my trees die it will greatly hinder my paying it off. Oh, kindly look at my poor sick plantain tree." Then, as a new thought came to her, she continued with more assurance, "I said 'my tree,' but is it mine? My hands planted it, but my hands are Yours, and my water watered it, but my water is Yours. And is it not true that You take care of my trees? You made the sun shine on it and fed it, though how I do not know. So do You not feel responsible for it? I think it certainly must be that You do. Please therefore, O Father, You who live in the Heavenly World, take care of it now and heal it, for indeed it is very sick."

Then she saw to the watering of the nine hundred and ninety-nine healthy trees, and having committed the matter, went home.

Next morning she went to the little church in the next

village. There was no pastor stationed there, but the schoolmaster's wife talked to her occasionally. She was a friendly woman who had lately come to the village, and Linnet was not so lonely as she had been at first. The "service" taken by the schoolmaster was still something she never expected to understand. Its prayers and exhortations rolled over her head like pleasant waves. But out of the preaching she did try to get a word she could carry away, and that Sunday the teacher told an interesting story of how our Lord Yēsu went up a hill and sat down on the top, and of how ten people started to go up the hill to see Him, but five got tired and sleepy and went to sleep halfway up, and only five went to the top and heard His sermon on the hill. In such wise does our poor puzzled mind mix things, at first. But Linnet sucks honey from every flower, and she returned home distinctly happier, feeling that at least she had worshipped and given her little offering (for she regularly kept apart from all other moneys a few coppers from every sale in the market, and these precious coppers she offered Sunday by Sunday), and also she had "received good advice," for had not she a hill to climb, and must she not beware of falling asleep halfway up?

"Poor thing!" said the neighbours as they saw another day pass and Linnet still doing nothing, so far as they could see, for the protection of her field. "Poor thing! Such trouble! As if she had not enough already!" Their language is full of descriptive sentences about people caught in trouble: like a little green frog among a thousand snakes, like the quivering water on a lotus leaf, like a fly in a drop of honey, like an ant on a stick which is on fire at either end, like a boat that cannot find the harbour, this was Linnet as

they saw her. Poor unfortunate one, caught in police troubles, prison troubles, and now field troubles—why would she not offer a chicken? Who could tell what further woe might not fall upon her if she persisted in refusing? But to all this Linnet, who did not know nearly enough to argue, could only state a simple fact as she saw it.

"I worship the living God. He is my Father, and He lives in the heavenly world. I have often offered chickens to the god whom you worship. Did he ever eat them? No, never. Dead gods don't eat chickens, and as mine were never eaten I conclude that he is dead. What can a dead god do for my dying plantain tree?"

Next day she finished her house-work early and went to her tree. New leaves were uncurling. They were healthy. The disease had not spread. No other tree was sick.

Many came to see this wonder. The sunlight fell on some twenty thousand waving banners, a gallant show, green with the fair green of the young plantain. Some trees were beginning to fruit, and their long, curved stems were tipped with the purple and crimson of the large spathes. Not a leaf drooped. No one could explain this; for once disease enters a plantain-field it is almost sure to spread. Linnet told them what she had done. They accepted it without demur as the doing of her God. "Call the fruit of that tree after His name," they advised her. And with a kind of joyful awe she concluded, "There are to-day forty-two fruits in that cluster. The disease lessened their number; without it there would have been seventy or more. But think, forty-two from a tree smitten by the disease! Who could do such a thing but the God of

all gods who is our Father? If there be another who could, I should like to know who he is—I know of no such one."

"Linnet," we asked, "after you had prayed, between that Saturday morning and Monday morning, were you anxious about your trees?"

She looked up surprised. "Anxious? But why? I was very anxious before I prayed, not afterwards. I had asked our Father to look after the matter. I had also said to my Lord Yēsu, 'Is it not Your affair too?'" And she continued earnestly, "See how good He, who came that night to my house, and came again in the car by the cross roads, has been to me. Look what strength He has given me to labour"—she held out her hands, hard and roughened—"and have I not already paid off two hundred of the five—so two of the tangled chains are already disentangled. These two hundred have been chiefly paid off by means of pepper, chilli and onions planted before the troubles began. I sold them. Our Lord Yēsu inclined the buyers to give good prices. Fifty rupees I got for my onions alone. Such is the mercy of my Father and of my Lord Yēsu who came to me at the station at Shermadevi."

CHAPTER XII

YOBU? WHO IS THAT GENTLEMAN?

WHEN Linnet can, she comes to us for teaching, and she always arrives without notice, sailing in upon our day with a smile, sure of her welcome. It would be a hard heart that did not welcome her, but sometimes it is not very easy to fit her immediately into an hour already full. At such times she vanishes into the kitchen and lends a hand wherever the need presses. But one day she had a rare and awful joy. She sat on a stool in the verandah and Jasmine sat on another stool, and between them on the table was a small magic thing—a telephone.

"Can it talk Tamil? Can it talk in the dark?" were her first questions, after gasps of astonishment when Jasmine said, "It talks." Jasmine assured her that it could. "Nor does wind make any difference, nor does rain. As for distance, the magic thing takes no notice of distance. The Wonder-working Annachie (their name for the English member of the Fellowship to whom the internals of the "bandy that says tuck-tuck" are an open secret) has caused the talk to run along the wires, see"—and Jasmine pointed to the wires running across the compound to a room where one of the girls sat ready to astonish Linnet by fresh marvels. "Listen!" And Linnet listened, breathlessly, and heard Tamil talk through the magic thing, and a song that could be heard all over the verandah.

" It can talk English, and it can talk Tamil, and it can sing ! " was her summing up. " Very amazing are the deeds of the Lord and the Wonder-working Annachie."

Sometimes she has occasion to go to the dispensary and surgery, planned for our own family, now large enough to require it, but used also by the people of the villages. (Our latest castle in the air is a hospital for all the countryside.) She comes back from these visits full of conversation and description.

" I have been with our Lord Yēsu's loving ones in the medicine room," was the way she began one day. " I saw four of them, the doctor Sittie (Sittie means mother's younger sister) and the doctor Annachie (the word is rich. Any woman in peril or trouble may call even a stranger Annachie, and by that word claim his brotherly protection), the sick-people-tending Sittie and the medicine-mixing-and-bestowing *accal* (which means sister). And very much do they all love our Lord Yēsu."

" How do you know ? "

" Oh, well, I know. I watched them all. And *she* has a face full of smiles " (little jewel is the Tamil word for smile). " Not even in tiredness do her smiles depart. And with both hands does she help everybody. And *he* —he is of a great gentleness, and of a countenance of unceasing loving-kindness and hands of skill. And *she*—ah, the serenity of her disposition ! And *she*—her deeds and her laughter, who can describe them ? And could people go on being like that, entirely in happiness and love and gentleness and peacefulness and fun in the midst of all that *pudda pudda* of things, one on the top of the other, if they did not love Him

THE WIDOW OF THE JEWELS:
BAFFLED, ENLIGHTENED

very much? It does not appear to me that they could." Nor did it to me.

"And in those rooms were many and strange things whose names I do not know, and bottles—oh, how many bottles!—full of varieties of liquids of which some had desirable smells and some most undesirable." Here Linnet's face in two quick contortions expressed pleasure and disgust, and, after bursting full spate into a recently acquired Scripture to which she had attached one of her weird little tunes, she proceeded to describe her lesson—"a time of feeding—very thoughtful is the Lord. He knew that I should be coming here this week to learn, and He knew that no one would have much time to teach me, so He kindly arranged that Heart's-Joy Sittie should require the doctor Annachie's help for her foot, and she who otherwise would have been going from village to village in a bandy is now in a chair with a foot so large" (extended hands showed how large it was) "ready to teach me, and with much gladness she does so, such is the sweetness of her heart and the kindness of the Lord Yēsu."

As Linnet had left this sweet-hearted Sittie she had been snapped by the doctor Annachie, who by some delightful chance caught her in two familiar phases of feeling. The first shows her as she can be for a moment when she feels her limitations very keenly and is all baffled and perplexed. She did so very much want to be able to read what was in that little red note-book (the verses she had just been learning were written in it), but the letters that could say so much to others were dumb to her. For one short moment at such times her face is like a lamp with the light blown out. But toss the least crumb into her lap, read the merest line of that

precious writing, and the laugh sparkles out and ripples all over her and the lamp is alight again. God's merry men—it was a fine word in olden days. Why not God's merry women? Linnet at least has no use for the melancholy.

So now she came back to the bungalow, beaming like a summer's day. She had passed through the kitchen on her way, and had stayed to help the overwhelmed people there who had seven hundred meals a day to cook apart from the birthday feast which was being prepared. "Therefore the kind Father who lives in heaven sent me to help them. Hundreds of rice cakes have we made; heaps and heaps of oil cakes, all spiced with suitable tastes. Very lavishly He gives. Never did I see so many heaped-up cakes except in the bazaars." She was all animation as she described the feast; not a thought of her own meagre little ménage shadowed her sympathetic joy. "Now a Good Word, please," she concluded suddenly and expectantly. "I have learned only three to-day, and two of them I had half learned before."

"All things work together," we began slowly.

"Ah, that means if thy heart is with My heart, then nothing that happens can do thee any harm; only good will it do to thee. It will turn from bad to good," was her quick response.

"Well, but last week a poor man who has lately come to our Lord Yēsu refused to pay the temple tax—doubtless thou hast heard about it. It was he who came to the dispensary with a hurt hand and it was healed. He refused to pay the tax, and that night his two cows died. What of that, Linnet?"

She reflected for a moment.

"That was a bad thing surely, but up in heaven God must have said, 'I will show you all how a poor man who has had his two cows poisoned will remain true and trust Me.' And will that not be a good thing?"

Linnet had not heard of Job as yet, and this was a swift flight.

"But what if the poor man does not hear God saying that?"

"If his heart is with God's heart, God will tell him."

"And afterwards?"

"God will somehow help him; I do not yet know how. Only I know that it will be so. I think He will give him double. Have I not known Him for four whole years, and is it not what He has always done?"

This was too like Job to pass. She *must* have heard of him.

"Just as He did to Yobu," I began.

"Yobu? Who is that gentleman?" she asked eagerly, keen for a new story. So it was not Job but the God of Job who had taught her.

It is constantly like that. And we are pulled up, as it were, by a touch on the reins of the spirit, and caused to understand that the Unseen Teacher is no myth, and His work is no myth, and we can count on Him to do His own work. His is that gentle voice they hear—these dear, unlearned people—out in the open fields, in the busy kitchen and the crowded market. And He speaks of heavenly things in a way that they can understand. We can safely commit those whom we long to help so much and yet can help so little to Him who teaches with such carefulness. He will not overlook them; He will not hurry them. As they can

bear it He will open treasures to them. And what He teaches they will never forget.

How it eases life of fuss and worry and fretting care to know that it is so, for if it were not so, He would have told us.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LITTLE BOOK BY MARKU

THIS is no cloister story. Linnet's story, like Mimosa's, is too ordinary for that. But always it looks to the shut door: there is quietness in the heart of it, and the sense of the secret cell:

> A cell where Jesus is the door,
> His love the only key,
> Who enter will go out no more,
> But there with Jesus be.

And yet without going out there is a going forth.

A week or two before Linnet's baptism we picked her up on the road on our way to a remote little village where some men who were turning towards the light had asked us to come and see them. Such opportunities were always used for giving Linnet some new Scripture or story, and so we began that day, as the Ford raced along a fairly good road, to teach her the twenty-third psalm.

It enchanted her. "I shall not want" meant her debt would be paid, she would be enabled to go on working; and she stretched out a brawny arm and patted the muscles. "It will stay like that, and not get weak," she remarked in a pleased tone. "Still waters? One day last week I was exceedingly tired, and I lay down under a tree near a stream, and I went to sleep and dreamed that the gentleman who

reigns over the jail had opened the doors to my sons-in-law and said, 'In a few days you shall go out.'" And forthwith she burst into one of her mixed-up little songs: "My sheep-keeper is the Lord, and He will go on making me strong so that I shall not lack anything, being able to pay my debt to Little Eyes and Form of Beauty. And when I am tired He will put me to sleep under a shady tree beside a quiet stream. Oh, it means that my heart will rest, does it? Very well, then, my heart will not be uncomfortable whatever happens, for my Lord Yēsu is my Burden-bearer, and my coolie load I have put upon Him. Lover of souls, Lover of souls, what should I do without Thee? And You know, Lord Yēsu, my little grandchild can sing it all through very nicely, and——" But before we had got to the end of that tale we were in the village.

There was the usual crowd and excitement and scuttling about of everybody as the Ford hustled in among the promiscuous huts and houses. Like a brood of chickens, the children scattered all over the place; like agitated hens, their mothers recalled them, and a tall, dignified man came forward and welcomed us to his house.

Presently the hens and chickens were packed into a courtyard, with Linnet and two of our Dohnavur girls to look after them, and the men came with us to a small, darkish room between that inner courtyard and an outer one. Then they pulled some mats out of a dark corner, tapped the loose rolls smartly on the ground to shake out the dust and stray inhabitants, spread them in two rows, and after being convinced that we preferred a mat on the ground to the lonely dignity of a perch on a cane cot, allowed us to sit down

facing them in what at first was a grey whirlwind of dust.

Each man had in front of him a large white bundle. This, slowly unknotted, disclosed a Bible covered with brown paper, a hymn-book, and sundry tracts, all carefully kept in a square cotton handkerchief. The Bibles were in deplorably small print (the better type makes a large and to them expensive volume), and the numbers in the margins were difficult to trace, but each helped the other, and they peered into the powder print, as they called it, and followed with all their hearts and minds everything we said.

After a while, feeling with joy the living touch of the divine upon them, we asked them how they had first come to care for these things, and the headman, he who had welcomed us, answered as one surprised.

"Do you not remember? Have you forgotten the little book by Marku?"

"By the court-house," amplified one of the others, "the court-house in Nagercoil" (a town in South Travancore to which we had often gone when our friends, Raj's friends, were in trouble), "at the trial for dacoity at the Village of the Peacock." And in a flash it came back—we saw that face (it had seemed familiar when we came into the house, but the clue had eluded us), one of scores of faces pressing round the Ford, heard the hoarse shouts, "We want books! books!", saw the thrusting forth of many hands. And the day flashed past us too, minute by minute, like the flashing past of pictures. We had gone to the court to cheer the prisoners, one of whom was Linnet's son-in-law. The confinement and anxiety and grief had told hardly on them, and they had pined and sickened, and in their distress had begged us to come to

court when they were tried. So when the day came we had gone, and we were with them as they stood in the dock, and for a wonderful half-hour the whole court full of people had hushed, and let us tell them of the mighty love of God, The court pleaders, fussy and bustling, in black alpaca and white turbans, police, the prisoners' guards, and the crowd that always gathers when anything interesting is going on—all were quiet then, and they listened, to our wonder and thanksgiving, till the magistrate came in, and the usher shouted the witnesses' names, and the grimy business began.

And after it was over we had gone out to the road, and the prisoners had been led off, with many a backward look at us, and we had packed ourselves into the Ford, with Linnet added to our number, for we had found her standing all alone in the road, her bright face for that moment just a little overcast, but she had quickly cheered up, and a crowd had gathered round us, and we had given away many Gospels, wondering even as we gave them what would happen to them all.

And now the headman was speaking again, and we came back to the darkening room that was lighted by a light better than the light of lanterns. "When you put that book in my hand," he said, "Linnet sang out, 'O brothers, listen! Of a disheartened mind I am not. No, for my God is not as your god. Your god has eyes but he does not see, and ears but he does not hear, and a mouth but he does not speak. My God sees me and hears me and speaks to me. Read the books and believe Him. He alone is the true God.'"

As the headman spoke, his voice took on the tones of Linnet's. The words had bitten deep into his

IN THE COURTHOUSE.
THE MAGISTRATE IS
TAKING DOWN THE
DEPOSITION OF THE
WITNESS. NEAR WHOM
STANDS THE POLICE OFFICER
FOR THE PROSECUTION

soul, for he knew what lay behind them, knew the toilsome search for witnesses to help to prove an alibi, knew of the expenses paid when at last they were persuaded to come, knew of the careful shepherding of them to the court, knew how, when the court usher had shouted their names, they had slipped off, afraid, they said, of offending the Sirkar. Well did he know the disappointment of that hour, as Linnet stood alone outside the court-house, and if she had been of a disheartened mind he would have thought it natural. But now her face was full of peace, she was almost singing. It was this that gripped the headman, and moved him to read the book that could minister to such clear brightness.

There is a marginal reading in the Revised Version of Psalm xl, 23, which explains what happened then. "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me and prepareth a way that I may show him the salvation of God." On that prepared way God came that day. Linnet's son was acquitted, and returned to British India to serve his sentence there. The thought of all this, and of the intricate processes which lay behind that acquittal, blew through the dim room like a wind, as the headman continued his tale.

"So I read the little book by Marku; four times did I read it. And just then, when my mind was turning the matter over with desire to know more of it, to the place called Three Pavilions did one come who knew the Lord Jesus Himself. To him I went. He taught me how to find Him, and he taught those who are here with me." So a double salvation had been wrought that day that had seemed to us, as we drove back, a day of entire defeat.

It was a quiet story, quiet as the room where it was

told. From one side of that room arose a tumult of voices. The women and children were getting tired of this meeting, and wanted fresh diversion. From the other side came animal noises, poultry and so on, vociferous. But between the two clamours we sat and worshipped Him who sitteth on the throne. He is in charge of the world. Nothing can shake that truth. He must reign, He shall reign—yea, He reigns even now, in spite of all that can happen and does happen. This is true. It is not mere pious talk. It is rock true, or life is a delusion—dust and ashes and nothingness.

We returned from that village knowing that we had been walking over roads where our Lord had walked before we had even heard of the place. What if suddenly, on the soft carpets in great houses, on the well-swept city streets, on the highways and the by-ways of smaller towns and scattered little villages, on the decks of great ships, on the very waters about them and in the room where we work to-day, these unseen Footprints should appear, how would it be? But our seeing them would make them no more there than they are now.

CHAPTER XIV

DO WE ASK ENOUGH OF OURSELVES?

LINNET'S baptism was a beautiful event. Mountains, water, air, flowed with a swift rush of colour; it was as though Linnet belonged to them, was a new sister in their great family. "The head is crowned with a garland and the whole man is conscious of being glorified, the mouth pronounceth an oration and at once the eyes laugh and show their gladness." It was like that. And we who stood on the banks of the water were glad with all creation, visible and invisible, and with Linnet and her Lord. And Linnet, forgetting everyone and quite forgetting herself, began to sing one of her dear little songs as she came up from the water. God's Song is her new name.

Often it seems as though Religion had dressed herself in drab. "It's such a dull thing to be a Christian, and if it is not dull then it is painful," as somebody said when invited to join the company of those who follow our glorious Lord. But surely that is unfair. It is true that our Lord and Redeemer calls us to a crucified life; but He calls to a great joy too, and it comes by way of the Cross. And there is something beyond that; there is a peace that cannot be understood till it is tasted, and it comes when all questions about life, its discipline and its guidance cease, and we cannot be offended in Him who is the joy and rejoicing of our hearts.

Linnet's last words, as after her baptism she left us for her village and her fields, summed up her simple theology thus: "I thought all was going wrong, but all was going right. Should I ever have had this if I had not had that? The god of the temple among the palms, the goddess of the temple by the sea, this god, that goddess, or any of the many of whom I have heard —what are they to me now? What are they all to me now that I have this dearest Lord Yēsu? I have forgotten them all." But then, it was not an organization or an institution (clumsy words for stodgy things) that had won Linnet's allegiance, but the Lord, our Redeemer, the Saviour of the world. "And He is coming back again," she said one day, having only just heard this very good news, "what an eye-cooling sight that will be!"

Immediately after her baptism Linnet returned home and took up her daily toil with confidence and happiness, but she had hardly got midway into it, when her youngest married daughter became very ill. ("It was she for whom Raj arranged a marriage, and her firstborn is named Carunia, and great blessing is upon that family," Linnet always explains when she mentions her.)

"And she lay ill and as it seemed close upon departing, and people said, 'Hasten to offer a sacrifice at the shrine of thine old god,' and I said, 'Never! Would I forsake Him who has never forsaken me from the hour when He came to me at the station?'"

Here Linnet paused for breath, and holding her hands so as to represent the two sides of a rocky defile, she added, "Like a gully among the mountains, so has my way been sometimes; but always He was

there, and the way did not close before me nor did the rocks crush me; there was always room to go."

Then she told of a six days' watch, of the birth of an almost dead baby, of the death that very day of one of the bulls from rinderpest. "Worms, worms, worms in its mouth and its feet"—Linnet screwed up her face and wriggled in a wormish way at the memory of it. "No time had I to look after my poor bulls and all four got it and two died, the first on the day that the baby was born, but the son of Spiritual Shining, he took care of them and tended them, pouring in oil and removing the worms. Of the four two died. The others recovered."

There was a pause, Linnet was evidently pondering some pleasant thing, which was puzzling, as her bulls were her livelihood, and the death of these two meant serious loss to her, postponing the payment of her debt so much the further.

"Next to our house is the house of a rich man, and his bulls were worth much more than mine. One alone was worth one hundred and fifty rupees. My two were only worth fifty. Consider what it would have been had my loss been as his, even one hundred and fifty rupees! How good was the Lord to me to let my loss be only fifty!"

The work could not go on without two pair of bulls to draw water, so Linnet had to hire a pair, paying one rupee a day for the hire; a kind neighbour was troubled for her sake and lent her his bulls free of charge for a few days. "But I knew that he had need of them. Could I use them when he needed them? Could I go on using them free of hire?" She shook

her head vigorously. "No, I could not, I did not think it would have been becoming in one who belonged to the God of gods to do so mean a thing."

"It has been a hard time for you, Linnet," we said, thinking of the struggle life is at the best of times; but she would have none of it. "Hard? In one way, yes—there are five spade marks on my hand; but what does it matter? Should I fret? Is there any cause for fretting? I see no cause at all. Not once, since He met me at the station, has He forgotten me, and He says He is not going to forget me, and the matter of the bulls is very well known to Him and so are all my affairs. The neighbours said, 'Why are you not fretting?' And I said, 'Why should I? I know no reason at all. It might have been my child who died, or her baby. How much less precious is a bull than a baby. Why then should I fret?'"

Just at this point a note came from a perplexed young Accal, "These two children (the two who brought the note) are continually losing their needles, I do not know what to do with them. I have given them the punishment of going without curry, and *still* they lose their needles. What am I to do now?" The two small culprits stood solemnly waiting for judgment. Linnet beamed on them, "Ah, poor children," she began with sympathy, "could you not know that a needle stuck in and out of one's sari is safe? Or have you not even one little piece of rag into which to stick a needle? Oh, you have a book of flannel for the preservation of needles?"—this to a rueful admission from the children. "And *yet* you lose them?" Her kind eyes regarded them seriously now. "It appears to me that if you lose them in circumstances so convenient as these, you must

imagine that the sky rains down needles "—there was a quick movement of all ten fingers and we saw that rain of needles. "But no, each one has to be bought and paid for. Alas that you should so little regard such exceedingly valuable things." As the children, much impressed, departed, Linnet, thus far unwontedly sober, broke into amused laughter. "Poor little green things!" she said.

Linnet's story, like Mimosa's, has helped us to hope. "Despairing of no man" is a good word for people who have to be disappointed at times. Linnet was not of the kind to cause despair; she responded in a wonderfully quick affectionate way to the good news we gave her. But just as we were given Mimosa's story during a time of conflict for a soul, so we were given Linnet's during a time of dearth. It is so easy at such times to sink to the ordinary, to expect too little of these who are named by His Name, to postpone to a third generation of Christians the hope of anything like a glowing adoration of our Lord, and keen purpose to win others, and to settle down to something much less vital.

We are all wrong when we do that, and Linnet's story says so. If we take courage to expect, we shall have crushing disappointments sometimes, but often we shall find. And we shall tap deep wells. We shall discover a power and abandon of love to our blessed Lord Jesus that overflows our poverty of faith. Not the emotion of a moment, but the passion of a lifetime, this is what the Lord our God can effect, if only we rise to His thought. We ask far too little of men and women redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and the smoky, smouldering life of many who might have been flames for Him, and the frigid and

measured quality of the service that they offer, is our sorrowful, just reward.

But do we ask enough of ourselves?

Lord, when I'm weary with toiling,
And burdensome seem Thy commands,
If my load should lead to complaining,
Lord, show me Thy hands—
Thy nail-printed hands. Thy cross-torn hands—
My Saviour, show me Thy hands.

Christ, if ever my footsteps should falter,
And I be prepared for retreat.
If desert and thorn cause lamenting,
Lord, show me Thy feet—
Thy bleeding feet, Thy nail-scarred feet—
Lord Jesus, show me Thy feet.

O God, dare I show Thee
My hands and my feet?

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.