



by
Una
Marson

*Towards
the Stars*

Helen Jacobs.

TOWARDS THE STARS

Poems by
UNA MARSON
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With a foreword by
L. A. G. STRONG

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Una Marson is not always gay and childlike in her verse

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

and

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

and

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

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

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

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

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

L. A. G. STRONG

The Stone Breakers *

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

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

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

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

* Written in Jamaican dialect.

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

*My Philosophy **

(As expounded by a Market Woman)

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

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

Second market woman following quickly at her heels :)

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

Sleep

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

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

* Written in Jamaican dialect.

At the Prison Gates

Jamaica, 1937

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

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

And I looked,
And behold I saw numerous men,

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

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

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

Mother

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

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

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