

How It All Began
printed from the book

Things I Have Seen



*“Oh, mighty mystery --
This gift of prayer --
That I should speak,
And God should hear.”*

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These Things I Have Seen

How It All Began

*“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.”*

I am looking back over the years and marveling at the wondrous wonders I have seen. The verse of the hymn I have just written expresses exactly what I want to say.

The very beginning of things so small and insignificant I had almost forgotten, when one day as I prayed God brought it to my remembrance.

I go out into the campground and look around. Life, life, abundant life is there, women and children here, there, and everywhere. I look again; there are many houses and every one is full to overflowing.

I remember when there were no children, no converts, no house, no land, nothing but a hired bungalow and three mud huts, and we were facing the situation of how we could fulfill our commission to reach the Gospel to every creature.

The city is a city of villages. It was once a forest, held sacred with its big Hindu Temple, where the holy men gathered on the border of Nepal.

Men came and went and then began to settle. They built their grass and mud huts one by one close together in groups under trees and began their villages. Others came and joined them, and built on, and the building continued in the same old style until all the villages merged into one and became a city, and that is how Gorakhpur came into being. It is often spoken of as the place of the Ghurka, the city on the Border.



We see the blue hills of Nepal and the highest mountains in the world standing behind the blue. Sometimes it seems as if half of the mountains are lost in the misty distance, while the great snow peaks pierce the sky. They show themselves best after a storm, when the atmosphere is cleared and we stand and gaze at the Great Himalayas, God's own handiwork whose heights no man has touched; and from them we turn to the city with all its sordidness and desperate need, and we think of the thousands who live in houses with closed doors, women who never go out for a walk or a drive or anything else; and we begin to wonder how we can give the message we are sent with? How to tell these women the Good

News of Salvation for them?

Surely we are attempting the impossible, we think, but are we?

Is the One Who sent us not the God of the Impossible? Truly does He “move in a mysterious way is wonders to perform,” and the way He began is like the story of the source of the great river Ganges.

It is so small, it was scarcely noticeable; for it was all over those three mud huts that always came down in the rains and made a heap of ruins, looking more like a mud heap than anything else by the end of the monsoon.

True they were inhabited while they stood, but there was the difficulty of illness and weakness, and who could say that we cared, while we only provided such accommodation for three of our Indian fellow-workers?

Something had to be done. What?

There was no liberty to build, and no money to do it, and yet, if we were to fulfill our commission, we must have teachers, and if we got the teachers we must have a house or houses for them to live in.

One thing blocked the other and there seemed no way out, but the God who sent us meant His message to reach the people, and He began to work.

What could I do? I asked, as I walked across the compound, looking at the expanse, and then at the tumble-down mud enclosure.

“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” I prayed. I sat under a tree near the well, thinking thoughts of what I had left behind and what I had come to do. I knew that God had sent me, therefore He was responsible, and I was keen to know Him and prove Him and see what He would do.

It was the month of my birthday, and the date was drawing near, and somehow or other a determination was born within me to make a beginning. I did not know what to do, so I prayed and asked for thoughts to be put within me, and I went into my room.

I will make a start, I said to myself. I will open an account on my birthday, and then I thought of one who also remembered the day. She lived in a distant city, but she often visited us, and she knew our need. I knew her well enough to ask for the money instead of the present so that we might start together to get suitable buildings for the new teachers we felt the Lord would send. She was a passionate lover of the Lord who would dare anything for Him. It was through her that God called me to India.

An understanding letter arrived on the day, and out of it dropped a cheque. “This is the beginning, but not the end,” she wrote, and I held it up to Him. We are working together with Him, I said to myself. She visited and taught the women in the Zenanas of the city where she dwelt. She had seen how the entrance of God’s Word gives light and life, and she wanted Gorakhpur to receive, so she shared what she had, and on my

birthday I went to the bank and opened an account. The rich may laugh at our dowry, but no one can give more than all they have, and that was what we had done, and the whole amount was exactly ninety rupees.

I knelt by my bed with the account book open and solemnly offered it to God. I felt breathless with awe. I knew He was giving us a start, and it is a very holy memory that grips me now. "Give and it shall be given you. Good measure, pressed down and running over," has been literally fulfilled. Often have I knelt in wordless prayer, and He has come to me and spoken to my heart.

Long before I got to Gorakhpur, mission work had been done, but advance seemed absolutely impossible. Every device the enemy could concoct was put up against us, and we fought as if beating the air, but the Lord had said, "*Go forward*," and there was nothing else to do but to obey or lose the field.

Teachers and Bible women went their daily round of Zenana schools and villages, but the deadness was appalling and the atmosphere stifled any attempt to advance, and we seemed weighed down and warranted not to move out of our lifeless rut.

I had seen prayer change things before I arrived in India, and I believed that I should see it again, but, when we knelt to pray, a legion surrounded us on every side; it seemed as if the prince of the power of the air held the situation, concentration to pray was impossible. Mosquitoes seem extra fond of a kneeling figure; they hover near, they buzz and sing and play and nip every part of the body they can touch, and little fiery spots with a stinging pain and irritation take all the attention. Very tiny ants busy themselves and satisfy their hunger on any part of you they can get, and the longing for prayer is stifled by the agony of the mosquito-bitten body. Truly are we in the enemy's camp, and surrounded on every hand by the host encamped against us, and we rise unrefreshed, heavily burdened, mystified by the block to prayer, longing to get out -- get somewhere where we can pray. We still believe, for we know it is true that prayer changes things. We gird the loins of our minds. What can we do? we ask. Being present in the body is the most felt experience at the moment. Sometimes it is thus that the spirit is stifled, but God has a way of sending a hunger and thirst that nothing can stifle or put off, and we believe that He gave that to us.

We could not have prayed through the difficulties or pressed forward into a new way had He not put it all into us. "If ye ask, I will do," were His words, and so, in spite of blocks and hindrances of which there are legions, we gave ourselves to prayer and things began to move. We were not long before we had to face a vital issue. Prayer had gripped us, and we had to face its value. What place were we going to give it in our lives? Was it to be the morning and evening devotion and prayer about our work? Were we making plans and then asking God to bless them? How should we arrange? We were arrested. We knew God was speaking

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Excerpts from the book, *These Things I Have Seen*

to us and telling us of a more excellent way of prayer. Our longings compelled us to our knees to pray about the things we do, but there was the urge for something more in the school of prayer. What place were we prepared to give this power in our lives? Was it to be the fundamental or the supplemental part of our work?

The usual work of teaching and preaching had to be done. What place were we prepared to put it in our lives. Work with prayer? Prayer in work? Prayer, *the* work?

The answer was not given immediately, and the work in the city and villages began to grow. At once it gripped us, then enthralled us, and we were soon embedded and lost in it, and prayer became the supplement, while we went on with our ups and downs, in our extremely busy lives, and there was not much to see for it all.

“We have toiled all night and caught nothing,” is a very hopeless report to give to God, but He knew and understood and let us go on until we could go no longer, for the soul athirst for God must stop sooner or later to drink of the life-giving streams, and while he drinks he thinks and sometimes his eyes are opened, to see a garden with a tree of life in it, and a Hand beckoning him to rest, and almost before he knows it, he is looking into far distances and seeing possibilities he never dreamt of, and he looks back with a sigh.

“We did pray about it,” I have heard people say, “but it didn’t seem to do any good. We did our best, but we have achieved nothing. We have worked hard all through the heat of the day; we are weary in the work, though not weary of it. What is wrong?”

The questions dazzle and puzzle and tantalize, but they are not answered. It takes more time to retrace a by-path than to take the upward road. Yet it had to be done before we found the stone that marked the way that God had planned for us. It takes time, and it is a waste of time to do anything less perfect than His way. We found ourselves in the slough of despond, and there we stuck. What was the good of it all? What indeed?

Week in and week out, month after month, and year after year, working in powerless energy defrauded us of the fruits of our labours. We were at our wits’ end, and it was there God met us.

The by-path was left, and we knelt at the Cross that stands at the foot of Hill Difficulty. If we are going up there we shall need to stay here, we said to each other.

Stay here to go up, sounds very contradictory, but it is not so, for as we look up we hear a voice saying, “Thither shall the spirit ascend,” and we know that a spiritual battle is our portion, and on bended knees we go up.

The Cross is the touchstone of the Faith by which we shall conquer. Yes, He sent us to achieve, but we had to go back to re-discover the way of the Cross by way of the Garden, and there we knelt to pray; there we learnt to pray, and there we found the path of prayer that changed all

our doings. There our eyes were anointed to see and our ears were opened to hear, and we found the key that opened the door to all we see now, and we pass into a sphere where prayer began to be the fundamental part of our work.

I hear again the Voice of Him that sent me. “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you.”

Oh blind and slow of heart to believe, I said to myself, for the turning point so clearly marked had been missed by me, but He took me back there to the very spot where the work took first place, and He turned the tide for all of us and we began the upward Cross-marked way that we traverse today.

He meant us to bear fruit, He meant the fruit to remain, and He gave to us the mightiest weapon to achieve results surpassing all our highest dreams. This wonderful gift of prayer, this costly mystery. This call into the Holy of holies where we draw nigh to God and He draws nigh to us -- and the door is shut, and there, alone with Him, He can talk with us and reveal to us His longing for the ones we want to pray for -- to stay in His presence until the Holy Spirit breathes into us the prayers that are the will of the Father, and we know that the thing we asked for is given:

*“Oh, mighty mystery --
This gift of prayer --
That I should speak,
And God should hear.”*

And in the secret of His Presence there comes into the soul the desire to go all lengths with Him, and He opens a little door revealing a Blood marked path with a cross on every step and a sign “For warriors only,” and up that path climb a little army of called-out men and women. They are singing. Listen;

*“There is no gain, but by a loss;
You cannot save, but by a cross.
The corn of wheat, to multiply,
Must fall into the ground and die.
Wherever you ripe fields behold,
Waving to God their sheaves of gold,
Be sure some corn of wheat has died,
Some soul has there been crucified;
Someone has wrestled, wept and prayed,
And found Hell’s legions undismayed.”*

Is it for me? The eager soul questions: Can I? May I learn such

praying? And the answer is:

“All selfish aims and selfish gains
Are cut off where Jesus reigns.”

But the quivering hand is stretched out to take the sword, and it is God that girdeth me with strength to the battle, and the warfare begins. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Ah! He knows how to lead His own. He knows how to teach you and me, and if only we will harken to Him and obey His command, He will make the impossible situation we are in into a place of unrivalled opportunity. I believe He did it for us.

We made more time for prayer and the vision widened. Houses for teachers seemed a very little thing to ask for. We were realizing to Whom we prayed, and praying increased until prayer gripped us, and we ventured further in:

“Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.”

We lived in a hired bungalow, patched up, plastered over, covered with whitewash once a year, but the monsoon always played havoc with the roof of tiles and mud. Streams poured through the ceiling of cloth, and every room had five or six little tubs scattered about to catch the water that descended upon us. Inside and out it rained, and somehow thoughts of what it would be like to have a roof that always stayed up in all weathers gripped us. It is no joke to have to take an umbrella to bed in case of a storm in the night, and though we may laugh at a distance, it isn't much fun to be awakened by drip, drip of water because the rain had melted the mud that joined the tiles and was descending upon us.

We were in a desperate situation. The landlord was a man of set opinions, and he held strongly to one, that a missionary should have no complaints. He considered it greedy and grasping to ask for repairs, and his slowness in getting to action spoke louder than words. He had his rights to which he held, and the rent must be paid on the first of every month. But we, being Christians, and missionaries at that, had no rights whatsoever in his conclusions, so it was much of a stir to get anything done. Repairs were slowly and grudgingly pursued. There was often the rains, and we waited in hope to see something well done, while he patched and plastered and covered it all up with whitewash. It was a dreary and exhausting business, but it opened our eyes to see the real need, and oh, how I longed to pray -- to pray as they did in old time, and to see great and mighty things happen. We seemed like children playing with mighty forces, but we remembered that Jesus said: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name *that* will I do,” so we asked for the money to build

new quarters for the new teachers we expected Him to send; and I went out to ask the “man of affairs” who knows and understands these things, how much the building we needed would cost. We went over the list with a pencil and paper, and then he asked the question: “How much have you?” and I answered gaily, “We have ninety rupees.” He threw back his head and laughed.

“You can’t do much with seven pounds,” he said, and I laughed with him, but with the laugh came a boldness to think desperately.

“You will need eight hundred pounds, at least,” he said gravely, and I went back to think about it. We had ninety rupees, and we needed twelve thousand. We had seven pounds and we needed eight hundred.

I knelt to pray, but there were no words, and through the silence I heard a voice saying, “How many have ye? Go and see,” and I remembered that five loaves and two fishes were quite enough and to spare for five thousand people. Five and two are seven -- our seven pounds. We had a glorious opportunity of finding out what God can do, and we got down to the business. Elijah prayed and it did not rain for three years. He prayed again and the rain descended. I looked up the record in the Bible, and then I asked the Lord to teach me to pray the prayers that prevailed. We were too busy to be anxious, and so sure of Him that joyful assurance was ours, and exactly seven months after that prayer meeting we saw the realization.

God knows whom he can trust to give. They are those who hold their riches for Him, and when He says “Give,” then obey, and I think of the rapturous joy in Heaven when the angels see money dispensed for the Kingdom of God on earth. He says: “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” but, oh, I shall never forget the unspeakable joy that overwhelmed us when we knew that one thousand pounds was given to build a bungalow and houses for teachers by one of His lovers who knows His voice and hearkens to Him.

Please note the literal fulfillment of the Word of God. He gave to us exactly what we asked, and supplied all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The powers that be said: “You will need eight hundred pounds,” but our God knew that it would take more than that, and He sent it so there would be enough and some over, that we might build to His glory. He had made the seven pounds, our five loaves and two fishes, into enough to build a beautiful bungalow, six houses for teachers, and quarters for all that we needed. To him be all the glory.

Yes! “Jesus Christ *is* the same, yesterday, and today, and forever,” and we feel we can never do enough for Him.