

MUSINGS



OF A

MORESBY MOUSE

THE MUSINGS OF A MORESBY MOUSE

*by*

HOWARDE TILSE

To My Wife

“ . . . And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” . . .

—REV. 21:4.

*R.A.A.F., Port Moresby.*

Barker 21 . 11. 44

Acknowledgment is made to the Editors of the following journals, who first published several of the verses included in this little book—

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## INTRODUCTION

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These verses are not offered as gems of poetry, for the author feels, that poetry, is far too dignified a title to bestow on such humble works.

They are offered, however, as a sincere effort on his part to interpret his moods and thoughts and reactions to the War Scene, especially in Papua, where he served with the Royal Australian Air Force, for the greater part of 1942.

Written while on active service, they may serve to prove that the finer things of life, and the folks at home, are not forgotten in the stress of war.

They are dedicated to One, in particular, and also to the hope, that out of all the turmoil, and strife of these anxious days, there will finally emerge, a truer, greater humanity, and a better world.

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## TO MY WIFE. . .

The Tropic moon is weaving  
Arabesques among the trees,  
And distant night-birds call  
With mournful cry;  
A perfumed breath of past delight  
Is borne upon the breeze. . . .  
As my thoughts fondly turn to days gone by.

There was a time, when moonlit nights  
Were filled with quiet delight,  
As, in our little garden, I with you  
Would quietly sit and listen  
To the music of the night,  
Or talk, of all the things  
We planned to do.

But here, the moon is shining  
With a light that's strangely cold,  
And crystal stars  
Are winking cynically;  
For here, I do not see it  
Through the same eyes of old,  
When moonlight lit the ways . . .  
For you and me.

## FOR FREEDOM

Hark! the call to arms is sounding!  
Hark! the tramp of marching feet!  
What then is the use of staying  
Though the breath of life be sweet?  
Dare we fail to guard our country  
'Gainst the foeman and his hate?  
Haste then, for his hordes are nearing—  
Hurry e'er it is too late!

See the flag of freedom waving—  
Would you keep it waving so?  
There's a cause, for justice crying—  
Come then . . . linger not, but go!  
Let us fight like sons of free men,  
For the brave but once can die;  
If the enemy should triumph,  
Slavery waits for you and I!

Hark! the drums of war are beating,  
See! the ranks are filling fast!  
Join now, with the band of heroes—  
Till our land is safe at last.  
Do you fear to leave your loved ones?  
Think then, what their fate would be,  
Should the hosts of evil conquer,  
And we lose our liberty!

*Cummins & Campbell Ltd., Monthly  
Townsville.*



## BARBARIC NIGHT

From the distant village  
Comes the throb of a native drum,  
And savage voices  
Chanting through the trees.  
A full moon  
Crystalises palms against the sky;  
And my thoughts . . . wandering . . .  
Among the scent of frangipanni . . .  
Down the perfumed years—  
Like dreams . . . adrift in Time.  
No breeze stirs,  
As the softly whispering tide  
Plucks at the mangrove roots  
With supple fingers;  
You are so far away my love,  
And the moon seems so near and bright;  
But the memory of your sweetness,  
And your gentle voice still lingers . . .  
The very night is soft . . . with your caress . . .  
While I am dreaming here beside the bay,  
My feet, on the sands of the tropics,  
But my heart . . . with you . . .  
A thousand miles away.

*Moresby Mice*  
1943.

## BOMBER'S MOON—MORESBY

Clouds have been spread like a woolly blanket across the hill-tops all this evening, obscuring the rising moon.

In this strange tropic land, the valleys and hills are often hidden in mist and cloud, while high above, the sky is crisply clear. On moonless nights, the stars, unseen from the valley, are seen from the hills, to sparkle like gems upon a black velvet in the jewellers cabinet.

To-night, the valley just glowed softly into light, the concealed lighting of this theatre of Nature—and, as the mists cleared, the pale white trunks of gum trees glowed ghost-like from the scrub.

Here, a small steep hill sweeps up between me and the rising moon, and along its crest small trees stand out like silhouettes upon a screen. No breeze stirs their drooping branches, while the moonlight filters through the leaves and cascades gently over rocks and grass.

From above comes the sound of soft wings, beating the air, as some mysterious night-bird passes on its way—voiceless and lonely.

Among the long grass some little creature stirs, and, suddenly, the silence is pierced by the shrill song of a cricket.

Down in the camp I can hear men's voices . . . and laughter . . . and then a faint breeze stirs the trees about the hill, sending small showers of dead leaves pattering faintly to the ground.

How peaceful it all seems . . . and yet, only a few miles away is an enemy base, where bombers wait for moonlight, to strike at our positions. To them, the moon is a giant flare, to light up the target.



Our bombers, too, make good use of these moonlit nights, and all the jungle is tense, when the moon is full!

She has been called the "Queen of the Night" by poets, and also "Lover's Moon." Our enemies too have written dainty poems in her honour, pinning them upon the pine trees of Japan. But to men at war she is known as "Bomber's Moon," as she glides among the clouds, indifferent and serene.



## DREAMS IN A TENT

When the tropic sun is sinking  
In the purple mountains high,  
And the silver stars come stealing  
In the great dome of the sky,  
Then my spirit goes awander  
And my thoughts, on wing'ed feet  
Go a seeking through the silence  
For your kindred spirit, sweet.

In the gloomy, steamy drabness  
Of my lonely little tent,  
I sit, and seem to picture you  
And how our lives were spent . . .  
E'er brazen trumpet sounded  
And grim war flung us apart,  
Uprooting vines of tenderness  
That bound us heart to heart.

It is many weary months since I  
Last looked upon your face,  
But, though we never meet again,  
Time never can deface  
The lovely picture that your love  
Has etched upon my heart . . .  
An image that has deeper burned  
Since we have been apart.

And, dearest, though the song is old  
That I would sing to you,  
It's served full many lovers past,  
So shall it serve me too;  
O' may your loving spirit  
Hear my heartfelt roundelay,  
Sung by my minstrel spirit  
To my loved one, far away.

*Moresby Mice*  
1943.

## MOONRISE . . .

The yellow moon looms low  
    Upon the purple rim of night,  
Out-staring stars. . .  
    The voiceless trees  
Upstretch their leafy arms  
    Imploringly to Him  
Who broods above the valleys  
    And the restless ocean's brim;  
While I too, utter prayers.  
    Out there—beyond the dawn—  
Beyond day . . . go my prayers,  
    Where there is one who waits,  
Sobbing her heart's fond hopes . . . her fears . . .  
    Upon the lonely pillow of the years.  
Here whispering waters kiss the waiting sand . . .  
    I, her dear ghost,  
    Yet feel the sweet compassion of her tears.

*Moresby Mice*  
1943.



## ON A CHILD . . . PRAYING

Those two brown eyes, now cast demurely down,  
And childish brow, that knows no bitter frown,  
Those two small hands clasped now in earnest prayer—  
Just like some pleading Angel, kneels she there!

“Give peace O Lord!” I hear her soft voice cry,  
“Hear Thou the prayer of children, such as I . . .  
O bless my daddy, now far oversea . . .  
And bring him safely back to mum and me!”

“The little ones of every land and clime  
Must feel as I, and pray at eventime;  
Hear them O Lord, and hear me too, I pray,  
Give peace on earth, and wipe all tears away!”

I watched in silence, then I turned away;  
My eyes grew dim, it was my turn to pray—  
“Give peace!” I prayed . . . “And make all mankind sane,  
Let men all live in harmony again!”

*Family & Teleradio,*  
Brisbane, 24th June 1943.

## THE OWEN-STANLEY TRACK

We trudge along in the rain and sludge  
And there is no turning back;  
Upward and onward, into the night,  
Of the Owen-Stanley track.

It is a march to the end of day,  
And into another dawn,  
Where there will shine a day more fine,  
A rosier, happier morn.

Then, at the end of the 'Stanley trail  
Our faith shall stand secure,  
As we gaze serene on a victory scene,  
From the high hills of Papua.

The ranges will ring with laughter then,  
And comrades true will turn back;  
With a job well done, bright will shine the sun,  
Down the Owen-Stanley track.

*Cummins & Campbell Ltd., Monthly  
Townsville, July 1943.*

## KNOWN ONLY UNTO GOD

Flower of a nation's manhood, idly strewn  
Upon the crimsoned altars of the State . .  
Theirs was a sacrifice too great for words—  
An offering to god's of Greed and Hate.

Brave laughing laddies, now asleep in peace,  
The tall grass waves above their place of rest,  
And golden sunshine breathes upon the hills,  
While Nature weaves a wreath above their breast.

When Time has worn the battle-scars away,  
These quiet hills will scarcely even show  
Where war has been—except for these green mounds,  
And little wooden crosses—row on row.

O sweet rain of the mountains! your return  
Will wash away the blood of strife, it seems,  
And leave a smiling, flowering mountainside . . .  
A garden . . . a Gethsemane of Dreams.



## COMMANDO. . .

Bright shines the moon . . . indifferent to the hour,  
And to the south wind's flower-scented breath,  
Investing jungle paths with patterned gold,  
While fierce men, tread the trail, with dusky death.

Soft falls the foot of stealthy men, unseen,  
And from the jungle, shrills the lonely owl;  
Death stalks abroad, and beauty shrinks from sight,  
As strong men, trained to slaughter, quickly prowl.

Quiet smothered curses now, upon the moon,  
As, tense and silent, to destroy, they tread;  
Then, into action—panther-like and grim!  
While night is filled with sounds of nameless dread.

As though in shame, the moon's bright face is hid  
Behind a screen of clouds—as men slay men,  
And steal away, while yet the night is grey;  
Then . . . suddenly, the moon is bright again.

## CENOTAPH

Death leers from the jungle—mockingly,  
And smiles all-knowing from the skies:  
With bony hands outstretched, caressingly . . .  
But light of bitter mockery in his eyes.

Ah! Sons of men,  
Are you so tired of life  
Which, all too short  
You would have shorter yet?  
Remember—all those promises you made,  
The vows, and tears you poured on bronze and stones?  
While sadly murmuring  
“Lest we forget?”  
Need you more sacred bones  
To bury in more vaults,  
And call “unknown?”

Enough!  
All men have paid enough  
To have their names engraved upon a shrine,  
Where many stand and stare at fluttering flags  
Then wander onward, quickly to forget—  
In sacred parks  
Where drunkards swill their beer,  
And old men sit  
Unheeding in the sun,  
Stand monuments to men who died in pain . . .  
Fighting for that which each one held most dear—  
Kindred and homes:  
Must they have died in vain?  
Someday, we too must die,  
Maybe within this festering clime,  
And sad-eyed mothers, lovers, grieve for us;  
While civic fathers raise ironic cheers

Around great stones . . . and saying "Thus they died,  
and thus!"  
We shall not know, or care,  
Nor will the wide-eyed multitude  
Who come to stare, and do not have to pay!  
They will have much to talk about at tea—  
"Did you see those women weeping  
By the cenotaph, to-day?"

*Moresby Mice*  
1943.





## “FUZZY WUZZY”

The black boys come a swinging  
Down the old Kokoda Track,  
With savage voices chanting,  
Bearing wounded soldiers back.

These grinning “Fuzzy Wuzzies,”  
Unpretentious, simple, slow,  
Have been right to the battle front,  
Where only brave men go!

With their simple, childlike manner,  
They have worked in sun and rain,  
To rescue wounded “Aussies”  
And have nursed them, well again.

The gallant “Fuzzy Wuzzies,”  
Though their skins are surely black,  
Have proved the whiteness of their hearts,  
On that Kokoda Track.

## THE GRAVE IN THE GRASS

Stand to—sentry . . .

The dreams of the past file by,  
While the buried hopes of a mother,  
'Neath the Kunai grasses lie.

A small wood cross  
And a tin-hat, mark his bed;  
Salute! when you're passing, soldier,  
Where a mother's dreams lie dead.

Here, where the hand of evil  
Has slain the brave and good,  
Pause, and pray . . . for a mother—  
By this little cross of wood.



## NIGHT WATCH

To-night is one of the quiet nights. The moon is on the wane, and consequently does not rise until very late.

We two who are on duty have little to do on nights like this, but we sit and yarn by the soft yellow light of the lantern. Its feeble but comforting glow barely illumines the table, with its daily log, field telephones, and other odds and ends laying about. The grotesque shadows are dancing on the walls of the hut.

It is wonderful what a comforting thing a little lamp can be to men . . . we mortals are really very timid creatures at night, although we do not always care to admit it, and the reassuring glow of a little lamp, like hope itself, often helps us, as we go through the dark hours of our existence.

The silence to-night is only broken by the occasional rustling of some small animal in the bush outside, and occasionally the voice of the amazing little Gekko lizard is heard, clicking away in the hut somewhere.

Men are more given to thinking their most profound and serious thoughts at night, I believe. The more frivolous ones come most freely in the sunny hours.

We two have been discussing the war to-night . . . what we fear, and what we hope of it; we have touched too, on man's relationship to man, of his great possibilities for good, and for evil.

Now I muse alone; my companion has gone to sleep on the floor rolled up in his blanket; and I sit watching him in the gloom.

Only a boy he looks . . . probably not long left his home, and his mother's tender care. There are many



such boys here, few who know just why they came, but all willing to give their all, for the cause.

The atmosphere is heavy with the fumes of the lamp, and the impending rain.

We welcome the rain, in one way, as it precludes the possibility of enemy raids by night, and we enjoy a period of somewhat damp and clammy security.

Outside a heavy mist has descended on the valley, and, even with the aid of a torch, I cannot see more than a few yards up the track.

In the damp grass a lone cricket raises his shrill song, and he is answered by another from somewhere amongst the boards of the hut. Strange little creatures, completing their ordained existence, utterly unaware of any limitation, pre-destination, or any of the many vexed problems that so haunt the human mind. Completing their short cycle of life, they sing their way unwittingly to death!

And now I must sleep, and sleeping I too may catch a glimpse of that destiny—even as a dream.

## DAWN . . . ON A JUNGLE 'DROME

Dawn creeps  
Through the misty valleys and the hills  
And runs along the ridges . . . tinting trees;  
First with a purple, gleaming on our guns  
Sky-pointing, messengers of death,  
But silent now, and awed  
By greater majesty of dawn's tree-scented breath.  
Then dawn-fire spreads its crimson down the 'drome,  
Tinting the planes that couch inside the bays,  
Like giant creatures in some jungle home.

And then—the sunrise comes,  
Bursting from the misty ranges' rim,  
And warmly flowing, over dumps of petrol drums.  
A sleepy sentry, paces up and down, then stays,  
To warm his thoughts upon the flame of dawn,  
And dream, perhaps, of home, and happier days.

## THOUGHTS ON EUROPE

The fields are green and fair,  
But no corn waves,  
No workers toil, beneath a friendly sky;  
Some upturned waggons—an abandoned plough  
The only sign,  
That men once laboured here.  
Now, silent vultures glide  
O'er field and farm,  
Or quarrel for the slowly rotting corpse  
Of man and beast,  
That lies, amongst the grass.  
Here was a man! and this . . .  
Was once his child!  
And yonder charred remains  
Was once their home!  
But now . . . all is a festival for worms.  
Fascists rejoice!  
That all the world may know,  
What war has done.



## SIMPLE THINGS

Oh, Lord, how I yearn for the simpler things,  
The sounds of a brook or a clear splashing fall;  
To tread the soft sand by the blue ocean's shore,  
And to hear the sea singing and wild sea birds call.

To see in the distance a farmer's small home  
Set midst some acres all waving with grain;  
The quiet cattle grazing beside a still stream,  
Or the glad sight of sheep spreading out on a plain!

To hear on the Sabbath the sweet sound of bells,  
Which ring out wild music from church tower's steep;  
To hear the slow chant of the old home-town choir . . .  
The voice of the organ, majestic and deep.

Oh, just to behold a white rose in full bloom,  
A green lawn and gardens all scattered with leaves;  
To hear the gay notes of the small garden birds,  
Or the twitter of sparrows from under the eaves.

I long for the solace of my little home,  
The warm, gentle touch of my own tender wife;  
The sound of loved voices and children at play—  
Oh, Lord, I could ask nothing further of life.

*Australian Woman's Mirror*  
19th January 1943

## NIGHT. . .

Across the purple mountains dies the day,  
And night falls softly, gently, as does sleep;  
In the valley twinkle lights in tents,  
And silence comes upon the forest deep.

In gathering gloom I sit and think of you,  
My own beloved, now so far away.  
But ever near in my fond, aching heart  
Nor absent from my thoughts by night or day.

Night falls so softly where you are, my love;  
The sunset dies, and stars are in the sky—  
The great trees whisper and the south wind blows  
As I sit here and dream on days gone by.

The south wind brings a message of you, sweet;  
Perhaps the very breeze that fans my cheek  
Has touched your hair in passing, eventime  
Beheld you walking—even heard you speak!

Alas! The wind more fortunate than I  
Can pass unhindered throughout time and space,  
While I can only dream of you, my love,  
And cannot hear your voice or see your face.

*The Australian Woman's Weekly*  
26th September 1942.

## I AM TIRED. . .

I am tired of the roar of engines,  
And war's loud clamor and strife;  
The roar of guns and a thousand things,  
And I yearn for a quiet life.

I long for sounds that are softer—  
The voices of those I love,  
The calm and peace of summer days  
With a clear blue sky above.

Or the soothing sound of raindrops  
On my cottage roof at night;  
And at dawn bird voices, singing  
In the fragrant morning light.

These and the sounds of the ocean  
On some sandy southern shore,  
Are some of the joys that are missing  
From life, since the world's at war.



## WHEN I COME HOME. . .

When I come home. . .

There's scores of things  
That I am going to do;

I'm going to build, beside the sea,  
A home, for me and you.

I'm going to have a garden,  
Full of flowers, fair and bright. . .

And they will be for you my sweet,  
For you . . . and your delight.

I'm going to walk the tide-line

With my fishing rod and gear,  
And you shall walk beside me,

When the day is fine and clear.  
But when the sky is cloudy

And the ocean's gloomy grey,  
We will stay inside our cottage,  
And we'll laugh all care away.

Ah yes! That's when I'm home again,

And Peace is there once more . . .

But I'm still in Papua . . .

And we are still at war!

## NEW MOON

The Moon's a silver sickle,  
And the stars, like diamonds bright  
Are lovely jewels sparkling  
On the velvet cloak of night;  
And Nature, mighty jeweller,  
Scatters star-dust on the bay,  
And fire-flies on the jungle  
To replace the light of day.  
But, brighter yet the nights shall grow,  
And unborn glory, soon  
Shall make the bright stars pale before  
The magic of full moon.

*Cummins & Campbell Ltd., Monthly*  
Townsville, July 1943.

## HOMeward BOUND

Farewell to jungle stillness, and to forest and ravine,  
Farewell to all the strangeness that my roving eyes have  
seen;

At last I am returning to a land where love awaits,  
And where fresh morning breezes will soon sweep away  
my hates.

Australia, even fairer still than when I sailed away,  
How anxiously I've waited for this glad home-coming  
day;

My feet are growing restless, as I walk the deck, and  
gaze  
Toward your distant coastline showing dimly through  
the haze.

And now that I'm returning to my home, and those I  
love,

I breathe a prayer of thankfulness to the good Lord  
above;

I thank Him for Australia the free land of my birth;  
And that I'm safe, returning to the fairest land on earth.