

WORDS IN EDGEWAYS – 21

Two Poems

The Blind Man

I am blind now but I remember the stars!
Reaching along the twisted lane
To my blind cottage: as the hand of the Universe
Tossed them like dust across the sky.

There is no simile to describe them,
Just the stars, the stars.
No distance, no science, no silence
Will account for them.

My head thrown back
So that I might stare into the zenith,
You guided me; but I am blind now,
Seeing only what I remember.

Bradford

(a letter for Jean Black)

I thought it had all gone—the Victorian terraces
Built on the backs of gigantic waves of land,
Treeless, not green but brown with bricks and mortar;
Row after row, uphill and down, cemented together,
Like one set of inanimate Siamese twins;
With close-packed traffic—hundreds of cars
Snaking their way, haltingly, along the roads:
The streets desolate and empty, or filled with
Brown-skinned people in foreign dress:
This is Bradford in the year two thousand and six.
Once the streets were full of wagons, loaded
With bales of cloth, drawn by heavy horses.

But it is the land itself that moves us, the land
 That bears the weight of all these dwellings
 And the ephemeral crowd of flesh and blood:
 Where do they come from? India, Kashmir, Pakistan?
 This is what they said about my own forebears,
 Jews whose sons and daughters took care to look
 As much like Englishmen and women as they could,
 Whilst factories still flourished.

Now, thanks to you, Jean, I see it all again,
 Whilst you look out on to the selfsame brick walls,
 In a busy ward which, despite the sun, is lit electrically—
 A true daughter of this town, with daughters of your own
 And grandchildren. May you soon return home.

But let me say again: it is the land itself that moves me:
 That which lies under these bricks and under all bricks:
 It is a mighty, static sea, with mighty, swelling waves:
 I can imagine the green banks that cover it—a silent, empty place,
 Except for the sound of the invisible wind and an occasional bird.
 Don't tell me, anyone, the North is the same as any other place.
 No, every place is different. You need a strong spirit to live here;
 And I can imagine the resurrection of these hills, the time
 The earth was molten and the mountains forming—
 The great volcanic Armageddon when Bradford,
 Together with all places, is shattered like Pompeii:
 All bricks, all mortar thrown into a heap, all lifeless.

But I am no prophet and I know our ending will be
 Of our own making and perhaps quite undramatic.
 I record here only what I see and imagine
 Out of concern for our homeland and for you;
 Half in awe and half hesitant. We pray for you, Jean.

From Barrie

M. B. Mencher