

Verna
Wentworth Falls



Babes of Bethlehem

By Aunty Helen
(L. Claydon)

Photo Diana Jerusalem
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Three Broadcast Travel Talks

On Palestine, INDIA and Elsewhere

Given by MISS L. CLAYDON on Station 2 G B, 2 K A,
The Voice of the Mountains

January 1947

For the Country Women's Association.

Foreword by Miss Mary Welsh



The Author, Aunt Helen, L. Claydon
Ticketiboo and David

FOREWORD

When first I met Miss L. Claydon in Wentworth Falls in 1945 I was so interested in her stories of experience in Palestine that I asked her if she would give a talk at one of our C.W.A. meetings in Leura. The talk was such a success that members asked her to come again and tell them more about her life in other lands. This time she came to a meeting in Katoomba.

But still we felt that she should speak to a bigger audience and later on we suggested to C.W.A. Headquarters that Miss Claydon be asked to broadcast in the weekly session to country women. She kindly agreed to give these three broadcasts and her well-trained voice added greatly to the impression she made on her listeners.

I am glad that these broadcasts are to be printed now and I wish them the same success as they met over the air. Their author reminds me of J. Elroy Flecker's Pilgrims, who go—

"Always a little further; it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow
Across that angry or that glimmering sea . . ."

I trust that her Golden Road, ending as it does in Wentworth Falls instead of Samarkand, will bring her the leisure and happiness she has planned.

(Signed) MARY WELSH,
The President of the Blue Mountains Branch of the C.W.A.

I.—Palestine

By L. CLAYDON



CHILDREN OF THE BETHLEHEM BABIES HOME

WHEN I first started my travels abroad in 1917 I went to India, to the Punjab in the North-west of India. The surest way into the lives of any foreign people is through their language. So I started at once to learn Hindustani. My teacher arrived and presented his card by way of introduction; it was also his certificate of qualification. Under his name was printed Triple Fail, B.A. Most impressive! I engaged him. We got on well and before long I was stumbling along in a conversation about my journey from Australia to India via Singapore. He was greatly impressed, but his English then was about as good as my Hindustani. His admiration for my efforts and interest in my travels were most aptly summed up in this, which I now look upon as quite prophetic! He said, "You are a very travelsome lady."

In both India and Palestine I've always remained an anonymous person and seldom heard my name used, as it is not the custom to use people's surnames, especially with women. It's not polite. We even find that it was so in Bible days when we read of a woman, unnamed, but referred to as Peter's wife's mother, who was sick of a certain fever, probably malaria, but not known then as such. All the rift valley of the Jordan was very unhealthy, but since the first World War many gum trees have been planted and they flourish there now. Strict measures, too, have succeeded in combating the spread of malaria and it is now non-existent.

When I came back to Australia to stay at the beginning of 1945 I landed in Melbourne, very glad to be safe on shore. The last night at sea was a terribly anxious one because of the close proximity of an enemy submarine. We had radar and it was caught.

In Melbourne I found great difficulty in getting accommodation, but when I told of my long, long journey from Jerusalem back to my homeland, a little corner was found for me until I could travel on to Sydney. I will never forget what my hostess said when she learnt that I intended to settle down now and build my own home. I asked her if she thought that that would be a possibility. "For you," she said, "the little matter of where to live shouldn't be hard after all you've been through. You've had so many big problems to solve in your time—surely now you have found the way to win through."

Now this year just two years later I have the joy of holding in my hand the key of my own little home on the Blue Mountains by the lake at Wentworth Falls. I have called it GALILEE, which means a circle.

My special interests have always been centred in children's work in many countries of the world. But now I hope to settle down and write about some of my experiences in other lands.

Of all the many peoples and races that I have met in the past 30 years abroad, I know of none other with so great a love of travel as the Australians. It must be in their blood, for their forbearers had risked much to come out in those old days to pioneer this great land of ours. All honour to them, especially the women; it was not easy then as it is now.

When in England in 1934 I had access to family records in the British Museum and was interested to find I came of a Crusading family. In Palestine that means a lot. It is very curious how in Bethlehem, where many Crusading families settled down, they left their mark upon the place. Today it is unique in having a wholly Christian population. The women of Bethlehem, many of them blue-eyed and fair-haired, still wear the quaint peaked and veiled headdress of the Middle Ages and cross-stitched embroidered gowns, with flowering sleeves, so typical of those times.

In the Crusading days groups of people went out to Palestine with the Crusaders and organised, what today we would call Community Centres, which eventually remained on in existence as hospitals for the people of the country. Perhaps the oldest hospital in existence and certainly the most famous is the Ophthalmic Hospital of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. When I left Palestine there was a New Zealand doctor in charge. There is more blindness in Palestine, comparatively speaking, for it is a very small country, than in any other part of the world. It is possible to travel from one end of Palestine to the other in a day.

When I first went to Palestine I became interested in blind children. There were two homes, one in Ramallah, eight miles north of Jerusalem, and one at Bethlehem, five miles south of Jerusalem. As the children had to learn Braille for their education, it was easier for them to learn it in English. Their Arab Christian teacher was also blind. She had been taught Braille by an English lady, 50 years ago. When only a girl of 14 she translated the whole Bible (Arabic) into Braille and wrote it out herself. Even today there is no other literature in Braille Arabic; only English is taught. I have never heard such perfect part-singing

in my life. They seem to have especially lovely voices. They sang like birds. I left them as a parting present my record of an Australian Kookaburra—they loved it so. I will never forget watching their faces one night. I had taken my portable radio to their home to hear a broadcast by the new High Commissioner for Palestine, whom they called MANDUP SAMI. Being blind, it was hard for the little ones to realise the VOICE was not the PRESENCE. At the close of his speech one little girl came forward and bowed low before the radio and said, "We are very glad you came to SEE US."

My special reason for going to Palestine was to work among children. Shortly after my arrival I was invited to take charge of a Babies' Home for two months while the head had a holiday. I gave them a Christmas box of a bale of blankets from England. When the head told the children that Father Christmas had returned, they said, "That's impossible." They had been taught the European way of having a decorated pine tree at Christmas time. "That cannot be," they said, "for he is already burnt up under the copper!"

Bethlehem can be very cold at Christmas time and even snowy. That year, for the first time in six years we had a really white and wintry Christmastide. I'll never forget opening the front door that looked on to the olive woods and the 21 babies grouped around me standing and looking with awe and wonder at the sight that met their gaze. It was one of unforgettable loveliness. They said, "Oh, look Ma Ma, the whole world is full of soap bubbles!"

So I will end my talk at Bethlehem, where over the Cave of the Nativity the bells peal out their message of PEACE to men of goodwill in all the world.

2.—India

By L. CLAYDON

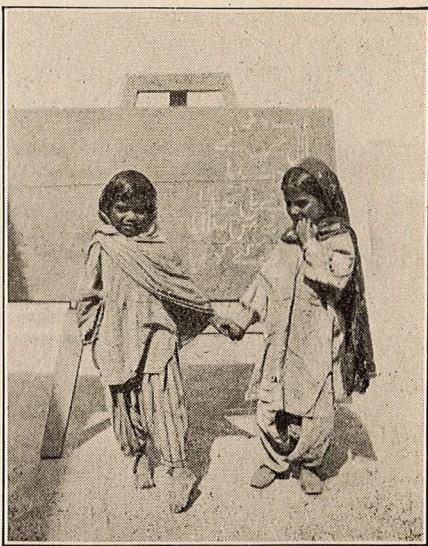
DIVERSIONAL Occupation was the name given by the British Red Cross to the special form of Occupational Therapathy which I had to evolve to suit the specific needs of a large Indian Hospital in Palestine. As I had two Indian languages, and there was not a soul to do anything for the men, I volunteered to go there as a Red Cross worker.

Back to Babyland, might be the title of a method I utilised to captivate the attention of a ward full of seriously wounded men from an Italian battle-front. They were waiting for their turn to come when they would be flown back to India as soon as they were well enough to stand the journey. None of them would leave it again, they were very, very sick men. As I stood there gazing down the long lines of beds and saw what war can do to stalwart men, I longed in some way to turn their thoughts from turmoil to PEACE. I offered a silent prayer for help and guidance. Quickly the answer came, sing them an Indian lullaby. There's not a man here, I thought, that hasn't known a mother's love, for boys are more precious than girls over there; they'll recall the tune if not the words, and it will soothe them in their hour of need. So I sang:

Are Ko Ko ja re Ko Ko jungal pakki bhir
Mere munni khane ko mange dhuammre ko do seer.
Tu ae kyun na jae? Tu ae kyun na jae?
Aur mere chhote munni ko sulae kyun na lae?

This means—

Come on, Pixie, go on, Pixie, in the jungal fruit is ripe.
My little laddie, fruit is begging, two pounds cost a penny.
You came here, why not go there? You came here, why not go there?
And for my little baby boy, sweet slumbers, why not bring him?



INDIAN GIRLS

There is no class distinction in this mission school where all receive the same education, whether rich or poor, Hindu, Christian or Moslem.

One by one as I sang, their faces turned towards me. On some of those pain-racked faces there lurked a smile. It wasn't long before they beckoned me to their bedsides to enquire how it came about. Then it was my turn to be amazed. I discovered that in the Indian Army, it had had to be compulsory for all Indians to speak one common tongue. The language they had chosen was the most widely spoken of all in India,—Hindustani or Urdu. I was overjoyed to find that although I hadn't used Urdu for 12 years, it all came back the moment I was with them again. In India it would not have been possible for me to speak to people from every part of India, because of language barriers, so it was indeed a miracle. I stayed on at the special request of the head of the Indian Red Cross until others were trained and sent from India to replace me. It was very curious how the moment I entered that vast hospital of 1000 beds and all under canvass, I felt I was actually in India. The food was Indian, good hot curries, but English food was also provided for the Anglo-Indian nursing staff. Even the washing was done the Indian way by washermen or Dhobies. It was Rudyard Kipling who wrote of the Dhobie that he was the most optimistic man in the world because he was always trying to crack a stone with a shirt button!

Now things have changed in India, but I was very interested to hear on the 14th of January in the Radio News Reel what the present attitude towards India really is. An Indian known to be strongly anti-British was being interviewed and asked what he thought of England's attitude. He confessed, to his blank amazement, in these words: "Britain's attitude towards India has changed very considerably. It is beyond our comprehension how so great a nation as Britain, victor at the end of World War II can adopt such an attitude and, in effect, say to India, we are prepared to go, let us arrange details." The commentator added that England was sure that there lay ahead of India a great future of prosperity once the difficult period of transition was over

One of the seven wonders of the world is the TAJ MAHAL at AGRA. It's a monument to the memory of an Indian woman, MUMTAZ MAHAL, which means the Crown of the Palace. She was the beloved wife of Shah Jahan, Emperor of India. In India it's merit to build, but none to repair! It was in a sad state of disrepair many years ago, when Britain sought to repair and improve. They gathered there hundreds of famine-stricken people, housed them, gave them food, clothing and work. They made a most exquisite garden that would set off the Taj to advantage. An Indian guide wanted to show it to my father (who was on a visit to see me in India). I declined, saying I had lived in Agra and seen the Taj by moonlight, dawn, midday and sunset. Then he begged at least to have the honour of pointing out that he was sure I had not seen the lightning conductor; to him that was the most wonderful of all, the simple little wire that saved it from being struck.

In great contrast to India's wealth is her terrible poverty. In the North-west where I lived for nearly 15 years, the villages are all built of mud. A hollow place is dug out in the flat plains that are very sandy, and there are no stones there at all. Canal water is run in, then the houses, furniture and all are made from the mud mixed with straw. Every season it is the women's job to remud the entire place. The cattle bathe in the pond as well as the people; clothes are washed there and

then the blackest of black mud forms on the bottom of the pond. When this is put on their houses and dries, it turns almost white!

The Panjab is a wheat-growing district. Physically, the people there are much stronger than the southern, rice-eating people. In the North, too, there is quite a cold winter. I was very interested in their wheat crops as compared with our Australian varieties. I imported some 15 different types of Australian wheat, and through the kindness and help of my nearest British-Indian Agricultural College, they crossed it and gave me the first results for trial. I had some considerable difficulty in persuading a farmer to accept the gift, free gratis. The results were amazing and by degrees I hope the whole standard will have improved.

I lived for seven years in a village called Montgomerywala. The land was a gift from a British Commissioner many years ago. He was, I believe, related to our famous "Monty." It was for those who had lost all when they became Christians and found life very difficult. In five years' time the land had been reclaimed from the sandy waste and today is a model village with wide streets and houses with plenty of ground around them.

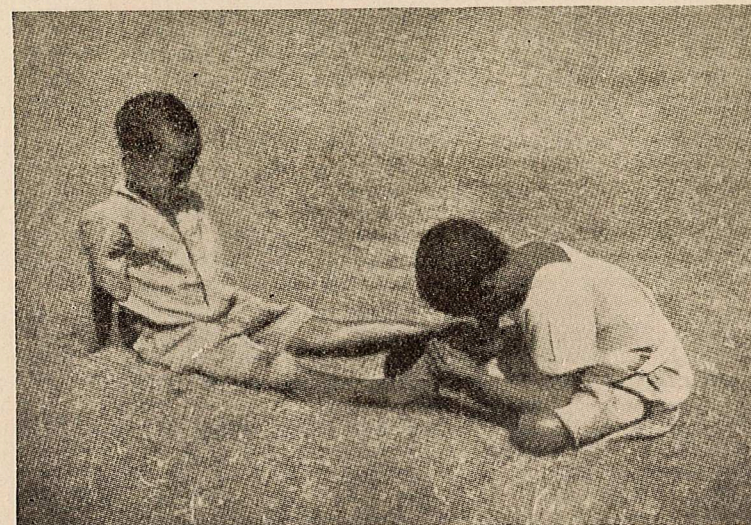
Finally, I would like to close with a story of a very courageous woman, Mrs. Starr, who risked her life to save a British girl who had been kidnapped by tribesmen from over the border at Peshawar on the North-west frontier of India. She was a nurse and her husband, the doctor at the Mission Hospital there. When he was stabbed to death in his own house one night by a Moslem fanatic, the brave little wife carried on. My sister and her doctor husband lived in that very house for years. Last year he was awarded by King George VI, Emperor of India, the Gold Kaiserie Hind Medal for his distinguished service as a British Medical Missionary in Peshawar. Mrs. Starr, being a nurse and knowing the language of the frontier, Pushtu, volunteered to go over the border in search for Molly, the girl of 16, who, after she had been made to watch the murder of her mother, was taken off in her night-clothes over the hills into "No Man's Land." The Khyber Pass leading from British India into Afghanistan is kept open for trade by the British, who have made the tribesmen responsible for the safety of those who travel on the Pass. Each week they come in for their weekly allowance for being good! Nobody is suppose to be out after 4 p.m. for their own safety. I'll never forget the feeling when our car broke down on the Pass and there were only 10 minutes to go. The hillsides looked like pincushions with the armed tribesmen alert and watching us. I hoped that their watches were slow or that the sun would stand still. We got back to safety quick enough, when a friendly car took us in tow. Mrs. Starr was given a bodyguard and she took medicines and ransom money. Imagine the joy of that terrified girl when she was finally rescued after her dreadful experience. But she was quite unharmed. In gratitude for her courage, the hospital was equipped with an X-Ray plant and electricity and the salary of a nurse to replace her, in perpetuity.

So, as I end this talk, I'd like to give the greeting of all Indian Christians. May God bless you all and give you PEACE.

Khuda barakat deve aur subonko SALAAM.

3.—Elsewhere

By L. CLAYDON



AFRICAN MATES

DURING my years abroad in India, Palestine and elsewhere, I have met so many people, mostly displaced persons, who have begged me to teach them English. I have evolved my own method of teaching, partly because, during the war, it was not possible to get books. I found that adults and children alike learn best and quicker if they begin as a baby does, with nursery rhymes. The melody and swing, together with the music of the words, are pleasing to the ear without being a burden to the mind. This way of teaching had its funny side. But I made them persevere with it without bothering with the meaning and by the time they could hum the tune and the words as they went about their work, they had got confidence in themselves and from that time on they succeeded. An Austrian dentist had been released from Drauchau Concentration Camp, through the influence of his friends; he offered to do my dentistry in return for English lessons. He was almost too clever for me. He would wait till he had my mouth gagged up and then fire off at me a whole page of short sentences I had given him to learn, something suitable for a dentist to say to a patient. I could say nothing, but just laughed at his determination to succeed. I had the services of a French dressmaker and an expert cook in the same way—service in exchange for English!

How often in these days after the war do we hear of displaced persons? Do we in this fair land of Australia realise what this means?

I'll never forget Christmas, 1940, while I was in Palestine when I saw 300 women and children, all refugees, who had fled from the terror of Europe under Hitler's reign. It was Christmas Day, there was not a laugh or even a smile or anything to mark that day as different from any of those countless days of misery, persecution and terror as they fled onwards, ever onwards, seeking to escape to a place of peace, with their little ones, and they came to Palestine. I invited 40 of them to a simple little tea party and gave each one a tiny gift. Smiles were exchanged and there was even some laughter among the children, but not a word was said, for they knew no English. I picked from among them one Czech family, a mother and three children and took over responsibility of teaching them English and getting help among my friends for them. The eldest child, a boy of nine, was very good. He was eventually chosen by the British Council for education in an English school and that was only nine months later. The people who gave most help were those who had come as refugees themselves from Malta. They brought all their possessions with them, but when they heard of others far worse off even than they had been in the most bombed place in the world, they gave so liberally, two sacks of clothing, and even the children sent toys and money to buy sweets for them.

Another group of displaced persons whom I came to know through teaching them English, were Abyssinians. There was a chubby little fellow three years old. I called him Ticketiboo; he was a Prince of the Royal Household. His grandfather had given him into my care when he went back to rally the Patriots. He was speaking fluently after three months living with me and never hearing any other language but English. On the great day of rejoicing when all the high English officials went to their home to congratulate them on the recapture of their capital city, Addis Ababa, it was little Ticketiboo who acted as Master of Ceremonies and did the honours in truly regal style. It caused much amazement and amusement when they heard the little fellow speaking English.

The Abyssinians are a most hospitable people and their guests are always given very strong black coffee to drink. It has a very delicate flavour and is made from freshly roasted and newly ground coffee beans to which has been added just a pinch of cloves. The actual name COFFEE is the name of a village in Ethiopia where coffee is indigenous. They serve it in small cups that are made without handles and when drinking are skilfully balanced between the fingers, together with the saucer. It's polite to sip the coffee with a loud noise as a mark of real appreciation.

Yet another group and with this I'll close. These were, I felt, the most needy of all. They were the children of British, Allied and friendly neutral people who had gone with their parents, who had been sent into occupied enemy territory (commonly known as OETA) to help the Administration. I went to Asmara, capital of Eritrea shortly after the British entered that country. It wasn't long before I discovered a group of little children who had never had a chance to go to school anywhere they had been. Many had never seen butter except the tinned variety. They were a pathetic little group. I felt that even more than education they wanted good plain food and playgrounds where they could be happy children and forget the war that had scattered them far away from their homes. So I bought up all the milk supply from

a small country dairy and every evening made pounds of fresh butter to go on the brown rolls that I gave them to eat at lunch time. They had all the milk they wanted and took bottles of it home with them. Then with the help and advice of an Italian carpenter, we visited a car park where 1,000 lorries lay discarded. We selected what we wanted and those old military trucks were soon transformed into swings and see-saws, gondolas and roundabouts. It was a great success. Then the war service approached me and I consented to amalgamate my K.G. with a larger group of older children. They gave me everything I needed and provided transport for the children. I had 50 children whose ages ranged from 15 months to 15 years. When I left Asmara to go back to Jerusalem before my journey home to Australia, the mothers of the school children gave me a farewell party and a cheque to cover my expenses so that I could travel by air to Khartoum in two hours instead of two days. It was what I had wished for all my life, but it was nearly the end of me, plane and all, for the door came open in mid-air through the shaking we got in air-pockets.

As I have worked among so many different peoples in so many far-off places, there has ever been with me the thought that one day there will be no more racial barriers and no more language problems. All that will be past when the reign of the Prince of Peace has come. Even in this fair land of ours, there are so many homeless people that everyone everywhere can understand the joy it will be to have no more housing problems, for there'll be many mansions in the Heavenly City.

One of the last things I did before I left Africa for Australia was to make a special lamb's wool shoe for a little crippled African child. I got his little mate to help me take off the filthy rags he had worn tied round the deformed foot. Then together we washed it and at last fitted it into the comfortable lamb's wool shoe that I had made. The little laddie smiled his thanks. He had no words to express it. But it was his mate's words that touched me deeply. "One day," he said, "you'll have a home in Heaven." He seemed quite sure of that, and then quickly added, "And I want to live next door to you."

And so I close with these lines. I do not know who wrote them, but I am very fond of them. They say—

"When I enter that Heavenly City so far removed from earth's care, I should like to hear somebody saying, 'It was YOU that invited me here.'"

Geo. H. Gearside Print, Lithgow