

HOME OF THE GODS

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Home of the Gods by Alexander D. Penfold

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THE GODS**



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By
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Home of the Gods.

So covered with the moss of time
That hazy thoughts quite balk the mind,
When sires of the Dewart name
First aspired to healing fame,

But doctors they have been of yore
Down to our Sandy's mystic score;
Who'd reached the hour when he could see
The proud appendix of M. D.

His alma mater's master eye
Had scrolled his vellum with India's dye;
He'd only to stretch forth his hand,
To blaze his shingle in the land.

But choicest fruit upon a tree
Is often what we fail to see;
We pluck instead the very worst,
For which Dame Luck is always cursed.

Dewart père with a cheering crowd
Had gathered to make his offspring proud,
Within the famous hall of old
Where honor-wreaths are won untold.

With eager eyes these kind friends looked
Among the sons for honors booked,
But Sandy's face they did not see:
Where could the coming doctor be?

Cold silence answered to the call,
When Dewart's name rang through the hall;
The cloud upon the parent's face
Was sadness, tempered with disgrace.

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HOME OF THE GODS.

A search from Mull to Dunnet Head
 Found no Sandy alive or dead.
 Hed vanished out of mortal sight;
 No human eye had seen his flight.

Had th' bright waters of her lakes
 Entombed this son of the land o' cakes?
 Or had some treacherous mountain cave
 Opened its mouth to make his grave?

A wayward thought or freakish trend
 In Aleck was spurned by foe and friend.
 The only ray on cloud so dense
 Was love for Eastern lore intense.

Could this bent for a hoary fad
 Have driven this youthful student mad?
 For weeks and months the mystery slept,
 While his friends a ceaseless vigil kept.

When time each gleam of hope had spent,
 To this group of bleeding hearts was sent
 A stream of light bright as mid-day,
 In a poem from far-off Bombay.

As a Scot my birth was out of place, and equally out of date.
 My heart throbb'd for another race, and my life for another fate.
 With native heathered hills aglow with shades and colors galore,
 A quenchless thirst with time would grow for mystic Eastern lore.

'Twas in my dreams through night's still hours and my thoughts
 through the garish day;
 I cared not for fragrant flowers, nor the boyish games of play.
 Even Horace with his ancient voice, and Virgil pure and sweet
 Only enhanced my craving choice to seek my idol's feet.

The humdrum of a doctor's life, or the surgeon's doubtful skill—
 I spurn'd alike the cruel knife, and the delusive pill.
 So against the wish of family pride, and a father's honest aim
 I left my Scottish fireside and to these Indies came.

Here th' rugged glare of life was turned upon the dreams of Night,
 And from the world's school I learned to judge mankind aright.
 The romance of the Orient, like a turtle on its back,
 Reversed my thoughts, to my lament, and dealt conceit a whack.

'Tis true my fairy Vedic land, in beauty, shames my dreams,
 But at its size, aghast I stand; to me a world it seems.
 I thought to climb its mountain wall and from the topmost peak
 To watch Ganges and Indus fall into the waters deep;

Then with a sweep of vision wide, toward the Southern seas,
 To view Ceylon, the Orient's pride, the isle of fragrant trees.
 My meter-chart was out of gear, 'twas gauged by Scotia's chain,
 Where I could, from Ben Nevis' ear, scan all from main to main.

Wee Scotland, with her tiny brood, withal a giant's might,
 Inspired my heart, as with pride I stood, that stilled a coward's fright,
 Appalled at scores of petty thrones, instead of a single mind,
 To rule India with her complex zones, and medley of human kind.

I'd pictured hosts of the saintly class, as in the Vedas taught,
 Pouring through the snow mountain pass when great battles must be
 fought,
 The Aryan with his golden hair, and mien of a god,
 To assail the native in his lair, and use the conqueror's rod.

These ancient foes I still could see, in Veda's musty pages,
 One to defend, and still be free from those invading sages.
 Instead I find more scattered breeds than the average mind can grasp,
 With scores of tongues and mystic creeds which make the wisest gasp.

The Vedic hymns in primal scrip, which early won my heart,
 Have by time and wicked hands been stripped of every vital part.
 Even the Brahman, astute of brain, who loves his father's shrines,
 Sadly admits the evil stain upon those holy lines.

The atma of the triad, the heart of the sacred roll,
 Which in current life hath little part the true ones to console,
 'Tis buried beneath a mass of creeds, like Ganesa and its kind,
 For the people crave the poison-seeds, and not the Godlike mind.

The pundits of the hoary past, by their magic skill,
Over the Vedic truths have cast their blighting spells that kill.
To Brahm, the Jehovah of the Jew, the one who's over all,
They've added a hundred gods anew — inviting certain fall.

Gauging the power of the supreme by what man may know,
They've dared to aid Him in his scheme to rule heaven and all below.
There's a god of the torrid Sun — his breath the lightning's flash —
A symbol of the flaming spot, in which doomed sinners gnash.

'Tis strange this Sun, with all his might, must for a helper search,
Who invokes Ushas for infant light before he warms the Earth.
Then add the Soma of the moon, whose holy juice inspires
The taster with a heavenly boon around the sacred fires.

They've too a god of clouds and rain, who makes them wet or dry,
The one a blessing to parched plain, the other a mocking sky.
But Varuna of the raging wave they cannot well disdain,
Whose affrighting figure is to save the toilers of the main.

If the people of this sordid world would own their love of self,
For Kuvera they would their flags unfurl — the Indian god of wealth.
'Tis said this land so full of gold was th' site of Solomon's mines,
From whence this famous king of old bejeweled his concubines.

Next in line would Kama fall, whose love for the unchaste,
Would by his sensual flaunts win all of his lewd evil taste.
There's too the sacred bulls and trees, and the hallowed creeping thing,
Whose worship doth strange hearts appease without a chiding sting.

There are gods of caves, and gods of earth, and of perennial snow; —
Gods so many that words grow dearth to name them as we go.
Thus with a picture robbed of all, once seen within its frame,
Your wayward son has met a fall unworthy of his name.

There's no single figure upon the scene, my ardent hopes to greet,
While many strangers there are seen that pain me much to meet.
Though depressed and sore at heart, defeat I spurn with pride,
So of the army's med's I'm part, and a student too beside.

In my bungalow I mix my drugs, and my Sanskrit text devour,
While my guests are snakes and stinging bugs up to fair dawn's wee
hour.

My jovial friend by day or night is Tippoo of ready speech,
If I shout aloud, and a stinger smite, he rebukes me by a screech.

To this feathered chum, in gaudy dress, I owe a heavy debt,
As friend to cheer me in distress he's never failed me yet.
Oft quite afar from human ear I read Sanskrit aloud,
Which Tippoo shouts so shrill and clear that his learning makes me
proud.

But Tippoo's gifts are none of mine, nor are they of recent growth,
For years quite close to a Hindoo shrine he acquired a classic mouth.
So when'er by chance, a line's misread, or I an error make,
This bird will promptly check my speed by quoting my mistake.

No better teacher can be found than Tippoo at his best,
Like his sainted lord long under ground, at Meru safe at rest.
But now the Sepoys' mongrel gods, and tongues of nameless sounds,
Must brave this Tippoo's caustic prods, with which our tent resounds.

Although these slurs, so deftly thrust, amused my dearest friend,
They angered, as I knew they must, those I should least offend.
For these *browns* are reckoned a mighty host—a factor in the East
Of which old Britain is proud to boast, as the anchor of her peace.

Come! Come! said I to saucy Tip, as I called this bird for short,
Don't be so free with the critic's lip, or my office you'll abort.
Poor Tippoo bowed his head in shame—like a sage forlorn—
And from that hour no Sepoy's name was target of his scorn.

This quite undreamed of wisdom, in a head so very small,
Called forth my admiration for this wise Indian Poll.
Though watchman of this shifting tent, where're its home might be
I would not from my aim relent to keep him close to me.

My mild rebuke wrought instant change—Tippoo's tongue was tied,
Would he my friendship thus estrange, to avenge his wounded pride?
My humble suit I pled in vain, to win back his loyal heart,
Until by vows I made it plain we twain must never part.