

**SALSETTE AND
ELEPHANTA:
A PRIZE POEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649760305

Salsette and Elephanta: a prize poem by John Ruskin

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN RUSKIN

**SALSETTE AND
ELEPHANTA:
A PRIZE POEM**

SALSETTE AND ELEPHANTA.

Religio pedibus subjecta vicissim
Obteritur. Nos exasquat victoria celo.

LUCRETIUS.

'Tis eve—and o'er the face of parting day
Quick smiles of summer lightning flit and play,
In pulses of broad light, less seen than felt,
They mix in heaven, and on the mountains melt,
Their silent transport fills th' exulting air—
'Tis eve, and where is evening half so fair?
Oh, deeply, softly, sobs the Indian sea
O'er thy dark sands, majestic Dharavee,¹
When from each purple hill and polished lake
The answering voices of the night awake,
The fitful note of many a brilliant bird,
The lizard's plunge, o'er distant waters heard,
The thrill of forest leaves—how soft, how swift!
That floats and follows where the night-winds drift,

¹ The southern promontory of the island of Salsette.

Or, piercing through the calmness of the sky,
 The jungle tiger's sharp and sudden cry,
 Yet all is peace, for these weak voices tell
 How deep the calm they break, but not dispel;
 The twilight heaven rolls on, like some deep stream
 When breezes break not on its moving dream,
 Its trembling stars continual watches keep,
 And pause above ² Canarah's haunted steep,
 Each in its path of first ascension hid
 Behind the height of that pale pyramid,
³(The strength of nations hewed the basalt spire,
 And barbed its rocks like sacrificial fire.)
 Know they the hour's approach, whose fateful
 flight
 Was watched of yore from yonder cloudless height?
 Lone on its utmost peak, the Prophet Priest
 Beheld the night unfolded from the East,
 In prescient awe perused its blazing scroll,
 And read the records stretched from Pole to Pole.

² The central peak of Salsette.

³ M. Anguetil du Perron, in his accounts of Canarah, says, that its peak appears to have been hewn to a point by human art, as an emblem of the solar ray.

And though their eyes are dark, their lips are still,
Who watched and worshipped on Canarah's hill,
Wild superstition's visionary power
Still rules and fills the spirit of the hour.
The Indian maiden, through the scented grove
Seeks the dim shore, and lights the lamp of love,
The pious peasant, awe-struck and alone,
With radiant garland crowns the purple stone,⁴
And shrinks, returning through the starlit glade,
When breezes stir the peepul's sacred shade,⁵
For well his spirit knows the deep appeal
That love must mourn to miss, yet fear to feel,
Low sounds, faint rays, upon the senses shed—
The voices of the lost, the dark eyes of the dead.

How awful now, when night and silence brood
O'er Earth's repose, and Ocean's solitude.

⁴ "A stone painted with red, and placed at the foot of their favourite tree, is sufficient to call forth the devotion of the poor, who bring to it flowers and simple offerings."—T. S. Buckingham.

⁵ The superstitious feeling of the Indian, with respect to the peepul tree, is well known. Its shade is supposed to be loved and haunted by the dead.

To trace the dim and devious paths, that guide
Along Canarah's steep and craggy side,
Where—girt with gloom—inhabited by fear,
The mountain homes of India's gods appear.
Range above range they rise, each hollow cave
Darkling as death, and voiceless as the grave,
Save that the waving weeds in each recess
With rustling music mock its loneliness,
And beasts of blood disturb with stealthy tread
The chambers of the breathless and the dead.
All else of life, of worship, past away,
The ghastly idols fall not, nor decay,
Retain the lip of scorn, the rugged frown,
And grasp the blunted sword and useless crown,
Their altars desecrate, their names untold,
The hands that formed, the hearts that feared—how cold!

Thou too—dark Isle, whose shadow on the sea
Lies like the gloom that mocks our memory
When one bright instant of our former lot
Were grief, remembered, but were guilt, forgot.
Rock of the lonely crest, how oft renewed
Have beamed the summers of thy solitude.

Since first the myriad steps that shook thy shore
Grew frail and few—then paused for evermore.
Answer—ye long-lulled echoes! Where are they
Who clove your mountains with the shafts of day,
Bade the swift life along their marble fly,
And struck their darkness into Deity,
Nor claimed from thee—pale temple of the wave—
Record or rest, a glory or a grave?
Now all are cold—the Votary as his God,
And by the shrine he feared, the courts he trod,
The livid snake extends his glancing trail
And lifeless murmurs mingle on the gale.

Yet glorious still, though void, though desolate,
Proud Dharapori,⁶ gleams thy mountain gate,
What time, emergent from the eastern wave,
The keen moon's crescent lights thy sacred cave,
And moving beams confuse with shadowy change,
Thy column's massive might and endless range.
Far, far beneath, where sable waters sleep,
Those radiant pillars pierce the crystal deep,

⁶ The Indian name for Elephanta.

And mocking waves reflect with quivering smile
 Their long recession of refulgent aisle;⁷
 As, where Atlantid bath her lonely home,
 Her grave of guilt, beneath the ocean's foam,
 Above the lifeless hearth and guardless gate,
 The wildly-walking surges penetrate,
 And sapphire tints of phosphor lightning fall
 O'er the broad pillar, and the sculptured wall.
 So, Dharapori, through thy cold repose,
 The flooding lustre of the moonlight flows,
 New forms of fear,⁸ by every touch displayed,
 Gleam, pale and passioned, through the dreadful shade,
 In wreathed groups of dim, distorted life,
 In ghastly calmness, or tremendous strife,
 While glaring eye and grasping hand attest
 The mocked emotion of the marble breast.
 Thus, in the fevered dream of restless pain
 Incumbent horror broods upon the brain,

⁷ The interior of Elephanta is usually damp, and its floor covered with water two or three feet deep. By moonlight, its shallowness would be unperceived.

⁸ The sculptures of Elephanta have such "horrible and fearful forms that they make a man's hair stand upright."—Linschoten.

Through mists of blood colossal shapes arise,
Stretch their stiff limbs, and roll their rayless eyes.

Yet knew not here the chisel's touch to trace
The finer lineaments of form and face,
No studious art of delicate design
Conceived the shape, or lingered on the line.
The sculptor learned, on Indus' plains afar,
The various pomp of worship and of war,
Impetuous ardour in his bosom woke,
And smote the animation from the rock.
In close battalions kingly forms advance,²
Wave the broad shield, and shake the soundless lance,
With dreadful crest adorned, and orient gem,
Lightens the helm, and gleams the diadem;
Loose o'er their shoulders falls their flowing hair,
With wanton wave, and mocks th' unmoving air,

² "Some of these figures have helmets of a pyramidal form, others wear crowns richly decorated with jewels, others display large bushy ringlets of curled or flowing hair. In their hands they grasp sceptres and shields, the symbols of justice and the ensigns of religion, the weapons of war and the trophies of peace." Maurice, *Antiq. of India*, vol. ii. page 143.