

Nanda Devi

CHARLES S. HOUSTON

And there she was!
Cresting the ragged rocks, casually scattered
By some huge force, we gaped
Star-struck across the flowered fields
To where the Goddess rose.

Like some vast sculpture made
By powers not conceived by man,
The Goddess rose
From calm and quiet meadows to the
Unviolated Sanctuary.

We — not the first to burst
Upon the scene — were yet to be
The ones who reached the Goddess' crown
Not conquerors but pilgrims, seeking
Light not fame.

In those past days,
We came from far to love, enjoy,
And cherish mountains and the lands
About them. Not to foul or spoil
Their timeless fragile peace.

A poet wrote, "High mountains
Are to me a feeling, felt in the heart
And felt along the blood." He said it well,
But only part. He might have added
"For my soul's sake."

My son and my son's sons
Will never see or know what I have seen
And known. They'll get the leavings, scraps
That greedy, careless, selfish men have
Torn and spoiled.

My son's sons will find
The virgin forests gone. White mountains
Fouled with trash and scraps. Clear waters
Fouled with human waste that time
Cannot remove.



Green wooded slopes
Stripped bare for wood to burn or waste.
The scars bleed soil and wash to the sea.
Sheep graze in mighty flocks where only
Bharal singly grazed before.

But man's the foe of nature.
Man knows better and does worse to other living things.
Man fouls his nest and cuts the trees
And burns the brush and forages
His flocks which kill the soil.

Years ago we made our way
Along the mighty Rishi Gorge into
The Sanctuary. Found it sweet and pure and new.
Climbed the great peak and left it
Sweet and pure.

Since then a score — no, more —
Of others came that way and climbed.
They cannot foul the Goddess, no man could.
But they have fouled her garden
For their sons' sons.

But wait! There's time.
For God and Time to heal these wounds if man
Will let them heal. It still can be
That men both wise and brave can halt the
Rape and save the wilds.

We need to count the blessings
Given us and save and hand them on
To our son's sons — and daughters too, of course.
We must, there's time, we must cry "Halt" to those
Who are too blind to see.

The Nanda Devi is but one
Of scores and scores of wild and blessed hills,
Islands of peace and joy and home to many
Living things. Man's future rests on holding these
As dear and safe as life itself.

So many years ago
We were the happy, lucky ones to be there early on.
Now we must help to save what's left
So our son's sons can have
A little of the joy.

Not greed, not fame
Must draw man to the woods and hills
And sacred places. Not noise and trash and wastes
But only memories must mark his visit
To the holy places.

Now! Act now, my Lords.
Think now of what you wish your sons
And their sons too, to know and love.
Know well that what you do or fail to do
Will save or kill the future
For us all.

(The Editor heartily agrees with this special pleading on behalf of all the beautiful but threatened fairy world of the mountains. He was with the poet when we were the second group to enter that then unspoiled Paradise. Recently, The Nanda Devi Sanctuary has been closed for a few years in order to preserve this unique area from further damage by trekkers and climbers. This came about principally through the untiring efforts of Nalni Jayal. However, a few unscrupulous shepherds have sneaked their flocks in with serious destruction to the flora and fauna. The Indian authorities are threatening to open the Sanctuary again. We urge our readers strongly to encourage the Indians severely to restrict access to the unique Nanda Devi Sanctuary, probably the only remaining area in the Himalaya that has not felt seriously the heavy hand of man.)

