

No Continuing City
(working title)

Words by Margaret Morgan

Text. St. Luke 9. 33

*et factum est cum discederent ab illo ait Petrus ad Iesum praeceptor bonum est nos
hic esse et faciamus tria tabernacula unum tibi et unum Mosi et unum Heliae nesciens
quid diceret*

And St. Peter, when he thus said
He knew not what
Was in the mount with Jesus
Moses and Elias
And saw their glory.

One cannot blame his crying out
'It is good to be here'
Words that would sound nothing amiss
On our late being
With Christ at the Holy Table.

It is good for us to be here
In thy holy presence.
Let us build tabernacles,
Tarry here, nor go
In affection to earth.

But somewhat was wrong in Peter's words
As there is commonly
In the most of our best words
If God should enter
Into judgment with them.

Our common judgments, expressions
In contentment, happiness
Extraordinary, spiritual or temporal
Are we know not what,
So branded by the Evangelist.

Begin we then to sift the saying

But this 'here' was in the mount,
A place of solitude and retirement.
Surely it is good to withdraw
From the world and worldly business
And think of heavenly things?

When we have tasted dainties
May we not chew and relish them?
Sit down a little and bethink ourselves
Of the glory we lately bathed in
Under the fringes of blazing light?

Oh how good, yea, joyful, a thing
The presence of Jesus and Moses,
Elias and another we understood not..
Nothing drives away sad thoughts
Like the presence of good company.

But did we hear what they spoke of
Enveloped in shimmering cloud
And the light that shone but overshadowed
And the very voice of the father, until sound
and sight merged in one great movement
that overwhelmed our senses?

Surely we know the shining glistening garments,
The encompassing of everlasting glory,
The changing fashion of Christ's countenance,
The heavenly rays that lit us from his eyes
Lie over a chasm of sighs, sweating and bleeding
And blows and mocking and death?

Surely we realise that mountain tops
Are where the lightening strikes and thunder roars,
Nearer the heart of danger than low valleys?
Away from the fringes of the shining, with him
We must go to the plains of action.
The Transfiguration will not last for ever

No. The transfiguration will not always last
Nor Christ's face shine like the sun upon us
Here is no continuing city, no abiding stay.
Christ will return to lower ground
And have less splendid clothing.

Still. Let us pitch three tents.
Let us build them here.
Let us pitch them not
'among the tents of Kedar'
nor choose to dwell in 'Mesech'.
Let us keep out of the streets
Of Gath and Askelon.

And let them be but shelters
Place not our minds and dwellings there.
Make them but tents
To lodge in for a night or stay in
For a shift along the way.
Have our abiding city somewhere else.

Or we know not what we do.

A chamber, bed and candlestick
That the prophets who pass by
May enter in and bless us.
A sanctuary in our hearts
Where zeal of God's glory may lodge.

Or we know not what we say.
Know not what we ask.

But at heart we would make tabernacles here,
Make them no higher than Thabor,
Seek out our Heaven on earth
As though we are here for ever.

For we know not what we need.

At heart we would shun the Cross.
We would have nothing but comfort.
All for Mount Thabor or Mount Olivet.
Peace. Quiet. Nought for Mount Calvary.

Then we know not what we ask,
We who would coop up Christ
Who came to redeem the world,
Not just a pittance on a hill,
A few particular elected
Mountaineers.

We are talking in our dreams.
Build no such tabernacles in our brains,
Raised on a mound of vain imaginings.
We say, believe, advise
We know not what.

Words proceed from fear of death.
 Words proceed from excess of delight.
Squeeze from the very rapture of joy,
 Or scatter over conditions judgments
On things we have no knowledge of..

All will be good unto us,
All will work for good
If we but temper our words
And speak them soberly

And place them rightly
And direct them every one
To his *hic et nunc*,
His proper circumstance.

Then Christ will tarry with us,
Moses not forsake us,
Elias not depart away
Out of the mountain

And our clothes whiter
Than any earthly fuller
Can white them. We shall
Forever shine bright as stars.