

LEPER

With gnarled stubs where feet should be
And calloused plates upon each knee
She trudged, a tripod, slow and calm,
Supported on but half a palm.
All fingers gone, left elbow bare,
The ground too hot to linger there,
She squirmed while neighbors hurried past,
Secure with maya, karma, caste.

A Western fan of Hindu thought
Hid in the crowd, but soon was caught
By glassy eyes that fixed his own.
Her armless elbow lifted, lone,
As if to beg his alms, his care.
But out beyond he cast his stare,
Pretending clearly not to see
The heap of creeping agony.

This devotee from West to East
Had come to have his mind released.
A tranquil soul was all he sought
By learning what their wise men taught:
“Illusion and rebirths explain
The sorrows of a world in pain.”
But gurus’ proverbs met their death
Within the panting leper’s breath.

Again she crouched to struggle on.
He watched her crawl till she was gone. . .
Then something deep inside awoke.
His clouded spell of numbness broke.
In one loud breath illusions died.
Impassioned truth stood up and cried:
“In dust this daughter drags along!
To hell with it! By God, it’s wrong!”

— *David L. Hatton, 8/15/1994*