

## Minnie Louise Haskins

12 May 1875 – 3 February 1957

The following is from *Wikipedia*:

On Christmas Day 1939, soon after the outbreak of World War Two, King George VI made a historic wireless broadcast to the peoples of Britain and its Empire. Ahead of his closing lines, in which he paid tribute to the fighting services of Britain and its allies, he spoke of the uncertainty of the year ahead - would it bring peace, or continued struggle? Offering a message of encouragement, the King concluded his speech with the following lines - "*I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shalt be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.'"* He added, "*May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all.*"



Response to the broadcast was extraordinary. Thousands contacted the BBC to ask the authorship of the lines that had so poignantly matched their mood and feelings. Newspapers here and abroad, having advance copies of the speech, were already attempting to track down the author. But no one, academic or otherwise, including Buckingham Palace, knew the answer to the question - who wrote it? On the 9pm Boxing Day news, the BBC was obliged to announce that the author had not been traced and was assumed dead. Later, a man phoned the BBC to say he had permission from his sister to reveal that she was the author. Then, on its midnight news bulletin, the BBC stated that the sought for writer was a Miss M. L. Haskins of Crowborough who had written her now renowned lines

some years earlier as an introduction to some verses called *God Knows*. News of Miss Haskins and her whereabouts spread rapidly. Early next morning, with the arrival of snow, so descended the world's press to await the first signs of life from a house called Brooklands in Ghyll Road, Crowborough. To global surprise, the King's unknown poetess turned out to be a shy, softly-spoken retired university lecturer with greying hair and steel-rimmed spectacles. Aged 64, she lived with two younger sisters, also unmarried, in a large house which they ran as a school for young children. Minnie Louise Haskins, made famous the world over in one minute of a king's speech, had led a remarkable and dedicated earlier life as a teacher, missionary worker, academic and factory welfare pioneer, as well as a poet and novelist.

Haskins was born at 2 Kingswood Hill, Oldland, South Gloucestershire, and grew up in the neighbouring village of Warmley. Her father was Joseph Haskins, a grocer, and her mother was Louisa Bridges. She was a Congregationalist and she taught Sunday School for many years. She studied informally at University College, Bristol while undertaking voluntary work for her local church. By 1903, she was working in Lambeth, London, for the Springfield Hall Wesleyan Methodist Mission. In 1907, she departed for Madras, India with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to work in one of the Zenana missions to Women. In 1912, to raise funds, Haskins published a volume of poetry *The Desert*, which included the poem *God*

*Knows*, written in 1908, to which she added the famous preamble to create the poem that today is commonly known as *The Gate of the Year*".

In 1915, poor health led Haskins, now 40 years old, to return to England where she ran a munitions workers' hostel in Woolwich for six months. This was followed by three years supervising the labour management department of a controlled factory in Silvertown, West Ham. Somehow she found time to publish a second volume of poetry, *The Potter*, in 1918.

At the age of 43, Haskins attended the London School of Economics to study for a Social Science Certificate under Agatha Harrison. After gaining the Certificate with distinction in 1919, she took the Diploma in Sociology, gaining a further distinction in 1920. From 1919 to 1939 she worked as a tutor in the Social Science Department where the senior tutor described her as *a woman of unusual capacity and character ... a rare understanding and sympathy and infinite patience, combined with a great deal of love and interest in people*.

In 1921 she published with Eleanor T Kelly *Foundations of Industrial Welfare* promoting "a spirit of co-operation" between worker and employer. Haskins was closely involved with the establishment in 1924 of the Institute of Industrial Welfare Workers, the successor to the Welfare Workers' Institute and the precursor to what is now the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the world's oldest association in its field. During this time, Haskins wrote two novels *Through Beds of Stone* (1928) and *A Few People* (1932) and a further volume of poetry *Smoking Flax* (1942).

Minnie moved to 'Brooklands', Ghyll Road, Crowborough, in 1927 with her two sisters: Bessie (1884-1955), a qualified teacher who established Brooklands as a preparatory school for boys and girls, and was its principal until ill-health forced the sale of the school in April 1954, and Edith (1885-1970), served as an army officer in WWI, then became a diplomat.. Minnie also assisted in the school whenever she could and after retirement. All three sisters were unmarried.

Minnie died in the Kent and Sussex Hospital at Tunbridge Wells on 3 February 1957 after a lifetime of dedicated service to many but acknowledged throughout the world for her eloquent words of encouragement in Britain's darkest hours, endorsed by her King. Her words live on inscribed at the entrance to the George VI memorial chapel in St George's Chapel, Windsor, and in a window at the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy. The poem was read at the funeral of Elizabeth, the Queen Mother in 2002.

She is buried in St John's churchyard.

## The Gate of the Year

### Minnie Louise Haskins

#### 'God Knows'

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

*So heart be still:*

*What need our little life*

*Our human life to know,*

*If God hath comprehension?*

*In all the dizzy strife*

*Of things both high and low,*

*God hideth His intention.*

*God knows. His will*

*Is best. The stretch of years*

*Which wind ahead, so dim*

*To our imperfect vision,*

*Are clear to God. Our fears*

*Are premature; In Him,*

*All time hath full provision.*

*Then rest: until*

*God moves to lift the veil*

*From our impatient eyes,*

*When, as the sweeter features*

*Of Life's stern face we hail,*

*Fair beyond all surmise*

*God's thought around His creatures*

*Our mind shall fill.*