

## MRS. CHATTERTON: A PERIOD PIECE

*Broomsticks, Broomsticks, all the skies over!  
When Packets lay in Calais roads for a wind to Dover,  
Broomsticks, Broomsticks, flew the Narrow Seas;  
The upper air was their affair, they rode it at their ease,*

*Goat-fat on your buttocks, kirtled to the crutch,  
Snug it home beneath your frock, and petticoats and such,  
Clip your thighs about the twigs, pipe a prayer to Nick—  
And up you go like one o'clock, a-straddle on the Stick!*

Of all the Flying Witches, the unpleasantest I knew  
Was ancient Mrs. Chatterton, who very seldom flew,  
But hitched her Stick in El-Aman, and made poor living  
there

By peddling spells and rubbish to the simple and the fair.

Round about the Residence, squatting in the dust,  
Hawking charms for aches and pains, and love, and hate, and  
lust,

There the Witches gathered; Mrs. Chatterton made one,  
But queened it in the colony, and never shared their fun.

Now, when Imperial Airways came, the Witches raised a cry:  
Let Man hold Earth and Water; we, Sisters, hold the Sky;  
Our Corridor, our Enclave: let them encroach who dare;  
For we are Satan's daughters, and Lord Satan rules the Air!

They plugged their nuisance value to persecution point;  
*Aroint thee, Witch!* the Pilots cried—but they would not  
aroint.

They lurked beyond the tarmac, they hovered, soared and  
swooped,  
Rode level with the fuselage and peered, and pried and  
gooped.

Then up spoke angry travellers, invoking Thomas Cook:  
Are these the Sights we paid to see—nay, Things whereon to  
look?

Nodding, smirking, beckoning, tapping on the pane,  
Mouthing nasty nonsense through the thunder of the 'plane?

The Resident Commissioner, a man of nerve and heart,  
Took note of the position and resolved to play his part.  
He sent for Mrs. Chatterton, and begged that she would bring  
Some influence to bear upon her lewder following.

With hackles high she made reply: Mister, we mean no ill;  
Nor have we cause to fear your laws; we neither rob nor pill.  
As for your dapper Pilots, we plague them but in sport;  
Nay, till you catch us cozening, we'll not come into court!

He answered: Mrs. Chatterton, our laws must then prevail;  
Since I wot well you trade one spell for which the price is Jail.  
Take time to think things over, ere I pronounce your doom;  
For I must be in Uniform, by Lunch-time, in Khartoum.

O proud to be a C.M.G., borne on Official flight,  
Compact of Empire's majesty, endued with Empire's might!  
O proud and sleek Official 'plane, the nimblest of its kind . . .  
*Yet not so proud if, through the cloud, a Stick creeps up behind!*

He thought he saw a Hand—or Claw, that scratched upon  
the pane;

But his eyes were dim with reading, and he sought his files again  
Till a Face, pressed to the window, showed clear as clear  
could be

That here was Mrs. Chatterton, to purchase amnesty.



Incorrigible huckstress! She'd brought her stock-in-trade;  
The Lord's Prayer written backward on a rusty razor-blade;  
A mandrake plucked at Matins; a toad found dead at Prime,  
And half a naughty post-card, with half a naughty rhyme;

A hangman's cord; a merman's eye; a vampire's tongue and  
tooth;  
With choice of horrid philtres for age that lies with youth;  
A lump of quartz, for wens and warts; a balsam for the pox;  
Her pipe; her cigarette-ends; her battered TINDER-BOX.

The treasure could not tempt him; he paid no kind of heed,  
But touched the Pilot's shoulder, and urged him to make  
speed.  
Confounded, Mrs. Chatterton hung screeching at their tail:  
Hey Mister! Look you, Mister! I will not go to Jail!

Whip, duck, or hang or burn me, as men have done of old;  
But Prison is too cheerless, too comfortless, too cold;  
And we that flit by the high moon and curtsy to the stars  
Have lost the trick whereby a Stick may glide through Prison  
bars.

But when she knew him obdurate her clamour turned to  
rage;  
She came aboard, and screwed and clawed along the fuselage;  
Then—easy, all too easy, in Nineteen-Thirty-Two—  
She arched her neck, and snapped her fangs, and bit the  
feed-pipe through.

Like sun-scorched Icarus he fell, crash-landing all agley;  
The Pilot tossed the baggage clear, turned sick, and moved  
away—  
While she, to wreak calamity conclusive and entire,  
Dived with a squeal, smote flint on steel, and set the thing afire.

She circled slowly earthward, and goggled at the flames;  
She hailed him Pretty Gentleman, and outworn Gypsy names;  
Until he cried: My Government will view this act with gloom,  
For I should be in Uniform, by Lunch-time, in Khartoum.

O well-a-day, and mercy-me, and here's a how d'ye do;  
But hark ye, Pretty Gentleman, I know a thing or two:  
Unbutton you, unbutton you, while we have time to spare;  
Put on your pretty Uniform, and I will take you there!

Forthwith upon the gleaming sand, discountenanced, irate,  
He doffed the stripe of Savile Row and donned Official state,  
While she, with a forbearance past hoping, past surmise,  
Explored her rags, and slew her fleas, and turned away her  
eyes.

She strapped along her besom the natty sword and sheath;  
She plucked from him the *chapeau-bras* and held it in her  
teeth;  
She prayed the prayer that none may pray, and gave the reins  
a flick,  
And up they went, the two of them, a-straddle on the Stick!

O strange to be a C.M.G., borne on a Broomstick flight!  
O transport how irregular; unprecedented sight!  
The Resident Commissioner was ever loth to tell  
In Departmental circles how they fared, or what befell

Until she crowed: We're coming down: put on your pretty  
hat:  
We're going to do it Handsome, now, and not be pointed at . . .  
The Palace surged to meet them as the clocks were striking  
one,  
And he himself conceded it was decorously done.



Official punctuality was nothing very new;  
Yet the manner of his coming gave concern to not a few;  
And some remarked a whiff of Goat, strong in that festal  
room;  
Still, there he was, in Uniform, by Lunch-time, in Khartoum.

And, what is very singular, it's certain from that day  
That *someone* called the Witches off, and bade them leave their  
play;  
For the Pilots all assured me that the planes might come and  
go,  
While the Witches sat and chattered in the market-place  
below.

The Resident Commissioner had heart as well as nerve.  
The least that he could wish on her was that she too might  
serve;  
And when Imperial Airways failed to run as they were billed.  
He thought of Mrs. Chatterton, and what a gap she filled.

When wayward *Arethusa* had her moods and would not start,  
Or frigid *Amphitrite* proved too proud for skill or art,  
I KNOW—although the G.P.O. kept silent as the tomb—  
He sent for Mrs. Chatterton, who'd flown him to Khartoum.

Loin-girt and greased of person, the indomitable Hag  
Set the Residency seal upon her dreadful shopping-bag,  
Left her hokum to a *locum* and, for glory, not for gain,  
Unpleasant Mrs. Chatterton took the air again.

And when you saw a sooty streak that sullied all the blue,  
Like those black-darting liver-spots that frighten me and you,  
You might laugh if you'd a mind to, you might jeer at old  
wives' tales;  
But *that* was Mrs. Chatterton: outward, with the Mails.

## TO JULIA, IN SORROW

Belcheth my Julia at the evening's close?  
Mourn, mourn (you Nymphs and Naiads), for the fall  
Of one whom I, that freely picked and chose,  
Held to be daintiest of Ladies all;  
Weep for Hymettus' honey turned to gall!  
I planned a feast Lucullan; naughty Zeus  
Pondered such meats for royal Danae; wines  
Sunlit as Julia, golden, from warm vines  
The Sea-born tended. And what *was* the use?  
Julia thus fed, I argued, can't refuse:  
And spoke. As tender prelude to a sigh  
Her bosom mounted, mounted rosebud high . . .  
Then belched my Julia. I had bought the ring;  
But Julia's belch hath torn the whole darned thing.