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JO ROBERTS, M.B.E. 1914-1998

Agnes Josephine Roberts was a Cornish Roberts. Her father was in the Navy. She was born in South Africa, but went to school with the Sisters of All Hallows, Ditchingham.

On leaving school she went to Australia, becoming a nurse, and later a parish worker in New Zealand. After World War II she returned to England to work in a London Diocesan Moral Welfare Home and as Housekeeper to the clergy of Holy Redeemer, Clerkenwell, before going to Germany to work in British soldiers' Clubs. She then offered herself to the Mothers' Union and was sent out to Korea. Jo arrived in Seoul in 1958 and worked for the Mothers' Union in Korea from 1959-1976. Following her retirement from this work, she then worked for some time as Overseas Secretary to Bishop Mark Pae.

Bishop Daly insisted that Jo should learn Korean properly. She quickly mastered a cute pidgin-Korean of her own: the Bishop gave in and her language study was cut short. She had already organised winter shelter for beggar boys in the Cathedral crypt.

She never had any money of her own, but she found gifts to pay for many very expensive operations, saving sight, restoring mobility, saving lives. She would tour refugee shanty camps, often emerging with a sick or injured child. If she heard of a woman having a difficult labour she would set off in the landrover she had been given by Oxford Diocesan Mothers' Union, even at dead of night. She would then climb the mountainside to find the miserable cottage where the woman was. She held mother-and-baby clinics all over the land, and was always ready to drive a priest out to the leper colony for a dawn Mass. She was for ever making things, from Christmas decorations to visual aids for village Sunday Schools. The secret of her work was Chestertonian: she knew that anything worth doing was worth doing badly.

Her nickname was Granny of the Great White Mountains. 'Granny' was an affectionate word for any senior lady, and the Great White Mountains are the backbone of Korea. She often drove through them alone. When asked what precaution she took against bandits, she said, 'I lock the doors of the landrover before I start, and when they come out of the trees and jump on the bonnet, I just drive on till they fall off'.

Jo was awarded the M.B.E. in 1982. In 1983 she retired to Leicester, where, in spite of hip replacements, she became active in Leicester Royal Infirmary's chaplaincy, working to within a few weeks of her death.

She was sure God loved everyone except her; but she took comfort in the doctrine of Purgatory. The ill-concealed love she gave to people will surely earn its reward when the trumpets sound for her on the other side.

RICHARD RUTT

