

## “PUNDITA” RAMABAI.

THE EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN WHO  
DEFIED THE TRADITIONS OF  
HER COUNTRY.

Probably no one woman on this continent has received more notice during the past year than has Pundita Ramabai, the high caste Hindu woman who has devoted her life to the work of relieving the sad lot of the millions of suffering child-widows throughout her country, and who is to visit Montreal this week, and not without the very best reason, as the barest sketch of her life proves.

Her father was a Marathi priest, who traced his Brahman ancestry back a thousand years. Such was his love of learning that he began to teach his child-wife at a time when such an act was looked upon by his fellows as little less than insanity, and considered just about as sensible as to try to teach their cows to read. But he was well repaid in her devotion to their little daughter. In her mother's arms little Ramabai learned the Sanskrit language, and from her also, as a few years later they walked thousands of miles on pilgrimages to sacred shrines, she learned twenty thousand verses from the poets and sayings of the philosophers.

At the age of sixteen she was left an orphan, and after this travelled several years with her brother, who proved himself a worthy successor to his noble father. Even at this early age she had devoted herself to the work of elevating her unfortunate countrywomen. It was in Calcutta, during a visit to the wife and daughter of Keshub Chunder Sen, that she first learned anything of Christianity. He, with even more liberality than her father had shown—who had taught her that no woman must read their sacred books—gave her a volume of selections from the sacred books of all nations, and in it she found our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount. After this she broke her caste, regardless of the anathemas of her people. Soon after her brother died, but with

undaunted bearing she went forth, now alone, more determined than ever to carry out her beloved scheme. She travelled, lectured, wrote for the cause, gained the sympathy and help of the resident English, when she urged that the Hindu women should be trained as physicians and educated to teach, and before very long she had succeeded in forming a society among the leading Brahmin ladies of Poonah which had resulted in the establishment in that city of not only primary schools there for girls but high schools as well, with several high schools in Bombay, and the “Victoria” school in Calcutta which prepares girls for the university. In this latter city she received from the Pundits of the university the degree of Saravati and was the first woman upon whom such an honor had ever been conferred.

Soon after she married of her own free choice, another act almost without precedent among her people. Her husband was a Bengalese lawyer, but of different caste, by which act, with the fact that she called him by his first name, she again went directly against all the traditions of her country. After only two years of married life her husband died of cholera, and she was left at the age of twenty-four, with a little eight months old daughter, that despised thing in her country, a widow with no son. The life of a widow in India is one extremely hard for any one outside of the country to understand. She is regarded as being punished for horrible crimes which she committed in some former existence, and receives the hatred and abuse of the whole community as “the greatest criminal upon whom heaven's judgment has been pronounced.” Her hair is shaved every fortnight, she is only allowed to wear a single coarse garment, must eat but one meal a day, must never take part in any of the family feasts, is held to bring ill-luck on the person whose eyes rest upon her first in the morning, is closely confined to the house, forbidden to associate even with female friends, is