

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXVIII. No. 41

MONTREAL, OCTOBER 9, 1903.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid

An Indian Priestess

Now and again from the great mass of India's womanhood some noble soul asserts for itself a position on the roll of fame; and we may well believe that many others, though coming short of celebrity, as accounted by human judgment, place their fellows under lasting obligation for services rendered in the fear of God. In this class we would name Chundra Lela, whose story has been told by Mrs. Ada Lee in 'An Indian Priestess.'

Chundra Lela's father was a wealthy landowner of princely ancestry in Nepal, but she was the child of a polygamous marriage, and was left a widow at nine years of age. Through the broad-mindedness of her father, she enjoyed the benefits of an education altogether unusual among girls even of her station; but at thirteen she was deprived of the care of this parent, and left to study the dark, sad story of Hinduism in the sacred books.

Among other promises held out to her was that of pardon for the sin which had caused widowhood, by the performance of 'Char dhom,' the visiting and worshipping at the four great shrines situate at the cardinal points of India. She determined to do this, and everything else prescribed in the sacred books; and across mountain and plain she went, repeating incantations and counting her beads. The devotion which she threw into her pilgrimage may be gathered from the following extract from the story:

'She bathed in every sacred river, and worshipped at every shrine on her way, making offerings to the idols, and giving gifts to the Brahmin priests. On the way to the first of the four great shrines she visited Calcutta, worshipping at Kalighat (the great temple from which Calcutta is named), and bathed in the Ganges. . . .

'The image of the goddess is hideous in the extreme. She has a black face with a protruding tongue covered with blood, and is adorned with a necklace of skulls. She is called the "Bloody Goddess," and many goats and kids are sacrificed to her daily by her worshippers. On the regular festival days the drain about the temple is said to flow with the blood of her victims.'

Chundra Lela trudged on, and at length arrived at the first of the four great shrines—the Temple of Jagannath, in the country of Orissa. The god is ugly, and the incidents of his worship are demoralizing in the extreme. The second of the shrines is Ramanath, near Ceylon, on a small island not far from Madura. Passing to the third famous temple, Dwarkanath, in the west of India, the pilgrim made further sacrifices after the manner of devotees. Lastly she reached Badrinath, in the north of the peninsula, among the snows of the Himalaya range. There it was fondly hoped that the burden of sin would be taken away. Seven years had passed since Chundra Lela left home in search of God, and not yet had she found rest and peace. Neither journeyings nor

ceremonies, neither offerings nor prayers, had availed anything!

Continuing her search, she found herself at the residence of a king twenty miles from Midnapore. In the presence of the king and queen she related her moving story, and the result was that she was begged to cease wandering. The king built her a house, and gave her servants; she became a priestess of the royal household, taught the women Sanscrit, and 'performed worship' for them. Thus, in luxury and honor, she lived seven years, when the king and his first queen died. Not yet, however, did she know peace of mind; so once more she began pilgrimage, determined to please the gods, whatever bodily torture or affliction it might mean. She joined herself to a body of fakirs, and for three years called upon Ram, but without response. If anyone ever 'found out' the gods of the Hindus, it was Chundra Lela; at length, she came to distrust the Brah-



CHUNDRA LELA.

min priests, proving them to be liars rather than holy men.

Gathering up her idols, she took them to the house of a Boostrum, a caste rather low in the scale, and left them with the woman, saying: 'You may worship these if you like; I have done them homage many long weary years—all in vain. I will never worship them again. There is nothing in Hinduism, or I would have found it.' She had made the acquaintance of a girl who was enjoying Christian instruction from Miss Julia Phillips, of the American Free Baptist Mission, Midnapore. Buying a Bible for eight annas (8d.), she read it day and night at first, and soon loved it so that she could not hold her peace about the treasure she had found.

After a few weeks of inquiry and instruction, the earnest seeker expressed a wish to become a Christian. Leaving all the past, and 'counting not the cost,' she was baptized, witnessing a good confession. She took a path of her own, and, by tact, perseverance, and Christian devotion, surmounted many obstacles, and

overcame difficulties before which many would have fainted. Where she had been known as a pilgrim, she has since preached the Gospel of Christ. Among others whom she led to the Lord was her own brother. He was ill at the time, and she nursed him tenderly. The story is thus told:—

'One day he called her to him, and said: "Sister, I believe in Jesus, and have been trying to serve him ever since the teaching I had when I went to see you. Do you think he will receive and save me?"

"Certainly, brother; that is just what he died to do," said Chundra Lela.

"You think he will?" he said earnestly. "I had intended to take my family and go to Midnapore, and come out openly and be baptized and live with Christian people; but I fear now I will never live to do that. I feel my days are few, but I do wish to die a Christian; and you think Jesus will receive me, anyway?"

"Yes, brother; I know he will receive you now. Do you give your soul and body to him?"

"Yes, I do; and I believe Jesus does save me. Oh, I wish I could be baptized!"

"But there are no Padre Sahibs here, brother; no, not one in all our land," said Chundra Lela, yearningly, "and how could I bring one so far?"

"You could not," said the dying man; "for there would not be time. But, Lela, you are a Christian, and you preach the Gospel. Why could you not baptize me? I do want to die a Christian."

Chundra Lela thought a moment, and looked into the face of her beloved brother, for whom she had so long prayed. She then said: "Surely God would not be angry with me for doing such a thing. When I have performed all kinds of official and priestly services before heathen gods, I surely can do this for him." She quietly left the room, and returned, bearing in her hand a brass bowl of water. Placing it on the ground, she reverently knelt by her brother's bedside, and pouring out a heartfelt prayer to God, who had so wonderfully led and saved her, and had now answered her prayer in the salvation of her brother, she asked him to bless the water she was about to use, and to fill her brother with the Holy Spirit. She then, still kneeling, took the water, and dipping it with her hand, poured it upon the head of her brother, saying: "My brother, I baptize you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." She bowed her head in silence, and it seems to me that during that solemn ceremony the angels, and the Saviour himself, must have hovered over that couch, and filled that room, away there in the centre of that heathen nation, with the glory of heaven.

'As she rose, a sweet smile of peace had settled upon her brother's face, who was no longer a heathen, but a Christian. A few days later the angels made another visit to that room, and carried her brother away with them, home.'

Other incidents must be sought in the