

ISABELLA THOBURN—PIONEER IN EDUCATION FOR INDIAN GIRLS.

Miss Nellie Davies.

Any connection between a vulture's quill and a girls' school in Lucknow? Yes, and much that is interesting. It all centres around Isabella Thoburn.

One day while her brother, a missionary in India, was resting in a mango orchard after a busy day spent in one of the villages in Rohilkhand, India, he picked up a vulture's quill and idly whittled it into a pen. Going back to his tent, he wrote to his sister of his work and the great needs. Chiefly, his thoughts dwelt on the tremendous need of a girls' boarding school. Almost in thoughtless fun, he asked her if she would not come out and start the work.

By return mail her answer went back to her brother that she would go when the way was opened. This was not a spasmodic, emotional idea. She had sound judgment, loyal devotion to duty, and a cheerful Christian spirit which carried her through all difficulties to the place where her work lay.

Perhaps much of this was inherited from her parents, who were Scotch and Irish. They were among the pioneers to the country south of us. They had plenty of opportunity to show their calibre. Her mother, on more than one occasion, showed wonderful bravery. Once a greatly infuriated, insane man rushed into the room where she and one of her daughters were sitting. Quietly going on with her work, she had such an influence over the man that when she asked him for the axe which he had been brandishing he willingly released it. Surely every woman will agree that almost equal courage was shown, when after a particularly hard season, but when conditions were becoming a little easier, her husband gave her an extra dollar, telling her to buy a new cloak, she quietly returned it, saying, "It will go along with yours to the Lord's work. I can turn my old cloak." Though only ten years old at her father's death, Isabella Thoburn says that she well remembers his high devotion to his Christian principles.

It was not until three years after her promise to her brother that she was able to fulfil it. Her duty was at home, where she cared for an invalid, widowed sister-in-law and her two boys, while at the same time she taught school. In

1869 she sailed with Dr. Clara Swain, arriving in India in time for the Methodist Episcopal Conference, under whose Board she held her appointment.

In Lucknow, where she was located, her school was begun with six girls. Although the attendance was small, and there were some who might have helped by, at least, refraining from saying that her plan was not practical, she settled down with her usual quiet, forceful energy to make this work a success. Very soon she was able to buy a piece of splendid property, which, strange to say, had been occupied by one who had opposed her work. Six years later, seeing the great need of a school for English girls, she opened one at Cawnpur, forty-five miles west of Lucknow. There was no one else to take charge of this work but Miss Thoburn. This necessitated her travelling by night between the two places.

At the end of ten years, during which time much lasting work had been accomplished, she sailed for home on her first furlough. There she was to meet another problem. She was naturally of a quiet, retiring disposition, but just as naturally were the people at home curious to know of her work. It was also very important that they should be told of it. When her first invitation came to speak in public, she had a hard time to bring herself to the point of acceptance. She told them she would sit at the front of the church and answer any questions that might be asked. The outcome was that the questions came in so quickly and required such lengthy explanation that she soon found herself standing at the front of the church delivering her first lecture. This was on a Sunday afternoon, in a Presbyterian church. She afterwards, laughingly, blamed her Presbyterian friends for her unorthodoxy. After that she spoke many times, one of the most noted being at the Ecumenical Conference in New York in 1900.

One writes of her: "She was soon in demand everywhere, and ever afterward was one of the most acceptable and effective of missionary speakers. She was never pretentious or exciting, but always earnest, calmly intense, and so direct and practical that no one heard