

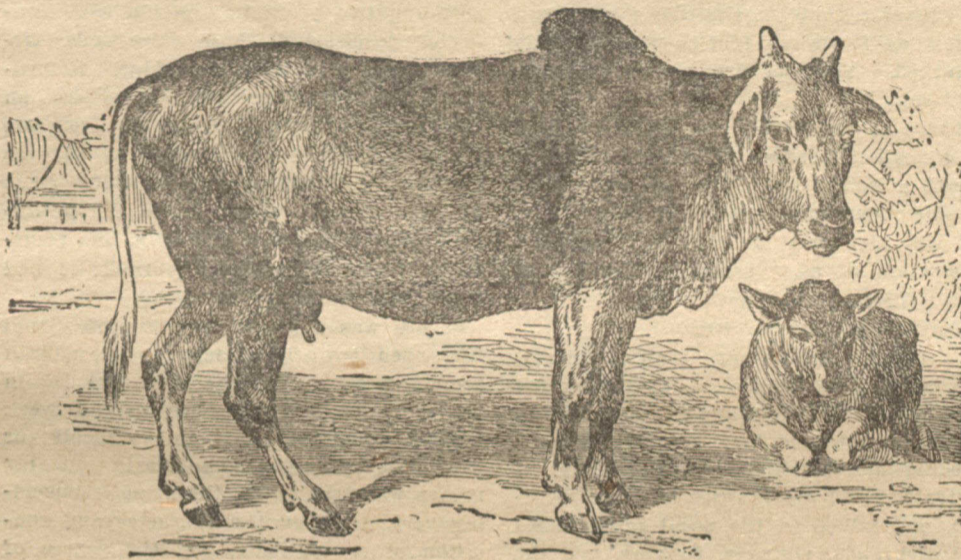
BOYS AND GIRLS

The Story of Durgamma

(By Miss M. L. Christlieb, of Anantapur, India.)

(Abridged from a publication of the London Missionary Society.)

It stood at the end of the bazaar, a little tumble-down mud hut, with thatched roof; windows it boasted none; one rickety door had to admit people and cattle, and



THE SACRED COW OF INDIA.

light and air, and allow exit to the smoke from the tiny fireplace within as well. There was not much cattle to come through, only one buffalo cow, bald and black and ugly as all buffaloes are, for they say in India, 'God made the cow, and the devil saw it and tried to make one too, but it turned out a buffalo.' The inhabitants of the cottage, however, thought much of it, for it was their principal source of income. In the morning the mother milked it and churned the milk into butter, and then the butter was clarified and sold as 'ghee,' that indispensable article of food in India.

Small as the hut was, it held, beside the buffalo (who was considered the chief inhabitant and had the best corner at night for itself), a family of father and mother and five children, four of whom were girls. There dwelt little happiness amongst them and great poverty. The wife, whose name was Durgamma, would often repair to the sacred tree in the village where stood the huge stone idol, and offer some of her precious 'ghee' and some flowers to propitiate the goddess and avert coming disaster; she took all the little girls with her and taught them to worship the stone and repeat the name of the goddess; it might have been Ghaliyamma or Yellamma, or many others; these are all so many different forms of the dread goddess Kali, the great mother, who yet has no mother-heart at all in her, but loves to destroy and to kill, so that in former times human sacrifices were constantly offered her, and at her chief shrines in the large cities in India she is represented as a monster with bloody lips and a necklace of skulls.

Poor Durgamma had never heard of a divine Being whose character was love; she knew but the sacred image under the tree and revered it in ignorant superstition and fear. When Durgamma heard that her husband had at last carried out his threat to leave her she fell down and knocked her forehead on the ground, weep-

ing and wailing bitterly. 'What have I done that such a thing should happen to me? Why have the gods cursed me with this dreadful fate? I shall be considered a widow like Achamma, whose husband died the other day, and who is so despised now, and everybody says she must have been very wicked in a former life that such misfortune should overtake her. What shall I do? What shall I do?'

And, indeed, she had reason to bewail

herself. It is not easy to describe to those living in Christian countries how wretched is the life of widows and deserted wives in India. Dark, miserable days followed in the little hut, and Durgamma grew despairing and reckless. 'They all say I am a widow and a bad woman. I don't care any more if I do get bad.'

dhora asked me if I would like to go to school,' repeated Obana, breathlessly, 'but I said I could not, I must take the buffalo out, and, besides, I'd rather play marbles with the other boys.'

'Go and clean this rice,' said her mother wrathfully, 'and don't stand there wasting your time. And you, Obana, take out the buffalo; it is overlate already. What the dhora says may be all right for the white people, but what does he know about us?'

However, the dhora did get to know about Durgamma. Through a chain of circumstances, too long to relate here, he heard all her story, and one day he paid her a visit. 'Durgamma,' he said, 'you are having a hard time. Now, I will tell you something. Would you like to give me those three little girls of yours and the boy, too? Then I would send them to school and educate them and see that they grow up good and useful. They are running wild here and learning many bad things, and you, yourself,' he added sorrowfully, 'are not setting them a good example. You have grown careless since your husband left you, Durgamma, and the children are not learning good things in this house.'

Durgamma burst into tears. 'Yes, yes; take them,' she said. 'They will grow wicked here. I don't want them to be bad like me. It will be better for them at school.'

As she was talking one day, Obana, the only son in the family, rushed in, saying, 'Girls, come and look! There is a padre dhora (European gentleman) in the bazaar and others are with him. They are singing and talking, and a lot of people are

And so it came to pass. Obana went to a Christian training institution, where he is getting on very well; he has learnt something about the Lord Jesus and has been baptized, and is now called Nathanael, and the three little girls have received the names of Priscilla, Rachel, and Salome. Priscilla has grown into a big girl, and shows that she is a true Christian by trying to help in small ways of unselfishness the other girls in our Christian girls' boarding school. She is not very clever at her books, but she can turn her hands



WORSHIPPING THE GODDESS KALI.

listening. But mind you don't go too near; they say he has little bottles of medicine about him, and when no one is looking he squirts it over some people, and then their caste is broken and they are bewitched.'

They all rushed out to see the unusual sight, and did not return till a couple of hours later, chattering like magpies. 'The

to all household tasks very well.

Is that the end of the story, you ask? What about Durgamma the mother, and the eldest daughter, Sundri? Ah, my story has not a nice ending at all, and if you only like happy endings you had better not read mine. Sundri and her mother are both dead now. Durgamma became a servant in the missionary's home, but