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# W. F. M. SOCIETY.

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MRS. WILSON'S LETTER.

NEEMUCH, CENTRAL INDIA, Sept. 29, 1885.

DEAR MRS. HARVIE,—

Some weeks ago Miss Rodger kindly asked me to spend a couple of hours with her in her zenana visiting ; and knowing that you are specially interested in this branch of our mission work, I am glad to be able to tell you something of what I saw. The four or five houses we went to were in the Camp Bazaar, and all within a short distance from Miss Rodger's new bungalow. The first we entered was that of a high caste Hindoo, who has a good position in the Post Office, and who is quite wealthy, as indeed were, I fancy, all on whom we called. From the street the house looked very much like the surrounding houses, perhaps a little larger than some of them. The appearance of their dwellings does not, to a *new* Indian at least, tell very much of the circumstances of the inmates. The street wall of the building was unbroken but by a tiny entrance door ; not a single window or balcony, or anything to show that it was a "living" house. By the little door we entered a room in which were comfortably "housed" the cattle belonging to the establishment, and passing through, we left it by another little door that opened on a very dirty court-yard. We crossed the yard, and mounting a rather steep stairway, followed our guide, a daughter of the house, to what was, I suppose, the chief sitting room of the family. The building contained a good many up-stair and down-stair rooms, all opening on the square court-yard, those on the upper story opening on a verandah which ran round the entire court. The room into which we were shown was, according to our ideas, small, and very, very untidy, though Miss Rodger said that it was in fairly good order that day, and much better than she had often seen it. On the floor was an old Brussels or tapestry carpet,

whose pattern and colours could only be guessed at, so worn and threadbare was it. There was little in the furniture line. A couple of beds, one entirely surrounded by faded green curtains, the other used as a sofa seat, one chair, and in niches in the wall a couple of native candles and some bottles, nearly complete the inventory of household effects. The little girl who was doing the honours (a daughter-in-law of the house) found somewhere a second chair, and then went to call her mother. After waiting perhaps fifteen minutes (for the lady was at her toilet at the time), she appeared, gorgeous in silk and jewels. Many of you are familiar with the form of the Hindoo lady's dress, so you can picture to yourselves what she looked like in a skirt of richest red and yellow striped silk, the bottom of the dress being finished with a purple silk border. The jacket was of purple to match the border, and the sari, also of very fine silk, was of the same shade of red that appeared in the skirt, and was also bordered with purple. The jewellery consisted of a very heavy necklace, ear-rings, bracelets and ankle-rings of gold. You think she must have looked rather odd in such splendour of colour and of jewels. The dress was striking certainly, but the material was so soft and rich, and the colours so beautifully shaded, and the different parts harmonized so well, that the whole was not only a very gorgeous but a very pleasing picture. Miss Rodger asked her if she had donned her finest to receive us ; but she had dressed to attend a dinner that afternoon, and we had been fortunate enough to call in time to see her in full party costume. With her came into the room her only child, a little girl about thirteen years of age, and of whom she is very fond. The three—mother, daughter and daughter-in-law—sat on the bed, and after finding out all about me from Miss Rodger (Indian women are just as curious about strangers as Canadian women, and take a very straightforward way of learning one's history, sometimes asking questions that are rather embarrassing), they asked her to read something to them. The piece selected was from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, exhorting His hearers to return good for evil, blessing for cursing. All listened earnestly, and when the reading was finished, the mother said that these words were very good, but did any one act on them. When Miss Rodger explained to her that Christians at least tried to do so, she shook her head rather doubtfully, and said, "Perhaps one in a thousand may do it." This woman had been

anxious to learn to read herself, and had asked Miss Rodger to teach her. Though done as quietly as possible, her step-son got knowledge of it, and influenced his father to forbid it; so the lessons had to be given up. It is very hard for these people to break loose from old customs and habits; and while I have no doubt that the lady would be quite able to hold her own in her own sphere, and that a larger one than we sometimes imagine it to be, she is helpless before her son when it comes to a question of learning to read. As a rule, they say, it is the women themselves who resist any reform in this direction—any attempt to bring education to them; and the fact that zenana visiting by our missionary ladies creates a desire for knowledge on their part, is one of the best proofs we have of its influence and value.

The next house we went to was that of a doctor in Government employ, a Rajput by "caste." The surroundings of the place were much the same as of the other, only the court-yard seemed to be common to a number of families. The doctor, whom we disturbed in his afternoon "siesta," was loafing on a couch in the house, and for some time contented himself with watching us and listening from this post of observation, while we sat in a sort of porchway. I wish you could have seen him brought to his feet by his wife tossing her keys over her shoulder at him and ordering him, without even deigning to look round to him, to get up and bring her fancy work for the inspection of the visitors. Few Western husbands, I will venture to say, would have behaved so well in the circumstances, and have done what was ordered so meekly. It was evidently not the first time he had *obeyed*. He produced the fancy work (a pair of socks, and some canvas and wool work), apparently very proud of his wife's accomplishments; and considering that she had begun for the first time to use her needle just nine months before, the work was very good. At the time we called she was busy knitting a pair of slippers that Miss Rodger had been teaching her to make. The doctor, who was the finest-looking Indian I have seen, tall and well-built, features regular and expression pleasing, spoke English pretty well; but he was so occupied in admiring his wife, that he gave only scraps of attention to us. Miss Rodger was engaged all the time we could spare here in making some corrections in the slipper work, so she did not read, as in the last house.

Leaving this interesting pair, we went through a number of narrow lanes to the dwelling of another high caste family—if I remember rightly, a Brahmin family. This house was decidedly finer than the others we had seen. The one little street door opened into a court on the side of the house belonging to the men of the family, the court-yard around which the zenana rooms were ranged being more secluded. In this latter yard everything was clean and tidy; and the taste of the inmates was shown in the little patch of garden, carefully kept, which was in the centre of the court. But at best these places are very dreary. There was no light admitted into the rooms around the court but by the doors that opened on the verandah, and the rooms, into which I could see (we sat on the verandah), contained only a bed and a candle. No carpet, no table, no chairs, nothing that we consider necessaries, and, of course, no pictures or pretty knickknacks of any kind that add so much to the pleasantness of our homes, were to be seen there. And the women in these houses we visited being of high caste, are never allowed to go beyond their zenana walls, except in case of a party or when travelling. Then they are shut in a closely-covered palki, a sort of long-shaped box borne by four coolies; and great care is taken that on entering and leaving this cage no one shall get a glimpse of my lady.

But to return to our work. We were very kindly welcomed on entering the court by the grandmother, daughter and granddaughter; and after the usual questions about the "stranger" were asked and answered, and a little friendly gossip indulged in, Miss Rodger read to them. The grandmother, a remarkably fine-looking old lady, with a soft, sweet voice, answered fluently and intelligently any questions on the life of Christ that Miss Rodger asked her, and showed an appreciation of gospel teachings that I had not expected to find amid such heathen surroundings. Miss Rodger must experience great pleasure in seeing such results of her work among these women; as also from feeling that to her they confide their most secret troubles, looking to her for the sympathy of a friend.

The sons in this family are university men; and, as is common among students here, do not believe in their own religion, and have even given up doing *pooja* to their gods. We would hope that the teaching given week by week to the mothers and wives may be as the leaven, working first in their hearts, and

spreading until whole families shall acknowledge Christ as their Saviour, and shall in turn become centres of light in this land of heathen darkness.

We visited two other houses that afternoon, but my letter is already too lengthy, so I shall not write about them just now. The families in which I was most interested are those I have told you of. I hope before very long to spend another day with Miss Rodger in visiting some of the zenanas in the City Bazaar, and shall be glad to tell you something about them in another letter.

I am, yours very sincerely,

M. C. WILSON.

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EXTRACTS FROM MISS MCGREGOR'S LETTER.

INDORE, Sept. 19th, 1885.

MY DEAR MRS. HARVIE,—

I was thinking this evening that it will soon be eight years since I left Canada, and it scarcely seems possible that such is the case, so quickly has the time fled, passed like a dream. I hope I have accomplished a little, but I feel sorrowful when I think how much there is to be done, and, alas! how feeble the instrumentality. There is no need for discouragement, however; quite the contrary as to educational matters.

Medical work amongst women is the topic which receives most attention in public, and Lady Dufferin is doing her best to promote the good cause. She has even taken up the study of the language, which is rarely done by ladies in her position. Miss Beatty has had a letter from her, inquiring as to her scheme of work, etc.

Remarriage of widows and their social condition is also exciting attention, and as I have some personal experience in dealing with these unfortunates, I may tell you something about them. Five widows in all have been taught and trained sufficiently to take the places of assistant teachers. One thing I have observed in every case; that is, the hunted, down-trodden look which every one of these poor creatures wears when she first comes to school, and which gradually gives place to a brighter expression when she finds that she is of some use. I remarked the same look of woe in the face of one who came a

few days ago. When I first saw her, she was cowering in the corner of the room, and seemed to think I might turn her out, and nothing could be more timid and distressed looking when I hesitated about admitting her before knowing whether she bore a good character. I am obliged to be particular on this point, on account of the school girls. This woman has not a living relative, and my heart ached when I thought of her friendless condition. I hope she will continue to come to school. Another widow, who had taught for about two years, died a short time ago, and as I saw her on her death-bed, I felt glad that God in His providence had sent her to me. She had often conversed freely with my Bible women, and expressed her willingness to trust in Christ, though she made no open profession. When her feet were touching the river of death, she said firmly, "I do trust in Him," "I am not afraid," and her look was one of quiet contentment till the summons came. She and her mother were all to each other, and a few days after her death, the poor old woman brought back her daughter's school books, and said, with a sorrowful burst of tears, "Who will read them now." I feel glad to think that even a little joy came into the last few years of the poor crushed life, and, better than all, that she was saved through the blood of Christ.

This morning I showed two of my teachers how to darn, and one of them tried to do a little herself. She was quite successful, and she was so delighted, that she asked permission to show it to her brother. He praised the work, and then she requested me to send her all my stockings, and she would darn them; I think I shall do so with pleasure.

Miss Ross has had rather a sharp attack of fever. She is better now, but has not regained her full strength. She, Miss Rodger, Miss Beatty, Mrs. Wilkie and the children, are all going away for change of air, going to Masooree.

I hear that Lord Dufferin is coming to Indore in the month of November.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson have settled at Neemuch, about one hundred miles by railway from Indore. It is in British territory, and has not been occupied by any mission before. I think it is a good centre for work. Mr. and Mrs. Builder are well.

Yours very truly,

M. MCGREGOR.

MISS BELL'S HEALTH.

NOTE.—Societies will gladly learn that Miss Bell is slowly gaining strength. In a letter, recently received, dated Rostock, N. Germany, Oct. 4th, she states that she hopes soon to be able to walk out in the open air.

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MRS. JAMIESON'S LETTER.

TAMSUI, Sept. 6th, 1885.

DEAR MRS. HARVIE,—

Your last letter, annual report, etc., yet unacknowledged. I wish you could have seen the effects of a typhoon that passed over us lately. It lasted two days, and the most solid buildings suffered more or less; the wind roared almost like thunder; tiles were cracked or torn off, and the rain came pouring down; fences were flattened; the colleges stood it well, but the trees were bent over or torn up by the roots. We were afraid they would die, after all Dr. Mackay's care; however, they were set up again, and seem to be doing well. The Doctor was himself away in the country, exposed to the full force of the storm, and A. Hôa narrowly escaped drowning when trying to cross some water in a little boat. Storms are so frequent inland and on the east coast, that constant attention is necessary to keep the chapels in order. Where buildings are put up the Doctor must be present to show the masons how to build, and to watch everything, or their work would soon tumble down.

The seven chapels destroyed were among the best; the converts tell us they cannot be replaced, as there were paintings and other work in them that Dr. Mackay and some of the preachers did with their own hands. He saw two or three of the chapels, but made only one visit to the ~~con~~, when Sintiam chapel was reopened on 30th March, in 1884. I can't help always thinking of the building as it was that day; the clean red brick and white plaster contrasted so with the mud-coloured houses round it. From the door there was the prettiest view I think I ever saw; a wide shallow stream flowed past the foot of the mountains; but I won't try to describe it. In front was a clean little yard surrounded by a bamboo fence. To the right hand as we entered was a platform and table, a blackboard, and some sheets of hymn tunes; at the other end stood a cupboard with medicines. By a door in the opposite side we entered a small court that was that day covered with an

awning to hold part of the crowd of people. To the right and behind were rooms for Tàn Hê (now Rev. Tàn) and his family, and to the left a room with bed, table, fire-place, etc., for any passing missionary or preacher; pictures hung round the room. Such a crowd as came to worship, and, according to previous arrangement, 51 were baptized, but I wrote to Canada about it before. Many have suffered losses that cannot be repaired, but I think Hê's was the most trying. He had notes carefully written out and extended of all Dr. Mackay's daily teaching for the last 14 years; they were stolen in the general plunder, and no doubt destroyed.

The longer we are here the more we realize that in Canada, or without seeing Formosa, there can be little idea of the work accomplished or of what toil it has cost. Of many, many things we know absolutely nothing, but we have seen and heard what ought to fill with gratitude the heart of any one who cares for the Lord's work.

Dr. M. is at present at work in the country, and has students with him teaching them. Mrs. M. a short time ago had a severe attack of fever, but is well now. You never saw her among her own people, so cannot know what a help she is to the mission.

We are working away at the language; it is difficult, and I am glad when Saturday night comes, though just as glad to begin again on Monday morning. Do not, I beg of you, mistake our position. Though in Formosa, we cannot yet be called missionaries in the general sense of the word; we are only students, and even when we have learned a little more of what conversion is, and what faith is and how to speak, and something of Chinese customs and how to approach the people, we will be to Formosa Church just like a tiny little branch on the tree, and *grafted* on besides. A native knows so much to begin with, and the preachers have had such a training; but I must tell you more about them some other time.

Christian women, think of Formosa, and pray for us while you are busy over housework or caring for others. Preaching Christ is the same in a foreign land as it is at home, by His grace just doing the least thing as well as we can for *His sake*.

Yours faithfully,

ANNIE JAMIESON.

New Societies and other matter left over until next month.