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Soonderbai Powar

FOR 45 YEARS AN EARNEST WORKER
FOR GOD IN INDIA

(Friend of Pandita Ramabai)

BY

KATE STORRIE

WITH FOREWORD BY WM. C. IRVINE

Editor of *The Indian Christian*



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Preface

MISS SOONDERBAI H. POWAR, one of the best known Christians in Western India, was born on the 29th July, 1856, and died on 15th December, 1921. She began regular work for God at the age of twenty, and for the long period of forty-five years only illness or the shortest holidays interrupted her labours.

The story of this life of unceasing yet quiet and unhurried service has been written with a twofold object; first, that the account of her devotion to God and His Word and His work may be an inspiration to those, especially the young, who read it; and, secondly, that earnest workers in the cause of Foreign Missions may be cheered and encouraged as they read of the blessing which has followed the efforts of faithful missionaries, many of whom have now passed to their reward.

I wish to express my hearty thanks to all the friends who have helped me by sending recollections and information. For many of the facts contained in Chapters IV and VII I am indebted to the writings of my warm friend for many years, the late Mrs. Helen S. Dyer, the biographer of Pandita Ramabai. K.S.

CHANDGAD,
BELGAUM DIST.,
INDIA.

Foreword

By the Editor of *The Indian Christian*.

THE writer for many years had the great privilege of from time to time visiting the Zenana Training Home, to hold meetings for the girls and young women there, and always looked forward to the precious minutes spent with our sister, either in talking over matters concerning the Indian Christian Community, for which she had real soul-travail; or fellowship around the Throne of Grace—Soonderbai knew God as few do, and she knew His Word.

Perhaps the virtue in our sister, which most struck one, was her *quiet patience*, begotten of a deep faith in the overruling hand of God. I have never seen her ruffled; and her patience under suffering for years and years of pain, acute at times, was remarkable testimony to the keeping power of the grace of God in her heart.

Her life was a life of prayer, and I judge there were few Indian Christians or missionaries in Western India who were loyal to Christ and His Word, who were not constant subjects of her intercessions. She was always actively interested in any effort put forth for the spiritual good of her people, and quick to help or suggest any way whereby Christ's cause could be promoted or furthered. She deeply deplored, as did her friend of many years,

Pandita Ramabai, the modernistic trend of teaching in missionary and Indian Christian circles in Western India—of this she often spoke and wrote.

Her great work of preparing young Christian women for evangelistic work was carried on in simple, yet implicit faith in her Heavenly Father, as the story of this book will unfold to the delight of the reader; but the fruit of those labours cannot be estimated this side the Judgment Seat of Christ. How she loved the thought of Christ's Advent—it was to her a "blessed hope" indeed—in the truest sense of the word.

It is hardly necessary to say that Soonderbai was greatly beloved by the girls in her Home, and I cannot recollect a single person speaking of her in aught but terms of respect and love.

It is a great joy to know that the work is being carried on by two such capable and devoted workers as Misses Hall and Binns, both of whom are so well known and esteemed, that the writer would not presume to add one word of commendation.

WM. C. IRVINE.

BELGAUM, INDIA.

Contents

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
From High-caste Hinduism to Christianity,	- 1
The conversion of Soonderbai's future parents. Soonderbai's birth and childhood.	
CHAPTER II	
In the Dark Zenanas,	- 15
Soonderbai in early womanhood as a Gospel messenger in the homes of rich and poor in Bombay.	
CHAPTER III	
A Startling Call,	- 31
Visits Great Britain to plead her people's cause against a giant wrong.	
CHAPTER IV	
"The Abode of Wisdom,"	- 46
Soonderbai's friendship and association with Pandita Ramabai.	
CHAPTER V	
A Brave Step,	- 55
Opening of combined Training Home for Bible-women and Orphanage.	
CHAPTER VI	
"That Little World,"	- 67
Further interesting glimpses into life in the Training Home.	

CHAPTER VII		PAGE
"Floods upon the Dry Ground,"	-	79
Great Revival blessing.		

CHAPTER VIII		
Greatly Comforted,	- - - - -	88
Soonderbai's third visit to Great Britain. History of Dhanwantibai.		

CHAPTER IX		
"Always so Smiling, Always so Kind,"	- -	103
Soonderbai falls asleep in Jesus. Touching testimonies to her character.		

Illustrations

Soonderbai Powar,	- - - - -	<i>Frontispiece</i>
		FACING PAGE
A Famine Orphan on Admittance to the Home,	-	16
The same after some years,	- - - - -	32
Chandrabai with another girl,	- - - - -	48
Soonderbai in her little cart,	- - - - -	64
Bible-women ready to set out to the villages,	- -	80
Dhanwantibai,	- - - - -	96
Miss Binns and some Bible-women,	- - - - -	102

SOONDERBAI POWAR

Her Life and Work

CHAPTER I

From High-caste Hinduism to Christianity

"Called to suffer with our Master, patiently to run His race;
Called a blessing to inherit, called to holiness and grace;
Called to fellowship with Jesus by the ever-faithful One:
Called to His eternal glory, to the Kingdom of His Son."

RAMCHANDRA POWAR was very happy. His long-cherished ambition was to be fulfilled; he was going to College in Bombay. He would see the great city, and quench his thirst for knowledge at the fount of Western learning. True, there were some who shook their heads, for the institution selected was a Christian school, and they deemed it a dangerous experiment to send a young person there. But his nearest relatives argued that Ramchandra was such a staunch Hindu, and he so hated the Sahibs' religion that it was unthinkable

SOONDERBAI POWAR: HER LIFE AND WORK

that he would ever depart from the religion of his fathers. No such thoughts troubled the boy himself, and he entered upon this new path in life without the slightest thought of the tremendous consequences that would follow.

He went to Bombay ignorant of the real nature of Christianity, but as he learned more of it, his whole attitude towards it changed. The missionaries at that time in charge of what is now the Wilson College were Dr. Wilson, Dr. Murray Mitchell, and Mr. Nesbit. Their aim was not only to educate the young men and boys who came under their influence, but also definitely to win them to Christ.

In her book,

“SIXTY YEARS AGO,”

Mrs. Mitchell describes a Bible Class which her husband held for the students on Sunday mornings. Bibles in hand, the bright-faced youths gathered round him on the veranda of his house, and from within Mrs. Mitchell could hear all that was said. Anxious to help them in their difficulties Dr. Mitchell allowed them to ask about anything they could not understand, and Mrs. Mitchell says the running fire of questions which they kept up was intensely interesting.

These keen young fellows were deeply interested in these new subjects, and from beginning to end of the class there was never a dull moment. The missionaries used to welcome the students to their homes, and often lasting friendships were formed.

RAMCHANDRA

had been married when only six years of age, and when he was eighteen years old his father-in-law died. He attended the funeral, and as he stood by the burning pyre he asked himself, "If what these Christians teach is true, then where will my soul go when I die?" The question haunted him, and he began to study the Bible with a new purpose. Hitherto it had been a most interesting comparison of religions; now it was a personal question on which his own eternal safety depended. As he searched and studied he saw how perfectly the atoning work of the Lord Jesus met his case, and a flame of faith and devotion was kindled in his young heart that never went out. The teaching of the missionaries and their consistent example helped him greatly, and soon to the other treasures of knowledge he added the priceless treasure of the knowledge of sins forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not hide his light, and was baptised by Dr. Murray Mitchell.

His first thought was of his young wife to whom he was sincerely attached. She knew nothing of Christianity—nothing, indeed, of the outside world, for, like the Powar family, her people belonged to a high Mahratta caste, and she had been brought up in the seclusion of the zenana. So when her husband went to see her, and told her of his conversion, and asked,

"Will you be a Christian and follow me?"

She answered, "I do not understand anything about it, but where you go, I will go."

Ramchandra next wrote to his parents telling them of the great change which had brought such joy and light to him. But they were filled with consternation. They would sooner have heard of his death. It was not only that their son had fallen into the deepest religious error—it was more than that—he was positively defiled. He on whom all their hopes were set had become an outcast and a disgrace. In their eyes it was the most terrible calamity that could have befallen them.

His mother immediately went to Bombay, and with many tears besought him to give it all up and go home with her. It would have been hard for any one to resist such pleading, and Ramchandra was an affectionate son. Gently he answered,

"I will come, mother, if you will promise not to ask me to worship idols again. I cannot do that."

The mother shook her head. Ramchandra was the eldest son, and according to the strict rule of Hinduism he alone could take his father's place, and perform the religious rites so necessary for the family. Again and again she pleaded with him not to disgrace them all, and promised him anything he could ask if only he would renounce this new religion and come back into caste.

Finding all her entreaties unavailing, the broken-

hearted mother returned to her home. She refused to see any of her friends, covering her face with her hands when any one approached and crying out,

"Do not see my face, do not see my face; my son has disgraced the Powar family."

No one could comfort her, and she soon became alarmingly ill, and three weeks afterwards she died.

It was well that Ramchandra had counted the cost of becoming a Christian, for other trials soon succeeded this heavy sorrow. His father cut down his allowance till he was unable to afford proper food, but he was too proud to tell anyone of his needs. A fellow-student accidentally discovered the straits his friend was in, and reported the matter to Dr. Wilson, the head of the College. But independent Ramchandra would accept no pecuniary help. However, a way out of his difficulties was found when a Christian gentleman offered to pay him for teaching some children in his leisure hours.

After his mother's death Ramchandra went home to

CLAIM HIS WIFE,

and remove her from the influence of her heathen relatives. But they refused to let him even see her, and, bitterly disappointed, the young man had to go away without her. For two years he was separated from her, and then, acting on the advice of the missionaries, Ramchandra took the matter to Court. On account of her strict zenana life, his wife entered

the court in a palanquin, or covered chair, and answered all the questions put to her from within its seclusion.

Her relatives had instructed her beforehand to positively refuse to go to her husband, but at the last, the young girl, bravely disregarding all their injunctions, intimated plainly that her husband's change of religion had made no difference to her, and she was just as willing as before to abide by the marriage contract. As by this time she was of age, judgment was given in accordance with her wish, and the two young people, so truly attached to one another, took up their residence in Bombay. Ramchandra now had regular employment as a teacher at the Wilson College, while at the same time continuing his studies.

But the wife had no intention of breaking her caste or accepting her husband's Christian beliefs. For some time she continued to live in the retirement to which she had been accustomed, and refused even to eat with her husband. She had never seen a European, and was quite alarmed the first time she saw one, and when her husband came home she told him she had seen a white ghost. Later on, when she had become quite familiar and friendly with the "white ghosts," they often teased her about this.

Soon Ramchandra began to teach his wife to read and write, using the Bible for a reading book. As time went on she could not help noticing a change

in her husband. As a youth he had been very passionate, and she remembered that on one occasion he had wanted some hot water. This was not ready at the time he wished, and the angry boy left the house and stayed three days in the village temple. But now there was no sign of the old petulance, and when the months passed and the outburst which she secretly dreaded never took place, she began to think there must indeed be some good in a religion which could so transform character.

Gradually she learned, as the reading lessons continued, of the Saviour who not only cleanses from the stain of sin, but keeps from its power. All her prejudice and fear vanished, and she began to long to know the Lord Jesus Christ as her own Saviour. He who ever satisfies the longing soul met the need of her heart, and gave her the assurance that she was indeed His own.

Two years after the commencement of the lessons the young husband, whose own confession of Christ had cost him so much sorrow, had the great joy of seeing his wife take her stand for the Lord Jesus. Can we imagine what a comfort it must have been to him, cut off as he was from all his own relations? And so they began a life of united testimony and service. Through all the years that followed she was his unfailing helpmeet, and their Christian home became a centre of light which shone brightly amid all the darkness around them.

When their first child, a girl, was born, their cup of joy was full to overflowing. In India girl babies are not always welcomed, and in former days many a new-born babe found a watery grave in the Ganges. But in this Christian home the tenderest love surrounded the baby girl. The parents named her

SOONDERI,

meaning beautiful, and to that they added the Bible name Hannah. They little dreamed how well-known and loved that name would become in future years! Their friends rejoiced with them, and Mrs. Wilson presented a tiny frock which she had spared time to make herself. This little token of love was deeply appreciated and remembered with pride and gratitude for many years.

For twelve months the pretty ways of the bright little baby gladdened the parents' hearts, and then she sickened, and in spite of all their care gradually grew worse. They called in a doctor, and with a great fear in their hearts listened for his verdict. He shook his head gravely and said there was no hope. But this young father and mother knew where to take their trouble, and instead of giving way to despair as Hindu parents would have done, they cried to the living God. "O Lord," they prayed, "if it is Thy will, spare our precious baby, and we will dedicate her to Thy service." Their prayer was answered. The little patient began to recover

immediately, and soon she was as well and merry as ever.

As the years passed by other children came to the home, and Soonderi was the eldest of several brothers and sisters. Most Indian children have a household or pet name, and Soonderi was most appropriately called

AKKA,

which means "elder sister." She became an elder sister in the truest sense of the word to numbers outside her own family circle, and in after years the name was used with respect and affection by many of the Indian Christians and others.

When Akka was ten years old her father removed with his family from busy, crowded Bombay to Sasvad, a country town in the Poona district, and for fourteen years it continued to be their home. Sasvad was then, as it is now, one of the mission stations of the United Free Church of Scotland, and from that time her father gave himself wholly to the preaching of the Gospel. There was a large proportion of Brahmins and good caste people among the population of the town and its surrounding villages, but many were very ignorant, and knew nothing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The new preacher who had come among them longed to see his countrymen turning to the Saviour, and patiently and lovingly he laboured. He tried to clear up their difficulties for them, and when he

was interrupted by questions from those who would fain have turned the Gospel preaching into a useless argument about obscure subjects and difficult doctrines, he would ask them in his own gentle way to wait until he had finished speaking, and then accompany him to his house, where they could talk at their leisure.

Many an hour did he spend thus, patiently answering questions, meeting arguments, and setting forth as faithfully as he could the truths of eternal life. All the while, quiet as a mouse, and unnoticed by the group of men, little Soonderi would sit in the background, listening to the long conversation, and learning much that was to be of immense value in her own work in the coming years.

But with all his earnestness,

MR. POWAR

had not large results to show for his work. The hearts of the proud Brahmin and the stolid Mahratta are never easily won, and Hinduism, as Miss Lilius Trotter says, takes "a strange magnetic hold" on its followers. He met with much opposition, and sometimes his audiences became actively hostile and handled him roughly, pelting him with stones and other missiles, and sending him home with his clothes spattered with blood. For Mr. Powar, though gentle and tactful, was a faithful preacher. He never watered down the truth. He could not

placate his hearers by saying flattering things of Hinduism.

He did not believe that Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism, nor could he say with one of the present-day Scottish missionaries that "the root in every man is Christ and it is watered with His Blood." Unlike him, he did not find "many signs of this root among the Maratha saints"—in his day the worshippers of false gods were not even called saints! He did know that here and there were some earnest souls who longed for the light, and who, even in the darkness, were groping after God. But he believed that the Light of the world is only to be found in Jesus Christ, and that those who would follow Him must needs turn their backs on Hinduism. So he patiently bore the rough treatment, anxious only to be able to say with the Apostle, "I am pure from the blood of all."

But God allowed him to see some fruit from his labours. On one occasion when it was known that a young Maratha was going to be baptised, the intensest excitement prevailed. Angry crowds assembled, and things were looking serious. But two missionaries coming out from Poona were mistaken by the excited people for Government officials, and their violence was checked. The young convert was driven by a circuitous route to Poona, and he became a witness for the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Within the circle of his own family also Mr. Powar was cheered by tokens of God's blessing, and the

answer to his own and his wife's prayers. Surrounded by Christian influences and constantly hearing her beloved father's clear teaching, the earnest-minded Soonderi was being gradually drawn to the Lord Jesus. What was the text or subject of it is not known, but a sermon by her father brought her to a definite decision for Christ. She was then thirteen years of age.

When Mr. Powar first went to

SASVAD

to live, the people of the town were much prejudiced against Christianity. The newcomers were shunned by their neighbours, who would not even touch the children. But the refined manners and kindly ways of the despised Christians no doubt helped to overcome this, and within a year a great change took place. The people began to associate with them, going to their house and inviting them in turn to their houses.

Mrs. Powar, with a heart full of the love of Christ, gladly used the opportunity thus given her. Taking her two eldest girls with her she returned her neighbours' calls. Seating herself, Indian fashion on the floor, with the women and children grouped around her, she told them in the picturesque language they understood so well, of the Saviour who was born in Bethlehem—of His spotless life—His deeds of mercy—His death and resurrection. It was all so new and strange to them, and the women sitting at

the noisy mill ceased turning it so that all might hear; and often the baby's long hood, or the short jacket that was being embroidered, fell unheeded on the worker's lap as she listened to the wonderful words of life. There by her mother's side, in these high-caste homes of the country town, the zenana worker took her earliest training. For Akka herself often read the Bible and tracts, and added a few words of explanation.

But it was not only in the homes of the well-to-do that they visited. Mr. Powar owned some land there, and a number of women used to work in his fields. It was their custom to stop work in the middle of the day for food and rest, and at those times they gladly listened to the Bible stories which are so beautifully suited to

THE EASTERN MIND.

Some people tell us with an air of assurance that the Hindus and Mohammedans do not need missionaries—they have a religion of their own—that is enough, and there is no need to waste time and money taking them another. Ramchandra Powar and his wife, reared in Hinduism, having seen its workings in actual life and experience, thought otherwise. They knew that its teachings could never satisfy the heart—that its ceremonies could never cleanse from sin, and they were glad to spend their lives in witnessing to high and low, rich and poor, of the Saviour who had saved them and filled their lives

with blessing. And their greatest joy was when their daughter began to share in their labours.

Yet, though she was serious and earnest enough at times, no one should imagine from what has been written that there was anything dull or gloomy about Akka. Her merry laughter rang through the house, and she joined as heartily as either of her brothers and sisters in the various games which Indian children love. She had a keen sense of humour and an irresistible love of fun and mischief. "Soonderi," her father exclaimed one day, "I believe if you were dying you would still make fun!" And it is a fact that in middle life, when she had to bear heavy cares and responsibilities, this spirit of humour would still come bubbling to the surface, and find vent in some innocent trick or joke that would have surprised those who did not know her well.

CHAPTER II

In the Dark Zenanas

“Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.”

SO the first twenty years of Akka's life glided by, swiftly, and peacefully. If her parents had remained Hindus she would have been married as a child, and long ere this would have been settled in her husband's home. But Akka and her sisters grew up under their father's roof, and from their own sweet-tempered mother they learned all the arts that an Indian housewife needs to learn. And in their spare time they carried the Glad Tidings to the women and children of the town.

Long after that happy home was broken up, Akka looked back on those peaceful years, and thought lovingly of the one who so quietly and efficiently guided the domestic affairs. “When I think of the splendid way in which my mother managed, and remember that she had had no education or Christian training, I just marvel at it,” she said more than once.

Akka herself must have been a great help to her mother. Her influence with her younger brothers

and sisters was all for good. To this day her sister recalls her

GREAT PATIENCE

with them all, and particularly with one delicate little girl who in fits of passion would beat her elder sister and push her into a corner. Akka was bigger and stronger, and had she exerted her strength she could no doubt soon have gained the upper hand. But her patience never failed, and, though sometimes this spiteful treatment made her cry, she never once used an angry word to the naughty little sister. No wonder that every one loved her, and that her mother leaned on her for help in bearing all the every-day burdens!

She was not aware how true this was until one day the postman brought a letter in a strange handwriting, bearing the Bombay postmark. It was from a lady missionary who was about to open a Home for the purpose of training young Indian girls for work in the zenanas of that great city, and it contained an urgent request that Mr. and Mrs. Powar would send their eldest daughter to her.

Akka's heart gave a great bound. For years her one desire had been to preach the Gospel.

"THE POOR WOMEN IN THE DARK ZENANAS"

called her unceasingly, and now the way would open before her, and she would receive the instruction that would fit her for this great service. But the



A FAMINE ORPHAN ON HER ADMITTANCE TO THE HOME.

(See same girl opposite page 32.)

mother's heart sank like lead, and then rose again in strong self-will. Her eldest, her Akka, so helpful, such a companion, why should she send her away to the city to live with strangers? She could not, she would not part with her.

Then came other thoughts of the thousands of her countrywomen living and dying in darkness—of the Saviour who had given all and suffered all for her. For a day or two a fierce conflict raged in her heart, and many tears fell. Then memory wakened, and the mother seemed once more to be standing by her suffering babe while the doctor made his examination. She seemed to live again through those agonising hours when she had prayed, "O God,

SPARE MY BABY,

and she shall be Thine for Thy service."

Could she take back now what she had yielded then? Grateful love gained the victory, and she went to her disappointed daughter and told her she might go to Bombay and begin her work. How glad and happy Akka was! And when, all the preparations completed, she left her home for Bombay, it was not alone. One of her younger sisters, Shawanti, accompanied her to share the opportunities and privileges the new institution offered.

It must have left a blank in the home, the going forth of those two bright young sisters! But as time passed on, and they heard of the useful work their

daughters were doing, Mr. and Mrs. Powar must have felt amply compensated for the sacrifice they made.

So Akka began

A NEW LIFE,

very different from the quiet home life she had led up to the present. The Training Home was intended for girls between the ages of twelve and twenty years, and at first only twelve girls were allowed in it. Later on the number was increased. In those days there were few, if any schools for girls, and the Powar sisters had been educated at home, their father teaching them English, and a Brahmin pandit, Marathi. In Bombay many languages were spoken, and Akka studied and became proficient in Guzerati and Hindustani, learning to read and write the difficult Persian character. Half the day was devoted to study, and the other half to visiting the zenanas in company with an experienced lady worker.

The ladies in charge of the Home were anxious to give their girls a thorough, all-round training, and they proposed to include in the curriculum a course of cooking lessons. But the young maidens did not at all appreciate this effort on their behalf! They regarded it as quite unnecessary and a waste of time, and put their heads together to see if there was no way to alter this decision. A strike, or anything savouring of rebellion was out of the question—argument or persuasion was doubtful—another plan must be found.

After much deliberation they came to a decision, and very soon each of the ladies received an invitation to a dinner prepared by the girls. They had carefully arranged that each one should do the part which she could do best, and the result was not disappointing. The curry was rich and delicately flavoured, and rendered still more appetising by excellent chutney and pickle. The sweet flat cakes and the spiced pasties were of the lightest, and the sweetmeats melted in the mouth. The brightly polished brass cups and plates shone like gold—in short, the whole meal was such a success that not another word was said about cooking lessons, and the students were left free to devote all their time to the study of those special subjects for which they had entered the Home.

Now, indeed, Akka's life became busy and full of interest, and she formed many friendships, not only among those of her own age in the Indian Christian community, but also among the missionaries. Not a few of these links remained unbroken through life. She was much beloved by her fellow-students, who were all younger than herself. They looked up to her as to an elder sister, and brought to her all their joys and sorrows and difficulties, finding her always ready to sympathise and help and suggest.

On one occasion only do we hear of her misleading one of them, and for that her indomitable love of teasing was responsible. One day one of the younger

girls confided to her that she was much frightened and troubled by

BAD DREAMS.

"What shall I do, Akka?" she queried anxiously. With a perfectly sober face Akka answered, "Do, Mary? I'll tell you what to do. The next time you have a bad dream just scream as loudly as ever you can." Mary ran off, and Akka thought no more about the matter, until a few nights afterwards the whole house was aroused by a succession of loud shrieks from the dormitory. Then, no doubt, the elder sister wished she had given different advice!

At that time it was a new thing for young unmarried girls to go about visiting in Bombay, and it required some little courage and devotion on their part to take up such an occupation. It was tiring work, too, climbing many steep flights of stairs, and going about the hot, close streets. They usually drove to the part of the city in which they were to visit, but sometimes they had to walk. Akka was not delicate, but whenever she failed to ride, an attack of fever followed.

On one occasion she had driven to a large Mohammedan house where she was in the habit of visiting. When she returned to the carriage the driver, a servant of the missionaries, asked her whether she had sent him a message to drive home without her as she had made other arrangements for returning. She answered in the negative, and the

driver then told her that a Mohammedan had come out of the house and given him such a message, but he had replied, "The young lady went into that house, and I shall wait here until she comes out again." Akka told the missionaries of this occurrence and they were careful never to allow her to go anywhere alone again.

The women in the zenanas wondered much how a young woman of her age could remain

UNMARRIED,

and still pure. They used to say,

"She is a goddess, and, therefore, she can go about and mix with people and still keep herself pure."

Her pleasant ways made her always welcome among the women, and hard as the work was, she never grew tired of it. There can be no doubt that in those first five years in the training institution she learned lessons, and passed through experiences, that in a great measure helped to fit her to become the head of an institution, and to have many young lives under her care.

This work of zenana visiting Akka continued for many years. It was the work which she loved best of all, and to which God had called her. At one time she took up school teaching, but she was not happy in it, and her health began to fail. Acting on a doctor's advice she gave it up and returned to her visiting.

22 SOONDERBAI POWAR: HER LIFE AND WORK

Then came a great sorrow. Her dearly-beloved mother was called to her Heavenly Home, and this first bereavement was sorely felt by her young daughters. It brought great responsibility to Akka. Unselfishly putting aside her own grief, she tried to make up to her sisters for the loss they had suffered, and made a home for them in Bombay. It was a great joy to her that when their studies were finished they engaged in zenana work in Bombay. With motherly care she watched over them till first one and then the other was married. Their respective husbands were both working for the Lord, and they themselves were bright examples of all that a Christian wife and mother should be.

Akka too, now known outside her family and intimate circle as

SOONDERBAI,

was engaged to a Christian young man, but he became ill and died. So in the providence of God the young worker was left free to devote all her time and energy to Gospel labour among her countrywomen. (The term "Bai" means lady or sister. Every adult woman is entitled to that appellation, just as Mrs. or Miss is used in English).

Then the Lord allowed trouble of a different kind. She fell and broke her knee. She had always been so free and active that it was terrible to her to hear the doctor say she would have to lie on her back for four or five weeks, and that the leg might have

to be amputated. The first night after the accident was one of great suffering. Akka said about it, "I cried and prayed the whole night, and asked the Lord to take away the pain. The Lord heard my cry. The pain was removed, and it never came again. For weeks I was laid up in my room, but all the time I was quite happy. He gave me His perfect peace."

But for some time afterwards she continued lame and ill. Going to her father's, she rested there for some months until she grew weary of having no definite work. After consulting her father, she arranged to go back to Bombay to learn nursing, thinking it might be useful in the

ZENANA WORK.

But it would not do. A constant feeling of having done something wrong oppressed her until she became thoroughly miserable. One night, unable to sleep, she prayed until midnight, and the cry went up, "O Lord, why am I so miserable? I want to do Thy will." Then she thought she saw a tall man clothed in a white robe coming to her, and she heard him say, "Thousands of souls are perishing. How can you rest here? Go and do your work."

Then and there she determined to give up the nursing and begin again to make known the Gospel. All her usual peace of mind returned to her. Soon she was at her old work; this time as a helper to two devoted American missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Bruere,

with whom she boarded, and who remained her life-long, valued friends.

Many missionaries consider that the only means by which they can gain and keep an entrance to the homes where high-class Mohammedan and Hindu women are shut up so closely, is to teach English, or fancy work, or some such subject for the first part of the time, and then finish with a Bible lesson. Soonderbai told her friends before she began that the Lord had shown her that her work was to make known the Good News, so she was going to find houses where the women would learn the Bible only. She was not going to spend her time in teaching reading or sewing.

"You may try," they replied. "But you will find it a difficult task. You will not get many houses like that." But

SOONDERBAI POWAR

was not easily daunted if she believed the Lord had shown her anything, so she only answered, "I have determined, and the Lord will help me."

Within a week she gained admittance to twelve houses, and in a month or two the number had increased to sixty. In all these she was welcomed just to tell the Old, Old Story, with no other attraction of any kind.

In after years Soonderbai was often distressed to find missionaries so discouraged over their zenana

work. They worked for years, they said, yet none of the women were baptised or received into church fellowship. Soonderbai knew only too well the difficulties and dangers that attended a confession of Christ by any of the women. She knew they were absolutely under the power of their husbands, some of whom would even have poisoned their wives rather than allow them openly to confess Christ. But she held that although they might be effectually prevented from ever being baptised, they could still believe and be saved. So, for the encouragement of such disheartened workers, she wrote a booklet, entitled, "Is Zenana Work a Failure?" in which she gave several instances of definite blessing brought to zenana women through her visits.

First she told of a very rich Guzerathi woman named

JUMNABAI.

Her husband's favourite, she had thousands of rupees' worth of jewels and clothes, and every pleasure she could wish. When Akka read the Bible to her she took no interest in it. She asked no questions, and sat as quietly as though she did not understand what was being said. This continued indifference was very trying to the earnest worker. Often as she left the house the words of the Lord came into her mind, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!" At one time she even thought of giving up this house, and spending the

time in others where the hearers showed more interest. But another verse came into her mind, "With God all things are possible," and so month after month she continued her visits and, as she herself expressed it, "pounded the truth into that woman's ears *with prayers.*"

Three years passed away, and then the poor, rich woman was laid low with consumption. Even then there was no change. The things that had occupied her so long occupied her still, and she said her heart was burning with jealousy because she knew that as soon as she was dead her husband would marry another wife, who would wear her clothes and jewels.

Months passed by bringing only increased suffering and weakness, and her husband did get tired of her, and cruelly said he wished she would die soon because he wanted to be married again. Poor Jumnabai was left much alone with no medicine and no comfort, save that brought by Akka's visits. Counting a string of sacred beads she used to pray to God to take her away soon.

One day, when Akka went to her, she was so weak that it seemed she could not live through the night. Akka said to her, "Jumnabai, for the last three years I have told you about Jesus. He is the only Saviour. I need not teach you about salvation. You know everything. Now I know you will not live long. You have been my friend here, and I want you to be my friend in Heaven, too." Tears ran down the

wasted cheeks, but Junnabai was too weak for conversation, and Akka left her. The next day she looked quite bright and happy. Taking her visitor's hand she said, "Jesus saved me last night. We shall be friends in Heaven, too."

Then she went on to tell how in the night she lay thinking of Soonderbai's words, when all at once the burden of sin rolled away. She trusted the Lord Jesus and His finished work, and He made her happy.

Handing her friend the string of beads she said she needed them no more, for the Lord would hear her prayers, and soon she would be with Him. She worried no more about clothes or jewels, and when Soonderbai sometimes took Christian friends to see her she told them what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for her. For three months she lingered, and then passed peacefully away to be with Christ—"far, far better."

MATHURABAI'S

story was very different. She was very eager to hear the Gospel, and her husband's scolding and abuse did not deter her in the least. She used to watch for Soonderbai's coming to the neighbouring house, and if her husband was out she would call her in to teach her.

Mathurabai was able to read, and she used to read her Bible at every opportunity, marking passages she did not understand, so that she could ask Soonderbai to explain them on her next visit. After

a time she fell ill, and Soonderbai often went to see her, taking no notice when her husband treated her rudely as he did on one or two occasions.

One day she remarked, "Mathurabai, you look very ill." "I know it," was the calm reply, "but I am ready to die and go to Jesus. He saved me and I am happy." Her daughter was in the room at the time. Then she asked Soonderbai to close the door and pray with her. Afterwards she prayed herself, and when Soonderbai said "Goodbye" to her, she saw that her face was lighted up with a great joy. The next day when she called she found Mathurabai's happy spirit had fled. She had gone to be "for ever with the Lord," whom she truly though secretly loved.

Many houses were opened to Soonderbai through the testimony and the triumphant death of

ANOTHER WOMAN.

She was rich, and very pleasant and sociable. She allowed all her children to listen to the Bible lessons. When seized with sudden illness, and suffering great agony, she was soothed and quieted by Soonderbai's singing hymn after hymn. The sick room was crowded with her heathen relatives. Soonderbai prayed before them all, and the violent pain ceased. Then the sick woman told her husband, and all her relations, that the Lord Jesus had saved her, and had taken away her bodily pain, and given her rest. She told them not

to weep for her as Jesus Christ had washed away her sins with His blood, and she was going to Heaven. She begged them when she was gone to let Soonderbai continue her visits, and asked them to listen well to what she taught them. This woman's mother had been very much opposed to Christianity, but all her opposition broke down when she saw what it did for her daughter in the hour of death.

In the course of her visiting, Soonderbai came across

TWO CHILD WIDOWS,

who soon became very fond of her. When they were sixteen or eighteen years old, Soonderbai asked them if they would like to go to school. They said they would like it very much, but their parents would object. And so it proved, for it was only after several months of pleading that their guardians yielded, saying, "We know you and trust you, and for your sake we send them to school." Both the girls remained at school for several years, both were converted and became workers for God. With such blessed results following, it is not to be wondered at that Soonderbai closed her booklet with the words, in heavy type, "Zenana work is not a failure in India. Glory to His Name for ever."

While living with Mr. and Mrs. Bruere, Soonderbai occupied a room on the ground floor, the remainder of which was used by the boys of a boarding school conducted by them. Akka soon won the hearts of

these boys. There was something about her that always inspired confidence, and they used to go to her as to a mother, telling her all their troubles. And with Akka in such close proximity to them, the friend and confidante of them all, the missionaries found their task of caring for the boys considerably lightened.

By and by, Mr. and Mrs. Bruere went on furlough, and then Soonderbai was busier than ever. Her work included, besides the zenana visiting, large dinner-hour factory meetings, where hundreds of men and women heard the Gospel message; and there were also many day and Sunday Schools under her charge. In all this she had the help of three catechists and five Bible women. But it was a tax on her strength, and as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Bruere returned, they urged her to go away for a rest and change.

CHAPTER III

A Startling Call

"I am trusting Thee for power,
Thine can never fail;
Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me
Must prevail."

WHEN Soonderbai had been working in Bombay for some years, an English gentleman one day called to see her. After a little conversation on general subjects, he startled her by proposing that she should go to England for six months to help enlighten the Christian public on the subject of the terrible evils of the opium trade and habit in India, which is propagated under British rule for purposes of revenue. The Christian people of the Homeland had heard much of the awful results of British-Indian opium in China from Mr. Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, and from other eminent missionaries in that land; but information was sadly lacking regarding the consumption of the drug in India.

The visitor was Mr. Maurice Gregory, of London, from the office of *The Bombay Guardian*, a Christian weekly newspaper founded by the great missionary

saint and author, George Bowen. In making the above named request, Mr. Gregory represented an influential Committee in England.

Soonderbai at first declined, declaring the task to be beyond her abilities. Mr. Gregory replied he was quite sure she was the one whom God would have to go. He explained that every arrangement would be made for her safety and comfort, and re-expressed the belief that she was divinely called to the undertaking. But Soonderbai was not convinced, and again urged her unfitness for such work. Still Mr. Gregory sat there, quietly persistent, and only rose to take his leave when she agreed to write to her father on the matter.

To herself she said, "My father will *never* consent," yet she gave the proposal most earnest and prayerful thought. She was very different now from the light-hearted girl who had come to Bombay some years before. In her work among all classes of people in that busy city she had come closely in touch with some of life's deepest problems. She had seen a great deal of suffering, and often she had been appalled to notice how much of it could have been prevented—how much of it was entirely due to human selfishness and greed. She had been shocked as she had become acquainted with the great evils that have their strongholds in every crowded centre of population. The drink trade with its attendant train of suffering and poverty, and ruined minds and bodies, and



THE SAME GIRL AS SHOWN OPPOSITE PAGE 16 AFTER
SOME TIME IN THE HOME.

broken hearts—the unspeakable horrors of immorality—the awful stupefying slow poison of the

OPIUM HABIT

—all these in addition to the ever-present darkness and error of Hinduism and Mohammedanism, she met with as she went up and down among rich and poor.

Akka was a woman now, with a woman's sympathetic appreciation of the burden of human suffering. But though she was shocked and oppressed by what she saw, she was not discouraged. If sin was so rampant and Satan so busy, all the more need, she thought, for the soldiers of the Cross to stand up for Jesus. If the sum of human misery and woe was so great, all the more need for tender hearts to sympathise, and loving lips to speak the word of comfort. So she had pressed on day after day, doing what one Christian woman could do to lighten the load that lay so heavily on many hearts all around her. And now she asked herself was this proposal, through Mr. Gregory, God's call to her to be up and doing in a new way? Was she indeed to take a message to the comfortable dwellers in Christian Britain? Was she to give them a glimpse of the sad sights she had seen, and by her accounts of the evil that was actually being done in her country, stir them to action? If, after all, God was calling her, should she shrink back and say 'like Moses, "Send by the hand

34 SOONDERBAI POWAR: HER LIFE AND WORK

of him whom Thou wilt send?" But if she obeyed the call, would she not hear the Lord saying to her, "Certainly I will be with thee?" (Exod. 3. 12).

Then her father's reply came, and in effect it was this:

"My dear daughter, when you were an infant your mother and I dedicated you to the service of God. If He has work for you to do in England, I cannot keep you back."

"Then," said Akka, "I did begin to tremble." And no wonder! It was an ordeal for her to face! There was the absence from home and loved ones—the voyage—the constant travelling in the cold uncertain weather of an English winter—and, most dreaded of all, the public speeches in a foreign language before audiences that might not always be entirely composed of sympathisers. All that she said would be reported, criticised, and perhaps contradicted.

But when she was convinced that this was the call of God, Soonderbai went

STEADILY FORWARD.

She visited other Indian cities that she might see more of the evils she was called upon to expose. Then came the final preparations and the good-byes.

No doubt the voyage was full of interest to her, but as the vessel drew near the shores of England, we can easily imagine that some misgivings assailed her. She was going to strangers—how would they

receive her? What would it be like to live among them for many months?

But in London a group of committee ladies were far more anxious and perplexed! The Indian deputation would be arriving in a few days, and who was to entertain her? Neither of them had ever had an Indian visitor in her home before, and neither of them seemed eager for the honour! They were all kind and hospitable ladies, but they did not know just how to treat

AN INDIAN.

What would her tastes and habits be? No one knew, and each one secretly hoped that Mrs. Some-one-else would offer hospitality.

A suggestion was made to send her to a boarding house, but that did not meet with approval, and at last one of them agreed to take in the perplexing visitor until they found out what she was like, or could decide on some other plan. This lady quickly discovered that there was no need for any other plan. It was nothing but a pleasure to have this quiet Indian lady in the house, and as long as Soonderbai was in England she always found a welcome there. On her return visit the following year Soonderbai was much amused to hear from the hostess the story of the committee ladies' difficulty when they were expecting her the first time.

For very many years a number of earnest Christians in Great Britain had been labouring incessantly for

the abolition of the opium traffic with India and China. They felt this traffic was not only a national sin and disgrace, but also a terrible hindrance to the spread of the Gospel in these two great heathen lands. But the evil was deeply entrenched, and the general public were lamentably ignorant of its extent and seriousness. To educate public opinion was of primary importance.

In the beginning of the year in which the startling call to go to England came to Soonderbai in Bombay, a National Anti-Opium Convention had been held in London. Out of that arose the Anti-Opium Committee of Urgency, three of whose most prominent members were Mr. Benjamin Broomhall, Secretary of the China Inland Mission and Editor of *National Righteousness*; Dr. James L. Maxwell, Secretary of the Medical Missionary Association, President of the Medical Training Institution, and Hon. Secretary of the Christian Union against the Opium Traffic, London; and Mr. James E. Mathieson, for many years Treasurer and Superintendent of the Mildmay Conference, London. With this Committee originated the invitation to Soonderbai and to Mr. Cheok Hong Cheong, a Christian Chinaman, who was Superintendent of the Church Mission to the Chinese, Melbourne, Australia.

Soonderbai's work was carried on under the direction of the Secretary of the Women's Anti-Opium Urgency League who arranged all her meetings. These began

in London immediately on her arrival, and they carried her to all parts of Great Britain during the course of the winter. One of the first meetings was a great

ANTI-OPIMUM DEMONSTRATION

which crowded Exeter Hall "from the foot of the organ on the platform, to the back of the gallery at the other end." It was presided over by one who afterwards became the honoured and esteemed Prebendary Webb-Peploe. The Secretaries of the great British Missionary Societies were on the platform, as well as two members of the Chinese Embassy in their official costume.

Several rousing speeches were made that evening, and the large audience was deeply stirred. When Soonderbai's turn to speak came she rose and said, "I have left my sunny India and come to your foggy England, not for an education, nor a degree; not for funds for my mission work. I come because the Lord has sent me to give you a very sad message from my people." Then she went on to speak in simple but forcible language of the evils of the opium traffic in India as she herself had witnessed them, and showed the heavy responsibility of England in the matter. Her speech ended, she sat down amid loud and long-continued applause.

How It was always so. Wherever she went she won the immediate attention and interest of her audience. This was not surprising. There was the charm of

her personal attractions, her graceful foreign dress, the quaintness of her illustrations, the earnest conviction with which she presented her subject, and, besides all this, the sad, but appealing interest of the subject itself.

Who could fail to be stirred as they heard of a deadly poison being sold as freely as any ordinary article of food; of helpless infants daily dosed with it, and often fatally *over*-dosed, to enable their mothers to work in factory or field; of unhappy wives and widows using it to put an end to their misery; of strong men who should have been the mainstay of their families, leaving them to shift for themselves or starve, while they smoked away their senses and their strength, yea, their very lives in a filthy, licensed opium den; and of a so-called Christian Government refusing to abolish such evils because of the revenue it gained every year from the trade?

And who that had the cause of Christian missions at heart could remain untouched as they heard of Biblewomen being met with the objection,

“Let your Christian Government do away with the opium, and then we will hear about Christ?”

Just before Soonderbai's departure from India, 200 Mohammedan women were present at a meeting in Lucknow, many of whom went in closed carriages. Such a gathering of women had never been held in the city before, and when Soonderbai asked

“What shall I tell the people of England?” One

woman rose and said, "Tell them how opium is ruining my brother and his family. He has a wife and four children. His wages are two annas a day. He spends one anna in opium, leaving one anna to provide food for five people. They have one poor meal a day. His wife and children are weak from hunger."

"Tell them," added another woman, "there are thousands of families like that. No one can describe the sufferings produced by opium."

"Oh," said a third, "tell them we will thank the Government if they will take the sword and kill us all—wives and children of opium smokers—to rid us of the agony we endure."

The British people were touched by such pitiful messages, and much sympathy was shown to Soonderbai in her endeavours to expose the evil.

But some one has said there is no dust so blinding as gold dust, and there were not wanting those who tried to defend

THE AWFUL TRAFFIC.

Soonderbai, with her God-given wisdom and her personal knowledge of the facts, was well able to dispose of the excuses they offered.

It was said that opium suited the people of China and India. "Give six grains to me or to Mr. Cheong here," she said at one meeting, "and you will soon see how it suits us."

Another excuse was that it was sold as a medicine,

to which she replied, "When they know that five or six grains is a fatal dose, and yet that any one can buy sixteen hundred grains without any questions being asked, how can the Government claim that it is sold as a medicine?"

When it was said to be a remedy for fever she exclaimed, "What do they think of us? We *never* use it for fever. I never heard of such a thing—at least, not until I came to England."

She pleaded for justice for her country, and that *the same regulations which control the sale of the deadly drug in England, might be put in force in India.*

More than a quarter of a century has passed since Soonderbai presented this plea, but as recently as 14th July, 1924, the *Times of India* reported the death of a little child in Bombay, who was playing in a room, when he picked up a small tin box, and ate some of the contents. He became unconscious, and his father removed him to the J. J. Hospital, where, on arrival, he was found to be dead. He had eaten some of his grandfather's opium!*

Some people sneered at the sentimentalism of the workers in this cause. But that did not deter any of them. Between the beginning of November and the middle of April Soonderbai had addressed no fewer than one hundred and sixteen meetings.

*On 23rd October, 1924, the *Times of India* reported the death of another small boy in Bombay under exactly similar circumstances.

Miss LUCY E. GUINNESS,

one of her companions in travel and in speaking for part of this time, wrote: "It was my privilege to travel with Soonderbai Powar, and to speak with her at a number of meetings in England and Ireland. She worked hard during her stay in this country. Through the, to her, extreme severity of an English winter, whose cold might well have seriously injured her lungs, she steadily held to her post. In the far north of Scotland, right through Christmas and the New Year, the snow lying deep on the ground, and the meetings ill-attended; in the far south of Ireland, in the damp night fogs and the half frozen rain and mud of early March days—in crowded gatherings of enthusiastic sons of Erin—or in sober Scots assemblies—in the subdued atmosphere of drawing-rooms—on draughty station platforms—in cold cabs and omnibuses—in unwarmed third class railway carriages—amid the chilly miseries of the night mail from Holyhead to Kingston—or surrounded by the warmth, kindness, and cheer of the Quaker homes, whose overflowing hospitality welcomed us in almost every city—Soonderbai was always the same.

"I never saw her out of temper. I never heard her grumble. The settled calm that impressed me on our first meeting was with her from the day we made our way through the snow at Euston to catch the Irish mail, to the last night we spoke on the same

platform, when she rose, with her usual composure, to meet the blaze of eighteen hundred curious eyes from a sea of upturned faces, at the big Stratford Conference Hall in East London. It was a gift, that calm of hers. It was the peace of God."

That Soonderbai's work was appreciated by the leaders of the Anti-Opium Movement was shown by the fact that they requested her to return the following winter and resume her activities. This she consented to do, and before she left Bombay the second time, a farewell meeting was held in the spacious premises of *The Bombay Guardian*. There her friends and sympathisers gathered to commend her to God in prayer, and also Mr. Raja Naidu, who was proceeding to England on the same mission. At this gathering Mr. Alfred S. Dyer referred to the way in which Soonderbai had been Divinely helped and protected in the cold of an English winter the previous year; and Soonderbai related some incidents to show that the sympathy of the English people was with her people.

While she was in England an old man came to her and told her that though he was very poor he wanted to give her something, so he brought her some flowers. These she had pressed and preserved. Another man, in humble life, gave her twopence; and the rich gave large sums for the work. So, followed by the prayers and good wishes of many friends, Soonderbai sailed away for another season of constant travelling and

speaking. This time she was welcomed as a dear friend by numbers whom she had met for the first time the previous year. The blessing of God was upon this

SECOND VISIT,

too, and at its close one wrote of "the great help and encouragement her presence in this country has been. Almost all the meetings have been well attended, some crowded, and everywhere heart-felt interest has been awakened."

Another wrote, "Her labours during her second visit to Great Britain as a representative of her countrywomen against the home-destroying licensed demon of opium have been incessant and powerful. She may well feel exhausted by her efforts. She has been on her noble mission unsalaried. Without the thought or ambition to do anything greater than her duty, she has unconsciously placed herself *in the front rank of the world's womanhood.*"

It is interesting to read that on the return voyage a well attended Anti-Opium meeting was held on the steamer, presided over by Mr. Hira Lal Kumar, at which Miss Powar spoke for about three-quarters of an hour.

A striking token that her efforts on behalf of her countrymen and women were appreciated by them was given, when a meeting of educated Indians was held at Poona, to welcome and honour her on her return. The spacious old building was crowded

out, and many found it impossible to gain an entrance.

The Marathi Church of Sholapur sent her a letter of welcome and appreciation, thus indicating the feeling of the

MARATHI-SPEAKING CHRISTIANS.

Looking back over those months of happy service and fellowship with Christians in England, Soonderbai often expressed surprise that though many people asked her to which denomination she belonged, no one inquired how she was converted. Noticing that she evaded an answer to the question of her denomination, and concluding that she was not connected with any particular branch of the Church, some ministers, at a Breakfast one morning, attempted to show her the advantages of belonging to one of the denominations.

One of them likened the different sects to the different regiments of an army, and said it ought to be known to which regiment she belonged.

"Why, of course I am one of the 'King's Own,'" was her ready answer. Then another minister took up the subject and compared the denominations to the different rooms in a house, with the Church of England people in one room, the Wesleyans in another, Presbyterians in another, Baptist, Brethren, and so on, in others.

"Now," he said, "you believe the Lord is Coming

back again. You should join one of the denominations, then, when the Lord comes again. He will know exactly in which room to find you.

Soonderbai did believe in the Second Coming of the Lord—to her it was indeed a “Blessed Hope,” and she flashed back the reply,

“Oh, but I shall be at the front door to meet Him!”

Denominational distinctions loomed small on her horizon. These differences, indeed, do not usually mean so much to Indian Christians as to those brought up in Western countries. To “belong to Christ” (Mark 9. 41), to be known as His followers is sufficient for them, and Soonderbai resembled them in this. It was a joy to her to have fellowship with all who “love our Lord Jesus in sincerity and in truth” (Eph. 6. 24).

CHAPTER IV

“The Abode of Wisdom”

“Love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice,
And they who suffer most have most to give.”

IT was while working in Bombay that Soonderbai met one who soon became her dearly-loved friend, and with whom for several years her life was closely linked. This was PANDITA RAMABAI, who was even then becoming widely known through her work for Indian widows.

A Brahmin by birth and herself a widow, Ramabai had passed through much hardship and suffering in her younger days. A few years before Soonderbai became acquainted with her, she had been baptised as a believer in Christ, and now her ardent desire was for the uplift of her own countrywomen, particularly the helpless, despised widows.

With the aid of friends in America she had opened a small

WIDOWS’ HOME

in Bombay, where she sheltered and educated as many of that class as would come to her. The distinctive feature of this home was its religious neutrality.

No pupil was compelled to receive any Christian instruction, and Hindu pupils had full liberty to

retain their caste and perform their religious observances.

Ramabai honestly believed at this time that these were the only means by which she could attract the class of women she particularly wished to help. Some Christian friends and missionaries did not approve of this course. Ramabai, indeed, was in a rather trying position at that stage of her experience. The Hindu reformers mistrusted her, being afraid she would Christianise their women-folk; and many of the Christian workers of Bombay also withheld from her their full confidence and fellowship.

Soonderbai saw that, although her new friend was as yet far behind in some matters of Christian doctrine and experience, she was very sincere and earnest, and she set herself in a sisterly way to help her, never arguing, but relating things from her own spiritual experience, and seeking to lead her on in the things of God.

Admiring Ramabai intensely for her learning, courage, and devotion, she soon came to love her with all the ardour of her deep, warm nature. So, when the

“SHARADA SADAN”

(or, The Abode of Wisdom), as the Widows' Home was called, was removed to Poona, Soonderbai gave up her much-loved work in Bombay and went too.

For seven years she remained there as Ramabai's companion and friend, and as elder sister to the forty

or more residents in the Home. She was called by the familiar name of Akka, and many of the girls became deeply attached to her. Whenever Ramabai was absent, she left her girls in Akka's charge.

Who can tell what it meant to Ramabai, in those first years of her work, to have the help of an experienced worker like Soonderbai? And who can tell what it meant to those young women and girls, many of whom had the saddest histories, to have the friendship of such a one? They were free to go to her at any time to ask her help with a difficult lesson, or to pour into her sympathetic ear all their troubles. How tenderly she comforted them, how gently she reproved them, how simply she explained to them the Bible truths of which they were so ignorant!

For, though no one in the Sharada Sadan was compelled by any rule to attend Bible reading or prayers, any one who wished to do so was welcomed, and, as a matter of fact, more and more of the girls joined in the daily worship, and when Soonderbai returned from her second visit to England, she found fully half of the widows attending early morning prayers.

What a joy it was to the two friends to watch the work growing and strengthening! Soon there was no doubt in their minds that many of the girls were really trusting the Lord Jesus as their Saviour. A small Christian Endeavour Society was formed among them; and those who were not forbidden to do so by



CHANDRABAI (RIGHT) WITH ANOTHER INMATE OF THE HOME.

Page 61

their Hindu guardians, began to attend Church and Sunday School. In course of time some of these young women wished to confess Christ in baptism, but in this Ramabai, bound by promises of neutrality given when she first opened the Home, could not help them. Still, several of them made their own arrangements, and were duly baptised. For all these some useful work was afterwards found, several of them becoming teachers.

Like many undertakings that are begun in a quiet, unostentatious way, Ramabai's work soon increased far beyond anything she had planned. When she began she thought only of the widows, and all her plans were to help them. But when the

HORRORS OF FAMINE

swept over the Central Provinces, and she heard of so many in dire distress, all her sympathies were aroused, and she started off to the stricken districts to see how many of the perishing she could rescue, resolving to trust her Heavenly Father for all supplies. She soon began to send parties of from ten to twenty starving women and girls to Poona, where they were received by Soonderbai and her helpers in the Sharada Sadan.

Akka had taken part in many kinds of work since she first began to serve the Lord, but she had never faced anything like the task which now confronted her. Clothed in rags, ~~and~~ unspeakably dirty, and

suffering from various diseases and sores, the result of starvation, it was no light work to feed and clothe and tend these poor creatures day by day. But the love of Christ burned in the hearts of that little band of Indian women, enabling them to do that from which naturally they would have shrunk. Some of the newcomers were ignorant, rough, and ill-mannered, so different from the refined class who had hitherto occupied the Home, and some of the elder ones were very troublesome.

As many as sixty had been received when bubonic

PLAGUE

broke out in Poona. The authorities did their best to prevent this awfully fatal disease from spreading, and one of their measures was daily inspection of all dwelling houses in order that fresh cases might be segregated at once. We can imagine how earnestly Soonderbai and her helpers prayed for protection from the dreaded disease—how every case of slight fever sent them to their knees, and how thankful they were when the inspector paid her visits and found everything normal! Yet, eighteen of the famine victims under Soonderbai's care, who were suffering from various complaints, were removed to the hospital for observation, and strict orders were given that no more famine cases were to be received on the compound.*

*A "compound" is the enclosed land connected with a dwelling.

Ramabai had to be recalled from the famine districts to direct in this emergency. She promptly ordered a dozen tents, and sent the whole establishment into the country with Soonderbai in charge. What an undertaking it must have been! And after a few days another move had to be made to Khedgaon, where grass huts and a large barn were erected to shelter the women. The following rainy season found the Sharada Sadan still filled with famine refugees, many of them noisy and rough and repulsive. Poor Soonderbai! She could never forget those months.

Ramabai's idea was that the quickest and surest way to civilise this uncouth crowd was to live right amongst them, and Soonderbai, always willing to follow her friend's leading, carried it out literally. She slept in the same room with the girls, and shared their meals. It was almost more than she could bear, but she bravely persevered until her appetite failed, and she was unable to sleep, and fever attacked her. Then only did she go back to her own little room and separate meals.

A missionary friend who gladly helped in the famine work for a while, still has vivid recollections of how much Soonderbai suffered then. But to-day in Pandharapur, the “sacred” city of Western India, to which hundreds of thousands of pilgrims flock every year, some of those very women who were rescued at so much cost, are preaching the Gospel to

their own people, offering to them the Bread of Life.

Ramabai and Soonderbai were permitted to see much fruit from their labours together during those seven years in Poona, but the full results Eternity alone will reveal.

Soonderbai was one of the little company who witnessed the laying of the foundation stone of

“MUKTI,”

Khedgaon, the home of the great work which will always be associated with Pandita Ramabai's name. A Bengali engineer, a Brahmin convert, and a little handful of women were all that were present at the simple ceremony, but great trees grow from small seeds, and God's blessing was upon them.

Towards the close of this period of service with Pandita, Soonderbai received word that her dear father was seriously ill. With a heavy heart she hastened to him, and found that this was indeed so. For a few days she nursed him, and then he who had borne such a brave testimony and lived such a consistent life, went to his reward.

A desolate feeling swept over Soonderbai when he was taken from her. “Now I have no home on earth,” she said to herself. Her father had been her hero, and had always exercised a great influence upon her. After she was grown up she had still sought his advice in every difficulty. With both parents passed on

before her, she felt very lonely. But the God of all comfort drew near His child, and in His presence she found peace and consolation.

Within a year or two another deep sorrow came upon her. Her youngest sister who, although of a very quiet disposition, was much beloved for her sweet Christian character, passed away, leaving one little child, a curly-haired girl of only a year and a half. Soonderbai took her to bring her up, and in caring for her childish wants her own heart was comforted.

In addition to these heavy trials, there were constant smaller troubles and annoyances which needed much grace to bear in a sweet and cheerful spirit. Once in Ramabai's absence from the Sharada Sadan, she discovered, to her dismay, that quite a large sum of money was missing. A thorough search was made, and much earnest prayer, too, but no trace of it could be found. This was very trying, but what cut Akka to the quick was that some of the Indian Christians in Poona actually believed that she had stolen it! She sold a horse which had been her father's, to replace the money, and continued in prayer. Afterwards it was discovered that one of the girls had taken it, and buried it in the compound.

By and by another

FEARFUL EPIDEMIC

of plague broke out in Poona, and all the girls from the Sharada Sadan were removed to Khedgaon. The

Lord had begun to raise up other helpers for Ramabai, and Soonderbai remained in Poona. She could not see then how or where the Lord was leading her; but He had His own purposes, and in due time He made them plain.

CHAPTER V

A Brave Step

"O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea."

IN the meantime, as we are all apt to do, Soonderbai made her own plans for herself. She would live in Poona, go out in the day-time to visit in the homes of the women, and in the evenings she would translate helpful English books and tracts into Marathi for the benefit of Indian Christians who could not understand English. Her knowledge of this language had opened up to Soonderbai a mine of wealth for which she never ceased to be thankful.

The works of writers like F. B. Meyer and Andrew Murray she read again and again, and longed to be able to share her treasures with others. Few people had both time and ability for this work of translation, and Soonderbai felt this was a service she could render. She also wrote a few Marathi tracts which were printed by the P. & I. V. Mission Press. So she was settling down, quietly, happily, though not idly.

Soon her peace was disturbed. One and another of her friends suggested that she should open a training school for Bible-women. Soonderbai had

had enough experience to know how much work and responsibility such an undertaking would involve, and she shrank from the thought, and tried to put it out of her head. She had no strength or wisdom for such work—it was too much for her, she said. But the idea would not be dismissed like that. It recurred again and again until she felt it must be the call of God.

Yet she did not feel that she could respond to it, and the weeks passed on. Then one day at a meeting she heard words which seemed to be spoken directly to her. "Some people shirk work to which they know God has called them, because they fear the responsibility, or are frightened at the thought of their own weakness. But let all such stay themselves upon God, and follow fully where He leads." It was enough. As the audience bowed in prayer, Soonderbai said in the depths of her heart,

"Lord, I will open a Home, and take in as many girls as You send me."

Then with a mind at rest she returned to her little bungalow.

Not long afterwards a lady called to know if Soonderbai could help her out of a difficulty. She had come across a poor orphan girl called

JUL,

and had tried in vain to find a home for her in the Mission schools. Could Soonderbai suggest anything?

There was only one thing Soonderbai could suggest, and that was to take her herself.

Jui was a forlorn-looking object, not a very promising first inmate for the "Home," but all Soonderbai considered was that she needed shelter and loving care and teaching, which she could give. Soon after another girl was brought, and then another, and the Zenana Training Home became an established fact.

It was a brave step to take, although it was taken in fear and trembling, for Soonderbai had no means of her own, and was not connected with any Mission. She was sure of but one thing, that she was doing the will of God, and she tried to cast all her care upon Him. But she confessed,

"At times I worried a great deal about the finances, especially when it was time to pay the rent."

Yet, from the very beginning, the Lord graciously encouraged her with many a striking answer to prayer. At one time she had to pay Rs.60 for rent at the end of the month besides other expenses, and all she had was Rs.30. But a friend sent her Rs.200, an abundant provision for that time. One day she opened a magazine that had come by the English mail, and the first words she saw were, "Worry not, for worry is sin. That means distrust in God." She said, "That opened my eyes, and I saw how I had failed to trust Him, and yet He in His great love had provided for this Home."

THE ZENANA TRAINING HOME

was the name chosen by Soonderbai herself for the school, but the institution was much more than that, though the training of women workers was ever the object dearest to her heart. Orphans, young widows, deserted wives, and the children of Christians from places where educational advantages could not be obtained, all shared its privileges. The only persons she ever refused were middle-aged or old women. She considered that they needed a separate home altogether, and would never consent to receive them among her girls and younger women.

When it was known that the Home was opened, there was no lack of friends to counsel and advise. Many dear servants of God in Poona and other places were sincerely interested in this new enterprise. They held very varied opinions as to methods of work; each of them was sure that his or her own way was not only the best, but also the best for Soonderbai, and they freely proffered their advice. She would have been quite bewildered if she had tried to follow them all! But not only had she years of experience to guide her; she had also learned to wait upon God concerning every fresh plan, every new step, and, having found out what His will was, her eyes looked straight on, and she turned neither to the right hand nor to the left.

In the early days of the Home when she was in great difficulty, a missionary friend called to

see her and asked about the finances of the school, and she felt obliged to tell him. By that time she had one hundred girls to support, and hearing how matters stood, her friend strongly advised her to keep only twenty-five girls for training, and send the rest to other mission schools. To which Soonderbai replied that she had not gone in search of these girls; the Lord had sent them to her and she could not send them away without His permission; and not only so, but if He sent a hundred more girls she would take them. She could see that this quite vexed her old friend, and when he left her she turned again to prayer, her unfailing refuge. The very next day's mail brought her a cheque for £100, the largest she had ever received.

A lady who had worked for many years in Poona was sure Soonderbai was making a great mistake in training young girls as

BIBLE-WOMEN.

The proper way was to take widows of thirty or thirty-five years and train them for the work. Several friends thought it was unsuitable to have little girls in a zenana training home. Though the preparation for zenana visiting was the thing that lay nearest her heart, Soonderbai knew that most Bible-women are eventually married, and that wherever her girls went when they left her school, they would be sure to have more or less to do with children; and she held that to learn to love and tend and bear with them

was in itself no small part of a Christian girl's training. And it made the school more home-like to have the little ones playing about in it.

Then, too, she felt strongly that the sooner training began the better it was. She was often shocked at the language little girls used, and the lies they told when they first came to the Home.

Miss Burder was sitting in Akka's room one day when two small maidens, not more than six or seven years of age, and evidently in disgrace, stood before her. The little tongues were very glib, and the little voices very emphatic as each tried to prove the other's guilt and her own innocence.

Suddenly Akka sent both little girls away.

"Why, Akka, you didn't punish either of them," cried Miss Burder.

"No, Birdiebai," was the reply, "they were both telling so many lies I did not know which to believe, so I let them both go."

Such incidents showed the necessity for early training.

The numbers in the Home rapidly increased during the first two or three years of its existence. It is astonishing how many young girls there always are in India who need shelter and teaching, and the other advantages which such an institution as Soonderbai had opened can afford.

About that time a Christian woman brought to her a young mother and her baby girl.

CHANDRABAI

had been married to a man who did not care for her. She was exceedingly unhappy in her mother-in-law's home, but one gleam of hope she cherished, and when her baby was born she thought things would surely be different. Perhaps the father was disappointed because this first child was not a boy. However that was, the helpless babe made no appeal to his hard heart, and the poor little wife and mother became more and more wretched. She grew bitter and rebellious, and fretted and chafed, and probably made things worse for herself. Then the climax came, and her husband turned her and her baby out of doors.

Once away from her home, unhappy as it had been, Chandrabai realised how helpless she was. Who would give her work? and, besides, what work could she do hampered as she was with the care of her young baby? A Mohammedan gave her shelter, but she was afraid to stay with him. But One whom she knew not was watching over her, and in her extremity she was found by a Christian woman who had no difficulty in persuading her to go to the Zenana Training Home.

About the same time an official in Poona was walking along one of its beautifully shaded roads, when he noticed a strange-looking bundle lying under a tree. It proved to be a tiny girl left there to die. He took the child to the nearest orphanage, but as

that was a boys' orphanage, the missionaries passed the wee girl on to Soonderbai. And so they came to her in ones and twos.

Then there were unusual happenings which brought in large numbers at once. This was the case when Soonderbai's friend, Mrs. Bruere, felt compelled to return to America. At famine time she had opened a

GIRLS' ORPHANAGE

independently of the Mission with which she and her husband were connected. Now she had to find homes for scores of girls. A number of them were taken into the Mission orphanage, and the remaining forty she was glad to place under Akka's care.

Most, if not all, of these girls were supported by the American *Christian Herald* Famine Fund, and without Soonderbai sending out any appeals a number of her other girls were provided for, either by individuals, or by some Society, such as the Mothers' Prayer Union in Reading, England, which, from the beginning, undertook the support of Jui. It was wonderful how God supplied all needs.

A year or two before the Home was opened, Soonderbai's Bombay friends, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred S. Dyer, had gone back to England to live, owing to the failure of Mr. Dyer's health; but their interest in the Lord's work in India and their love for the Indian Christians never waned. They were delighted to hear what the Lord was doing through Pandita

Ramabai at Khedgaon and Soonderbai at Poona. Constantly and earnestly they remembered their friends in prayer, and endeavoured by every means in their power to aid them. Many of the friends who had learned to love and respect Soonderbai during the two winters she spent in England, heard with great pleasure of her new venture of faith, and gave her their whole-hearted support.

Mr. and Mrs. Dyer issued an Occasional Paper called

FAITH WORK IN INDIA,

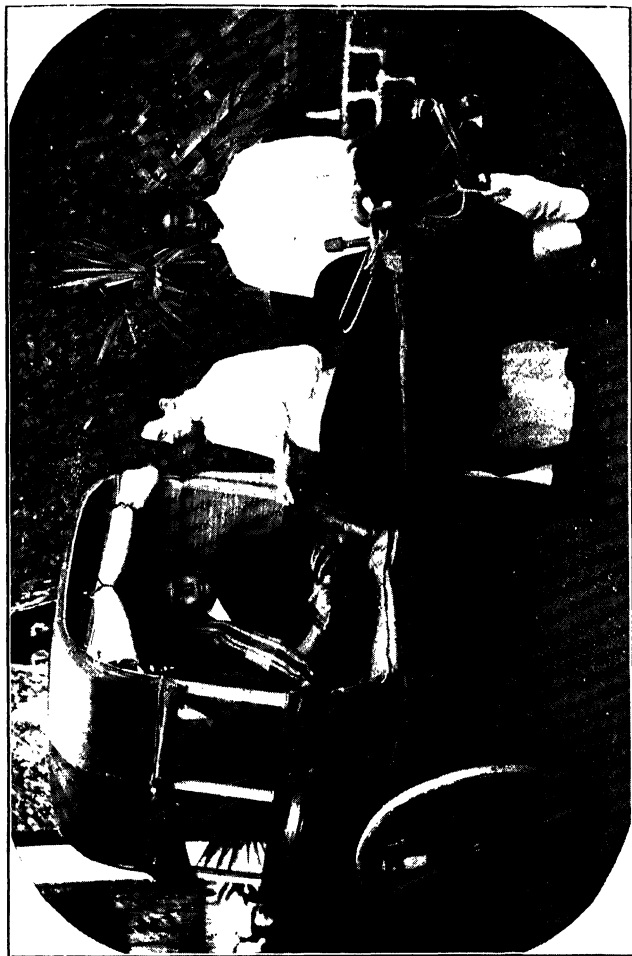
in which they gave news of Ramabai's, Soonderbai's, Miss Chuckerbutty's, and other work in India which was carried on solely in dependence upon God. They forwarded gifts to these workers, and helping in other practical ways, they formed a valuable link between the work abroad and the friends at home.

Although a number of the inmates of the Zenana Training Home were thus supported, there still remained occasion to look to God for the supply of many needs. These were not all financial. As the numbers increased, so did the amount of work and correspondence, and Soonderbai soon found she had more than she could do. Her sister, Mrs. Bawa, who was such a favourite with all who knew her, had lately been called from the midst of her work down here to the service above. Bright and energetic, she seemed to be the very soul of all that went on in the Mission station where her husband laboured for

many years. The care of her own four children and two adopted ones, and a boys' orphanage, were only part of her many duties. She was so happy and busy, but sickness laid her low, and when she knew she could not recover, she made her husband promise that Akka should bring up their three little girls.

Akka willingly accepted the responsibility, and until they were grown up she strove to fill their mother's place. How tenderly she cared for them, only one who watched her with them day by day could know. These little neices always called her Akka, but in her case the name held all the beautiful meaning that we associate with the word mother.

The eldest of them, who is now serving the Lord in Zenana work, writes touchingly: "Words can never tell what dear Akka was to me and to all of us, her neices. Oh, to think we may never sit round her as we were so often wont to do! Ever since I can remember we all ran to her with our childish sorrows and disappointments, and she was always ready to hear us and send us away again smiling. She was always so patient with us. Her gentle look of grief would do more in the way of correcting us than any amount of scolding. Once I used a harsh word when speaking to a servant woman, and I remember her look so well. I felt so ashamed of it that I hid myself in a tree for a long time. Since then I have never used a bad word.



SOONDERBAI IN HER LITTLE CART; MISS BURDER IS STANDING BESIDE.

"As a child I used to be very nervous, and every little thing frightened me. I used to call out to her in the night, and often jump on her bed through sheer fear. Once while I cuddled in her arms, she spoke to me of Jesus as my ever-present help. I shall never forget the lesson. Gradually all my fear went away. *I always wanted to be like Akka*, and even now her life influences me in every action. I do not like to do anything she did not approve. Her life is an inspiration to me, and it is because of her courage and fortitude that I gathered strength to launch out in Christ's Name for His service."

So Akka was the centre of

TWO CIRCLES,

as it were, the inner one, composed of her neices and one or two girls whom she had adopted as her own, and who shared her meals and her own rooms; and the outer one including all the residents in the Home. But the burden was heavy, and as time went on Soonderbai began to pray earnestly for helpers. The Lord sent her two, a matron and a Bible-woman, and their coming was a great cheer to her.

The Bible-woman, called Kashibai, came of a Brahmin family. Her relatives were very angry when she was converted, and for a year she was practically in hiding, the missionaries sending her secretly from place to place to keep her safely from them. By and by their anger cooled down and some

of them became friendly again, and Kashibai often used to visit one sister who lived in Poona. For several years she was a great help to Akka, as she could take charge of the young inexperienced Bible-women when they first began their work.

CHAPTER VI

That Little World

"O teach me Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart,
And wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart."

IN planning out the girls' work and lessons, Soonderbai arranged a three years' course of Bible study; the first year's consisting of the stories of the Old and New Testaments; and the second and third years' including a more thorough and advanced knowledge of the Bible and the chief doctrines of the Christian faith. The Bible-women received special instruction enabling them to understand something of the beliefs of the people among whom they worked, and the best ways of meeting their arguments and difficulties.

Soonderbai taught most of these Bible classes herself, and it should be noted that she taught the Bible stories as though they were, what she indeed believed them to be, absolutely true. In her own work among women she had always used them very largely, and she had seen how they appealed to the women, and what valuable lessons they taught. So she felt the first step in Bible knowledge was to become acquainted with them.

The myth and allegory theory found no favour or acceptance with her. She would as soon have administered

DOSES OF POISON

to her young people, as have imparted to them any of the loose and erroneous views of the inspiration of the Bible which, alas! are now so prevalent in India, as well as in other countries.

"I don't say much—I am old-fashioned," sighed the aged widow of one of the Scottish missionaries when conversing on this subject. And Soonderbai was old-fashioned, too.

The rise and spread of "Higher Criticism" and "Modernism" filled her with grief, and to the last in all the instruction she gave she remained true to the old Gospel and the old theory of inspiration.

And, thank God, there are still many missionaries in India who have all the more confidence in the Zenana Training Home to-day because its leaders are like-minded.

But a correct and thorough knowledge of the Bible, important as she deemed it, was not all that Soonderbai desired. To fill the girls' heads with right ideas was not enough if their hearts remained untouched and unchanged, so she made direct efforts to win their hearts for the Lord Jesus, and she counted it no waste of time to stop all other lessons and devote whole days to meetings.

Of the first of those special seasons we read, "A

few months ago Soonderbai had a three days' course of whole day meetings, when everything else was put aside and the

SALVATION

of each girl's soul became the chief and pressing question. So wonderfully did God bless them, those three days, that nearly every girl in the Home who had not been previously converted, gave her heart at that time to the Lord, and to-day there are only one or two latest comers who have not laid aside their caste prejudices and idol worship and become true Christians."

It was a wonderful result, but God has said, "Them that honour Me I will honour" (1 Sam. 2. 30), and, "Ye shall seek for Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29. 13). And surely it was a wise thing to put everything aside though it did mean the loss of three days' study!

As a result of the blessing given then, an atmosphere and an influence was created which must have been a help to every new girl who entered the Home, and in the improved order and obedience, a help to the teachers and principal, too.

In course of time a monthly day of prayer was instituted when Akka gave special Bible talks to the girls, and hours were spent in song and prayer and testimony. An opportunity was always given during the day for any girl to tell what the Lord had been teaching her, or how He had answered her prayers.

These times together with her girls helped Soonderbai to know how they were progressing in the spiritual life, for their growth in grace was ever her great desire.

Soonderbai was a wonderful teacher. Her special gift lay in the beautiful way in which she could take deep spiritual truth and set it forth so clearly and simply that all could understand. Then she would show how it applied to each one of the girls, and how it affected their daily life and conduct, impressing it on their minds by some vivid illustration.

One fancies one can hear again the earnest, persuasive tones, and see the loving smile which made her face beautiful as she talked. She was a very quiet speaker, and only emphasised her words by the slight movements of her right hand.

The editor of *The Bombay Guardian* once asked her which part of that paper she read first; and he looked at his wife and smiled when she answered, "The Family Circle page." But if he had known to what good use she put those Family Circle narratives, he would have been gratified indeed.* The Indian Christians as well as her own girls loved to hear her speak, and she could speak to them in the plainest way of their faults and shortcomings without ever offending them. She never made notes beforehand for any of her addresses; yet she prepared in a way of her own, by much prayer and Bible study, and by earnest thought on the subject, and then spoke out

* No fiction was admitted,

of a full heart without any arrangement of ideas into first, second, and thirdly.

Some one asked her once, "How do you punish the girls when they are very naughty, Akka?"

"When they are very naughty I don't punish them at all," was the answer. "They always come after a little while and ask to be forgiven."

Yet it was not that she passed over faults. When taking a meeting she would mention them in a general way, showing how they grieved the Lord Jesus; and often as she saw some dark head bending lower and lower she knew that her words were going home.

In addition to the monthly meetings, Soonderbai arranged a yearly week of meetings, when she invited two or three missionaries to come and address the girls.

When her work had been going on for about three years, Soonderbai was talking one day to a missionary friend, and after relating various answers to prayer in connection with the Home, she mentioned that she was praying for

AN ENGLISH LADY

to come and help her. She did not know that her friend was contemplating leaving the sphere of service in which she had been engaged during the four years she had been in India, and was even then waiting on the Lord to open up some other path for her. But so it was, and in a few weeks Miss Burder had taken up her residence in the Zenana Training Home. How thankful Akka was!

"I asked the Lord to send me an English helper," she said, "but I did not think He would send me one who knew the language." And in the evening as she and her three helpers gathered in her room for prayer she remarked,

"When I began this work I used to pray alone. Now there are four of us to pray."

Those were precious little seasons when, the day's work and play ended, a hush settled over the house, and in the welcome quiet the little band of workers offered their prayers and praises to the One whose ear was always attentive to their cry.

Those times of prayer showed how large-hearted Soonderbai was. With nearly one hundred and twenty young people under her care, there were many requests to make for them, but her sympathies reached out far beyond the limits of her own work to the pastors, evangelists, Bible-women, and teachers, throughout the Marathi country. She remembered the missionaries in India and other countries, and those in the homelands who denied themselves to forward the work abroad; also Evangelistic, Temperance, and Purity labourers among British soldiers and others. All found a place in her intercessions, and that not by fits and starts, but regularly.

The bungalow Soonderbai had occupied at first had some time ago become too small for her large family, and she had rented half a bungalow on the opposite side of the road. But it was not an ideal

arrangement, and she was very delighted when she was able to secure large premises within easy reach of city and *bazar*, or public market, and meeting places. The three buildings contained in the spacious compound had originally been built for some wealthy gentleman, and the rooms were large and lofty. There was a plentiful supply of water, and the garden was shaded by beautiful trees. How happy the girls were to pack up their belongings and carry them round to these charming new quarters! And for a year or two they all kept wonderfully well there.

A stranger might imagine that life in such an institution was dull and monotonous, but on the contrary, the Zenana Training Home was a most interesting little world. There was variety in the changing turns of house-work, cooking, and sewing, and lessons. On Sundays there was always the walk to Church, and often during the week to the Empress Gardens or Baker's Hill, and occasionally a picnic to some pleasant place. Excitement and even romance touched the lives of the dwellers in that little world! By this time some of the elder girls had begun to go forth to other parts as Bible-women. These departures were sad times for some, because the one who was leaving always had one or more special friends who grieved at her going, and many tears were shed.

Early one morning a gentleman drove up to the door in a tonga, a one-horse covered conveyance,

and very soon after Akka was seen to enter the tonga and drive away with him. But no one guessed what the unusual proceeding portended. The gentleman was a missionary who was opening up a large work in a Native State, and he wanted more workers. He and Soonderbai had gone to confer with Mr. Bruere about several of the girls whom his wife had placed in the Home. When they returned the news flew round that

THE SAHIB

was going to take five of the girls away with him that very evening. The suddenness of it gave the whole school a shock, and all the rest of the day the house and garden resounded with the voice of weeping.

There was excitement of a different kind when a devoted servant of God, who carried on a Rescue Home, sent sixteen girls to Soonderbai. They were famine, not rescue cases, and Mrs. Clark felt it was unfair to them to keep them herself any longer. The larger number were girls in their teens, but some were quite small. With them came a very nice-looking young teacher, called Sarahbai, who remained as one of Soonderbai's paid helpers.

About that time a young man came to Poona with the avowed intention of finding a wife for his brother. Soonderbai knew him to be a musician and a good singer, and she asked him to come and give a course of singing lessons to a selected number of her girls. The young man consented. The lessons were given,

and by and by he returned to Bombay. How his efforts on his brother's behalf prospered we do not know, but he made some successful efforts on his own account, for, with Akka's consent, he became engaged to Sarahbai! In a few months' time he came again with a small party of his friends from Bombay, and the Zenana Training Home was the scene of

A PRETTY WEDDING.

Akka had inherited her parents' hospitable nature, and many interesting visitors came to the Home. None was more welcome than Mr. Bawa, who used to come to see his little girls. He was very good at telling stories, and when lessons were over he would sit with a little crowd of girls round him telling them stories which, long as they were, were never too long for his interested young hearers. Once when they were all gathered in the schoolroom he told them of his conversion when he was but a youth, and of all it cost him to confess Christ.

Then there came a gentle little

PARSEE WIDOW

who told them of her long search for the true God. The Parsees have no Bible Society, and the sacred books of her religion were so rare and expensive that it was only by selling her jewels she obtained them. And after reading them she was still unsatisfied. Next she turned to the Koran, and paid a Mohammedan

to read and explain it to her. But with no better result. Then she got a Hindu pandit who read, and compared some of the Hindu books with the Gospels. When their studies were finished the Pandit said, "I do not know about you, but I am convinced that Christianity is the true religion." And Mrs. Bhimjibhoy found all her longings satisfied and all her needs met in Jesus Christ. And as long as her strength lasted she went up and down among her own people telling them of the Saviour.

One of Akka's girls was

SOLOCHANA,

a young Brahmin widow. Quite unexpectedly her mother came to the school to see her. She had lately become a widow herself, as her shaven head and total lack of ornaments showed. She knew her daughter was in a Christian school, and had tormented herself by picturing her eating beef and pork and other such abominations! When she saw the dahl and vegetable curry that was served out to the girls, and found that Solochana was never forced to eat meat, the poor woman went away considerably comforted.

One day Soonderbai received a letter from

TWO MOHAMMEDAN LADIES

of rank whom she had regularly visited when working in Bombay. The writer complained that though they had been so many days in Poona, Soonderbai

had not yet been to see them. "How was I to know they were here?" laughed Soonderbai.

She soon had her tiny black bull put into her little bullock cart, and drove off to the nice bungalow furnished in English style where her friends were staying. They were much amused and laughed heartily at the small conveyance which was such a familiar sight in Poona in those days, but they were genuinely glad to see its occupant, and promised to go and see her school. They came a few days afterwards in a closed carriage with blinds carefully drawn down. The girls all assembled in the school-room and sang and recited to the visitors, who were much interested in all they saw and heard.

They had thoughtfully brought sweets for all the girls, and when they left one of them put an envelope into Soonderbai's hand. When she opened it she found within a note for Rs. 100.

So the months passed by bringing the inevitable changes. Several of the girls had been married; one had gone to a Mission Hospital to learn nursing; others had gone out as Bible-women. Through an epidemic of plague all the girls had been graciously protected. The year had been one of financial straitness, and often Soonderbai's faith had been severely tested. But she was enabled to continue month after month, and the joy was all the greater when the God in whom she trusted, sent her through some kind friend a gift of £100. That one large sum

supplied many needs, and among them the need of blankets. What a pleasure it was to open those big bales! It was hard to say who was the happier, Akka, as she distributed them, or the girls, as they each carried off to the dormitory a warm, strong blanket.

Occasionally some of the girls caused Akka much sorrow by their behaviour, and she had her times of

DISCOURAGEMENT.

Still, there was blessing among them, and many were growing in grace. In order to arouse their interest in mission work in other parts of the world, Miss Burder proposed a monthly missionary meeting for the elder girls. *They* thought it ought to be weekly, so every Sunday morning they gathered together, when some interesting news from the mission field was related, and some time spent in prayer for the distant parts of the earth. It was a most interesting little meeting, and it continued till Miss Burder went to England for her furlough.

CHAPTER VII

Floods upon the Dry Ground

“There shall be showers of blessing,
 Precious reviving again;
 Over the hills and the valleys,
 Sound of abundance of rain.”

THE news of the wonderful Welsh Revival some years ago spread far and wide, and in India it awakened in many hearts a great desire for similar blessing. The tendency to “run down” spiritually is ever real and present, and the number of merely nominal Christians always tends to increase.

From many parts of India a cry went up to God for a season of refreshing. The Khassia Hills witnessed the first answer to this cry, and soon afterwards a wonderful movement took place at Khedgaon. There, ever since she had heard of the blessing in Wales, Pandita Ramabai and numbers of her young women had been daily praying for revival. Suddenly the answer came. Lessons had to be given up, and the Bible school was turned into an inquiry room. Whole nights were sometimes spent in prayer, and when some of the girls were blessed they immediately began to pray for others.

Ramabai could never keep a good thing to herself.

She was not only anxious to glorify God, but eager also that the wonderful blessing should spread to other parts. So, with a party of her helpers, she went to Poona, where she held meetings for the Indian Christians, at which some Europeans were also present. Nothing extraordinary took place at these meetings, but they were followed by definite blessing to individuals, and to orphanages, and schools.

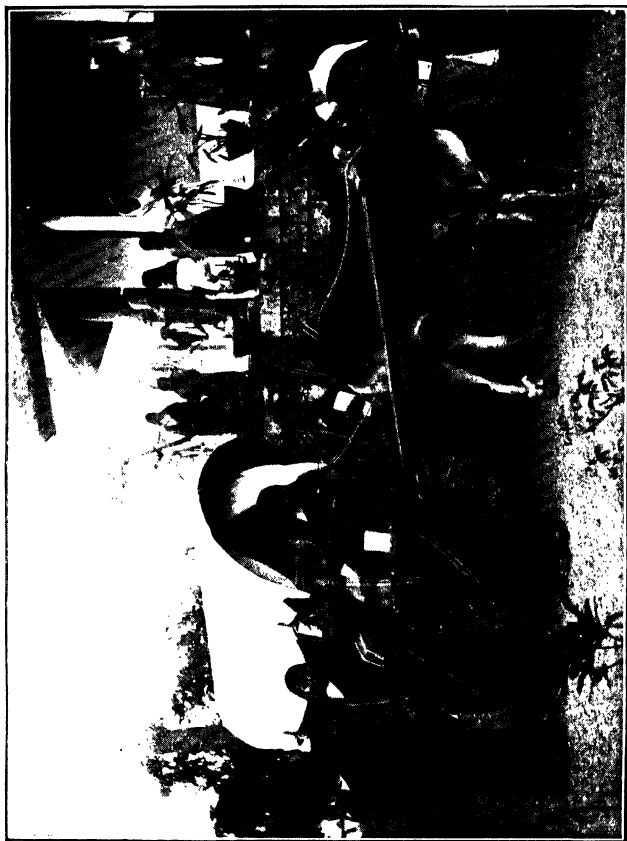
Soonderbai's girls attended them, and some days after a few girls began a special prayer meeting. It was a very small meeting, but on the third day one girl was deeply convicted of sin, and for hours she

PRAYED IN AGONY

of mind. Then, receiving the assurance of forgiveness, her sorrow was changed to joy, and she began to pray for others.

The work quickly spread through the whole school. The order was always the same. First, the deepest conviction of sin bringing a perfect agony of repentance and the confession of long-hidden sins—then the sense of pardon followed by a great joy that had to find expression, and then a deep concern and a wonderful spirit of prayer for others.

One girl said afterwards, "When the revival comes everything comes out. A long time ago I broke one of Akka's saucers, and buried the pieces. When the Holy Spirit came upon me I remembered that



BIBLE WOMEN READY TO SET OUT FOR THE VILLAGES.

saucer, and I had no peace till I confessed what I had done. ”

Many girls confessed such sins as lack of love, an unforgiving spirit, or secret pride. There was no keeping back these confessions—they had to be made; but when they were made, and there was “nothing between” themselves and God, there was no keeping back the joy that flooded their hearts.

Soonderbai wrote of that time, “When the Holy Spirit comes on the girls you can see at once. Some tremble, some laugh, some shake; shy girls, who had never opened their mouths in public, have the bands of their tongues loosed, they clap their hands and pray in a way impossible to describe. Night after night we were up till two or three in the morning. In the day time no one rests.

WHOLE DAYS AND NIGHTS

one hears the wail and struggle of their agonising prayer, and feels pity for girls in such a state. I do not interfere for fear I might hinder God’s work. Once they get blessing their cry turns into joy. Oh, what prayers the little ones and Hindu girls offer! The Lord’s work is wonderful! They do not think of cooking or sleeping. ”

After such a remarkable time of blessing it was strange that Akka had great trouble with the girls. Perhaps the enemy was indeed trying to undo the good work, but she said it seemed as though Satan was let

loose among them. Praise God, the trouble was soon ended by another wave of revival breaking over the Home! The Bible-women and teachers were gathered together for prayer one evening, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, and they began to shake and tremble. When the spirit of prayer came upon the girls they could not wait for one another to finish, but they all prayed at once, many of them with tears running down their faces.

Soonderbai related her own

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

at this wonderful time in the following words: "When there was a great revival and my girls got great blessings, I was delighted. I praised the Lord! But when the time came to take the meeting I was powerless. I thought, what could I say to girls who are filled with the Holy Spirit? For many years I had given Bible lessons to them, and held meetings, but this time I could not open my lips. Then I determined that I would not take rest till I got the baptism of the Spirit. *

"I fasted and shut myself in a room, and resolved not to leave it till I got what I wanted. I went on praying and the Lord taught me there what was the meaning of absolute surrender. The old nature was crucified with Jesus, and I was separated from the

*We quote her own words, as she then understood things. She had been *baptised* in one Spirit, but desired "the *filling* of the Spirit."

world as I had never been before. And I thought, 'If He takes my dearest from me, and my precious work and everything I have, yet I will praise the Lord with all my heart.'

"Then I received great blessing, the spirit of prayer and of intercession and great victory over the tempter. I saw a great light, and could say, 'I live in Jesus and He in me.' I asked the Lord to give me the burden of souls and He did so.

"Last September a series of meetings was held in Bombay for Christian workers. I was invited to take charge of some of the meetings. The Lord opened the way. After the first meeting I went home sad with a heavy heart. The burden of souls came upon me so that I could not sleep properly, and was actually in agony. I prayed, and prayed, and thought my heart would break. I said, 'O Lord, death would be better and easier than this burden.' Then I thought of the pain and agony my Saviour suffered—how He suffered for me. I said, 'Jesus, I cannot bear up any longer, but do not take away the spirit of intercession, but give me strength to bear it.'

"The Lord opened my lips in the meetings, and gave me power to speak for His glory. As soon as I received the blessing I was surrounded by all sorts of trials, temptations, and sorrows. I passed through deep waters, but the Lord Jesus was with me all the time. These trials brought me down very low, made me

humble, and taught me a great many lessons which I would not have learnt otherwise, and they were all blessings in disguise. I praise His Name for ever and ever. Pray for me that the Lord should keep me humble, and let me live in this world only for His glory."

And those who had most closely watched Soonderbai's already beautiful life could see that from that time there was something deeper and more intense about it.

Some friends, while truly rejoicing because of the Revival, nevertheless asked, "Will all this wonderful blessing last? What will be its

PERMANENT RESULT?"

A few weeks after Miss Burder returned from her furlough, she wrote as follows: "While I was in England I heard wonderful accounts of the revival that took place in the Zenana Training Home, and very often I wished I could be back in Poona to see for myself what was being done.

"It is even more wonderful to return after nearly two years' absence and see the great change in the whole school. The very atmosphere seems different, and though the girls are not perfect, yet they give far less trouble, and everything seems to run much more smoothly than before. They all seem to be much happier than they used to be; some of them are full of fun and mischief, and the house often rings

with their merry laughter. And how they sing now! They were always fond of singing, but they have learned many new hymns and choruses, and as they sing they clap their hands in perfect time, while their faces shine with joy.

"But it is the change in the prayer meetings which astonishes me most. Many of the girls know in a very real way what is meant by the ministry of intercession, and even quite little girls pray with such earnestness as I have never seen, except at Llandrindod Wells in 1905. The Bible-women have a prayer meeting every day, and when I first went to it it seemed very short. They all prayed together for what I thought was five or ten minutes, but found it was at least half an hour.

"I noticed particularly one young woman who sat opposite me in the meeting a few days ago. She prayed as the most deeply taught Christian might have done, pleading first for herself, and then for the Indian Christians, and the heathen. For thirty-five minutes she poured forth a perfect torrent of eloquence, never pausing except to choke back her sobs, or to dash away the tears that streamed down her face.

"Soonderbai tells me of one or two girls who received great blessing in the revival, but who have gone back again. But, still, there is much to encourage those who have prayed for blessing, especially when it is remembered that it is more than eighteen months since the revival first broke out in this Home.

'This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes' (Matt. 21. 42). To Him be all the praise and glory."

Such times of revival with similar glorious results were experienced in many parts of India, and caused great thankfulness and rejoicing among workers in the different missions. And the main features which were so clearly seen in the working of the Holy Spirit in the Zenana Training Home, were reproduced in all these widely separated fields.

The Zenana Training Home being well known now, missionaries and others sent girls to it for training. But no one ever came with quite the same request as a Brahmin convert from South India, who brought his young wife

EGAMMA

to Soonderbai, asking that she would make her a real Christian, not just a nominal one! The husband, though not then baptised, had already suffered loss for Christ's sake. He was an earnest young fellow with the faith of a little child. His wife was a gentle, shy girl, though with a good deal of character. She did become a *real* Christian, though Akka did not make her one! She eagerly drank in the Bible teaching, but at first she found it hard to grasp some things.

She soon made friends with a Rajput widow named Basanti, whose sad story Soonderbai has told in her little book, "Hinduism and Womanhood." Basanti

had only recently come to the Saviour herself, so she could appreciate Egamma's difficulties.

Many long talks the two friends had together over the things of God, and it was Basanti's little bit of service for her Lord to help this earnest seeker. Then came the revival with its overflowing blessing. Several of the girls were going to be baptised, and Egamma determined to take the opportunity to obey the Lord's command.

She wrote to her husband, who was working in Bombay, telling him of her decision, and begging him to come to Poona and take his stand with her. And she added that if he was not prepared to do this, she would wait no longer, but would be baptised without him.

He readily acceded to her request, and it was a glad day in the Zenana Training Home when the young husband and wife and a number of the school girls confessed the Lord in His appointed way.

Soon afterwards Egamma joined her husband in Bombay, and together they witnessed for God there.

CHAPTER VIII

Greatly Comforted

"For the heart grows rich in giving:
 All its wealth is living grain:
 Seeds—which mildew in the garner—
 Scattered, fill with gold the plain."

LIGHT and shade are always strangely mingled in our lives, and the deep joy of the revival was followed for Soonderbai by a heart-breaking sorrow. A strange disease appeared among her girls which baffled all medical skill. A girl would lose her appetite, grow thin and sickly-looking, and in spite of all that could be done for her would succumb in a short time. Some of the brightest little girls for whom Soonderbai had entertained the highest hopes were thus taken away. Some were sent to hospital, and some were attended by the doctor at home, but all with the same result.

Poor Akka was terribly distressed, and at last she took the advice of friends, and determined to leave the house and compound, which in many ways had suited her so well. But a house such as she required was not easily found, and, meantime, the girls were sickening at an alarming rate. So she hired tents,

which a friendly Mohammedan allowed her to pitch on his compound. With sad hearts the girls packed up again, for one of their number was even then at death's door, and the first night they spent under canvas she passed away. But one or two others who were showing symptoms of the disease began to recover immediately, and after that there were no more cases. It was exceedingly inconvenient to carry on school in tents for several weeks, but Soonderbai was too thankful to see the health of her dear girls improving to trouble much about that.

By and by another house was rented, beautiful for situation, but for nothing else; for it was very old and in a tumble-down condition. However, it was in a very healthy part of Poona, and some of Soonderbai's friends wished she could have bought it. But even in its dilapidated condition the landlord asked a tremendous sum for it, and then much of it would have had to be rebuilt.

Soonderbai was thoroughly convinced now of the need of having premises of her own. The heavy rent was a strain on her funds, and in hired houses she met with various troubles and inconveniences from unsympathetic landlords. She and her friends began to pray about the matter, and soon a building fund was opened, the first contributions being £50 from two sisters, and £50 from Anglo-Indian friends.

An unusually severe epidemic of plague brought Soonderbai her next trouble. People

FLED FROM THE CITY,

leaving only a third of its usual population, yet 15,000 people died. Soonderbai wrote, "Everywhere you met funerals; shops and houses were closed, and business was at a standstill. The few traders who remained charged exorbitant prices. For weeks our expenses for food, etc., were doubled, and in some cases trebled. Sometimes we had to send six or eight miles for articles of food." Then one of the Bible-women took the disease. It was only a slight case, but the Cantonment magistrate sent an order to vacate the house in forty-eight hours.

At that time neither house nor tent could be obtained. But once again the Lord carried His child through, keeping her mind quiet, and sending friends to help her. The Rev. W. H. Stephens, of the American Methodist Episcopal Mission, who had so often assisted her before, obtained an extension of the notice to leave the house, and lent her a large shamiana which held all her girls. But on account of the sickness all around, it was three days before she could get men to pitch it. For several weeks they lived in this tent, bringing all the water for such a number from a distance of half a mile, and suffering other inconvenience. Yet, in her Report for that year, Soonderbai wrote, "The whole of this year I have much for which to praise the Lord. He has done great things for me."

Through all these vicissitudes the work progressed.

Returning from her absence in England, Miss Burder found a great improvement in the way the Bible-women were speaking, so much more earnestly and clearly. In addition to the visiting in Poona, they worked regularly in a number of villages, and every month they went out several miles to meet

THE PILGRIMS

returning from Alandi. Under some trees by the roadside the people used to stop to rest and drink water from a well, and many a tired pilgrim heard there of the Water of Life.

This little place, Alandi, with its crowds of pilgrims, was much laid on Soonderbai's heart, and it was one of the joys of her later years to see work among them extending. Good reports were coming, too, from old girls who had gone to different places as Bible-women. One missionary was so pleased with one she had employed for a time that she took a long railway journey to Poona to get another.

One of the Bible-women, called

WASANTIKA,

had a severe test about this time. In one of the houses they visited a woman recognised her as her sister. She had not seen Wasantika for nine years, but she identified her by a scar on her head. This sister's first husband having died, and her children as well, she married a Mohammedan, and became one

herself. In course of time the second husband also died, leaving her childless, but well-off. Indeed, in poor Wasantika's eyes she was quite a wealthy woman.

It was not strange that the lonely widow wanted her sister to go and live with her. She showed the wondering Bible-women a house near by which she said she owned, and boxes full of clothes and jewellery, all of which was to become the younger sister's if she would only go. But it meant becoming a Mohammedan, and at first Wasantika stoutly refused. But a repeated temptation gathers force, and after some weeks she yielded. She said "Good-bye" to Akka, and rode to Poona city in the bullock tonga with the other Bible-women when they went to visit. But from that rumbling bullock cart as well as from the home she had left behind, earnest prayer went up for victory for her.

She reached the house and found her sister expecting her, with Mohammedan clothes and ornaments set out ready for her to put on. But somehow the sight of those garments brought home to Wasantika the reality and the sin of what she was about to do, and, to the intense disappointment of her sister, and the intense joy of her praying companions, she refused to put them on, saying she could not deny her Saviour. Re-entering the bullock cart, she returned to the Zenana Training Home. It was a real victory, and it is easy to imagine how thankfully Akka received her back again.

THE NEED OF PREMISES

of her own pressed more and more upon Soonderbai. She began to look around for a suitable house, or, failing that, a site on which to build. It proved to be a wearisome task, but she was always hopeful. In the meantime some of her friends in England thought it would be well if she could pay a visit to that country, and tell of the work and the need.

After waiting on God about it, Soonderbai was convinced that she should go. Kind friends in England promised her passage money, and Mr. and Mrs. Dyer arranged meetings for her, but the difficulties were all at this end. Her own health was not good; school funds were low, and her helper, Miss Burder, who had only returned from England eighteen months before, was again on the verge of a break-down. She felt quite unfit to take the extra responsibility which Soonderbai's long absence would involve, and very reluctantly she resolved to go back to the quiet of village life.

It was all very difficult for both of them, but Soonderbai never once thought of giving up. She went on quietly with her preparations, and sailed at the appointed time! A lady named Mrs. Gurr nobly came to her help, undertaking the correspondence, accounts, and general supervision, while Soonderbai's friend, Mrs. Chandrabai Paul, took charge of the Marathi side of the work. Mrs. Paul had often stayed at the Zenana Training

Home, and she knew Akka's girls and Akka's methods of dealing with them equally well. So everything was arranged, and, as always happens to those who love God, all things worked together for good.

Soonderbai had a busy time in England. Up and down the country she travelled, speaking at many meetings, attending the Keswick Convention, and making new friends as well as meeting old ones. *Faith Work in India* (edited by Mrs. Helen S. Dyer) records a visit paid to "The Orphan Homes, Ashley Down, founded by the late

GEORGE MULLER.

She found much happy fellowship with the present director and members of his staff, and had the privilege of speaking to about five hundred of the elder girls and the staff of matrons. The girls were deeply interested, and afterwards gathered together a generous sum to be sent towards the new home for the work in Poona."

Soonderbai did not beg for money, indeed, in some of her meetings she did not even mention money, but in her quaint earnest way she told of what the Lord had done in the past, and of the present condition of the work. The Lord touched the hearts of her hearers, and a substantial increase in her building fund was one result of that year's work.

But it was only one result. She was sometimes led

to leave mission topics and speak plain, searching words on the need for

SEPARATION

from the world, and a deeper consecration to God; and her addresses were made a blessing to many.

The same issue of *Faith Work in India*, above quoted, gives the following testimony, which was only one of many that were received. "I know you will join with me in praising God for what He has wrought through dear Soonderbai here.

"I wish you could hear the praises of some of our Y.W.C.A. members as they thank God for her visit, and for the personal blessing that her own testimony has been.

"Many of us have long prayed for Revival, and for a true spirit of prayer and intercession to be poured out upon us as a Branch, and God is surely answering and leading us to expect great things.

"Several outsiders, too, who came to the meetings, told me their eyes had been opened as never before to the needs of India's women, and I do trust this awakening may lead to real prayer.

"A girl in H——, not a Christian, wrote me to say how utterly ashamed and miserable she felt after hearing the message, and how she went home to pray as she had never done before.

"A young man who heard her in E——, was so deeply convicted of sin that he decided for Christ on his way home.

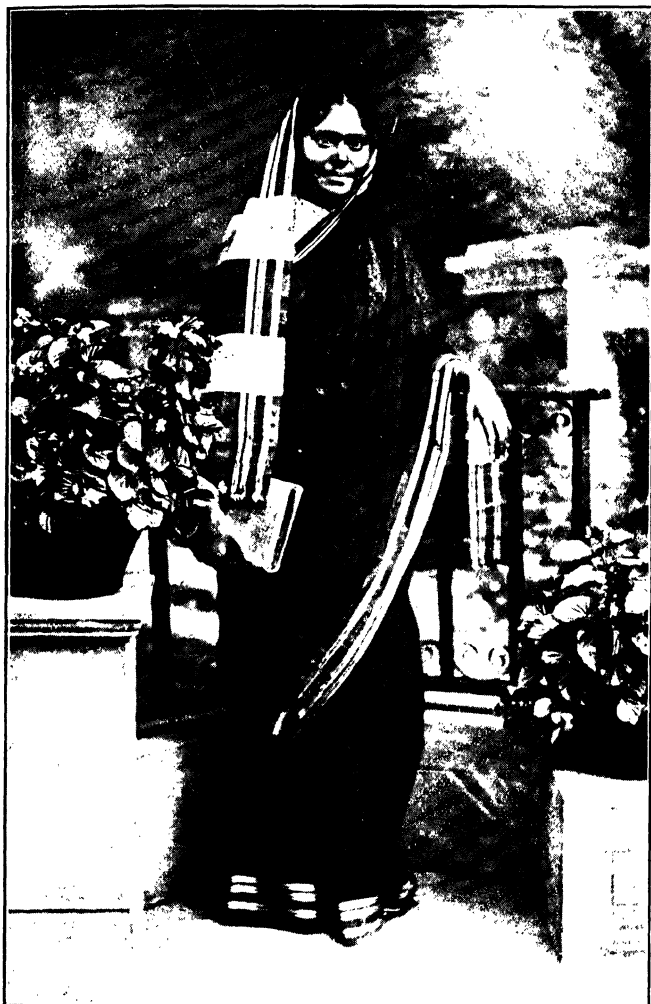
"A lady, who helped at one of the meetings, thanked God for Soonderbai's visit, and that each servant in her house had received spiritual benefit and help."

There was yet a third result. In the north of England

Miss EDITH HALL,

a Y.W.C.A. Secretary, with no other thought in her mind than to increase missionary enthusiasm among the members of her branch, invited Soonderbai to come and speak to them. But God, to whom all the future lies open, had a greater purpose in bringing these two workers together. And surely the missionary interest of those Y.W.C.A. members was not only quickened, but made as real and personal as it could be, for, when Soonderbai sailed again for India, their own Secretary accompanied her. She had heard God's call to go to the help of the brave Indian sister who could not carry on her work single-handed. And He who called her, supplied her passage money and all her other needs.

On reaching Poona the search for a building site was resumed, and negotiations were entered into for a conveniently situated piece of land. But it is one thing to enter into negotiations—it is another thing to bring them to a successful close! This piece of land was jointly owned by several members of a family, and one member was unwilling to sell. This caused considerable delay, but once again



DHANWANTIBAI.

Soonderbai proved that the Lord worketh for them that wait for Him. In due time the deed was signed and the property handed over.

Thus,

TEN YEARS AFTER

the Zenana Training Home first came into being, the foundation stone of the new School Hall was laid. The following year, when the main buildings were opened, a large number of Christian friends, European and Indian, gathered to rejoice with Soonderbai, and to praise God for all His goodness, and ask His continued blessing. It was a joyful day, for it saw the fulfilment of one of Soonderbai's most cherished desires, and at the same time the supply of a pressing need. From time to time as the means were supplied, she put up other rooms on the large compound, which added to the comfort of the inmates, and made the work easier.

The current of Soonderbai's life ran very quietly now. Rheumatism crippled her, so that she was very much confined to the house, and often suffered much pain. But, though she herself was kept at home more than she had ever been before, many of those whom she had taught and for whom she had prayed, were scattered as lights right over the Maratha country, and beyond it, and as news reached her of the lives they were living and the work they were doing, she must have been greatly comforted. Not that there were no failures among the large number of girls

who passed through her hands; but quite recently one who knew her work from its commencement remarked on the fact of her having "*so few* cases to be sorry for amongst those who went through her Home."

One of those who gave Soonderbai joy was a tall young woman whom she had renamed

DHANWANTI.

She was one of the sixteen girls who had been sent to the Home a number of years before. She was born in a little mud house in a village on the bank of a wide river. No preacher seems to have ever visited this out-of-the-way place, and the child, with her sisters and brothers, grew up amidst sin and idolatry. Her parents belonged to a low caste, but little Dhanwanti had a spirit as independent and proud as that of any princess.

The uneducated people of India often do not know their own ages with any certainty, but she was probably about twelve or thirteen years old when she and one of her brothers did something which made their mother very angry.

The brother used his nimble young legs with such good effect that he quite escaped his mother's wrath; but Dhanwanti received such a cruel beating that, nearly wild with passion, she ran to a neighbour's house declaring that she would never, never return to her own home.

The neighbour thereupon advised her to go to Miraj, where she said a missionary lady would give her food and a new sardie, the long garment worn by Maratha women. A famine was raging at the time, and the woman told her to say that both her parents were dead and she had no one to take care of her. The little heathen girl had no scruples about telling a lie, and the woman tramped with her to the town, and then directing her to the Mission House, left her alone. It all turned out as she had said. The lady believed Dhanwanti's story, gave her a good meal and a new sardie, and shut her up in a room with other girls for the night.

But the next day, to the poor child's surprise and dismay, she was put in a train and carried off to a town many miles away. "Then," said Dhanwanti, "I was like an animal caught in a pit from which it could not escape." She was afraid to tell how she had deceived the missionary at Miraj, and in her new home she fretted and sulked.

Mrs. Clark, the lady in charge, was very patient and loving, and when the unhappy girl would not even wash her face or comb her hair, she did it for her. Gradually Dhanwanti grew used to her surroundings and settled down happily, making friends with the other girls.

She had not many educational advantages in that Home, but it was there she first heard of the love of God in Christ. For some time she and the other

new girls could not understand what it all meant, and after a meeting they would say to one another, "Whatever were they talking about?" But by degrees the light entered her dark mind, and before she went to Poona she was baptised. All the sacred meaning of baptism she did not grasp then, but she gave up many of her bad habits, and when after three years in Mrs. Clark's Home she went to Akka, she made rapid progress. Indeed Akka was so sure she was a Christian that it was not long before she put her in the Bible-women's training class. Then the revival came, and it made spiritual things so real, and was such a blessing to Dhanwanti, that she always said herself that she was converted then.

After eight years' absence from her own home, she obtained Akka's consent to visit it, and tell her relatives of the Saviour she had found. But before she reached the village by the river, she stopped the cart and spent a few minutes in another little place where her mother had lived as a child. Only a few minutes, but when she took her seat in the cart again, her companion noticed that she wiped her eyes several times. Then she said quietly, "Bai, my mother and father are dead, two of my brothers are dead, and my sister is dead."

It was an overwhelming blow, and when she stood outside her home once more, and her youngest brother, not knowing how much she had heard, asked her, "Where are all those you left here when you went

away?" she literally lifted up her voice and wept and wailed. Her eldest brother was married and living in another village, but her aunt was there, and her little, old grandmother came tottering out to greet her. "Don't cry," said the aunt, "you have plenty of relations left." Dhanwanti spent a few days with them and then returned to Poona.

Not long after she left the Zenana Training Home, and went to help Miss Burder in her

VILLAGE WORK

in another district. Together they visited scores of villages, telling out in simple language the Glad Tidings. The women liked the young Bible-woman, and it was a rare thing for her to meet with anything but an attentive hearing. It was sometimes very impressive to hear her telling the women how she had been taught to worship the family idol, washing it and decorating it with leaves and flowers, just as they were in the habit of doing. Then she would tell how she began to think, if the god could not wash himself, how could he cleanse her heart from sin? Following this she would speak of the Blood of Jesus which cleanseth from all sin.

Dhanwanti's own life and conduct also commended the Gospel. Industrious, truthful, pleasant, and neighbourly, she won the respect of all who knew her. "She has a pure mind," said a Brahmin widow who used to visit her frequently.

She was paid a regular, though small salary, and every month she put aside the tenth part of it for the Lord's work. Much of this she sent either to Soonderbai, or to Mrs. Clark, whose patient love she had never forgotten. She continued in the work for several years, but now, in a far-off city, she is a wife and mother—the mother of little children who will never bow down to idols, but who will be taught from their earliest days to love and reverence the name of Jesus Christ.



MISS VIOLET M. BINNS WITH SOME OF THE BIBLE WOMEN TRAINED AT THE ZEPHANA TRAINING HOME.

CHAPTER IX

"Always so Smiling, Always so Kind"

"A heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise."

SOONDERBAI knew of many of her girls who were living such lives as Dhanwanti's, and she asked for no other reward for her years of labour. Nor did she ever think she had done enough. "Saved to serve," was her motto, and that of her Home, and no one ever heard her say a word about retiring. Her desire was always for extension, though she was fully alive to the danger of attempting more than she could do thoroughly.

It was a cause for hearty praise when Miss Violet M. Binns, an experienced missionary, came to her and took over the evangelistic part of the work, making the teaching and superintendence of the Bible-women her special care. She greatly developed the work at the places of pilgrimage, and it was a joy to Soonderbai to know that thousands of pilgrims were hearing of the One who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14. 6).

For the supply of all

FINANCIAL NEEDS

Soonderbai still looked to the Lord, and many an interesting story could she tell of answers to prayer and supplies received just in the nick of time, as it were. Once, when funds were urgently needed, and much prayer for them was going up, money was received one week-end from India, England, America, Australia, and New Zealand, as though God would remind her how many resources are His.

During the trying years of the Great War she was able to testify, "Though some friends have not been able to continue their help, others have been raised up, and we have not been allowed to lack any good thing. Some kind friends sent money for a Christmas treat for all the girls, and we had a nice dinner of curry and rice together. But at this sad time of need we did not feel we could spend much on ourselves, so all agreed to send a donation to the poor, suffering Armenians in this hour of their trouble."

For several years Soonderbai had not been strong, and at last she became

SERIOUSLY ILL.

But the Lord raised her up, to the joy of her many friends.

When Miss Hall first came to her she helped with the accounts and correspondence and the teaching of English. But as she grew familiar with the Marathi language, she took over more and more of

the management of all the work of the Home. So, when Soonderbai was again laid aside she was able to keep everything going on in its usual order, while Miss Binns superintended the Bible-women.

This was a special token of God's providential care, because, for some months, Akka could not leave her bed, and was much too ill to be troubled about anything. The lady doctors of the Church of Scotland Mission attended her unceasingly, but at one time they had no hope of her recovery. Yet God heard the prayers that went up from hundreds of friends, and she rallied even when the end was thought to be near. Strength slowly returned until she was able to walk again, though rheumatism still prevented her from getting about freely.

At this period, Miss Hall wrote: "It is nothing less than a miracle! Perhaps you can imagine how thankful we are, and not we only, but hundreds of others who value her work out here are rejoicing with us. Another cause for praise is the indefatigable way in which those of our workers who helped in the nursing, gave themselves to this service. Long weary nights of watching and waiting on the dear invalid were always most cheerfully and ungrudgingly given; indeed, without the help of these dear women, it is very doubtful whether we could have managed at all, and it was a real joy to some of us to see this fruit from the labours of the past."

Through all the suffering and weakness of those

last years, Akka remained as peaceful and bright as ever. As her sister expressed it, "Her face used to be so calm and cheerful that any one going to see her would return, not with a heavy heart, but getting the same cheerful spirit. When we, her relations and friends were depressed on account of our burdens and sorrows, and went to her, we felt relieved even by her presence, which was so cheerful."

As soon as she was strong enough, Akka resumed the work of taking her Bible classes and meetings. The usual monthly days of prayer and the annual meetings were held as regularly as ever, and during the last year or two of her life she was cheered by seeing the Lord's working in the hearts of her girls, some turning to Him for the first time, others growing in knowledge and in grace. As many as sixty young women had gone forth to work for the Lord, and with deep thankfulness Soonderbai recorded,

"We have not yet heard a complaint as to the conduct or work of these women. On the contrary, we have heard of their good behaviour and satisfactory work."

A year or more passed away, and Soonderbai was so far restored to her usual health (though still troubled with rheumatism) that when the way unexpectedly opened for Miss Hall to take a rest in England, she was able to leave her, although Miss Binns was already in that country.

For some months Akka superintended the work

herself. Her little nieces and adopted children had all grown up now, and it was a comfort to her motherly heart to see them happily married, excepting one or two who were engaged in zenana work.

At the beginning of the cold season she welcomed Miss Binns back again, and for

A FEW HAPPY WEEKS

they worked together. The usual routine of the Home was in full swing when, one bright December morning, the accident happened which sent such a thrill of sorrow through all the large circle of Soonderbai's friends. A fall from her chair as she was being carried into the garden caused serious injuries, and gave her system a shock from which it could not recover. Nurse Swain, of the P. & I. V. Mission, came to help with the nursing, counting it a privilege to do so. Akka's sister was with her too, and all that love and skill could suggest was done. But God was calling His servant to her rest, and after five days of great pain she went to be with the Lord whom she had loved and served from childhood. "God was merciful not to let her suffer longer," wrote her sister.

Miss Swain gives us a glimpse of the way in which she was regarded by all who knew her, and it gives us some idea of the feeling of unspeakable loss which came over them when they heard that she had been called away.

She says: "She was indeed a mother to the ninety girls gathered into this Home, and one could understand a little of what it has meant to others, as mothers with their children came to have a last look at that dear face, and said, 'I used to be in this school, she was my mother.' I thought that day how completely Christianity blots out caste distinctions, for some, from the highest to the lowest, came to have one last look at the face they loved, although they have not yet accepted Christianity. The washerwoman said with tears, 'Always so smiling, always so kind; where could another woman like her be found?'" The fine features were so lovely in their peacefulness that the tiny tots who gazed upon them only thought Akka was asleep; and Miss Binns said, "It did not seem like death to us."

Funerals in India have to take place very soon after death, but the shortness of the time did not prevent a large concourse of people gathering when Soonderbai was laid to rest. Missionaries and Indian Christians mingled with Brahmin teachers, merchants, and non-Christians of all classes who were one in the affection and respect in which they held the unassuming but noble woman who had lived among them so long. The funeral service was conducted by her old missionary friend, Rev. W. W. Bruere. When the coffin was lowered into the grave and the first clods of earth fell upon it, a great sob burst from the girls of the Home—

"OUR MOTHER GONE!"

It is a remarkable proof of the utter unworldliness and disinterestedness of Soonderbai that, up to the time of the accident, she had not saved enough money to defray even her funeral expenses. For years she had just lived a day at a time, and having food and raiment she was content. There was enough money in the house to buy food for three days, and that was all. Had God then forsaken His child who had trusted Him so long? No, no! Truly it was a dark hour for Miss Binns, with Akka lying only semi-conscious; Miss Hall, who would have been such a tower of strength, away in England; so little money in the house and such a large family looking to her for support and comfort! But, as she beautifully said, "God gave the treasures of darkness," and sent His supplies just when they would be most appreciated.

A donation of £100 for the work was the first token of His remembrance of them, and He also made it possible for the cheque to be cashed without any delay. Then came a love-gift of money from Pandita Ramabai, with the message,

"LET SOONDERBAI LACK NOTHING."

So one who had no wealth of her own, but who looked to God for everything for herself and for one of the largest institutions in India, was the means of supplying the very last needs of this dear servant of God. For this gift met all the expenses of Soonderbai's

illness and funeral. Truly it is no vain thing to trust in the Lord!

On receipt of the cable which was sent to her, Miss Hall returned at once from England, and she and Miss Binns are carrying on the work on the same lines which Soonderbai laid down. For the Zenana Training Home is needed to-day, as much, perhaps more, than it was when it was first opened over twenty years ago, and though its beloved foundress has been removed the work must go on.

We cannot measure the loss which that removal has meant, not only to her own relatives and the inmates of the Home, but to the Indian Christian community as well, but we can thank God for every remembrance of

SOONDERBAI H. POWAR,

and praise Him for all the work He did through her. May the thought of her steadfast faith and courage, her unflinching patience, and her sweet unselfishness, remind many that the grace which made her what she was, avails for them too!

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