



# Pundita Ramabai.

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## HER HISTORY AND HER PURPOSE.

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By FRANCIS E. WILLARD.

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### HER PURPOSE.

**R**AMABAI is the daughter of a Marathi priest. In his youth he saw his preceptor teaching Sanskrit to a royal princess and resolved that he would thus teach his own wife. But the relatives on both sides looked upon this as hardly less than insanity. They doubtless said, with a Hindu who was criticising the missionaries, "Having determined to teach the women, we shall next find you going with your primer to the cows." There was no peace in the house and our liberal-minded Marathi priest gave up the unequal contest. But a few years after, his wife died, and on one of his pilgrimages he met at a sacred river, a learned Brahmin whose lovely little girl he married and being three times her age, he found it more easy to do as he would about her education. She was very bright, and glad to learn, but after a while his strange course excited so much comment that he resolved to retire from the world and carry out his ideas without further molestation. He accordingly sought a home in the forest of Gangamul on the Western Ghauts in Hindustan, and here on the 23rd of April, 1858, Ramabai was born. She lived in entire seclusion and the consequent enjoyment of outdoor air and exercise; she was taught by the mighty ministries of Mother Nature, who has stamped her sanctities on this impressionable soul. Her earliest recollections are of the birds singing in the morning twilight, at which time her mother, busy during the day with household cares, as

she had several other children and step children, was wont to take little Ramabai in her arms to teach her the Sanskrit language. In this way and as they walked, later on, thousands of miles on pilgrimages to sacred shrines, Ramabai learned twenty thousand verses from the poets and sayings of the philosophers.

Before she was sixteen this gifted girl was left an orphan, and traveled several years with her brother, a noble young man who sympathized with her in the determination she had made to devote herself to the elevation of her country-women. The genius, learning, and devotion that she evinced gained for her a wide celebrity. She was the Anna Dickinson of her time, and the newspapers heralded her exploits, usually with approbation. Visiting Calcutta she was invited by Keshub Chunder Sen to come and see his wife and daughters. He presented her with a copy of the "Yajurveda," asking if she had read it. But she quickly answered, "No, I have been taught that a woman is commanded never to read the sacred books." He said nothing, but smiled significantly, and she saw that he was more liberal than her own father had been. He also gave her a volume of selections from the sacred books of all nations, in which she read for the first time, Christ's sermon on the Mount. For it is not from the "Brahmin caste" that our missionaries make converts; as in all countries and lands, the intellectual and cultured class is most difficult to reach. As Ramabai says, "If they haven't much money they still have what to them are 'great possessions'—in their ancestry, traditions, knowledge, religion, to which they are as devoted as we to ours, and most of all to their caste."

Ramabai was never a member of the Brahmo-Somaj, but perceiving its theism to be higher and better than her Hinduism, she became a convert to its ideas and broke her caste, for which she received the anathemas of her people. But she had one of the bravest souls ever enshrined in clay, and so went on her widening way, unperturbed by the criticisms of her people. She lost her brother and was once more sorrowful, but kept steadily to her work of traveling, lecturing, and writing in the interest of Hindu women. The English admired and trusted her. Before their high commissions her word was taken as authority concerning the needs of those for whom she labored with unselfish devotion. She urged that native women should be trained as physicians and taught to teach. Measures were introduced having these ends in view and as a sequel to the society formed by her among leading Brahmin ladies of Poonah, that city now

has not only primary schools for girls, but high schools ; while Bombay has several high schools, and Calcutta the "Victoria" school, conducting to the university.

In the latter city, learned pundits (professors in the university) proceeded carefully to examine into her acquirements, and as a result, conferred upon her the degree of Saravati. This made a stir throughout the empire, as no woman had ever received such a degree up to that time. Soon after, Ramabai married a Bengalese gentleman, a lawyer whom she freely chose—this being an instance almost without precedent. He did not belong to her caste and she suffered much criticism on this account. She taught him Sanskrit and he gave her English lessons. She called him by his first name which was a dreadful thing in the opinion of the women round about. (They lived in Cachar, Assam). She did not specially wait upon him, but took her meals at the same time, which was another mortal sin. She had already determined to go to England and Study medicine, and he agreed to help her all he could. But he died suddenly of cholera when they had been but two years married, leaving her a widow with an eight months' baby, when she was but twenty-four years old. But, though her protection and support were thus suddenly cut off, Ramabai did not despair. She sold their little home, paid off the debts, wrote a book which brought her money enough for the journey, and sixteen months after her husband's death set off across the unknown seas for England. This was in 1883. She found that a slight deafness, the result of scarlet fever would prevent her from studying medicine. Professor Max Muller, and other learned men took up her cause. She was made professor of Sanskrit in Cheltenham College, where she remained until 1886, when Dr. Joshee, who was her cousin, a lady of high caste, was to graduate from the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, and the Pundita came over to see her and to study our educational methods. The death of Dr. Joshee, soon after she returned to India, was a heavy blow to Pundita and to the women's cause in Hindustan.

While less broad and learned than Ramabai she had great talent and a devoted spirit. She never broke her caste, but adhered closely to her customs and religion, believing that she could thus reach the high caste Hindu widows in their isolation misery, and pain. Ramabai has thoroughly studied the kindergarten system, has lectured in our principal cities, and has written a remarkable book entitled "The High Caste Hindu Woman," in the eighteen months of her stay in America.

Dr. Rachael Bodley, (since deceased), Dean of the Women's Medical College, Philadelphia, in an introduction to this book, which cannot fail to enlist every reader, says that she never read one more remarkable. It tells of women whose only and unpardonable crime is having been born at all, and who are all their lives accursed in the eyes of their kinsfolk because death took away the boys to whom they were betrothed in infancy, and they are held to be the ones who caused this loss and grief in their prospective husbands' homes. It tells of their bondage from which suicide and shame are the only sources of deliverance, and it tells, in burning words, of Pundita Ramabai's undying purpose to work out their deliverance by means of a Christian education—not technically, but really such; "not the dead letter, but the living gospel," to use her favourite phrase.

The book contains an outline of Ramabai's own life, and fine photographic likenesses of herself and her cousin, Dr. Joshee. At present the Pundita is in Philadelphia, writing the text books for her school which she firmly believes herself divinely called to establish for high caste Hindu widows in her own land. She goes out lecturing on this behalf, and no one can hear her without a hearty God speed.

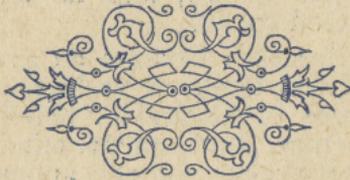
The Pundita Ramabai became an avowed Christian while in England, was baptized and declared her acceptance of the Apostles' Creed, and her belief in Christ as the Master and Redeemer. But her acute mind finds it difficult to choose among the sects, so she announces herself as being in harmony with all, and has joined none. But every Christian grace blooms in her life, communion with God seems her most natural habit, and love to Him and all that He has made, her atmosphere. She wishes to found in India a school for high caste Hindu widows, and asks good people of every name, to help her. But she is not under any "auspices"; no denominational missionary board can consistently take up her enterprise nor does she wish it. Were she more worldly-wise, she would avoid this hindrance by attaching herself to one of them and accepting their counsel and their money together.

But, earnest Christian though she is, the Pundita is a woman of "views" and will defend them to the last. She believes there is room for this new agency; that through the plans formulated by a Christian Hindu widow who knows the inner workings of that caste, its members may best be reached. I have seen the harsh criticisms of native papers in India, against her as a "weakling" be-

cause she had forsaken "the ancient faith" for Christianity. I have also seen and heard sharp criticisms here because she "didn't join some church."

But her circumstances are peculiar, her sincerity unquestioned and I have hoped that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union might help to solve her problem. A committee has been formed, with the Rev. Dr. Phillips Brooks at its head, which will endeavor to help on this enterprise.

I cannot help cherishing the earnest hope that under the Pundita Ramabai's Christian sway, women never yet reached by our appliances may be loosed from the prison house of ignorance, lifted out of the habitations of cruelty, and lead from their darkness into the marvelous light of that gospel which raises woman up and with her lifts toward heaven the world.



## . Toronto Ramabai Circle .

In May of this year, (1888) the Pundita Ramabai visited Toronto and made an eloquent appeal on behalf of the great work she is so desirous to accomplish. With the view of assisting her "The Toronto Ramabai Circle for the Elevation of Women in India" was organized, the following officers were elected :

**MRS. J. L. BRODIE,**

PRESIDENT, 469 SHERBOURNE STREET.

**MISS CARTY,**

SECRETARY, 263 JARVIS STREET.

**MRS S. R. HART,**

TREASURER, 25 WILCOX STREET.

The "Circle" consists of persons who contribute, in one payment \$10, or annually for ten years \$1, to the fund to defray the annual cost of maintaining the school now being established by Ramabai in Poona, India. Contributors of \$1 per annum must also, to become members of the "Circle," pledge themselves to continue their subscriptions for ten years. The "Circle" is in connection with the central organization known as the "Ramabai Association," organized in Boston, Mass., Dec. 13th, 1887. The work is to be carried on under the direction of an influential Committee of the Association assisted by an advisory Board in India. The expenditure of the funds contributed will be entirely under the control of this Committee, and the Treasurer of Local "Circles" will remit to the Treasurer of the Association at Boston all moneys received by them.

**Contributions of any amount from those not desiring to become members of the "Circle" or from others will be gladly received.**