The Autobiography of a Missionary

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THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
A MISSIONARY.

VOL. II.
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A MISSIONARY.

BY

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"A TWO YEARS' RESIDENCE AT NINEVEH."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A MISSIONARY.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Tobin was a tall, thin lady, with a solemn aspect and bilious complexion. She rose in a very stately manner to receive me, and waved her arm towards a seat with the air of a queen. Then she sank back on the sofa as if exhausted by the effort, and, in doing so, dislodged her handkerchief from the pillow. Fixing her eyes on the ceiling, she exclaimed, with a very languid voice: "Boy, boy!" when, to my surprise, instead of one of those nondescript youths called, in England, pages, there...
appeared an old, wrinkled native, who began making an incredible number of low bows—almost prostrations.

“What missis please to want?” said the boy.

Missis said nothing, and did not vouchsafe her sable attendant even a look, but pointed, in a dignified way to the handkerchief. The black page then raised and restored it very reverentially to its fair owner. All this struck me as rather ludicrous at first, but I became quite accustomed to similar scenes, and finally thought nothing about them.

The next day I was presented, by Mr. Tobin, to a number of people, as “one of our Missionaries,” and had certainly no reason to complain of the manner in which I was received. There was an open-hearted courtesy about most of those gentlemen which I still remember with gratitude, but which I have no desire to requite by putting them into print. Suffice it to say that, in hospitality and kindly feeling towards strangers, the English in India certainly do no discredit to the reputation of
the East for these amiable virtues. I found myself the guest of people whom I had never seen before, who knew nothing of me except that I was a Missionary, yet who placed not only their rooms and their tables, but their horses and carriages absolutely at my disposal, and treated me as liberally and as kindly as if I had been one of their own relations.

My stay, however, at Madras was short, for the Mission District allotted to me was about two hundred miles distant from the Presidency, and I was anxious to reach the scene of my labours. I travelled in a primitive kind of vehicle, drawn by bullocks, which pursued its weary and tedious course along the paths or tracks that, in India, are denominated roads. So few indications of civilization met my eye after I had proceeded a short distance from Madras, that it appeared almost incredible when I reflected that I was traversing regions which had been for so long a period under the government of one of the greatest nations of modern times. The squalid, miserable looks of the people, their
complaints of heavy taxation, and the wretched hovels in which they lived, seemed by no means creditable to the government which tolerated such a state of things.

The tracks are sometimes so difficult to distinguish, that even my native guides, who had frequently travelled by this road before, lost their way several times, and regained it with great trouble. The fact is, that the majority of Englishmen employed in India, feel but little interest in the country itself. It is for them a place of exile to be endured for a certain number of years, after which they hope to return and enjoy themselves in their native land. Hence few improvements take place, except those which are absolutely indispensable to the comforts or convenience of the European sojourners in a few thinly-scattered stations. In these localities, the roads are kept in good repair for the evening rides or drives of the Collector and his subordinates, while spacious and handsome dwellings are erected for their accommodation.
But the native town still retains its mud huts, its narrow lanes, its filth, and its abominations of various kinds. Cholera and other destructive diseases pursue their ravages unchecked and uncontrolled by sanitary measures and sanitary reforms, and though the death of an European excites attention, and calls forth inquiry, yet thousands of natives disappear annually from the earth without its awakening much remark, or drawing forth any investigation into the cause of such an alarming mortality.

But I must remember that it is not my province to dwell upon points like these, although it is very desirable that they should meet with some notice. My whole journey to the interior, indeed, impressed me with a melancholy sense of responsibilities neglected, and of duties left unperformed. It is my belief that if every Indian town had possessed, during the last hundred years, its school and its schoolmaster, the natives would, by this time, be so perfectly convinced of the falsehood and childish
absurdity of their popular creed, that they would be now ready and willing to receive the instructions of the Missionaries. This is no mere religious question. The Hindoos were always desirous of secular knowledge, and now they are agitating to obtain it. That agitation must increase in energy and vehemence every year, and if the boon is much longer denied, it may endanger our rule, and evoke a spirit of sedition which it will be difficult to lay.

At length, I reached the ancient city of Madura, once the capital of the old Pandion kings. The resident Mission Catechist had been deputed to meet me, and as he spoke English very well, I found myself quite at home with him. He told me that Madura formerly possessed a large university, and was then famous as one of the chief seats of Brahminical learning in the south. It had also been the head-quarters of the Jesuits when, under Robert de Nobili, the nephew of a pope, the astute sons of Loyola attempted to palm themselves off upon the Hindoo priests as the