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The Story of Bamba



Mrs. Andrew Watson, Cairo, Egypt.

WOMEN'S GENERAL MISSIONARY SOCIETY
of the
United Presbyterian Church of North America
904 Publication Building
Ninth Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.



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NEVER have missionary annals presented a more romantic story than that of Bamba, the wife of Maharajah Duleep Singh. Here is a romance which binds together missionary labors in India and those of a United Presbyterian Mission in the Valley of the Nile, which brings together in holy wedlock a Prince and a girl of lowly birth and training, and which causes the best blood of Asia, Europe and Africa to flow together. Here is a romance which touches the priceless Koh-i-noor of England's royal crown on the one hand, and poverty, real though respectable, on the other.

First, let us follow that part of the story which leads us to India. In the early decades of the 19th century, Runjit ruled the Punjab in North India. He took to himself the title of "Singh" or "Lion," and well might he be characterized as the "Old Lion of the Punjab," for with intrepid courage, he subdued the Punjab and set up the Kingdom of Lahore. His attitude toward the advancing power of the British in India was at first that of uncompromising defiance. "Hindoostan is not large enough for me and you" was the reply he sent back to the English viceroy's proposal for a conference, but later he entered into friendly relations with the British. In 1839, he died. It is said that four of his wives and seven of his favorite female slaves, some of whom were young girls of 15, were burned in the sacred funeral pyre that marked his burial ceremonies. Leaving no son old enough to take his place, his kingdom was torn by dissensions which led to British interference that order might be restored in the land. With the taking over of the kingdom by the British, the far famed Koh-i-noor or "Mountain of Light," a diamond valued variously at from \$2,000,000 to \$10,000,000, passed to the Royal Family of Great Britain and the infant son of Runjit Singh, just four years old at his father's death, Duleep Singh by name, together with his mother, the Maharani Junda Kowr, were given a royal pension of \$250,000 annually and a princely estate in Norfolk, England, to which they ultimately retired.

We pass now to Egypt. In an humble home in the city of Cairo, lived an Abyssinian woman, once a slave. With her lived her daughter Bamba. In her veins, however, flowed European as well as Abyssinian blood, for her father was a German. Although he supported her and her mother in a generous way, he scarcely saw anything of them, as his home and family were in Alexandria. Bamba attended the Girls' Mission School conducted by Miss Sarah B. Dales, and lived with her mother in a small room, which was kept neat and clean and showed many evidences of genuine good taste. The mother brought up her daughter in the native fashion. Her food was eaten in the native style, sitting on a rug at a low table and with little use for knives or forks. Bamba was a beautiful girl, guileless and unsophisticated perhaps, as she had had little contact with the world, but so graceful and queenly and most winning in all her ways. She was at this time about fifteen years of age.

Her religious life found inspiration and stimulus in an interesting religious movement which took place in 1863 in the Girls' School and which continued for some two years. Meetings for prayer and conference were held, at which the pupils and others took part. Miss Dales, who was in charge of the school, was more than once surprised at the earnest and simple prayers offered by Bamba and her mother, and at the facility with which they expressed themselves in prayer. The deep earnestness and sincerity of Bamba manifestly exerted a great influence upon her companions at school.

At this time, the Maharajah Duleep Singh visited Cairo on his way to India with the body of his mother who had requested that she might be taken to her friends in India to be buried by them according to the rites of the religion in which she had lived and died. The Maharajah himself however, was a Christian, for during his boyhood days in India, Christian teachings had laid hold of his mind and heart and he had received Christian baptism. In later years, in England, through the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Jay, who had formerly been in India, the Prince's Christian character developed so that all who met him were impressed by his loving spiritual nature.

When he came to Cairo, he sought out the Mission and visited the Girls' School. He was so interested in all the work that he saw there, that he gave contributions to a number of different objects. He seemed to have a peculiar interest in the Girls' School and visited it several times, giving the most earnest

attention to the stories that Miss Dales was able to relate to him concerning girls who had given themselves to Christ during the religious movement.

At this time Bamba was a pupil teacher. As he visited her class, and saw her standing so sweetly and gracefully in the role of teacher, he asked that the story of her life be told him a second time, and he betrayed no small pleasure in hearing of her religious devotion. On the Sabbath, he came to the Mission services at an early hour and stayed throughout the whole morning, being present at the Sabbath School. One morning soon after, he sent a note to the Rev. Mr. Hogg asking for a private interview. He explained that for some time, he had been praying to the Lord to raise up for him a suitable wife, for it was his purpose to marry only a Christian. Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, had advised him to marry an Indian Princess who had been educated in England. He said he did not wish one whose life was given over to the frivolities of fashionable life in aristocratic circles and that he preferred decidedly an Oriental, but that as he knew no lady in India who had been converted to the truth, he had thought to inquire whether there might not be one in Egypt whom the Lord had been preparing for him in special answer to his prayer. He stated that rank and position were nothing to him, as what he desired was one who loved the Lord in sincerity and truth. As the letter was read, one person and one only, seemed to the missionaries to possess the qualifications required and the decision was reached that the name of Bamba should be proposed to His Highness.

So the name of Bamba was mentioned to the Maharajah. He was frankly told of her humble mode of life, her parentage and her limited education and experience, save as related to religious truths and spiritual experience. The Prince remembered very well having seen her and recalled how deeply he had been impressed by her personal appearance. He said that the limitations which the missionaries had mentioned, would, so far as he was concerned, be no disqualification, if in every other way she commended herself to them as a truly Christian girl.

The next day, he called at the Mission House, and stated that having thought and prayed much over the matter during the previous night, he had come to the clear conviction that the Hand of God was guiding him, and he was ready therefore to make proposals. After Mr. Hogg had knelt with him at his own request, and implored the guidance of God in the matter,



H. H. Dhulup Singh



H. H. The Maharajah
(Bamba)

Miss Dales was appointed to make the proposal to Bamba. Bamba received the news with the utmost composure, and said that she wished to devote her life to God in the School and wished no other happiness than that of winning her companions to Christ. She was urged, however, to think the matter over carefully and was shown that in marrying the Prince, she would have as great, if not greater opportunities of working for Jesus than she would have in the limited sphere in which she had first desired to work. She then requested that the matter be referred to her father for decision. As the Prince had to embark for India, he left the matter to be settled in his absence and the decision to be transmitted to him as soon as possible. Before leaving, however, he presented her with a very handsome bracelet and a ring which he asked her to wear for his sake, even if she should decide not to accept his offer. Learning the situation and being asked to express his wishes and judgment, Bamba's father replied that she should be free to judge for herself as to the answer to be given to the Prince's proposal. This placed upon her a very heavy responsibility, for up to this time, she had not known of any other sphere of work for Christ save the School in which she herself had learned the way of salvation. She had never mingled in European society nor in native society. Her daily life consisted in an humble round of duties which carried her from the little room in which she lived with her mother, and from the School in which she studied and taught. The missionaries endeavored to broaden her conceptions as to the field of Christian usefulness and gave her information as to the different ways of serving Christ in high and middle life, so that she might be able to judge more perfectly of the will of her Saviour with reference to her life. They explained to her that while Jesus required her to serve Him. He had not told her that she must remain in any particular sphere in order to serve Him. They made it plain that it was her duty to say with Paul: "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" Striking examples of God's providences guiding His children in remarkable ways were pointed out to her and finally the matter was laid plainly before her and she was asked to quietly pray over it again and again until the Lord would give her light out of darkness. After four days and nights of anxious thought and prayer, she felt the call of God, expressed herself as willing to obey it, and wrote the following note to her father:

“To my beloved and revered father:

“Greetings. I wished at first that the answer be given by yourself about this matter and when you referred the matter wholly to me, I was in darkness and did not know what to do on account of my ignorance and youth. So I committed the matter and all my anxieties to God, that He might direct me and make His will evident to me, for I did not wish to follow mine own.

“After praying for a long time, waiting for an answer to my petition, the light of His countenance dawned upon me and it has now become clear to me that it is His will that I should leave the School and serve Him in this new position and if it please God, I wish to live for Christ and glorify His name all the days of my life, for He loves me and He even died for me. This I send with many salaams and love to you all and all who love you. That the Lord may be with you forever is the earnest prayer of your loving daughter.

BAMBA.”

In the meantime, while this was going on, the following letter was received from the Prince:

“Dear Mr. Hogg:

I send with this note a ring for Bamba which kindly make over to her for me and tell her it will give me much pleasure if she will always wear the presents I have sent her whether we are to be married or not. Kindly tell her that she must pray to God for guidance and entirely commit herself to Him, believing that ‘All things work together for good to them that love God’, and He who loved her and gave Himself a ransom for her will guide her in the right path. She does not know how much more anxious I am to possess her now that I heard yesterday of her determination to be entirely led by Him and to live for His glory only. I pray God that, if it be His will, her father may give his consent. I think (if everything should go on all right) that Bamba should have one or two maid-servants in order that she may learn to give her own orders about different things about herself, for should she become my wife, she will not very well know how to go on at first, as I keep a large number of servants and she must behave herself like a proper mistress before them. Thanking you for the kind interest you have taken in the matter, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Duleep Singh.”

As soon as Bamba had given her consent, the Prince was at once informed of the decision. His feelings on receiving the good news are expressed in the following letter to Mr. Hogg:

“Many thanks for your kind long letter giving the most happy and welcome news. I feel thankful to God for this His fresh act of loving kindness and mercy to me. The Lord knew my want and supplied it in His own good time and way. I have been praying now for a long time that I may be blessed with a Christian wife and the Lord has given me the desire of my heart. It is marvelous how everything connected with the affair has gone on and how Bamba’s father has been led to fulfil his long neglected duties toward his child. May the Lord give him grace to take the Lord Jesus as his daughter does. You and Miss Dales have been acting in such a way that it is useless for me to say as to how Bamba’s education should be carried on till my arrival. I think it desirable that she should learn English and music and to give her own orders and to go out driving a little so that she may be accustomed to going unveiled. I think she should wear a half-eastern and half-western dress like myself. Pray tell Bamba’s father that it is very kind of him to desire to pay all expenses connected with her education, etc., but I shall be equally happy to do the same. I have very little time more, as I wish to write to Miss Dales and Bamba herself. I remain,

Yours truly and gratefully,
Duleep Singh.”

When once Bamba’s decision had been made and her future life had been determined, preparation had to be begun and carried forward with the utmost tact and earnestness to fit her for her future life and position. Her social rank would be next to that of the royal family, and even above that of titled ladies in all public receptions. It was no small task to plan a course of training which might lead one who had known nothing of social requirements to feel at home in royal circles. The missionary ladies residing then at Cairo had many consultations as to the best use of the time which would intervene before the return of the Prince from India. Bamba and her mother were brought to the Mission house. European dresses were at once prepared for them, so that they might become accustomed to European ways and costumes. Dressmakers were employed and no expense was spared in order to get things suitable for her future position, but with all the efforts that could be put

forth, only a limited supply of dresses could be secured. Bamba had much to learn; how to sit at table, how to handle a knife and fork, how to eat in the European way, and a thousand things having to do with the amenities of Western life.

Mrs. Ewing helped her with English lessons. Mrs. Hogg gave her instruction in music and all of the missionaries did what they could to unfold to her the new life for which she must prepare herself. House furniture was also bought and servants were engaged and Miss Dales and Bamba began house-keeping, so that she might learn by practical experience something of what would be required of her. It was wonderful what progress Bamba made in a very short time. The strain upon her health however, was great and presently Bamba was confined to her bed with an attack of jaundice. She did not seem to regain her strength as rapidly as she should and it was thought advisable that she should go to Alexandria for a change of air. When the Prince returned to Egypt from India, she had been in Alexandria with her father for two weeks. The Prince accordingly went to Alexandria and spent there the six weeks which are required by law.

Bamba's character developed amazingly fast after she was lifted from the narrow sphere in which she had spent her early life and with easy grace she seemed to acquire that dignity and poise that belonged to her new position. Nor did she seem to lose any of her Christian gifts and graces, nor her love for her Bible. Her spiritual insight and her knowledge of Christian truth seemed to bind the heart of the Prince to her in even still closer affection. At length the marriage was celebrated on the 7th of June, 1864, first in the British Consulate, according to legal formality, and afterward the religious ceremony was performed by Rev. Mr. Hogg in the presence of the missionaries and a few friends of the family. The Prince's Hindu servant and a servant of Bamba stood by the door to witness the ceremony. After the ceremony, the guests sat down to a princely repast served in a princely style given by Bamba's father. The dress of the bride was of white moire antique, trimmed with Brussels lace, in French style with all the details of bridal attire. The bridegroom wore a plain dress suit. Bamba was calm and self-possessed and listened with marked attention to the marriage ceremony, while the Prince was so nervous that he afterwards confessed he knew little of what was being said. After the dinner and reception, the bride and bridegroom took their leave of the company and drove off to their home in Ramleh. After

two weeks they went to Cairo and remained for two weeks. Bamba spent most of this time among her companions in the School, as if she were still one of them. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated on the last Sabbath that they spent in Cairo, and the missionaries had the pleasure of sitting together with them at the Lord's table.

Before the Prince left Egypt, he presented the Mission with \$5,000 in Bamba's name as a thank-offering to the Lord. This gift was repeated each year on the anniversary of his marriage, for thirteen years. He also pledged \$2,500 to support two missionaries during the remainder of their lives. How wonderful are the provisions of God's Providence. These contributions came during a period when the Treasury of the Mission was sorely depleted and alone made possible the maintenance of the work and even its extension to new centers. At a later period, on two different occasions, the Maharajah gave to the Mission \$10,000. One of these gifts was set aside as a fund for the education of young men for the ministry. It was also from the Maharajah that the Mission received the "Ibis" which for so many years has served as the Nile boat for mission work.

The Maharajah and Maharani went to England soon after their marriage. As the Maharajah had been quite a favorite of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, she was rather displeased at his marriage, supposing that he had been entrapped through some designing person. Three weeks therefore elapsed before she sent her command for them to visit her. When Bamba was presented to Her Majesty and Queen Victoria saw how sweet and genuine she was, she became very fond of her and invited her many times to her palace. In 1865, the Maharajah and Maharani returned to Egypt for a visit. It was at this time that they purchased the "Ibis" and fitted it up for their own comfort as they journeyed on the Nile, subsequently turning it over to the Mission. Again and again were the missionaries invited to visit the Maharajah and Bamba at their beautiful estate at Elvedon and great as was their pleasure in enjoying the beauties and comforts of this royal estate, their greatest pleasure lay in discovering that these surroundings had not weakened the spiritual life nor cooled the Christian ardor of these two who had begun their married life in such humble dependance upon Christ. Bamba took much interest in visiting the homes of their tenants and in doing as much as possible for them, both



Her Highness The Maharanee Dhulup Singh and Child

for their temporal welfare and their spiritual good. At the hunting season, their home was always filled with guests of the highest aristocracy. Bamba was much interested in many of the ladies who came under her roof, but she felt grieved that they were living only for the world and she could not see how she, so young and so far inferior to them in education, could venture to say anything to them concerning the higher life. She asked me if I thought that they would take it amiss if she were to present them with suitable books. Thus was it that the Maharami lived in the humble and strong faith that characterized her conversion in her girlhood days.

It was toward the close of 1886 that Bamba's health began to break. She wrote to the teacher of her girlhood days, Miss Dales, now Mrs. Lansing, to visit her. "On reaching London" Mrs. Lansing wrote, "We were much grieved to find her so much changed—a mere wreck of her former self, but still the loving, hopeful, trusting Bamba of earlier days." A visit to Egypt, with its more genial climate was suggested in the hope that thus health might be wooed back again. But this was not to be. Strength ebbed away, as this gentle, sweet, trusting life leaned back in the arms of her missionary teacher and friend. They laid her away in the little cemetery at Elvedon "beneath the shadows of the wide spreading trees that adorn the beautiful grounds. Among the lovely floral wreaths that lay in such profusion upon her casket were several from the Royal family, the Queen, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the young princesses, silent but sweetly fitting tributes to unobtrusive worth." Thus one of God's faithful servants passed to her reward at the age of thirty-nine, leaving her husband, three sons and three daughters.

The Maharajah died a few years later. Clouds of religious doubt seemed to gather around his life toward its close. Strained relations with the British Government led him to remove from England for a time. But Dr. Harvey who had known him in Egypt visited him during these closing years of his life and discovered that he was still trusting in the Lord and in His grace for the salvation of his soul.

